

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document:

THE RELATIONSHIP OF GOD SUPPORT  
AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY SUPPORT  
TO CAREER EXPLORATION AND CAREER  
DECISION SELF EFFICACY

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The current study examined the relationship between religious support, social support, career exploration, and career decision self efficacy in a sample of 133 undergraduate students involved in religious organizations. Hypotheses were partially confirmed as one's level of social support and religious support, as measured by God support and religious community support, significantly correlated with CDSE but not career exploration. Regression analyses were conducted to explore the ability of the support variables to collectively predict CDSE, where results indicated that overall support accounted for 11% of the variance in CDSE, with God support and social support being significant predictors. It is suggested that, at least for religious students, support gained from religious sources may be equally as important in predicting career outcomes as social support. Further, it is recommended that additional research be conducted to explore the wide range of relationships religion may have on career development.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF GOD SUPPORT AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY  
SUPPORT TO CAREER EXPLORATION AND CAREER DECISION SELF  
EFFICACY

By

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## Chapter 1: Statement of the Problem

Over the past decade, interest in understanding the role that spirituality and religion play in the promotion of well being has greatly increased. Although operational definitions differ among theorists, spirituality often refers to an individual's relationship with a higher power or powers, while religiousness generally refers to a person's relationship with a certain religion, church, or faith community (Miller & Thoresen, 2003). Research on each of these variables has been completed relating to both physical health and mental health. In a meta analysis by Powell, Shahabi, and Thoresen (2003), the authors found that after controlling for other demographic variables, weekly religious attendance accounted for a 30% drop in mortality and a 22% decrease in cardiovascular disease. Spiritual factors have also been associated with physical health, where individuals' who use spirituality as a coping mechanism have shown significantly greater hope to recover from illness and significantly less anxiety among those suffering from a disease (Kaldjian, Jeckel, & Friedland, 1998; Roberts, Brown, Elkins, & Larson, 1997).

Similar positive relationships exist with mental health. In a review of over 80 studies, McCullough and Larson (1999) found that individuals who belonged to a religious group and had a strong faith were 20%-60% less likely to develop depressive symptoms. Aspects of spirituality and religion have also been significantly correlated with lower levels of depression ( $r = -.25$ , Fiala, Bjorck, & Gorsuch, 2002), less loneliness ( $r = .22$ , Kirkpatrick, Shillito, Kellas, 1999), greater stress related growth ( $r = .34$ , Pargament, Koeing, & Perez, 2000), higher self esteem ( $r = .31$ , Greenway et al. 2003),

higher positive affect ( $r = .24$ , Kirkpatrick, Shillito, Kellas, 1999), and greater life satisfaction ( $r = .30$ , Fiala, Bjorck, & Gorsuch, 2002).

Researchers and theorists have suggested that one of the reasons such positive relationships exist between spirituality, religiousness, and mental and physical health is due to an individual feeling supported and watched over (Kirkpatrick, 1998; Sim & Loh, 2003). Through spirituality, one suggestion is that a person will receive support by way of a relationship with a higher power, otherwise known as *God support*. Similarly, *religious community support* is espoused in the form of relationships with others in an individual's religious community, including their religious leaders and fellow faith members. Religious community support and God support have been shown to be especially potent during times of crisis and stress as they act as coping mechanisms and sources of support (Maton, 1989; Stone, Cross, & Purvis, 2003).

Research analyzing the relationship between spirituality, religion, and mental health has been extended to understand the role that these variables play in relation to career variables. In the management and organizational literature, a number of studies have discussed the interface between spirituality, religion, and the workplace. Alignment of religious values with work values has been shown to be strongly correlated with job involvement ( $r = .51$ ) and organizational commitment ( $r = .77$ ) (Milliman, Czaplewski, & Ferguson, 2003). Spiritual well being has also been correlated with decreased stress in the workplace ( $r = -.52$ ) (Csiernik & Adams, 2002). From a career development perspective, spirituality and religiousness have been related to social justice work orientation, finding meaning in one's career, and viewing careers as vocations or callings (Lips-Wiersma, 2002), as well as confidence in making career decisions (Duffy & Blustein, 2005). Also,



groups of individuals who view their work as a calling by God (Davidson & Caddell, 1994) or as a calling that serves the greater good (Wrzesniewski et al. 1997) have reported significantly greater work and life satisfaction than those who viewed their work as a career or job. In sum, while the literature in this area is sparse, aspects of spirituality or religion have been shown to relate positively to career variables.

