Over the past 50 years, new cultural influences have pushed the social sciences to change their understanding of religiousness and spirituality (Pargament, 1999). Traditionally, the term “religion” applied to any aspect of spiritual or religious faith (Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2003; Wulff, 1997). Religion was a source of meaning that drew people together under a common, collective understanding of the world (Wulff, 1997). However, the terms “spiritual” and “religious” are becoming increasingly distinct in how people define themselves and their faith. Gallup & Lindsay (1999) found that 30% of Americans reported being spiritual but not religious. Further studies showed that 14-20% of subjects saw themselves as spiritual only and 4-15% as religious only (Roof, 2001; Scott, 2001; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Clearly, people have not only begun to separate these terms, but they are also identifying with one more than the other.

One explanation considers this shift a reflection of large-scale sociodemographic changes as cultural interaction increases (Pargament, 1999). Many Eastern religions and alternative religious beliefs—which focus on meaning and spirituality separate from organized faith—have spread throughout the United States (Barrett, 1996; Ellwood, 1973). These new religious influences offer perspectives outside of traditional Western philosophy, thereby affecting individuals’ interpretation of religious experience (Saliba, 2003). Similarly, McLoughlin (1978) pointed out that the increased number of religious revitalizations and new religious movements in America has redefined religious involvement. These movements may imply that the population views traditional religion as insufficient in dealing with critical personal and social issues, thereby emphasizing a desire to add more “spirit” (personal investigation of faith) into the religious experience (Pargament, 1999; Spilka et al., 2003). Distinctions between the terms “religion” and “spirituality” help differentiate between distinct philosophies and approaches.

**In contrast to studies comparing personal and social aspects of faith, this study used measures of religious orientation (Allport & Ross, 1967), self-construal (Singelis, 1994), organizational religiousness (National Institute on Aging, 2003), and spiritual transcendence (Seidlitz et al., 2002) to investigate the psychosocial mindsets related to an individual’s religiousness and spirituality. We hypothesized that internal desires to believe as well as the tendency to define the self in terms of internal thoughts and actions would predict spiritual transcendence (spirituality). Conversely, we hypothesized that external motivations and the tendency to gain self-understanding from interpersonal relationships would predict organizational religiousness (religion). Findings from 244 online survey responses indicated that external influences largely motivated organizational religiousness, yet there also had to exist an internal desire to believe. In addition, measures of spirituality showed greater relation to external motivations and interdependence than hypothesized.**

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Another theorist noted the sociocultural shift toward deinstitutionalization and individualization in American culture (Berger, 1967). Faith acts as another medium for people to express their individuality by emphasizing a unique spirituality rather than a collective institutional belief. For instance, American baby boomers, a group that often ascribes to higher individualistic practices (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985), are particularly likely to describe themselves as spiritual rather than religious (Roof, 1993). Similarly, as American culture emphasizes individuality, institutions have lost authority in the eyes of Americans, and people have begun searching for personal meaning, picking and choosing what they want to believe (Bibby, 1987; Roof, 1993, 2001).

As research and culture draw lines between spirituality and religion, social scientists must understand the attributes distinct to these constructs. Increasingly, researchers conceptualize spirituality as an individual search for meaning, unity, and highest human potential (Hill et al., 2000; Pargament, 1999; Spilka et al., 2003). Religion, in contrast, is associated with formalized and collective traditions based more on social connection than self-contemplation (Wulff, 1997). Accordingly, Spilka et al. (2003) provided a classic definition for the study of religion and spirituality: “Spirituality is about a person’s beliefs, values, and behavior, whereas religiousness is about the person’s involvement with a religious tradition and institution” (p. 10). This definition attributes the institutional, ritual, and ideological aspects of faith to religiousness, whereas it attributes the individual, affective, and thoughtful aspects to spirituality.

