An exploration of community, identity, religion and spirituality

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An Exploration of Community, Identity, Religion and Spirituality

Sara Thomas

A report submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of
Bachelor of Arts (Psychology) Honours,
Faculty of Computing, Health, and Science
Edith Cowan University
October 2007

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Acknowledgements

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An Exploration of Community, Identity, Religion and Spirituality:

A Review of the Literature

Sara Thomas
An Exploration of Community, Identity, Religion and Spirituality

Research in the field of community psychology supports findings that membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs, a shared emotional connection, and a sense of belonging contribute to a sense of community (SOC) (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Sarason (1993) proposes that individuals have a basic instinctual need for transcendence which leads them to seek religious groups and experiences. Hill (1993; 2000) posits that Sarason’s sense of transcendence (SOT) is a construct that is closely related to and can be useful for conceptualizing and exploring spirituality and suggests that SOC may not be fully understood until Sarason’s (1993) related concept of SOT is explored. Furthermore, Hill suggests that it is the aspect of existence that people refer to as spiritual which forms the basis for religious beliefs. This review will discuss research that explores how involvement in a religious community affects wellbeing (Frazier, Mintz, & Mobley, 2005; Mattis, 2002; Wink & Dillon, 2003); how different ways of being religious relate differentially to wellbeing and other psychosocial outcomes (Allport, 1950; Batson & Ventis, 1982; Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993); how different ways of being religious relate to identity integration (Hackney & Sanders, 2003; Ryan, Rigby, & Scott, 1993); and how the relationship between religious orientation and identity integration influences psychosocial outcomes, prejudiced attitudes and moral behaviour (Fulton, 1997; Maclean, Walker, & Matsuba, 2004). SOC, SOT, and identity are also discussed in reference to the work of Maslow (Koltko-Rivera, 2006) and Erikson (Guisinger & Blatt, 1994). Implications for a greater understanding of religious and spiritual perspectives in psychology are discussed.

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An Exploration of Community, Identity, Religion and Spirituality

Community psychology has long argued that involvement in community is fundamental to the well-being of individuals. The concept of psychological sense of community (PSOC) was first posited by Sarason (1974, p. 41) as “the sense that one belongs in and is a meaningful part of a larger collectivity...the sense that there is a network of structure to the relationships...”. Further research led McMillan and Chavis (1986) to develop a definition of sense of community (SOC) that incorporated four elements. According to McMillan and Chavis, membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs, and a shared emotional connection comprise the central elements of SOC. Sarason (1974; 1993) has written extensively on the need for more research into SOC and also for research on sense of transcendence (SOT). According to Sarason (1993) a sense of transcendence can be defined as “the need to feel that what one is, was, or has done will have significance outside the boundaries of one’s personal place and time” and “it is a belief that one is part of a larger scheme of things”. Sarason suggests that individuals have a basic instinctual need for transcendence which leads them to seek religious groups and experiences and has offered a challenge to the field of psychology to include religious perspectives in its conceptualization of human functioning. The religious community may not only fulfil needs for a SOC but also for a SOT.

Although studies that include religious or spiritual variables are minimal in the psychological literature, many prominent psychologists including Allport (1950), Hill (1996), James (1958), Kelly (2002), McMillan (1996), and Sarason (1993) have advocated for the inclusion of these variables in psychological research. There is strong evidence that religious involvement is associated with a number of measures of well-being (Fransis & Kaldor, 2002; Frazier, Mintz, & Mobley, 2005; Mattis, 2002; Maton & Wells, 1995; Wink & Dillon, 2003). A number of these studies suggest that...
people derive well-being from positive relations with others and personal growth (Frazier, Mintz, & Mobley, 2005; Mattis, 2002; Wink & Dillon, 2003). Research on religious orientation suggests that people with an intrinsic orientation to religion in which their religious beliefs are fully lived have better mental health than those with an extrinsic orientation who seek religious involvement for utilitarian means such as social standing and protection (Bergin, 1991).

Allport (1950) posits that extrinsic and intrinsic orientations to religion reflect immature and mature forms of religious identity development. Allport and Ross (1967) created a Religious Orientations scale to measure intrinsic and extrinsic orientations to religion which has been widely used in empirical studies (Bergin, 1991). Batson and Ventis (1982) argued that an intrinsic orientation may not reflect religious maturity in terms of a critical search for answers and proposed three dimensions of religious orientation; means (extrinsic), end (intrinsic), and quest, which values an open-ended search to existential questions. Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis (1993) extended theory and research by Allport (1950) and Allport and Ross (1967) and conducted a meta-analysis which found positive correlations between ends/intrinsic orientation and mental health, negative correlations between means/extrinsic orientations and mental health, and mostly positive correlations between quest orientation and mental health.

Ryan, Rigby, and King (1993) added to the religious orientation debate by reframing extrinsic/means, intrinsic/ends, and quest dimensions in terms of identity integration. Ryan et al. proposed two types of religious internalization and examined how variations in these two constructs are associated with Allport and Ross’s (1967) and Batson and Ventis (1982) measures, and with psychological outcomes. According to Ryan et al. the influence of religious orientation on mental health is greater the
more central religion is in a person’s life and the more that religious beliefs have become integrated into one’s identity. In line with Ryan et al. Hackney and Sanders (2003) found similar results.

More recently, studies have investigated the relationship between religious orientation, identity status and prejudice (Fulton, 1997), and religious orientation, identity integration, and moral reasoning and behaviour (Maclean, Walker, & Matsuba, 2004). These studies support previous findings and add to them by providing evidence of how relationships between religious orientation and identity integration relate to prejudiced attitudes and altruistic behaviour. Connections between altruism, community, and identity are explored in a discussion of recent literature regarding Maslow’s work (Koltko-Rivera, 2006). Building on Erikson’s work, Guisinger and Blatt (1994) argue that social and personal identity develops throughout the lifecycle in an interrelated, transactional, and dialectical way. Continued identity development integrates elements of one’s individuality and one’s relatedness in kinship and community ties. Needs for a SOC, and a SOT may be met in the religious community, facilitating a socialization-developmental process underlying religious identity development. Implications for a greater understanding of religion and spirituality in psychology are discussed.

Sense of Community

Sarason (1974) presented his notion of the psychological sense of community (PSOC) as the overarching value by which community psychology should be defined. Since Sarason’s conceptualization of PSOC emerged, a number of studies have attempted to measure the specific dimensions that contribute to a sense of community (Hill, 1996; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Sonn & Fisher, 1996). Community can be thought of in terms of a geographical place or in terms of nonterritorially based
networks of relationships that provide friendship, esteem, and tangible support, and can provide members with a sense of significance, security, and solidarity (Heller, 1989). In addition, for many people, a sense of identity and feelings of belonging are attained from relational communities which are not confined to specific geographical areas (Heller, 1989; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Sonn & Fisher, 1996).

Based on the work of Sarason (1974), McMillan and Chavis (1986) proposed a definition of sense of community (SOC) that included four dimensions. The first dimension was Membership, which had four attributes: boundaries, emotional safety, sense of belonging and personal investment. The second dimension, Influence, has four attributes: attraction to the community in which one feels one can be a source of influence, conformity to the community to which one feels a sense of belonging, the need for consensual validation between the individual and the community, by which closeness between members is achieved, and reciprocal and concurrent influence between the individual and community. The third dimension of SOC is Integration and Fulfilment of Needs which refers to the extent to which one’s own and others values and needs are shared, and the capacity of the community to organize its need-meeting activities so that members can meet others needs as well as their own. The fourth dimension, Shared Emotional Connection, is an affective component of SOC that develops based upon opportunities for positive interaction, shared events and positive means of resolving events, opportunities to honour members, to personally invest in the community, and to experience a strong spiritual bond with other members. Based on this comprehensive theory for SOC, Chavis, Hogge, McMillan, and Wandersman (1986) created the Sense of Community Index.

Chavis et al. (1986) prepared 100 SOC profiles from 1213 randomly selected individuals that responded to the Neighbourhood Participation Project Questionnaire.
The profiles were based on responses to 43 items from the questionnaire from which 39 of the items were believed to be related to one of the four elements in McMillan and Chavis's (1986) theory. Twenty-one judges, representing four professional groupings were employed to rate each profile on a scale of 1 to 5 based on the judges perceptions of sense of community. The results indicated a very high level of consensus (.97) among the judges, and a regression equation indicated that twenty-three of the items from the SOC profile accounted for 96% of the variance of mean judges' ratings of overall SOC. This finding validated McMillan and Chavis's SOC framework by demonstrating a commonly held perception of SOC among a diverse population. Based on the twenty-three items that were found to be predictors of SOC the Sense of Community Index (SCI) was developed. Furthermore, predictors representing all four domains of SOC contributed significantly to the final equation and were highly correlated with the SCI. Analysis of the profile items demonstrated that items were appropriately assigned to their various domains, although items may be related to more than one element. This finding supported the SOC framework as suitable for further investigation and as a framework for intervention.

In the same study, Chavis et al. (1986) investigated the relationship between the SCI and self-reported level of SOC. Respondents to the Neighbourhood Participation Project questionnaire were asked to rate on a five point scale how much SOC they felt with residents of their own blocks. The SCI scores for the 100 profile respondents were compared with the total SCI scores and a correlation of .52 was obtained indicating that the SCI only predicted 25% of the variance of respondents' own ratings of SOC. This finding indicates that while the SCI includes enough information for judges to make highly reliable ratings of the SOC construct, it appears to be missing some important components of individuals' feelings of community.
The SCI has been used to investigate the correlates of SOC in a number of contexts representing a combination of locational and relational settings (Pretty, 1990; Pretty & McCarthy, 1991; Pretty, Andrews, & Collett, 1994) and supports the conceptualization of SOC as a multidimensional construct (Hill, 1996). In a qualitative study, Sonn and Fisher (1996) used McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) SOC framework to build a profile of a politically constructed group. Sonn and Fisher interviewed 23 participants to assess SOC among people who were classified as Coloured South Africans under the apartheid regime but who were currently residing in Australia. The aim of this study was to build on knowledge about group responses to enforced categorization and to investigate how SOC operated for this group. The data showed that the SOC framework presented two dimensions for this group. One dimension reflected the legal, externally constructed and imposed definitions of group membership under the apartheid laws. The second dimension related to the ways in which the people socially constructed notions of community within their subgroup and how they adapted within the socio-political reality of South Africa. The data also indicated that the participants rejected the imposed identity construct which labelled them as “Coloured” but some of the negative stereotypes associated with the label were internalized. Positive experiences of support and group membership that developed within the enforced groups were also internalized. Overall, Sonn and Fisher concluded that SOC facilitates experiences of belonging, security, and relatedness, and facilitates adaptation to new contexts. In addition they offered support for the SOC framework as a useful investigative tool for exploring group-specific meanings, experiences, ideologies and understandings that influence SOC.