The initial findings in this area leave a significant number of research paths to be explored, especially since most of these studies have either been qualitative or only used correlational analyses. One of these important paths is understanding how the support received through an individuals' religious community and relationship with a higher power may relate to the ability of individuals to successfully perform career development tasks. While God support and religious community support have not yet been related to career variables, there is existing research on other types of social supports as they relate to career outcomes, in particular interpersonal relationships (Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004; Schultheiss, et al., 2001).

Social support as received through interpersonal relationships has been shown to be significantly related to a number of important career development variables, including perceptions of career opportunities, educational opportunities, and job satisfaction (Harris et al, 2001; Wall, Covell, & Macintyre, 1999). One type of interpersonal relationship that has received a large amount of attention is parental support, which is often understood through an attachment perspective (Schultheiss et al., 2001). A number of studies have shown that college students who report secure attachment relationships to their parents also report greater levels of career exploration (Ketterson & Blustein, 1997), career decidedness (Scott & Church, 2001), and career decision self efficacy (O'Brien, 1996),

although most of these effect sizes were small. In a qualitative study examining relational influences in career development, Schultheiss et al. (2001) found that parental support was continually cited as a significant influence by respondents regarding both their career development and career decision making process. Respondents also reported that the support received through these relationships allowed them to feel more confident and able to perform career related tasks such as career exploration and decision making.

Research relating social support and career variables has not been limited to parental relationships. In the same qualitative study by Schultheiss et al. (2001), respondents also felt the support they received through their relationships with siblings and significant others played an important role in their career development. Peer support, as measured by attachment, intimacy, and mutuality, has also been shown to positively predict exploration and career choice commitment above and beyond the variance explained by parental attachment (Felsman & Blustein, 1999). At the present time, these studies have looked at the relationship between social support received from traditional relationships such as family, friends, and significant others but have failed to examine the sense of support received from spiritual and religious relationships. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore the relations between support received through spirituality and religion to aspects of the career developmental process.

The career development process as a whole consists of a number of key stages, including, but not limited to, career exploration, vocational identity formation, and choice implementation (Savickas, 2005). Though career development does not end at the choice stage, for the purpose of this study the goal will be to understand what role spirituality and religion play in the tasks preceding career choice and entry. Based on previous

relational support research in the career area (Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004; Schultheiss, et al., 2001), the dependent career variables that will be investigated include career exploration and career decision self-efficacy. Career exploration refers to an individual's ability and comfort at exploring a wide variety of career options (Stumpf et al., 1983). Career decision self efficacy is defined as an individual's confidence in his or her ability to make career decisions (Betz & Taylor, 1983).

These two tasks, which play critical roles in career development, can be viewed in a linear fashion, where career exploration proceeds career decision self efficacy (Guay et al., 2003). It is proposed that the support an individual receives through their relationship with God and religious community will positively relate to levels of career exploration, which will in turn predict career decision self efficacy. Several studies have shown career decision self efficacy to significantly relate to career exploration in mixed gender groups (.44) (Ochs & Roessler, 2004), and in groups of men (.31) and women (.17) (Betz & Voyten, 1997).