Neither aspect of faith is inherently more beneficial or detrimental to psychological growth (Wulff, 1997). Instead, researchers must understand what characteristics are associated with individuals’ identification in order to understand what these constructs are. Pargament (1999) pointed out that every form of religious or spiritual experience occurs in relation to social context. That is, the social situations people choose are reflective of their social motivation and understanding. For instance, the benefits inherent to the institutional aspects of religion may draw one person, whereas for another person, the individual aspects of spiritual self-seeking may be more attractive. Therefore, we hypothesized that individuals who gain their self-understanding from interpersonal relationships and are motivated by extrinsic rewards would be more likely to participate in organizational religiousness (religion). In contrast, we hypothesized that individuals who gain their self-understanding from their independent thoughts and actions and are motivated internally would indicate higher spiritual transcendence (spirituality). If spirituality and religion represent distinct individual versus collective constructs, then psychologists could appropriately use both based on an understanding of the individual’s mindset.

**Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religious Orientation**

Following from the idea that social context frames all aspects of belief, institutional involvement and spiritual self-seeking should attract people based on personal motivations. Allport and Ross (1967) argued that a person’s beliefs and religious behaviors were either intrinsically motivated, where religiousness comes from an internal desire to understand faith, or extrinsically motivated, where religiousness comes from an external pull to believe. As these definitions became more specific, researchers divided extrinsic religiousness into two types: the extrinsic-social (concern with social rewards) and extrinsic-personal (concern with gaining comfort, security, and protection; Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989; Kirkpatrick, 1989). Allport and Ross (1967) pointed out that religious participation is not always for faith-based purposes but can also be a way to fulfill other social or personal needs.

In this study, we examined the relations among religious orientation, spirituality, and religious involvement. Due to the individualistic nature of spirituality’s definition, we expected internal spiritual/religious desires to be a greater motivator for people with higher spirituality. We hypothesized that intrinsic religious orientation would predict spiritual transcendence. In contrast, because being part of a religious organization or group offers some external reward, extrinsic spiritual/religious desires should be a greater motivator for people with higher involvement in religious institutions. We hypothesized that extrinsic religious orientation would predict organizational religiousness. Relations between variables could illustrate how spirituality and religiousness represent different social/personal motivations in the religious and spiritual life of the individual.

**Interdependent and Independent Self-Construal**

How people understand themselves in relation to the world can play a part in how religious and/or spiritual they are. According to William James (1890), people want to understand themselves, so they will be attracted to situations and practices that allow for this understanding. For instance, Wink and Dillon (2003) found that religiousness correlated with positive social relationships, whereas spirituality related positively with personal growth. It follows that individuals who use institutional religion as means for self-understanding would also seek other interpersonal relationships for self-awareness. Similarly, individuals who approach...
their faith through personal, spiritual means should have a tendency toward individual contemplation for self-awareness.

Singelis (1994) defined two traits that identify how individuals gain their self-understanding: independent and interdependent views of self, or self-construal. Individuals with an independent self-construal define themselves in terms of their internal thoughts, feelings, and actions, not in terms of the thoughts, feelings, and actions of other people. In contrast, people with an interdependent view of self define themselves in terms of their relationships to other people, recognizing that the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others often determine their behavior. These two concepts are highly linked to individualistic and collectivistic cultures, respectively (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Typically, Western cultures are more individualistic, seeking independence and nonconformity, whereas Eastern cultures are more collectivistic and have a desire for interdependence and social bonds (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1994). However, independent and interdependent views of self are not mutually exclusive and exist within each person of every culture to different degrees (Singelis, 1994).

In this study, we examined the relations among self-construal, spirituality, and religious involvement. As mentioned earlier, a person’s spirituality and religiousness is dependent upon the social and personal context. Because involvement in social organizations provides a multitude of potentially defining relationships (Festinger, 1954), we hypothesized that people with higher involvement in religious institutions would be more likely to gain self-understanding from interpersonal relationships. Therefore, interdependent self-construal should predict organizational religiousness, whereas independent self-construal should not. In contrast, because involvement with groups is not necessary to analyze one’s personal thoughts and beliefs, we hypothesized that people with higher individual spirituality would be more likely to gain self-understanding from their independent thoughts and actions. Thus, independent self-construal should predict spiritual transcendence, whereas interdependent self-construal should not. Identifying existing relations among degrees of religiousness/spirituality and self-construal as well as extrinsic/intrinsic motivation would provide a greater understanding of the psychosocial mindset behind religious involvement and spiritual self-seeking.