Although the SOC paradigm has received much research attention, Hill (1996) suggests that there exists a general consensus among researchers that much
more work in a variety of settings needs to be done to reach a greater understanding of
the components of SOC. According to Hill, among the few firm conclusions that
research on SOC has offered are; that SOC is context specific, must be understood as
involving and transcending more than individual behaviours, and should be
researched at a community level. One suggestion that Hill makes for measuring the
aspects of SOC, that go beyond the behaviours of social support and networking, is to
study SOC in a context that includes individuals who do not know each other or may
know each other but have little contact on a normal basis. The religious community
could provide a context for this kind of study. Hill argues that many of the constructs
in McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) theory are yet to be explored. For example, the
element of a shared emotional connection which includes the constructs of honour and
humiliation, and a spiritual bond has not been investigated in the psychological
literature. If a spiritual bond, which suggests the transcendent, is thought to be an
aspect of a shared emotional connection in McMillan and Chavis’s SOC framework
then a complete understanding of SOC may only be obtained within the context of
understanding a sense of transcendence.

Sense of Community and Sense of Transcendence

Sarason (1974; 1993) has written extensively on the need for more research in
to psychological sense of community and also for research on sense of transcendence.
Sarason (1993) defines sense of transcendence as “the need to feel that what one is,
was, or has done will have significance outside the boundaries of one’s personal place
and time”...”it is a belief that one is part of a larger scheme of things in two respects:
that the scheme of things impacts on you and you somehow do or will impact on it”.
Sarason suggests that the sense of transcendence is clearer in religious people than
non-religious people. Hill (2000) posits that Sarason’s sense of transcendence is a
construct that is closely related to and can be useful for conceptualizing and exploring spirituality. She suggests that a working hypothesis should be developed around the understanding that all of life is interdependent and our individual lives are interrelated to form a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Hill believes that it is the experience of, and feelings of connection to this whole that is the basis for spirituality and Sarason’s SOT. Furthermore, Hill suggests that it is the aspect of existence that people refer to as spiritual which forms the basis for religious beliefs. In his article delivered as an invited address to the 100th anniversary of the APA, Sarason (1993) addressed the significance of religion as an error of omission in the psychology literature which has consequences for limiting the scope of our theories and the effectiveness of our interventions.

*Religion, Religiosity, and Spirituality*

Many researchers differentiate between the terms religion, religiosity, and spirituality. Annual Reviews of Psychology cited Dollahites’s (1998) definition of religion, “a covenant faith community with teachings and narratives that enhance the search for the sacred and encourage morality” as one of the best (Emmons, & Paloutzian, 2003, p. 381). Religiosity or religiousness refers to the many aspects of religious activity, dedication, and belief, and refers more to how religious a person is in degree rather than how a person is religious in terms of what religious system they adhere to (Hill, 2000). In contrast, spirituality refers to the experience of a personal relationship with or an awareness of a transcendent power or force (Hill, 2000; Zinnbauer, Pargament, Cole, Rye, Butter, Belavich, Hipp, Scott, & Kadar 1997). A sense of connection to something greater than oneself forms a central defining characteristic of spirituality (Hill, 2000; Sarason, 1993), a sense that we are intimately connected to the world around us (Hill, 2000), and to others (Mattis & Jagers, 2001).
In traditional social science terms religion represents the more substantive, extrinsic dimensions of religion whereas spirituality represents the more functional, intrinsic dimensions of religion (Marler & Hadaway, 2002). A number of studies have empirically examined definitions of religion and spirituality (Marler & Hadaway, 2002; Roof, 1993; Zinnbauer et al. 1997).

Zinnbauer et al. (1997) measured how individuals defined the terms religiousness and spirituality and examined whether individual’s definitions were associated with different demographic, religio/spiritual, and psychosocial variables. Three hundred and forty six participants which made up 11 groups from diverse religious backgrounds ranging from new age groups to Roman Catholics were compared on self-rated religiousness and spirituality. The results showed that 74% of participants responded that they were both spiritual and religious, 19% were spiritual but not religious, 4% were religious but not spiritual, and 3% were neither religious or spiritual. Analyses were also conducted to correlate self-rated religiousness and spirituality with predictor variables to distinguish between participants who identified themselves as spiritual and religious from those who were spiritual but not religious. Zinnbauer et al.’s (1997) results suggested that religiousness and spirituality describe different but interrelated concepts. Religiousness was found to be associated with authoritarianism, religious orthodoxy, intrinsic religiousness, parental religious attendance, self-righteousness, and church attendance whereas spirituality was associated with mystical experiences new age beliefs and practices, higher income, and bad experiences with clergy. Both religiousness and spirituality were associated with frequency of prayer and both related to church attendance, intrinsic religiosity, and religious orthodoxy.
In a meta-analysis, Marler and Hadaway (2002) explored the relationship between religiousness and spirituality in 1884 American Protestants and compared their results with four previous studies including Zinnbauer et al. (1997). They found that 64% of their participants identified themselves as spiritual and religious, 18% as spiritual only, 9% as religious only, and 8% as neither. Marler and Hadaway also conducted 49 interviews with select participants and content analysis revealed that 63% believed that religiousness and spirituality are different and interdependent concepts; 28% believed that they are the same concept; and 8% believed that they are different and independent concepts. In line with previous definitions (Hill, 2000; Sarason, 1993; Zinnbauer et al., 1997), spirituality referred to a connection between the individual and a larger, usually supernatural, reality whereas religion referred to as the expression or practice of that connection (Marler & Hadaway, 2002).

Religion and Wellbeing

In the past, psychologists have been reluctant to acknowledge the importance of religious and spiritual beliefs, have ignored the diversity of religious organizations and their effects on their congregations, and have viewed religious belief as a defence mechanism for the reduction of tension and anxiety (Hill, 2000; Pargament & Park, 1995). In a review by Pargament and Park (1995) the validity of the view that religion serves only as a defence mechanism was explored. Based on the literature, they argue that although religion can serve defensive roles, religion also serves a number of other important human functions such as the search for meaning, intimacy, the self, and the sacred. The core of their argument is that some ways of being religious are associated with active and effective coping behaviour. In this vein, a number of studies have investigated religious involvement, meaning-making and coping, and psychological
well-being (Fransis & Kaldor, 2002; Frazier et al., 2005; Mattis, 2002; Maton & Wells, 1995; Wink & Dillon, 2003).

In a qualitative study by Mattis (2002), the ways in which African American women used religion and spirituality to cope and to construct meaning in times of adversity was explored. Twenty-three African American women participated in semi-structured interviews which were conducted by two African American women interviewers, including the author. Content analysis revealed a set of eight themes underlying religiosity and spirituality’s role in meaning-making and coping. The findings suggested that religion and spirituality helped the women to (1) interrogate and accept reality, (2) gain the insight and courage needed to engage in spiritual surrender, (3) confront and transcend limitations, (4) identify and grapple with existential questions and life lessons, (5) recognize purpose and destiny, (6) act in principled ways, (7) achieve growth, and (8) accept transcendent sources of knowledge and communication.

In discussion of each of these themes, a number of critical points were revealed regarding meaning-making. In line with Pargament and Park’s (1995) review, religious involvement was not viewed merely as a defence against the realities of the participant’s circumstances. In contrast the women in this study suggested that religion and spirituality helped them to confront and accept circumstances by using them as analytic devices that promote rational and critical thought. A finding of particular relevance to this review was that for these women meaning was constructed in the context of relationship. The participants insisted that their relationships, particularly with other women, served as the contexts in which they made sense of their lives. In particular, the women’s beliefs in the interconnectedness of people’s lives and destinies, their use of prayer, and their reliance on God, ancestors and other
people for guidance, support, protection, and knowledge suggested that even seemingly private acts of devotion have a relational function. Another important finding indicated that for these participants' symbols that emerged in dreams, proverbs, and daily interactions had to be decoded for personal growth and learning to occur. Information about the participants’ religious affiliations could have added too but were not included in this study.

In another study, Frazier et al. (2005) examined religious involvement and psychological well-being among elderly African Americans affiliated with various Christian denominations. Eighty-six participants completed the Multidimensional Measure of Religious Involvement for African Americans, to assess (a) Organizational Religiosity (formal public religious behaviours); (b) Non-organizational Religiosity (informal private religious behaviours outside of a religious institution); and (c) Subjective Religiosity (beliefs, feelings, and attitudes toward one’s religious experiences and the importance of religion in one’s life. Participants also completed Ryff’s Scales of Psychological Well-being (SPWB) which consists of six self-report inventories that measure six dimensions of well-being including: Positive relations with others, Environmental mastery, Purpose in life, Self-acceptance, Personal growth, and Autonomy. Correlation analysis revealed significant relations between both Organizational and Subjective Religiosity and five of the six SPWB scales, excluding Autonomy. Non-organizational Religiosity was significantly correlated with four of the SPWB, excluding Autonomy and Environmental mastery. Further canonical analysis revealed specific relationships between dimensions of wellbeing and religious involvement.

Organizational religiosity and positive internal perceptions of one’s religiosity were associated with environmental mastery, positive relations with others, personal
growth, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Non-organizational religiosity and positive internal perceptions of one’s religiosity were associated with positive relations with others, and self-acceptance. A combination of Organizational and Non-organizational religiosity was associated with mastery over the environment, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Frazier et al.'s (2005) findings that positive relations with others and personal growth contribute to well-being in Organized and Non-organized religious contexts are comparable with Mattis (2002) who found that relationships and intimacy with others and personal growth were important themes in the meaning-making and coping experiences of African American women in a religious/spiritual context.

Difficulties inherent in both Mattis (2002) and Frazier et al.'s (2005) studies concern definitional distinctions between religiosity and spirituality. Mattis’s study includes no definitions and makes no distinction between religiosity and spirituality, and although Frazier et al. makes a distinction between Organized and Non-organized religious involvement which implies a distinction between religiosity and spirituality, no explicit distinction is made. In addition, these two studies focus exclusively on African American samples and it is recognized that significant differences pertaining to cultural, religious, and spiritual beliefs and practices may exist in comparison with other populations. Regarding Frazier et al’s study, it is also noted that differences between the beliefs and practices of various Christian denominations can also be expected to exist and warrant further research attention.