While these relationships vary in their strength, what this suggests is that those who are more willing to explore their career options also report greater confidence in making career decisions. Based on these prior findings, the current study seeks to extend this framework to explore the role of religious support in the career development process. It is hypothesized that the support one receives through their relationship with God and religious community will function similar to social support, where these variables will relate to CDSE as mediated through career exploration. These relationships have received little empirical investigation to date, perhaps due to a direct connection between these variables not being apparent. While the purpose of this study is to understand the

relations of God support and religious community support to these career related outcomes, a secondary goal is to understand how these supports function as predictors when including other previously studied support variables such as peers, family, and significant others. By doing this, we may better understand the degree to which God support and religious community support uniquely relate to career development above and beyond other support variables.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The career development process of late adolescence is complex and multifaceted. Career theorists have taken varied approaches to understanding why individuals make certain career decisions and how a person can most effectively navigate the career process. Some approaches have placed a great emphasis on person-environment fit, where individuals are hypothesized to be best suited for work environments that are most congruent with their personality (Holland, 1997). Other more complex approaches have proposed that career interests and choices are shaped by what we perceive we can do well and what outcomes are most likely to attend our choice behavior (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). While career theorists place differing degrees of emphasis on variables such as person-environment fit and self-efficacy, consistent in most major theories is the importance of external supports as one navigates the career development process. Late adolescents who are at the point of developing career interests and making decisions do not do so in a vacuum. Rather, they are part of a community that will present the adolescent with both supports and barriers that can play a critical role in their career development. The purpose of this study is to better understand the relationship of different types of social support to career exploration and career decision self efficacy, with a particular focus on the role of God support and religious community support.

This literature review will be organized by first examining the current research regarding the role of social support in the career development of late adolescents. This research supports the notion that those who are more supported by friends, family, and significant others are better equipped to explore career options and make decisions. Next, the relationship that spirituality and religion have with physical health, mental health, and

social support will be addressed. Current research in this area suggests support received through an individual's relationship with a higher powers or powers and their relationship with their faith community can function as a positive resource during times of stress and daily life. Following this, a number of theoretical models and empirical studies will be discussed that have investigated the relationship between spirituality, religion, and career related variables. Though research connecting these variables is limited, these theoretical models provide some insight into how spirituality and religion may be relevant to the career development process.

### Social Support and Career Development

The study of social support as it relates to career development has received a fair amount of research over the past twenty years. Social support is a widely used construct in the field of psychology and most often incorporates the support an individual receives from friends, family, peers, and significant others (Zimet et al., 1988). Social support as received through interpersonal relationships has been shown to be significantly related to a number of important career development variables, including perceptions of career opportunities, educational opportunities, and job satisfaction (Harris et al., 2001; Wall, Covell, & Macintyre, 1999).

One form of social support in particular that has received a large amount of attention in the career field is parental support. In the career literature, parental support is often conceptualized as an outgrowth of parental attachment. It has been hypothesized that individuals with secure attachments to their parents feel more supported and better prepared to deal with life challenges (Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004). An important point to note is that most of these studies have only measured attachment -not support per

se- as it relates to career development, with the implication being that those who are securely attached to other individuals also perceive higher levels of social support. This theoretical rendering of the attachment and support connection has been examined in the literature. In one of the first articles to be published on the topic, Blustein et al. (1991) conducted two studies that investigated how parental separation and attachment related to the career development process. The first study investigated the relationship between parental attachment and levels of career decidedness and career decision self efficacy using a sample of 101 undergraduate students. The second study investigated the relationship between parental attachment and levels of career exploration, career choice commitment, and career choice foreclosure using a sample of 178 undergraduate students. Study 1 yielded no significant findings, as parental attachment did not predict levels of career decidedness or self efficacy. However, using canonical correlations, Study 2 revealed that strong parental attachment was positively correlated with career choice commitment and negatively correlated with career choice foreclosure. The authors found that attachment variables accounted for significant variance in predicting commitment and foreclosure for both females (16%) and males (14%) (Blustein et al., 1991).

Similar approaches and variables were used in subsequent studies to try and understand if, and to what extent, parental attachment and separation relate to career development. In one study, O'Brien (1996) surveyed a group of 282 adolescent women. Results revealed that those who had a moderate degree of attachment and separation from parents reported higher career decision self efficacy and greater congruence between their career choices and abilities. Overall, parental attachment and separation were found to

account for 14% of the variance in the dependent variables. The author suggested that it is important for women in particular to receive the support a secure attachment can bring but also to be independent enough to make their own career decisions.