**Method**

**Participants**

In this study, 244 participants (122 men, 122 women) completed an online survey. Participants came from across many age groups: 47% were 18–21, 24% were 22–34; 5% were 35–44; 12% were 45–54; 9% were 55–64; and 3% were 65 and older. In addition, participants came from many religious backgrounds: 54% Christian; 5% Jewish; 3% Muslim; 3% Agnostic; 9% Atheist; 18% nonaffiliated; and 8% other. We solicited participants through social networking tools such as Facebook and Twitter and offered no incentives for participation.

**Materials**

The online survey included scales to measure participants’ religious/spiritual self-identification, organizational religiousness, spiritual transcendence, intrinsic/extrinsic religiousness, and interdependent/independent view of self. We presented the scales in the order they are listed subsequently followed by demographic questions about age, sex, and religious affiliation.

**Religious/Spiritual Identification Scale (R/SI).** The R/SI (Zinnbauer et al., 1997) is a single-item measure that assesses participants’ identification according to one of four groupings: (a) “I am Spiritual and Religious,” (b) “I am Spiritual but not Religious,” (c) “I am Religious but not Spiritual,” or (d) “I am neither Spiritual nor Religious.” We also used this item to assess how adequately the following scales represented the sample’s interpretation of spirituality and religiousness.

**Self-Construal Scale (SCS).** The SCS (Singelis, 1994) measures how independent and interdependent an individual’s self-construal is. It consists of 15 items for both the independent and interdependent subscales, for a total of 30 questions. We measured each item on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The independent self-construal aspect of the scale included questions such as “I enjoy being unique and different from others in many respects,” whereas the interdependent self-construal subscale consisted of questions such as “I feel my fate is intertwined with the fate of those around me.” The scores were calculated separately for each of the two dimensions (i.e., independent and interdependent) and evaluated as distinct but nonopposite variables.

**Spiritual Transcendence Index (STI).** The STI (Seidlitz et al., 2002) is an 8-item survey that measures perceived experience of the sacred that affects one’s self-perception, feelings, goals, and ability to transcend difficulties. This scale best represents the research definition of spirituality as a focus on beliefs, thoughts, and actions (Spilka et al., 2003). We measured each item on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Examples of questions include “My spirituality gives me a feeling of fulfillment,” and “My spirituality helps me to understand my life’s purpose.”

**Organizational Religiousness Form (OREF).** The OREF (National Institute on Aging, 2003) is a 6-item...
scale that assesses the involvement of the respondent with a formal public religious institution. It is a combined measure using two questions about religious attendance (Wingrove & Alston, 1974) as well as three questions about fit within the specific religious institution (Pargament, Tyler, & Steele, 1979). Questions for the first section included “How often do you attend religious services?” and “Besides religious services, how often do you take part in other activities at places of worship?” using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (less than once a year) to 5 (at least once a week). The second set included questions such as “I feel at home in this religious organization” with a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

**Religious Orientation Scale-Revised (I/E-R).** The I/E-R (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989) is a revised version of Allport and Ross’s (1967) Intrinsic/Extrinsic Religious Orientation Scale. The scale contains eight intrinsic items (e.g., “It is important for me to spend time in thought and prayer”), three extrinsic-personal items (e.g., “What religion offers me most is comfort in times of trouble and sorrow”), and three extrinsic-social items (e.g., “I go to church mainly because I enjoy seeing people I know”; Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989; Kirkpatrick, 1989). We measured all I/E-R responses on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

**Procedure**

The recruitment materials specified the nature of the study and contained a link to reach the survey, which we compiled using the SurveyGizmo online survey host (www.surveygizmo.com). The combined survey took under 15 min to complete; we assured the participants that the results would be strictly anonymous. The link stayed available for 1 week. Treatment of subjects was within the ethical standards of the American Psychological Association.

**Results**

Reliability analyses showed that the Cronbach’s alphas calculated for each scale all indicated good reliability (range = .76–.92). Based on responses to the religious/spiritual identification scale (R/SI), we ran a chi-square test comparing current responses to those previously reported (Scott, 2001) and found a significant change over time and samples, \( \chi^2(3, N=242) = 93.25, p < .001 \). A smaller percentage of our participants reported being “Spiritual and Religious” than expected, whereas a larger percentage reported being “Spiritual but not Religious” and “neither Spiritual nor Religious.” There was no significant difference in the percentage of participants who reported being “Religious but not Spiritual.” Table 1 displays the numbers and percentages of participants who fell into each category with results from past research along with additional results from chi-square comparisons.