In a longitudinal study by Wink and Dillon (2003) relations among religiousness, spirituality, and three domains of psychosocial functioning in late adulthood were explored. Wink and Dillon drew their data from 303 participants who originally participated in intergenerational studies established in the 1920’s and who
took part in at least one of three assessments between early and late middle adulthood. The participants were studied in childhood and adolescence and interviewed in-depth four times: in early adulthood (age 30’s), middle adulthood (age 40’s), late middle adulthood (age 50’s or early 60’s), and 181 of the participants were interviewed in late adulthood (late 60’s to early 70’s). Religiousness and spirituality were operationalized as distinct but related dimensions and were coded on 5-point scales by two independent raters using the interview transcripts from early, late middle, and late adulthood. Religiousness was coded from 1 indicating that institutionalized religion played no part in the life of the participant to 5 which indicated a high level of involvement in institutionalized religion. Spirituality was coded from 1 indicating that the participant reported no interest in spiritual matters to 5 which indicated that non-institutionalized religion or non-traditional religious beliefs or practices played a central role in the participant’s life.

The three domains of psychosocial functioning that were measured were (a) sources of well-being; (b) involvement in social and community service tasks; and (c) generativity and wisdom. In line with Frazier et al. (2005) well-being was assessed using two of Ryff’s Scales of Psychological Well-being. The Well-being from Positive Relations with Others scale assesses the degree to which the individual derives a sense of well-being from warm, satisfying, and trusting relationships, and is able to maintain a sense of affection and intimacy with others. The Well-being from Personal Growth scale assesses the degree of the individual’s sense of well-being derived from experiences of the self as growing, expanding, and continuing to develop. The results indicated that involvement in institutionalized religion was significantly related to well-being from positive relations with others. This finding was in line with Frazier et al.’s (2005) finding. Religiousness was also significantly
related to involvement in social and community service tasks, and generativity. Furthermore, religiousness in early and late middle adulthood was significantly related to these variables in late adulthood. Spirituality was significantly related to well-being from personal growth, involvement in creative and knowledge-building tasks, and wisdom. Spirituality in late middle adulthood was significantly related to these variables in late adulthood. Wink and Dillon (2003) also found that religiousness in early adulthood was significantly related to creativity and wisdom in late adulthood even though these two variables were significantly associated with spirituality and not religiousness in late adulthood. This finding supports a previous finding by Wink and Dillon (2002) that religiousness in early adulthood is positively related to spirituality in later adulthood.

Religious Orientation and Mental Health

Allport (1950) posited one of the earliest and most widely known approaches to the study of religiosity, which distinguishes between extrinsic (immature) and intrinsic (mature) orientations to religion. According to Allport, an extrinsic orientation entails a utilitarian approach to religion in which a person seeks religion to protect the self, gain social standing, and find solace. In contrast, an intrinsic orientation is characterized by striving for meaning and living one's religion. Allport and Ross (1967) created a Religious Orientations scale to measure intrinsic and extrinsic orientations which has been widely used in empirical studies of religion to assess orthodoxy, dogmatism, and prejudice (Batson, 1976; Hoge & Carroll, 1978). The Religious Orientations Scale has also been used to investigate mental health outcomes, with the intrinsic scale correlating positively and the extrinsic scale correlating negatively with mental health (Bergin, 1991).
More recently, it has been argued that the Intrinsic-Extrinsic dichotomy does not include all the elements that constitute mature religiosity (Batson et al., 1993). Batson (1976) argued that intrinsic scores may reflect a tendency to identify with religion in an uncritical way which may not reflect a mature orientation. He suggested that at least one aspect of mature religiosity is an open-ended, critical search for answers to existential and religious questions. Building on past work on religious orientation Batson and Ventis (1982) subjected three scales from their own Religious Life Inventory, an orthodoxy scale, and Allport and Ross’s Religious Orientations Scale to a higher order factor analysis and found that together these scales formed three factors suggesting three orientations to religion: Religion as means describes the use of religion to gain emotional support, social support, or status and is essentially the same as an Allport and Ross’s (1967) extrinsic orientation. Religion as end describes the experience of religion as a central part of one’s life that is internalized and fully lived and is similar to Allport and Ross’s intrinsic orientation. Religion as quest describes a critical and reflective personal search for answers to existential questions and is also an integrated, fully lived orientation to religion.

In order to examine correlations between religious orientations (including the quest dimension), and mental health, Batson et al. (1993) reviewed 61 studies and conducted a meta-analysis. Based on the review they proposed seven indicators of mental health including: (a) freedom from worry and guilt, (b) personal competence and control, (c) open-mindedness and flexibility, (d) appropriate social behaviour, (e) self-acceptance and self-actualization, (f) personality unification and organization, and (g) lack of illness. The results of their meta-analysis indicated that Religion as means was negatively associated with (a) freedom from worry and guilt, (b) personal competence and control, (c) open-mindedness and flexibility, and was not positively
associated with any mental health indices. Religion as end was positively associated with (a) freedom from worry and guilt, (b) personal competence and control, (d) appropriate social behaviour, and (f) personality unification and organization. Religion as quest, although not studied as extensively as the other constructs, showed positive associations with (b) personal competence and control, (c) open-mindedness and flexibility, and (e) self-acceptance and self-actualization, and indicated a trend toward a negative association with (a) freedom from worry and guilt. Thus Batson et al. extended the intrinsic/extrinsic dichotomy to include the quest dimension of religious orientation and provided research findings indicating differential correlations between religious orientations and mental health outcomes.

In extension of theory and research by Allport (1950), Allport and Ross (1967), and Batson et al. (1993), Ryan et al. (1993) introduced a new conceptualization and measure of religious orientation. Based on Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory Ryan et al. explored the relationship between religious orientation and internalization. According to self-determination theory internalization is the process by which people tend to assimilate and integrate external regulations into more self-determined ones. The internalization process has been emphasized in psychoanalytic, social psychological and sociological theories as important to the transmission and stability of culture (Ryan et al., 1993). Ryan et al. propose two types of religious internalization which they call identification and introjection and examine how variations in these two constructs are associated with Allport and Ross's (1967) and Batson and Ventis (1982) measures, and with psychological outcomes assumed to be influenced by religious participation. Identification refers to personally chosen and valued regulations or beliefs that the individual identifies with and carries out autonomously. Introjection refers to
regulations or beliefs that are less internalized and are performed by the individual because one should do them, or because not doing them might cause anxiety, guilt, or loss of self-esteem.

In order to investigate associations between religious orientation, identification, and introjection, Ryan et al. (1993) assessed four groups of Christians on measures of self-esteem and mental health, including the Multidimensional Self-Esteem Inventory; Self-Actualization Index; General Health Questionnaire; and the Marlow-Crown Social Desirability Scale. Measures of religious orientation included the Religious Orientation Scale; Doctrinal Orthodoxy Scale; Religious Life Inventory; Batson and Ventis's Alternative Orientations: Means, End, and Quest; Belief in Personal Control Scale; and the Christian Religious Internalization Scale. Correlational analysis revealed evidence that identification was closely associated with Allport and Ross's (1967) intrinsic religiosity and with Batson and Ventis's (1982) Religion as end orientation. Introjection was moderately related to extrinsic religiosity and Religion as means, and Religion as quest was unrelated to either identification or introjection. Identification and introjection were both associated with church attendance and doctrinal orthodoxy, particularly identification. Both identification and introjection were also related to mental health and well-being in different ways. Identification was positively associated with psychological adjustment, whereas introjection was negatively associated with psychological adjustment.

In line with Batson's (1976) concern about Allport's (1950) conceptualization of intrinsic orientation as relating to maturity, Ryan et al. (1993) suggested that although identification reflects a commitment to and a positive embracing of Christian practice it is not clear whether this embrace is either reflective or self-critical.
However identification appears to facilitate and provide the positive functions of mental health often attributed to religion, whereas introjected religiosity does not. Ryan et al.'s findings are in line with previous findings by Allport and Ross (1967) and Batson and Ventis (1982) but do not seem to contribute much more in terms of a deeper understanding religious orientations. However Ryan et al. suggest that the purpose of their study was not so much to replace or contradict existing findings but to examine religiosity through a new theoretical lens by bringing the additional implications of self-determination theory to the debate. Thus, Ryan et al. contribute insight to previous findings by suggesting that the influence of religious orientation on mental health is greater the more central (internalized) religion is in a person's life and that the interaction between centrality and orientation in the prediction of functional outcomes should be a topic for further enquiry.

A meta-analysis by Hackney and Sanders (2003) attempted to clarify the proposed relationship between religiosity and psychological adjustment by focusing on whether differences in researchers' definitions of religiosity and mental health could account for contradictory findings of religion as beneficial, detrimental, or neutral to psychological adjustment. Thirty-five studies were coded in terms of the definitions they used for religiosity and mental health. Definitions of religiosity that focused on social and behavioural aspects of religion such as church attendance, participation in church activities, and extrinsic religious orientation were coded as institutional religion. Definitions that focused on beliefs involved in religious activity such as attitudes, belief salience, fundamentalism, and ideology were coded as ideological religion. Definitions of religiosity that focused on personal, internalized devotion such as emotional attachment to God, devotional intensity, and intrinsic religious orientation were coded as personal devotion. Likewise, definitions of
psychological adjustment that focused on negative indicators of adjustment such as depression and anxiety were coded as psychological distress. Definitions that focused on positive indicators of mental health such as self-esteem and happiness were coded as life satisfaction. Definitions that focused on growth-orientated aspects of mental health such as existential well-being and identity integration were coded as self-actualization.

The results indicated that when all effect sizes were combined, there was a significant positive relationship between religiosity and mental health despite definitional variations. When effect sizes were combined within each type of religiosity and compared across types, institutional religiosity produced the weakest correlation with psychological adjustment, followed by ideology with stronger effects, followed by personal devotion which produced the highest correlation. Significant increases in effect size were also found as one proceeds from definitions of low psychological distress to life satisfaction to self-actualization. In terms of interactions between definitions of religiosity and mental health it was found that for institutionalised religion, mean effect sizes increase from low psychological distress to life satisfaction but then decrease as one proceeds from life satisfaction to self-actualization. Ideological religion produced steadily increasing mean effect sizes from psychological distress to life satisfaction to self-actualization. Personal devotion produced a slight increase in mean effect size from lack of distress to life satisfaction followed by a large increase as one proceeds to self-actualization.