Parental attachment has also been studied as it pertains specifically to the career exploration process. Ketterson and Blustein (1997) surveyed 137 undergraduate students on parental attachment and career exploration, finding that the quality of the attachment relationship with both parents correlated with environmental exploration ( $r = .22$ ). This is consistent with the original attachment theory proposed by Ainsworth (1989), suggesting that strong attachment allows for more exploration. Through canonical correlations, the authors found that age, attachment to mother, and attachment to father predicted 13% of the variance in self and environmental exploration. Other studies of parental attachment and career related variables have shown parental attachment to negatively relate to fear of career commitment ( $r = -.27$ , Wolfe & Betz, 2004), and positively relate to vocational self concept crystallization ( $r = .22$ , Tokar, Winthrow, Hall, & Moradi, 2003).

Research relating attachment and career variables has not been limited to parental relationships. A number of studies have analyzed different forms of attachment or relationships including peers, friends, and significant others. Felsman and Blustein (1999) investigated the role of peer relationships and how they relate to career choice commitment and exploration. The authors surveyed 147 undergraduate students about their peer relationships in terms of attachment, mutuality, and intimacy. Adolescents who reported greater levels of attachment to their peers also reported higher levels of environmental exploration ( $r = .25$ ) and progress in committing to career choices ( $r = .22$ ). These relationships were shown to relate to exploration and commitment above and



beyond what is accounted for by parental attachment relationships. Career exploration and decision making has also been explored in relation to sibling relationships.

Schultheiss et al. (2002) interviewed thirteen commuter college students, finding that participants felt that the support they received through important relationships with siblings had a strong influence on how confident they were in their ability to explore and make career decisions.

A similar qualitative study based on the past research in relationships and career development was completed by Schultheiss et al. (2001) with the purpose of understanding the role that all types of relationships play in the career process. The authors found that respondents felt the support they received through all of their relationships (including siblings, significant others, peers, and parents) played an important role in their career development (Schultheiss et al., 2001). Once again the findings were consistent with attachment theory in that respondents indicated that support received allows one to feel more confident and able to explore career options and make career decisions. In each of the studies discussed, researchers examined the role of supports and/or attachments through the major categories of support such as friends, family, and significant others. However, one area of support that has received little attention in the career literature is support received through religious communities or relationships with a higher power.

### Spirituality and Religion Research

The study of spirituality and religion as they relate to aspects of both physical and mental health has become a burgeoning research area over the past decade. Though definitions vary between researchers, spirituality tends to refer to an individual's

relationship with a higher power or powers, while religiousness generally refers to a person's relationship with a certain religion, church, or faith community (Miller & Thoresen, 2003). Most of the research done in this area has focused on the relationship that spirituality and religion uniquely have to physical and mental health variables. In a meta-analysis published in the *American Psychologist*, Powell et al. (2003) examined all the studies done to date on the relationships between spirituality, religion, and physical health. While much of the research done in this area failed to meet the statistical guidelines necessary to draw claims about the existence of a distinct relationship, and causality cannot be asserted, the authors found that, after controlling for other demographic variables, weekly religious attendance accounted for a 30% drop in mortality and a 22% decrease in cardiovascular disease. Spiritual factors have also been associated with physical health. For example, individuals who use spirituality as a coping mechanism have shown significantly greater hope to recover from illness and significantly less anxiety among those suffering from a disease (Kaldjian, Jeckel, & Friedland, 1998; Roberts, Brown, Elkins, & Larson, 1997). Researchers hypothesize that religion and spirituality function as protective mechanisms and coping resources during times of illness.