**Participant Definition**

To test the validity of the classic definitions of spirituality and religiousness (Spilka et al., 2003, p. 10) against participants’ perceptions of their religiousness/spiri-
tuality, we used results from the R/SI to develop two new variables for each participant: self-identification as religious (religious or nonreligious) and self-identification as spiritual (spiritual or nonspiritual). Using these variables, we compared self-identification to results on the STI and OREF. We evaluated all results in this study at the .01 alpha level to account for family-wise error increased by multiple analyses.

An independent-samples t test between STI and participant spiritual self-identification showed that the STI score for people who responded “I am Spiritual” ($M = 4.41, SD = 1.15$) was significantly higher than for people who responded “I am not Spiritual” ($M = 1.99, SD = 1.05$), $t(239) = 14.64, p < .001, d = .68$. Therefore, the STI scale measure is an excellent indicator of how people understand their spirituality.

Another independent-samples t test showed that OREF was significantly higher for people who responded, “I am not Religious” ($M = 4.43, SD = 2.40$) than for people who answered, “I am Religious” ($M = 3.34, SD = 1.66$), $t(232) = 3.86, p < .001, d = .25$. This result means that a significant portion of the participants had a different understanding of religiousness than the research definition of institutional involvement.

How, then, do people define their religiousness? A possible answer is that participants did not differentiate between the concepts of spirituality and religion. We conducted an independent-samples t test to investigate whether participants who were high in STI associated this trait with their definition of religiousness. This analysis showed that STI did not differ between participants who self-identified as religious ($M = 3.75, SD = 3.78$) and not religious ($M = 3.78, SD = 1.77$), $t(239) = .14, p = .89, d = .01$. Therefore, religion and spirituality were two distinct ideas in the minds of those in this sample.

After testing self-identification, we used multiple regression to determine how well religious orientation predicted organizational religiousness and spiritual transcendence. We hypothesized that both types of extrinsic religious motivation would predict OREF, whereas only intrinsic religious motivation would predict STI. Table 2 displays the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for the variables involved. The overall model predicting OREF was significant, $F(3, 181) = 63.74, p < .001, R^2 = .51$, with extrinsic-social ($\beta = .25, p < .001$), extrinsic-personal ($\beta = .15, p = .009$), and intrinsic religious orientation ($\beta = .59, p < .001$) as significant predictors. The overall model predicting STI was also significant, $F(2, 237) = 338.85, p < .001, R^2 = .74$, with intrinsic ($\beta = .73, p < .001$) and extrinsic-personal religious motivation ($\beta = .25, p < .001$) as significant predictors. Extrinsic-social religion motivation was not a significant predictor of STI ($\beta = .03, p = .41$). These

### TABLE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Transcendence</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>.83**</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.54**</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.21**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org. Religiousness</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>.64**</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.29'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predictor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Intrinsic</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Extrinsic-Social</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Extrinsic-Personal</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Independent</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Interdependent</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .01, **p < .001.
results supported our hypotheses, yet also showed that both aspects of faith involve additional types of religious orientation.

Next, we used regression to determine how well self-construals predicted organizational religiousness and spiritual transcendence. We hypothesized that interdependent self-construal would predict OREF whereas independent self-construal would predict STI. Table 2 displays the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for the variables involved. As hypothesized, the model predicting OREF was significant, $F(1, 185) = 16.66, p < .001, R^2 = .08$, with interdependent self-construal ($\beta = .28, p < .001$) as a significant predictor, whereas independent self-construal ($\beta = .04, p = .54$) was not. The overall model predicting STI was also significant, $F(1, 241) = 11.34, p < .001, R^2 = .05$, with interdependent self-construal ($\beta = .22, p = .001$) as a significant predictor and independent self-construal ($\beta = .05, p = .42$) as nonsignificant. These results supported the research hypothesis that interdependent self-construal relates to organizational religiousness, yet they contradicted the hypothesis in terms of spiritual transcendence, finding that interdependent self-construal related instead. These analyses showed that both aspects of faith were higher for people who understood themselves in terms of their relationships.