Hackney and Sanders (2003) interpret their results as suggesting that the process of internalization might be an important factor in determining how different ways of being religious contribute to psychological adjustment. In line with Ryan et al. (1993) they propose that self-determination theory may provide a suitable
explanatory framework for understanding religious internalization and its impact on well-being. According to Hackney and Sanders institutional, extrinsic religiosity is less internalized and produces the lowest correlations with mental health. In contrast, personal devotion and intrinsic religiosity is associated with a high level of internalization and produces the highest correlations with mental health, with ideological religiosity fairing somewhere in between. Hackney and Sanders recognize that one limitation of this study is that all of the studies that were analysed are correlational which leaves open the possibility that people with better mental health might be predisposed to seek religious involvement, rather than vice versa. Based on their results, Ryan et al. (1993) and Hackney and Sanders add to the religious orientations debate by proposing that Self-determination theory offers an alternative explanation as to how religious orientations may be differentially associated with mental health in terms of identity integration.

Religious Orientation and Identity

Allport’s (1950) intrinsic and extrinsic orientations to religion appear to represent an integrated and non-integrated religious identity, respectively (Maclean et al., 2004). Erikson (1968) recognized the importance of religion to adolescent identity formation. Based on Erikson’s theoretical insights Marcia (1980) operationalized identity along two dimensions: exploration and commitment from which four identity statuses were derived: Diffusion refers to those who are not exploring and have no enduring commitments; Foreclosed refers to those who have not explored but have made a commitment; Moratorium refers to those who are exploring but have no enduring commitment; and Achieved refers to those who have explored and have emerged with enduring self-chosen commitments. In terms of maturity, Diffusion is viewed as an immature stage of identity development which reflects deferred
exploration; Foreclosure is also viewed as an immature stage reflecting arrested exploration and premature commitment. Moratorium is viewed as a developmental step on the way to mature achievement and Achievement is viewed as the most mature status, reflecting a healthy resolution of the adolescent identity crisis (Fulton, 1997).

Fulton (1997) recognized that the religious orientation paradigm had some obvious commonalities with the identity status paradigm and conducted a study which explored religious orientation, identity status, and prejudice among 257 undergraduate students from a Californian Christian college. Participants were assessed on measures of religious orientation, identity status, and racial and homophobic prejudice. Significant mean differences and correlation were found for the relationship between identity status and religious orientation. The results found that the two uncommitted identity statuses, diffusion and moratorium were both negatively associated with intrinsic religiosity and positively associated with extrinsic religiosity. However diffusion was unrelated to quest whereas moratorium was positively associated with quest. For the two committed statuses, foreclosure was associated with low intrinsic and high extrinsic religiosity whereas achievement was associated with high intrinsic and low extrinsic religiosity. Both had lower Quest scores than moratorium. What appeared to differentiate diffused, moratorium, and foreclosed students the best was their Quest scores which indicated very low scores for foreclosed, moderate scores for diffused and very high scores for moratoriums.

Hypothesized relationships between identity status and prejudice were not supported in that the only significant correlations were found for foreclosure which correlated positively with racism and homophobia. Quest yielded a near significant negative correlation with homophobia. The results suggested that participants with
higher foreclosure scores were the least mature and the most rigid in terms of religious orientation and prejudice. Participants with high moratorium scores were characterized as high in quest orientation which emphasizes the positive value of doubt and open-ended search and low in intrinsic orientation which reflects internalization of religious values. The high diffusion participants were similar to moratoriums but were less likely to value doubt and open-ended searching. Achieved participants showed signs of relative maturity in that they had internalized religious commitments and did not show prejudice for race or sexual orientation, however according to Fulton (1997) they were not necessarily more able to transcend value biases present in their subculture which was indicated by an absence of any association with tolerance. A point of contention in this study was that most students attending a conservative Christian college will most likely have some kind of religious commitment and as a group may have a higher level of religious commitment than the population at large. Fulton’s study extended religious orientation research into the identity domain and demonstrated evidence for a possible developmental process underlying religious orientation.

In another study that explores the relationship between religious orientation and identity, Maclean et al. (2004) investigated the role that identity integration and religious orientation play in moral functioning. Sixty undergraduates attending a Canadian university, approximately half of which indicated diverse religious affiliations, were assessed on measures of religious orientation, identity integration, moral reasoning, altruistic behaviour, and socially desirable responding. The results indicated that moral reasoning was positively correlated with identity integration and intrinsic religious orientation and was not significantly correlated with quest or extrinsic orientations. Identity integration was positively associated with intrinsic
religiosity but not with quest or extrinsic orientations. Quest was positively correlated with an extrinsic orientation. Self-reported altruism was positively correlated with intrinsic religiosity and unrelated to quest or extrinsic orientations. Identity integration and moral reasoning were also found to be significantly related to self-reported altruism however a hierarchical regression analysis revealed moral reasoning to account for most of the variance and to be the only significant predictor of self-reported altruistic behaviour.

In line with Fulton (1997), Maclean et al. (2004) suggest that it appears to be the integration of an individual’s beliefs into identity that is important in determining religious orientation. Furthermore, Maclean et al.’s study added to previous findings by investigating the role of these two variables in moral functioning. According to Maclean et al. it appears to be the integration of an individual’s beliefs into identity that is important in determining religious orientation and its relationship with moral reasoning and behaviour. It is interesting to note the relationships between identity integration, religious orientation, moral reasoning and self-reported altruism in this study in terms of considering how altruism relates to the concept of transcendence. Altruism is a form of helping behaviour without expectation of personal gain and thus can be thought of as self-transcendent behaviour. Colby and Damon (1992) support this notion with findings from a study of moral exemplars. Colby and Damon made no mention of religion in the nominating criteria for their study but discovered that the majority of their moral exemplars had some spiritual focus or faith and those without religious convictions identified with a transcendent belief “in the forces of good, a sustaining hope in a power greater than oneself, a larger meaning for one’s life than personal achievement or gain” (1992, p. 311). Morality, spirituality, and identity appeared as integrated aspects among the moral exemplars in this study.
Identity and Transcendence

Maslow (1999, p. 117) stated that “the greatest attainment of identity, autonomy, or selfhood is itself, a going beyond and above selfhood”. In a recent article by Koltko-Rivera (2006) it is suggested that Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is an inaccurate description of his later thought. Based on Maslow’s vast body of work including unpublished critiques and private journal entries, Koltko-Rivera explores evidence that Maslow amended his hierarchy, placing self-transcendence as a motivational step above self-actualization. According to Koltko-Rivera, Maslow did not distinguish between self-actualization and self-transcendence until the last three years of his life when his writings indicate that he came to consider the two constructs as distinct. In Maslow’s words (1993, p. 270) “I have recently found it more and more useful to differentiate between two kinds of self-actualizing people, those who were clearly healthy, but with little or no experience of transcendence, and those in whom transcendent experiencing was important and even central”. Koltko-Rivera proposes that recognizing self-transcendence as part of Maslow’s hierarchy has important implications for theory and research including a better understanding of worldviews regarding the meaning of life, a broader understanding of the motivational roots of altruism, social progress and wisdom, a broader understanding of religious violence, integration of religion and spirituality into mainstream psychology, and a more multicultural approach to psychological theory. Maslow’s work provides a framework in which needs for belonging, self-actualization, and self-transcendence are arranged in a hierarchy. It is interesting to note how SOC, identity development, and SOT relate to Maslow’s hierarchy.

Community and Identity
Guisinger and Blatt (1994) argue that an increasingly mature sense of identity is contingent on interpersonal relationships and that the continued development of increasingly mature relationships is contingent on one’s sense of identity. According to Guisinger and Blatt individuality and relatedness are two lines of development which become interrelated and integrated in the formation of identity during adolescence. However, even after this temporary synthesis these lines of development continue to interact in the development of identity throughout the lifespan. Continued identity development integrates elements of one’s individuality and one’s relatedness in kinship and community ties. The continued development between personal and social identity is essential in the maturational process that leads to Erikson’s (1968) stages of intimacy and generativity later in life. Generativity involves a concern for extending beyond self-interest and dedicating oneself to goals, values and principles, and the teaching of another generation and thus shares some conceptual similarities to SOT. Erikson’s stages of intimacy and generativity are again reintegrated in mature adulthood in the development of integrity.

Conclusion

Since Sarason’s (1974) conceptualization of SOC emerged, a number of studies have attempted to measure the specific dimensions that contribute to sense of community (Chavis et al., 1986; Hill, 1996; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Sonn & Fisher, 1996). Sarason (1993) proposed that people have a basic instinctual need for transcendence which motivates them to seek religious communities and experiences, and that a SOT is closely related to a SOC. Hill (2000) believes that if a more comprehensive understanding of SOC is to be gained, SOT must be explored. Furthermore, Hill suggests that Sarason’s SOT is closely related to and can be useful for exploring spirituality. Although definitions surrounding religion, religiosity, and
spirituality have been topics of psychological research, further exploration and clarification of these terms is suggested. A lack of research regarding religion and spirituality’s influence on mental health outcomes and behaviour has consequences for limiting the scope of our theories and the effectiveness of interventions (Sarason, 1993).

In the past, religious and spiritual beliefs have been viewed by psychologists as defence mechanisms for the reduction of tension and anxiety (Hill, 2000; Pargament & Park, 1995). However, religious belief and activity has been associated with well-being in a number of studies (Fransis & Kaldor, 2002; Frazier et al. 2005; Mattis, 2002; Wink & Dillon, 2003). In studies by Frazier et al. (2005), and Mattis (2002) well-being from religious involvement was associated with positive relations with others and personal growth. Wink and Dillon’s (2003) longitudinal study extended previous studies by differentiating between religiousness and spirituality and found that religiousness was significantly related to well-being from positive relations with others, and spirituality was significantly related to well-being from personal growth. Religiousness in early and late middle adulthood was significantly related to positive relations with others, and spirituality in late middle adulthood was significantly related to personal growth in late adulthood.