Discussion

Defining Religiousness and Spirituality

Both religiousness and spirituality are difficult terms to separate and define. This dilemma is true for both theoretical conceptualizations and in terms of their operationalizations for use in the average population (Hill et al., 2000; Marler & Hadaway, 2002; Pargament, 1999). Our study showed that the participants in this study had shifted their identification of whether they were religious or spiritual from rates of a decade ago (Scott, 2001). Recent studies have shown that people seem to focus more on internal beliefs and less on institutional involvement when responding to questions about faith (Marler & Hadaway, 2002; Roof, 1993, 2001). However, people’s self-identification could also be changing because of different societal connotations associated with the terms religion and spirituality rather than actual differences in practice and belief (Pargament, 1999). Therefore, researchers must try to understand how the population understands these faith constructs. Our study indicated that people who identified as spiritual also scored high on the STI, showing that it is a good measure of how people understand their spirituality.

In contrast, participants’ religious self-identification showed no relation to their level of organizational religiousness, indicating that participants did not define their religiousness by how often they attended or how well they fit into a religious institution. Thus, researchers must reevaluate the classic definition of religiousness as well as other research definitions. Within the boundaries of this study, religious self-identification was different from spirituality in that religious self-identification did not significantly relate to spiritual transcendence.

One possible explanation for the discrepancy between participants’ religious self-identification and their involvement in religious institutions is that participants are less willing to self-identify as religious given that the term “religion” has taken on negative connotations because of its institutional affiliation (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). This explanation relates to the idea that spirituality is now “cool,” whereas religion is “uncool” (Marler & Hadaway, 2002). Therefore, social desirability could play a part in how participants responded. The difference between the definition used in this study and the participants’ responses indicates that psychologists require more research into how people understand what it means to be religious, because institutional involvement does not capture participants’ definition.

Despite participants having a different understanding of religiousness, this study remains useful in its analysis of organizational religiousness and spirituality in relation to religious orientation and self-construal. We found that both extrinsic-social and extrinsic-personal religious motivations were significant predictors of organizational religiousness, clearly indicating that people are more likely to be religiously involved if they recognize and value social and personal rewards from attendance (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). The relation to intrinsic religious orientation, however, implies that independent religious desire also motivates organizational religiousness. This finding indicates that people simply looking for social connections can find other secular venues with the same reward (e.g., YMCAs, social clubs), but that organizational religiousness provides something more to satisfy the religious inclination. Therefore, organizational religiousness is not a solely social and interpersonal aspect of faith, but internal, spiritual desires are a large motivation behind involvement.

This study also supported the hypothesis that participants’ personal spiritual transcendence correlated with their internal desire to believe (intrinsic religious orientation). Interestingly, an individual’s desire to gain external comfort, security, and protection (extrinsic-personal religious orientation) was also a predictor of spiritual transcendence. We assumed that spirituality would be more for personal edification than external reward, yet this finding indicates that people may believe that personal spirituality has the ability to affect
a person’s sense of comfort in life (Gilbert, 2006). However, researchers should perform additional studies to further understand these motivations.

Like religious motivation, an understanding of self-construal can provide insight into what types of people attend religious institutions. Research shows that there is considerable variation within North American culture with respect to self-construal (Singelis, 1994), yet many religious groups emphasize an interdependent or relational nature (Spilka et al., 2003; Wulff, 1997). This study supports the idea that organized religion attracts people who look to relationships to understand themselves. Individuals who place greater value on independent understanding are less likely to utilize the services that a religious institution provides.

The relation between our measure of spirituality and interdependent self-construal, however, provides an interesting challenge. Following the definition provided by Spilka et al. (2003), spirituality is the individual’s search for meaning apart from others. However, our findings indicate that spirituality is not an isolated and solely personal aspect of an individual’s faith. It is possible, though, that even if a person’s main spiritual interaction (e.g., prayer, meditation) is not with other people, spirituality could represent a connection and response to a higher power or some influence outside the self (e.g., nature, karma; Pargament, 1999). Therefore, the beliefs, thoughts, and behaviors may be internal, but they can originate from a nonparticipation of oneself in relation to another. The opposite would be true if spirituality correlated with independent self-construal, which implies individuality and separation from others. It is crucial, then, to recognize that spiritual transcendence is not an isolated phenomenon. Like its relation to extrinsic-personal religious motivation, a person’s spirituality comprises of a belief that the person is either having an effect on or being affected by something external.