Allport (1950) distinguished between extrinsic and intrinsic orientations to religion and referred to an extrinsic orientation as a utilitarian approach to religion in which a person seeks religion to protect the self, gain social standing, and find solace and an intrinsic orientation as characterized by striving for meaning and living one’s religion. Batson and Ventis (1982), and Batson et al. (1993) extended previous work (Allport, 1950; Allport & Ross, 1967) and proposed three dimensions of religious orientation, Means (extrinsic), Ends (intrinsic) and Quest, which refers to an open
ended search for answers to existential questions and measures another dimension of
religious orientation unmeasured by extrinsic or intrinsic scales. Research findings by
Allport (1950), Allport and Ross’s (1967), Batson et al. (1993), and Bergin (1991)
suggest that people express different orientations to religion, that an intrinsic
orientation to religion enjoys the greatest correlations with mental health, followed by
quest and extrinsic orientations respectively.

Allport and Ross (1967) proposed that extrinsic and intrinsic orientations to
religion may form a developmental ordering from immature to mature religiosity.
Central to Allport’s (1950) notion of mature religion was the concept of integration or
integrity in the personality. Ryan et al. (1993) reframe the extrinsic/means, and
intrinsic/ends orientations to religion in terms of self-determination theory which
provides an explanatory framework for how religious involvement may be assimilated
via a developmental process of internalization. Hackney and Sanders (2003) agree
that self-determination theory may provide a possible explanation as to why lower
correlations with mental health are observed for people with an institutionalized
(extrinsic) orientation to religion whereas higher correlations with better mental health
are observed for people who are more orientated toward personal devotion (intrinsic
orientation). This pattern of results suggested that the move away from
institutionalized (extrinsic) religion toward personal devotion (intrinsic), and more
specifically the internalization and integration of personally valued religious beliefs
into one’s identity is associated with better mental health. Longitudinal research that
explores the development of religious orientation should be a topic of further enquiry.

Fulton (1997) and Maclean et al. (2004) recognized similarities between the
religious orientation and identity status paradigms and investigated the relationship
between them and in relation to prejudice, moral reasoning, and altruistic behaviour.
This expanded previous work by directly exploring the relationship between religious orientation and identity status. Furthermore, altruism is conceptually related to the notion of transcendence in that it is a form of self-transcendent behaviour. Maslow (1999) believed that the greatest attainment of identity, or selfhood occurs when one transcends selfhood. Koltko-Rivera (2006) presented evidence that Maslow clearly differentiated self-actualization from self-transcendence and amended his hierarchy, placing self-transcendence as a motivational step beyond self-actualization. Building on Erikson’s (1968) work, Guisinger and Blatt (1994) recognized the importance of community in the development of identity, and proposed that identity development continues throughout the lifespan, and that continued identity development integrates elements of individuality and relatedness in kinship and community ties.

Expanding our knowledge and perception of how SOC, SOT, and identity development fit with existing theories has implications for a better understanding of these constructs and also for understanding worldviews regarding the meaning of life, the motivational roots of altruism, social progress and wisdom, a broader understanding of religious violence, and the integration of religion and spirituality into mainstream psychology (Koltko-Rivera, 2006). Needs for SOC and SOT may motivate people to seek religious involvement and the religious community may provide a context in which people can meet these needs. Interaction between the individual and community may facilitate a socialization-developmental process in which the individual participates in and is open to influence by the teachings and activities of the community, which fosters religious identity development and integration. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the relationships between SOC, SOT, identity development, and existing theory, greater research efforts, including qualitative and longitudinal, are suggested.
References


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Reference Examples


An Exploration of Community, Identity, Religion and Spirituality in an Anglican Christian Community Sample

Sara Thomas
An Exploration of Community, Identity, Religion and Spirituality in an Anglican Christian Community Sample

The concept of psychological sense of community was first posited by Sarason (1974). Sarason (1993) also proposed that individuals have a basic instinctual need for transcendence which leads them to seek religious communities and experiences. Research supports findings that membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs, a shared emotional connection, and a sense of belonging contribute to a sense of community (SOC) (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). However, few studies have explored SOC in religious settings. Furthermore, religion and spirituality have been considered to be fundamental to identity (James, 1958; Jung, 1964; Marcia, 1980), with recent studies exploring the relationship between religious involvement and identity integration (Hackney & Sanders, 2003; Ryan, Rigby, & King, 1993). The aim of this study was to explore experiences of community and identity in a religious setting. Conceptualisations of community, identity, and relationships between them were explored among 12 Anglican Christians using semi-structured in-depth interviews. Results were analysed using interpretive phenomenological analysis. Participants identified six interrelated concepts: (1) Active involvement and participation; (2) Support, for and from the Christian community, and for the wider community; (3) Sense of belonging; (4) Identity; (5) Journey; and (6) Religion and Spirituality. Implications of this research include a greater understanding of SOC, of religious perspectives in psychology, and religious identity development. Implications for future research are discussed.

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Submitted: October, 2007
An Exploration of Community, Identity, Religion and Spirituality in an Anglican Christian Community Sample

Community psychology has long argued that involvement in community is fundamental to the wellbeing of individuals. The concept of psychological sense of community (PSOC) was first posited by Sarason (1974, p. 41) as “the sense that one belongs in and is a meaningful part of a larger collectivity...the sense that there is a network of structure to the relationships...”. Further research led McMillan and Chavis (1986) to develop a definition of sense of community (SOC) that incorporated four elements. According to McMillan and Chavis, membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs, and a shared emotional connection comprise the central elements of SOC. A number of researchers have attempted to measure the specific dimensions that contribute to a SOC in a number of contexts representing a combination of locational and relational settings (Pretty, 1990; Pretty & McCarthy, 1991; Pretty, Andrews, & Collett, 1994; Sonn & Fisher, 1996). Although the SOC paradigm has received much research attention, their exists a general consensus among researchers that much more work in a variety of settings needs to be done to reach a greater understanding of the components of SOC (Hill, 1996).

Sarason (1974; 1993) has written extensively on the need for more research into SOC and also for research on sense of transcendence (SOT). According to Sarason (1993, p. 188) a SOT can be defined as “the need to feel that what one is, was, or has done will have significance outside the boundaries of one’s personal place and time” and “it is a belief that one is part of a larger scheme of things in two respects: that the scheme of things impacts on you and you somehow do or will impact on it”. Sarason suggests that individuals have a basic instinctual need for transcendence which leads them to seek religious groups and experiences and has offered a challenge to the field of psychology to
include religious perspectives in its conceptualization of human functioning. Hill (1996) argues that many of the constructs in McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) SOC framework are yet to be sufficiently explored, for example, the element of a shared emotional connection which includes the attribute of a spiritual bond. This lack of research is surprising considering that McMillan and Chavis (1986, p. 14) propose that a shared emotional connection seems to be “the definitive element for true community”. The notion of a spiritual bond suggests Sarason’s notion of sense of transcendence. Furthermore, Hill posits that Sarason’s SOT is a construct that is closely related to and can be useful for exploring spirituality and that a complete understanding of SOC may only be obtained within the context of understanding a SOT. The religious community may not only fulfil needs for a SOC but also for a SOT and may provide a fertile context for exploration of both constructs.

Although studies that include religious or spiritual variables are minimal in the psychological literature, many prominent psychologists have advocated for the inclusion of these variables in psychological research (Allport, 1950; Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Hill, 2000; James, 1958; Kelly, 2002; Kloos & Moore, 2000; Kress & Elias, 2000; Mattis & Jaggers, 2001; McMillan, 1996; Pargament, 1999; Pargament & Park, 1995; Sarason, 1993; Walsh-Bowers, 2000; Zinnbauer, Pargament, Cole, Rye, Butter, Belavich, Hipp, Scott, & Kadar 1997). Among the studies that have included religious or spiritual variables there is strong evidence that religious involvement is associated with a number of measures of well-being (Fransis & Kaldor, 2002; Frazier, Mintz, & Mobley, 2005; Mattis, 2002; Maton & Wells, 1995; Paloutzian & Kirkpatrick, 1995; Wink & Dillon, 2003). A number of these studies suggest that people derive well-being from positive relations with others and personal growth (Frazier et al., 2005; Mattis, 2002; Wink & Dillon, 2003). In addition, studies
have investigated how different ways of being religious relate differentially to mental health and other psychosocial outcomes (Allport, 1950; Allport & Ross, 1967; Batson, 1976; Batson & Ventis, 1982; Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993; Bergin, 1991); how different ways of being religious relate to identity integration (Hackney & Sanders, 2003; Pedersen, Williams, & Kristensen, 2000; Ryan, Rigby, & King, 1993; Watson, Morris, Hood, Milliron, & Stutz, 1998); and how the relationship between religious orientation and identity integration influences psychosocial outcomes, prejudiced attitudes and moral behaviour (Fulton, 1997; Maclean, Walker, & Matsuba, 2004).

Research on religious orientation suggests that people with an intrinsic orientation to religion in which their religious beliefs are fully lived have better mental health than those with an extrinsic orientation who seek religious involvement for utilitarian means such as social standing and protection (Bergin, 1991). Allport (1950) posits that extrinsic and intrinsic orientations to religion reflect immature and mature forms of religious identity development. This lead Allport and Ross (1967) to create the Religious Orientations scale to measure intrinsic and extrinsic orientations to religion which has been widely used in empirical studies (Bergin, 1991). Batson and Ventis (1982) argued that an intrinsic orientation may not reflect religious maturity in terms of a critical search for answers and proposed three dimensions of religious orientation; means (extrinsic), end (intrinsic), and quest, which values an open-ended search to existential questions. Batson et al. (1993) extended theory and research by Allport (1950) and Allport and Ross (1967) and conducted a meta-analysis which found positive correlations between ends/intrinsic orientation and mental health, negative correlations between means/extrinsic orientations and mental health, and mostly positive correlations between quest orientation and mental health.
Ryan et al. (1993) added to the religious orientation debate by reframing extrinsic/means, intrinsic/ends, and quest dimensions in terms of identity integration. Ryan et al. proposed two types of religious internalization and examined how variations in these two constructs are associated with Allport and Ross’s (1967) and Batson and Ventis (1982) measures, and with psychological outcomes. According to Ryan et al., the influence of religious orientation on mental health is greater the more central religion is in a person’s life and the more that religious beliefs have become integrated into one’s identity. In line with Ryan et al., identity commitment has been found to be positively correlated with an intrinsic religious orientation and inversely related to quest and extrinsic orientations (Watson et al., 1998). Building on Erikson’s work, Guisinger and Blatt (1994) argue that social and personal identity develops throughout the lifecycle in an interrelated, transactional, and dialectical way. Continued identity development integrates elements of one’s individuality and one’s relatedness in kinship and community ties. Pargament and Park (1995) suggest that the religious community provides a context for the search for intimacy, self, and the sacred. Needs for community, identity, and a sense of transcendence could be met in the religious community, facilitating a socialization-developmental process underlying religious identity development (Sarason, 1993).

Findings suggest that the religious setting may provide a rich context in which to explore community and identity constructs. Although qualitative exploration of community, religion, and spirituality has begun, and quantitative studies have investigated religious orientation and identity, dual exploration of the experience of community and its relationship to identity has yet to be explored. In his article delivered as an invited address to the 100th anniversary of the APA, Sarason (1993) addressed the significance of religion as an error of omission in the psychology
literature which has consequences for limiting the scope of theories and the effectiveness of interventions. The purpose of this study will be to respond to Sarason’s challenge and to address a gap in the literature. Thus, there are two research questions that this study will attempt to address: What is the experience of community for a person of the Christian faith? and How does the experience of the community relate to identity?

Method

Design

The current study utilized qualitative research methodology which emphasizes the socially constructed nature of reality, the relationship between the researcher, the participant and the phenomenon under study and the situational constraints that shape the co-construction of knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). This approach adopts a phenomenological perspective which focuses on the meaning of the lived experience of participants and searches for the essential and invariant structure of the experience in a contextual, holistic way (Patton, 1980; Smith & Osborn, 2003). It is recognized that meanings are negotiated within a social context, therefore this design also draws on a symbolic interactionist perspective (Smith, 1995).

Participants

The participants were 12 Anglican Christians, 10 women and 2 men, aged between 47 and 78 years ($M = 62.16, SD = 8.85$), who responded to advertisements that were displayed in Anglican churches in the Perth metropolitan area. A divergent snowball sampling process was utilized (Patton, 1990) and the number of interview participants was determined when the information elicited reached saturation point (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
Materials and Procedure

An interview schedule was used to collect data through semi-structured, in-depth interviews (Appendix A). These interviews were tape recorded. The structure of the interview was based on an example by Smith (1995, p. 14). A small notebook was used to record participant details such as name, address, phone number, and age of participants. Prior to the interviews, participants were informed of the confidentiality and anonymity of the project, and of their prerogative to abstain from responding to any questions. Letters containing information about the study were given to the participants (Appendix B) and any relevant questions or issues that the participants had were addressed. The participants were informed that any identifying information would be removed and therefore kept anonymous. Participants were also informed that their information was confidential in that themes were to be generated and their individual information would not be identified. When the participant was satisfied an informed consent document was signed (Appendix C). The interviews were conducted at a comfortable and convenient place identified by the participant and were of approximately 35 to 45 minutes in duration.

Data Analysis

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to explore the experience of the participant’s personal and social world through the participant’s perceptions of experiences, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The assumption underlying IPA is that the researcher is interested in learning something about the participant’s experience in the form of beliefs and constructs that are expressed through the participant’s use of language. Meaning is central to the analytical process and the aim is to understand the content and complexity of the participant’s meanings through sustained engagement with and interpretation of the transcribed data. This process
consists of a number of interpretive data analysis steps which are outlined by Smith and Osborn (2003) as a set of flexible guidelines for qualitative analyses. The data was coded and organized according to the conceptual themes that emerged. The transcripts were read a number of times to elucidate recurrent and meaningful themes. Passages were underlined, and comments, references to other passages, and preliminary interpretations were recorded in the left margin. The right margin was used to document emerging themes using keywords to capture the essential quality of what participants said. Emerging themes were then recorded in an exercise book, separate from the transcripts in an attempt to create order from the concepts and ideas in the text. Master themes and sub themes were recorded with identifiers of instances indicating where in the transcript instances could be found. As the interpretive process continued a list of the final themes for each participant was compiled and recorded. This process was replicated for each transcript individually and when this process was completed a list of the most salient and common of participant themes was compiled. Links within and across participant themes were examined until no further insights were generated. Cognitive mapping was used to clarify themes and sub themes and to discover possible relationships between them. Major ideas, concepts and themes were member checked to ensure rigour and integrity (Cresswell, 1994).

Results and Interpretation

This study explored participant’s involvement, experiences, and notions of identity as a member of the Anglican Christian community. The themes that emerged from the data were multidimensional and interrelated. Predominant themes and dimensions of the interview data were interpreted as supporting theories which posit both community and identity as mutually reinforcing constructs (Guisinger and Blatt, 1994) and are presented in Figure 1.
### THEMES

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Figure 1. Themes and dimensions representing concepts of community and identity

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**Active Involvement and Participation**

Involvement and participation refers to the process by which individuals contribute to decision-making tasks within the groups that affect them (Unger & Wandersman, 1985). The type and extent of involvement and participation among participants varied, and included attending church services, social functions, bible study groups, meditation groups, weekend retreats, assisting serving communion, helping at the church op shop, raising funds, and involvement in social and organizing committees in which “we run finances, we make decisions as far as maintenance, as far as what’s going to happen as far as the community goes, whether there’s going to be a quiz night, whether there’s going to be a bible study group, all those things we
make the decisions". Participants expressed that they felt important to the community because of the specific skills that they each brought to supporting the livelihood of the church community as reflected by the following statement: "I have administrative skills, that's what you end up doing, you work in the office, you oil the wheels for the people that don't have much expertise. It makes you feel like you're doing something really important". Furthermore, participants stated that involvement in the Christian community "makes me feel as if I have an avenue in which I can use my time to use what I'm good at to benefit that community". Another participant said of their involvement that they get "that feeling that I'm useful, that I can contribute something and people rely on me and that gives me a great feeling of fulfilment".

The concepts of active involvement and participation are consistent with two dimensions of McMillan and Chavis's (1986) SOC framework; influence, and integration and fulfilment of needs. According to McMillan and Chavis, these dimensions are important in the promotion of social change, and because they influence self-efficacy and self-identity. The data suggested that attending and participating in various community activities was an important part of participant's involvement with the community. More specifically, the data suggested that making an active contribution to the community such as helping with the general "running of the church" as well as involvement in social and organizing committees was of as much importance to the participants as simply attending and participating in community activities and indeed contributed to feelings of self-efficacy, fulfilment, and wellbeing through the meeting of individual and community needs. Participants attached feelings of importance and fulfilment to their role in the community and felt that their unique contributions were valuable in influencing the activities and directions of the community.
Support: for the Christian Community

Support was repeatedly discussed by all participants, and included three dimensions; Support for the Christian community, Support from the Christian community, and Support for the wider community. Active involvement and participation in community activities was one way that the participants supported their Christian community, however much practical and emotional support for fellow community members was also expressed. A number of participants spoke of their support for elderly community members who were in need of transport to church, for example, “I regularly pick up elderly people who don’t have transport, so I do that on a regular basis”. Elderly church members who were sometimes unable to make it to church were visited at home by one participant who said this “that’s my reason, one of my reasons that I like being there because being one of the younger members you can help the older people and it’s been their life for so many years, and they just need the extra support to carry on, such as waiting on them a little bit and looking after them so they can carry on, and carry on being a church member as long as they can”.

Support for community members was often extended beyond church activities as one participant expressed “if they want to go somewhere and they haven’t got a car, you give them a lift, or if they’ve been ill you go to see them in hospital or you ring them up to see how they are”. Helping the elderly portion of the community to stay involved in the church community demonstrates supportive relationships among the participants with one participant comparing the level of support in the Christian community to days gone past as this statement demonstrates “there’s a very special feel about caring for your fellow church members. If somebody gets sick, we rally round, we make pots of soup, in the old days how a neighbour would have done”.

Participant's accounts were in line with McMillan and Chavis (1986), who propose that personal investment is an important contributor to feelings of group membership. Furthermore, it is thought to increase the meaning and value placed on group membership and contributes to the development of a shared emotional connection. Participants invested much in their community in terms of support, and discussed their support for the Christian community as an integral part of their role in the community and overarching Christian belief system. However, the support that participants received from the Christian community was discussed with even greater feeling.

**Support: from the Christian Community**

Participants spoke of the social and emotional support that they received from the Christian community. In terms of social support one participant said “if you move to a new place, automatically you get social contact because you go there (to the local church) and you’re made welcome”. Many participants spoke of the social and emotional support that they received in times of illness or need, for example “when your not well or you don’t feel good, other people know that you don’t mind if they know, they ring you up, how are you is there anything I can do. That’s a special relationship”. When asked about how the community had been supportive in the past, this participant responded “Big time. They’ve supported me by listening to me and by food wise if I’ve been sick, like if I’d had a fall or something or if I’m unwell they’ll ring up and see how I am”. In reference to a period of crisis that one participant had experienced she said that the Christian community had supported her “By keeping me involved in their activities.....making sure I was kept busy, making sure I wasn’t on my own which is what you need really”.
Participants described ways that community members had supported them in the past, however an expectation of future support was also evident as this statement reflects, “when I'm in the wide community I don’t have an expectation of people like if I had (in the Christian community)”. Speaking of friends that this participant had “made through churches” and the Christian community that she’s currently involved with, she said “they would do anything for me and I would do anything for them, and I feel confident where I’m going now that if I had a need and the people in the church could meet it, they would and they wouldn’t expect anything back”. The anticipation of support was suggested by another participant as this statement reflects “I know if I needed support in anyway, I only have to ask and I would receive it”. Participant’s accounts of support were in line with research by Krause (2007) in that they included accounts of enacted and anticipated support. Krause found that enacted support including tangible and emotional assistance, and anticipated support from family members and close friends was associated with a greater sense of meaning in life. Krause’s results indicated that emotional support was significantly associated with a deeper sense of meaning in life however anticipated support was the most significant indicator of one’s sense of meaning in life.

General social support has been positively associated with both physiological and psychological health and well-being (Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996). However, only a few studies have explored associations’ between religious social support and psychological functioning (Fiala, Bjorck, & Gorsuch, 2002; Maton, 1989). Fiala et al. (2002) found that congregational support was positively related to attendance, social support, decreased depression, and increased life satisfaction. Further analysis revealed that the association with life satisfaction remained after variance due to church attendance and social support was controlled, which suggested
that support from the church community was a distinct resource above and beyond general social support. In line with Fiala et al., findings form the current study suggest the need for further evaluation of the unique resources provided by congregational social support.