Application

A better understanding of religion and spirituality in its social context has a number of benefits. As researchers define what it means to be spiritual and religious, therapists and counselors can better aid their clients. Empirical evidence has demonstrated positive relations between religious beliefs and health (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001; Miller & Thoresen, 2003). For instance, religious people are less likely to use illegal substances, abuse alcohol, or be sexually promiscuous (Davidson, Moore, Earle, & Davis, 2008; Nelms, Hutchins, Hutchins, & Pursley, 2007). Research also links religion to generativity and positive relations, whereas spirituality links to creativity, wisdom, and personal growth (Wink & Dillon, 2003). In addition, intrinsic religiousness positively relates to one’s subjective well-being (Byrd, Hageman, & Isle, 2007). Therefore, the internal desire to believe (intrinsic religious orientation) may be a predictor of how successfully a person copes with life events.

Markus and Kitayama (1991) also found that self-construal has an effect on cognitive, motivational, and emotional processes. As such, if one knows how religion and spirituality interact with self-construal, then therapists can better use both aspects of faith to help people work through issues related to self-understanding. More broadly, researchers can compare coping levels in individualistic and collectivistic cultures and recognize their relation to levels of religious and spiritual belief. Knowledge of religious practices will better aid in cross-cultural understanding. Commonly, American culture has a positive bias toward independent self-construal and a negative bias toward interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Singelis, 1994). Our study shows that interdependence relates to religion and spirituality, which could explain the negative bias toward religion. Thus, as American culture continues to embrace the norm of individualism, it follows that religiousness and spirituality will continue to decline. Our study supports this theory as well, demonstrating that since 10 years ago (Scott, 2001) people are less likely to report either spirituality (from 81% to 74%) or religiousness (from 69% to 41%; see Table 1). Overall, participants were more likely to report having neither aspect of faith (from 11% to 20%). This bias against collectivism affects organized religion most clearly, yet our study shows that spirituality has many of the same interdependent elements and may soon be regarded in the same negative light as religion. Therefore, the shift may not be from religious to spiritual but from believing to nonbelieving (Marler & Hadaway, 2002; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Given the positive effects of both religion and spirituality in terms of risk behaviors and coping, this shift may not be a desirable trend.

Limitations and Future Research

In addition to the information regarding religiousness and spirituality this study has provided, future studies should incorporate additional measures of religiousness to determine how the average person perceives distinctions between spirituality and religion. Often, researchers attempt to identify the nuances of modern spirituality and have pushed the study of religion into the background (Spilka et al., 2003; Wulff, 1997). However, the changes in how people understand their faith occurring over the past 50 years apply as much to people’s religion as their spirituality. Using measures that offer greater variability in terms of self-identification responses—as opposed to the single-item scale used by
Zinnbauer et al. (1997) and Roof (2001)—could also provide a better analysis of how participants understand spirituality and religiousness. Therefore, there is a need for further studies that track current cultural definitions of both constructs.

In addition, although the sample for this study was relatively diverse in age, there was limited diversity in other respects (e.g., 54% Christian). In addition, due to the marketing of the study—as a survey on religion and spirituality—the sample may be weighted toward a segment of the population who felt motivated or passionate about sharing their spirituality and religiousness. The Web-based nature of the survey also limited the survey to people with the time and means to access the Internet for the purposes of filling out the survey. Future research should examine whether these findings are consistent among a more varied sample.

Until then, it is clear that understanding spirituality and religion requires an investigation of the psychosocial mindsets that draw people toward faith rather than simply ascertaining academic definitions. Just as this study challenged preconceived ideas of the characteristics that factor into a person’s spirituality and religious involvement, it is likely that despite faith-based beliefs and behaviors requiring an internal religious draw, they are more influenced by social factors than personal ones. Only by looking at the characteristics related to an individual’s tendency to become spiritual or religious can researchers really understand religion and spirituality.

References