A reciprocal relationship between support for and from the community was evidenced by this statement "there's a lot of support in the Christian community and you get back what you put in". Support for and from the Christian community are themes that reflect McMillan and Chavis's (1986) integration and fulfilment of needs attribute in the SOC framework. According to McMillan and Chavis people are attracted to people and groups that can benefit them in some way. Reinforcement is a basic organizing principle underlying integration and fulfilment of needs but as recognized by McMillan and Chavis seems directionless unless accompanied by other concepts. One concept that is thought to determine the success of the person-environment fit is shared values. The extent to which community members share values determines the ability of community members to meet the needs of others whilst having their own needs met. According to Hill (1999), Christianity portrays a social and communal definition of the person. In line with Hill (1999) and McMillan and Chavis (1986), participant's accounts suggested that they highly valued supportive community relationships which appeared to be an important determinant of the community's success at meeting their own and others needs for support.

Support: for the wider community

Shared values of helping and supporting others was not limited to relationships among community members. As the Support for the wider community theme suggests, participants also shared values which emphasized supporting people and causes outside of the Christian community. Many participants had been or were
currently involved in supporting people and causes outside of the Christian community. As one participant mentioned “The church I currently go to has a large ministry to homeless and people with mental illnesses....they all pop in for morning tea on a Sunday morning so they get fed and they get food packages”. This participant was also involved in the running of camp programmes for children who had a parent in prison, and had also previously taken on the foster care of children through her church involvement. Her reasoning for taking on such responsibilities was consistent with her Christian values as this statement suggests “I think we have a responsibility not just to the planet but to each other. We are our brother’s keepers”.

Another participant was involved in helping to co-ordinate the church op shop, prison chaplaincy, helping children of prisoners, and reconciliation for Aboriginal people and spoke of the support that she received from the church to help her with her outreach efforts. In line with the previous participant she felt that she was also guided toward outreach efforts by her Christian values as this statement reflects “it’s a great guide, it’s a great support and it’s worthwhile because it’s helping people”. Furthermore “I couldn’t just be a Christian, going to church and saying my prayers and contributing financially...it never was enough, and I have to be involved in outreach which I believe is what Christianity is all about”. The Christian community and value system appeared to provide a secure base from which participants extended their efforts to engage in outreach. Participant accounts of engagement in high levels of supportive behaviours involving the wider community can be related to Colby and Damon’s (1992) study of moral exemplars who reported that their altruistic behaviour was often guided by a spiritual focus or faith.
Community and Identity

A salient theme throughout the participant’s accounts of their experiences with the Christian community was a strong sense of belonging. In line with Frazier et al. (2005), Mattis (2002), and Wink and Dillon (2003) feelings of belonging and positive relations with others were important aspects of religious involvement and were a source of fulfilment and wellbeing. Many participants referred to their Christian community as family. When asked how it felt to be involved with the Christian community participants replied, “it makes me feel like I’m a very important part of that particular church family”, and from another participant “you’re part of a family, but it’s more than just a social group because the underlying reason why you’re there is service to God”. Other participants said “You know you have family around you”, and acknowledged the church community as a family outside of the immediate family unit such as this statement portrays, “I look at the fact that we have two families”.

Participants also expressed a sense of belonging with “like-minded” people in the community, for example “I do get a lot of satisfaction out of it and that we’re all like-minded” and “it gives me a sense of community with like-minded people”. One participant was explicit in his feelings of belonging, “What I get out of it is just purely that feeling of belonging”. Whereas other participants spoke of feelings of acceptance, warmth, and love that existed within the Christian community, for example “I don’t have to explain where I’ve come from, I don’t have to explain...I’m accepted emotionally and socially”, and “I feel part of it, I feel part of a loving warm group”, again “It makes me feel accepted and supported and I just love being with those people”...“I feel like there’s understanding, support, strength, friendship”.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) proposed that a sense of belonging which is an attribute of membership in the SOC framework, involves feelings, beliefs, and
expectations that one has a place in the group, is willing to sacrifice for the group, and feels accepted by the group. In line with McMillan and Chavis, participants indicated a strong sense of belonging through their accounts of like-mindedness, acceptance, and belonging. Furthermore, participant’s accounts suggested a shared emotional connection which is another aspect of the SOC framework. According to McMillan and Chavis, a shared emotional connection is based partly on a shared history that members identify with. Participant’s descriptions of the church community as family who share feelings of warmth, love, and understanding, strongly suggests a shared emotional connection within the community. McMillan and Chavis propose that a shared emotional connection could be the definitive element of true community and suggest that future research should focus on the causal factor leading to this attribute. Inherent in McMillan and Chavis’s notion of a shared emotional connection is also the little explored notion of a spiritual bond. For the participants in this study it appeared that a sense of belonging was very much related to a shared emotional connection. Furthermore, shared emotional connections among participants appeared to be related to Christian social and communal beliefs and values, inherent in which is recognition of a spiritual bond among people. Findings suggest that further exploration of shared emotional connections and spiritual bonds in religious settings could generate fresh insight into the SOC literature.

**Identity**

In line with McMillan and Chavis (1986) participants experienced a strong sense of belonging and identification with the Christian community. In addition, the identity theme in this study relates to Ryan et al.’s (1993) notion of identification which reflects a commitment to and a positive embracing of Christian practice. All of the participants in this study emphasised that being a Christian was an important part
of their lives and identities. Participants spoke of their Christian value system as a guiding force in their lives, for example “it makes me the person that I want to be, I’ve got a set of values, and I’ve got a set of morals and I believe that I’ve got those because I’m a Christian and I do my upmost to live by those”. In the words of another participant “without religion I have no identity, it’s who I am, it’s how I operate everyday of my life” and another “it regulates the way I act and the way I look at the world”.

Furthermore, participants spoke of their Christian values in terms of guiding their interactions and relationships with others as these excerpts reflect “It’s my foundation and it’s the way I make my choices in life, so it’s the way I react with other people……..it is who I am. It’s how I treat other people”, and “it’s really the basis of the way I live or the way I try to live. My family relationships, how I am with the community”. Statements such as these are in line with Arnow’s (1994) who proposes that identity can be defined in terms of the point of intersection between the individual and the social group. Indeed, a number of authors have stressed the importance of a religious identity in the formation of ones wider social identity (Adams, Shea, & Fitch, 1979; Kress & Elias, 2000; Marcia, 1980). Theorists such as James (1958), Jung (1964), and Marcia (1980) considered issues of religion and spirituality to be intertwined with maturational processes and fundamental components of personality. According to Guisinger and Blatt (1994) an increasingly mature sense of self develops in the context of interpersonal relationships and community ties. Successful development is contingent upon increasingly complex roles, relationships, and activities, and the degree of mutual support among them (Kress & Elias, 2000).

A recent qualitative study by Vignoles, Chryssochou, & Breakwell (2004) explored individuality and relatedness among Anglican clergy. Themes of
Relationship with God, Uniqueness, and Relationship with others supported the coexistence of individualistic and relational values. For participants in Vignoles et al. study, relationships and self-representations of uniqueness were dependent on each other and were only meaningful in a social and relational context. Similarly, in the current study, an emphasis on community relationships underlies Support, Sense of belonging, and Identity themes. These findings can be interpreted as supporting theories which posit individual and community as mutually reinforcing constructs (Guisinger and Blatt, 1994). Furthermore, findings such as these support the premise that the construction of identity can be understood hermeneutically, as an interpretive activity that occurs within a social context (Laverty, 2003).

**Journey**

A major theme connected to participant's identification with the church and the church community was a journey process. All except one participant spoke of at least some involvement with church related activities as children. Participants engaged in rich descriptions of their journey process and were explicit in their descriptions of "gradual" and "developing" journeys, for instance "from the time I was about 12 it's been a gradual journey". Participants often spoke of initial extrinsic reasons for involvement in the Christian community, for example "some school friends were going there and I just went along with them to keep company" and "when I started out on my Christian journey I did it probably for selfish reasons of going along to play at the club with the kids".

Many participants said that they had taken time away from church involvement for lengthy periods for reasons such a childrearing, family, and career commitments, and personal issues but had since returned and become "involved" in and "committed" to the church community. One participant recalled that as a teenager
he was "involved in the church choir and just absorbing the ritual but not really being part of it, although physically looking like part of it but not really being" but in adulthood considers his involvement in the Christian community to have become an important part of his identity "because I’ve been there so long you start to develop, you can remember the service, you can nearly recite it, and then you take on tasks one after the other". Another participant stated "It’s certainly developed" and recalled "going to church but always thinking, this is a bit boring, being in church. Now I’ve got to the stage where it isn’t boring. It’s the same service but I’m with it, I’m involved with it”.

Some participants explained that their Christian journey had moved from an intellectual to a more experiential approach as this participant expressed "I used to have a much more intellectual approach to Christianity... As I’ve become older I’m less factual and more concerned with the underlying wisdom". Similarly, another participant said that her identification with the Christian community had "developed gradually from being there I think intellectually, now to a deep spirituality". For one participant the "biggest change is an awareness that God is love...before when I was younger it was these are the rules, you’ve got to follow the rules. And now I look at the rules and how we use them and say, is it nurturing, is it love?”. Participants also suggested that their religious involvement helped them to strive and succeed at becoming more forgiving, compassionate, patient, tolerant, and selfless such as this statement describes, "it gives you more patience for everything, tolerance for people or things that happen in your life, far more patience than I had before", and from another participant "I’m much more forgiving, I’m much more compassionate and I think I have a totally different outlook on life in that I look at it now as what can I do rather than what can I get". Similarly, another participant expressed that her religious
involvement helped her “to focus on other people, on what you can do for other people instead of what you can get for yourself”.

Inherent in many participant’s accounts was the recognition that one’s personal journey develops within the context of community as this statement suggests “it was a developing thing over a period of time and I’ve got people now that are far more mature Christians than me – so I’m sort of halfway I suppose, but it’s an ongoing thing”. This statement is in line with many participants’ accounts that their involvement in the Christian community supports their personal journey toward becoming mature Christians. The notion that members of the Christian community range in levels of “Christian” maturity is in line with Allport’s (1950) notion that extrinsic and intrinsic orientations to religion reflect immature and mature forms of religious identity development. Participants’ accounts of initial involvement in the Christian community for extrinsic reasons toward involvement and commitment to the community, similar patterns of development from a more intellectual to a more experiential approach, and the development of self-regulatory beliefs which guide participants to value tolerance, patience, and selflessness, suggest the development from an extrinsic/immature toward an intrinsic/mature religious identity. Furthermore, it is interesting to note how the journey theme relates to Batson et al.’s (1993) quest dimension which values an open ended search to religious and existential questions. Although Batson et al. propose quest as an orthogonal dimension it is intuitively plausible that this search would journey toward an intrinsic/mature religious orientation over time. Findings are also in line with Sarason’s (1993) notion of a socialization-developmental process underlying religious identity development which should be explored in future longitudinal research.
Religion and Spirituality

In traditional social science terminology, religion represents the more substantive, extrinsic dimensions of religion whereas spirituality represents the more functional, intrinsic dimensions of religion (Marler & Hadaway, 2002; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). To add to developing definitions of religion and spirituality in the psychological literature, participants’ were asked to define what these terms meant to them. In line with the previous literature participants offered extrinsic conceptualizations of religion, for example, “the structure that keeps everybody in order”, “guided by the doctrines” and “values of it”, and “the belief in the ultimate being, the creator. It gives guidelines of how one should live” which includes “joint worship with other people”. In line with Hill (2000) and Sarason (1993) definitions of spirituality included a sense of connection with a transcendent dimension, such as these statements describe, “for me spirituality means connection with spirit, and spirit is to do with heaven or God”, and “you feel like you have some direct connection where the Lord watches over you”. In addition, participants’ often defined spirituality in terms of “depth”, an “inner feeling”, and a connection with an “inner self”, for example “spirituality to me is something that you do on your own, your own spiritual journey”, “Spirituality to me is like an inner feeling...what I’ve got on the inside and that’s God”, “it’s something right within yourself”, and “spirituality is something that you experience within.... I think my spirituality is very much a part of me...it’s so much a part of me”. Participant’s definitions of spirituality appeared to relate to intrinsic conceptualizations of religion in which religious beliefs and values are experienced as fully lived (Allport, 1950). Participant’s accounts of religion and spirituality as motivating forces which guide them toward active social responsibility, such as the Support: for wider community theme suggests, reflects findings from
Colby and Damon’s (1992) study which found that rather than being distinct aspects, morality, spirituality, and identity appeared as an integrated whole among moral exemplars.

Most participants defined religion and spirituality as distinct but interrelated concepts, for example “Both of them are growth areas if you want them to be but they’re interconnected”. When describing how religion and spirituality relate to each other one participant had this to say, “My religion, my Christianity is Anglican….the spirituality fits with my Christianity in the relationships, relationship with God, relationship with self, and relationship with others”. This statement was in line with Vignoles et al. (2004) who found themes of relationship with God, Uniqueness, and relationship with others among their participants. Another participant also related her experience of spirituality to relationship with God, self, and others in this insightful statement “God…is not something that we could ever hope to grasp, it’s something bigger, greater, far beyond whatever we could ever imagine, so that sense of a greater being is very, very strong and in order to know about that being I have to give up a lot and gradually let go of my individuality or sense of self, just let it merge in with other people, with humanity”.

The last two participant statements suggest the notion of a spiritual bond, which is an attribute of shared emotional connection in McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) framework. Statements such as these which suggest a spiritual bond within the community are findings of interest because they could in part, reflect McMillan and Chavis’s notion of what constitutes “true” community. Although McMillan and Chavis posit that the notion of a spiritual bond is difficult to describe, participant’s accounts suggest that the recognition of the interrelatedness and interdependence of peoples lives and relationships could play a part. Participant’s accounts of spirituality
in terms of relationships with God, self, others, and humanity suggest that in line with Hill (2000), further exploration of Sarason’s (1993) SOT could generate further insights about what constitutes SOC. Furthermore, the last participant statement reflects Maslow’s (1999, p. 117) sentiment when he stated that “the greatest attainment of identity, autonomy, or selfhood is itself, a going beyond and above selfhood”. Koltko-Rivera (2006) proposes that in the last three years of his life, Maslow amended his hierarchy of needs placing self-transcendence above self-actualization. In Maslow’s words (1993, p. 270) “I have recently found it more and more useful to differentiate between two kinds of self-actualizing people, those who were clearly healthy, but with little or no experience of transcendence, and those in whom transcendent experiencing was important and even central”. It is interesting to consider how religion, spirituality, and Sarason’s SOT relate to Maslow’s notion of self-transcendence as a motivating force above and beyond self-actualization.

Discussion

Participant’s involvement, participation, and investment in community activities, and supportive relationships with one another engendered feelings of self-efficacy, belonging, and wellbeing, which contributed to the integration and fulfilment of individual and community needs. Underlying the success of the community’s ability to provide and receive practical, social, and emotional support was the sharing of values which emphasised positive, caring relationships. Maintaining supportive relationships within the Christian community was an integral part of participant’s role in the community and overarching Christian value system. Furthermore, anticipated support, trust that the community would continue to provide for each others needs, appeared to be an important dimension of support. Participant’s accounts suggested that the Christian community provided a secure base from which
to engage in outreach efforts for the betterment of people and causes outside of the Christian community.

Supportive relationships appeared to contribute to participant's sense of belonging with many participants referring to the community as their Christian family suggesting that a sense of belonging was also related to a shared emotional connection. Related to participants sense of belonging, and shared emotional connections, suggested by notions of family, was the sharing of values, spiritual values which emphasized and strengthened community relationships. McMillan and Chavis's (1986) notion of a spiritual bond was evident in participants accounts suggesting that links between SOC, shared values, and spiritual values warrants further investigation. Sense of belonging related to participant's identification with the community, with participants expressing a commitment to and a positive embracing of the community's beliefs, values and practices (Hackney & Sanders, 2003; Ryan et al., 1993). Findings suggested a sense of belonging to be an important theme connecting community based themes such as Active involvement and participation, and Support, to identity based themes such as Identity, and Journey.

The journey theme was a separate but connected theme to identity in which participants described their Christian journey, often in terms of personal growth toward Christian maturity. These findings reflected Allport's (1950) notion of a developmental ordering from an extrinsic to an intrinsic religious orientation, and Batson et al.'s (1993) quest dimension that emphasises the (often religious or spiritual) search for existential meaning. Findings were in line with Sarason's (1993) notion of a socialization development process underlying religious identity development, suggesting an avenue for longitudinal research. Definitions of religion and spirituality reflected Sarason's SOT, with definitions of spirituality also
suggesting connection to self and identity. Thus, findings from this study were interpreted as supporting community, identity, religion and spirituality as mutually reinforcing constructs.

Conclusion

It is hoped that this study demonstrates that the religious setting provides a rich context for community and identity research. This study focused on an Anglican Christian sample and it is recognized that other Anglican Christian communities, other Christian denominations, and other religious communities' experiences and conceptualizations of community and identity would be expected to differ from the current sample in significant ways. Thus, future research efforts exploring community and identity constructs within other Christian or religious contexts are encouraged. Implications of this study include the extension of SOC research into the religious domain which may generate fresh insights to the SOC literature. Findings from this study suggest the religious context to be a fertile ground for the study of individual and community level factors, such as values, that promote relationships constructive of community. Further exploration of religious communities may provide a greater understanding of religious social support above and beyond general social support, which may be of particular interest to community psychologists interested in religion as a potential resource for intervention efforts. Greater awareness of religious involvement, its personal value to individuals, its benefits, and detriments, could also benefit clinical and counselling psychologists in their work with clients from diverse religious backgrounds, contributing a more multicultural approach to psychology.

Dual exploration of community and identity constructs may contribute a broader understanding of social and personal identity development and relationships between them. The Journey theme in this study was unique and suggested that the
process of belonging and identification to religious communities warrants further investigation. Implications of such research could include a greater understanding of processes underlying the development of SOC, SOT, self-transcendence, values, altruism, and perhaps terrorism and religious violence. Exploration of definitions surrounding religion and spirituality at a finer level could increase understanding of community and identity relationships in religious settings. Community, identity, religion, and spirituality, and relationships between them, suggests exiting possibilities for future, qualitative, quantitative, longitudinal, and multi-method research efforts in a variety of settings.
References


Community Psychology, 30, 761-786.


Appendix A: Semi-structured interview schedule

Community

(1). What activities do you do, or have you done in the past with other Christians?

(2). What do you feel that you get out of your involvement in the Christian community?

(3). How does being in the Christian community make you feel? For example:
   - Emotionally
   - Mentally
   - Physically

(4). Does your experience with other Christians differ to your experience with non-Christians?

Identity

(5). What does being a Christian personally mean to you?

(6). How did you become a Christian?

(7). Has your experience of being a Christian changed over time?

(8). Would you consider that being a Christian is an important part of your identity?

Religion/Spirituality

(9). What does religion and spirituality mean to you?
   - Religion
   - Spirituality
Appendix B: STATEMENT OF DISCLOSURE (Information Letter)

Dear Participant,

My name is Sara Thomas and I am conducting a student research project as part of my Psychology degree. I would like to invite you to participate in my research project which will explore the experience of the Christian community. I would like to learn about your experience within the Christian community and how you personally identify with the community. In addition, I would like to know your thoughts about how religion and spirituality relate to community and identity. If you would like to participate I would love to have a conversation with you that addresses these topics.

The interview will take approximately 45 minutes. I will be tape recording the interview so that I may transcribe it and analyse it for my project. I would like to assure you that your name will be omitted from all of the research material so that you cannot be identified and you can decline to answer any questions and/or withdraw from this project at any stage. Please be aware that this project has ethics approval from the Ethics committee of the Faculty of Computing Health and Sciences.

Any questions concerning the project entitled “An Exploration of Community, Identity, Religion and Spirituality in a Christian Community Sample” can be directed to me, Sara Thomas of Edith Cowan University on [redacted] or my supervisor Dr Julie Ann Pooley on 6304 5591. If you have any concerns about the project or would like to talk to an independent person, you may contact Dr Dianne McKillop on 6304 5736.

Kind Regards
Sara Thomas
Appendix C: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project title: An Exploration of Community, Identity, Religion and Spirituality in a Christian Community Sample

I have read the participant information letter and any questions I asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in this activity, realizing I may withdraw at any time.

I agree that the research data gathered for this study may be published provided I am not identifiable.

I understand that I will be interviewed and the interview will be audio recorded.

Participant: Date:

Investigator: Date:
Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion

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To facilitate an interdisciplinary format, JSSR continues to correspond closely with the 13th edition of The Chicago Manual of Style (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961, 1982). A style sheet is also available from JSSR;

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4. Submit a cover page stating date submitted, title, acknowledgments, and information on author(s) to include position, affiliation, and mailing address. Omit name(s) of author(s) elsewhere in the manuscript, except when citing previous work, which should always be done in the third person and in such a way that reviewers cannot identify author(s). BE SURE REVIEW COPIES ARE ANONYMOUS.

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2. Make all references as complete as possible, including volume numbers for journals.

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