A related meta-analysis completed in the same issue of the *American Psychologist* focused on the linkages of spirituality and religion to mental health (Hill & Pargament, 2003). Similar to Powell et al. (2003), the empirical evidence supporting these relationships has been weak due to both the difficulty of measuring the constructs and the adequacy of research. However, Hill and Pargament found that within this literature, spirituality and religion were hypothesized to be connected to mental health in a number

of distinct ways. An individual's spirituality may be viewed in some cases as a relationship, or attachment, with a higher power or powers. Consistent with attachment theory, individuals who report being strongly connected to God also report significantly less loneliness ( $r = -.22$ ), less depression ( $r = -.23$ ), and higher self esteem when under high levels of stress ( $r = .43$ ) (Kirkpatrick, Shillito, Kellas, 1999; Maton, 1989).

Similarly, avoidant or anxious attachments to God have been shown to produce small but significant relationships with neuroticism and negative affect (Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002).

The support provided by this relationship with a higher power produces relationships to dependent variables that are similar to those produced by religious community. Religious community support involves the network consisting of community members and religious leaders. Clergy support has been shown to significantly relate to negative affect ( $r = .20$ ) and emotional support ( $r = .17$ ) (Krause, Ellison, & Wulff, 1998), and overall religious support has been related to higher life satisfaction ( $r = .30$ ) (Fiala, Bjorck, & Gorsuch, 2002). Along with providing support, spirituality and religion may also be related to mental health when they are conceptualized as motivating forces, or variables that serve as driving forces in a person's life. For many, religion and spirituality can provide an ultimate sense of purpose and serve to help people transition through difficult life experiences (Baumeister, 1991; Emmons, 1999).

Although on the whole spirituality and religion have been shown to relate positively to aspects of mental health, Hill and Pargament (2003) note that this may not be the case for individuals undergoing a spiritual or religious struggle. This may involve a struggle with God, church community, church leaders, or religious principles. People

undergoing struggles with their spirituality or religion have elicited more negative psychological outcomes, including anxiety ( $r = .57$ ), depression ( $r = .44$ ), and suicidality ( $r = .34$ ) (Exline et al., 2000; Hays, Meador, Branch, & George, 2001; Trenholm, Trent, & Compton, 1998). The implication from these studies is that spirituality and religion can relate both positively and negatively to mental health and that authors need to acknowledge the dualistic role these variables can play.

Despite ongoing operational and measurement difficulties regarding spirituality and religion, research in this area has continued to expand and incorporate new variables. To date, the relationship between spirituality, religion, and mental health has usually been confined to general variables such as life satisfaction, mental functioning, and depression. However, there is a growing literature on the relationship of these variables with more specific aspects of mental health, including career development and workplace outcomes. Currently, there has been a small but important set of theory and research efforts integrating aspects of spirituality and religion into the workplace and career development process.

### Spirituality and Religion in the Workplace

Like mental and physical health, career issues play a role in well-being, and may also relate to spirituality and religiousness (Bloch & Richmond, 1998; Lips-Wiersma, 2002). To date, the study of this relationship has been primarily focused in the area of work and the workplace. Adams and Csiernik (2002) wrote, “workplace spirituality involves positively sharing, valuing, caring, respecting, acknowledging, and connecting the talents and energies of people in meaningful goal-directed behavior that enables them to belong, be creative, be personally fulfilled, and take ownership in their combined

destiny” (p. 43). Clearly, this definition strays from more traditional definitions of spirituality which are often tied to a higher power or powers or are support based. However, it represents a recent trend in the field where spirituality has become more broadly defined, incorporating such variables as values, meaning, and community (Miller & Thoresen, 2003). Recent empirical studies have shown that certain dimensions of what Adams and Csiernik (2002) define as “workplace spirituality” relate to positive workplace outcomes.

In an exploratory study assessing spirituality at work and employee work attitudes, Millman et al. (2003) surveyed 200 part time MBA students who were working in full time positions. The authors found that variables they believed encompassed workplace spirituality, such as a sense of community and work meaningfulness, each correlated moderately to strongly with specific outcome variables such as organizational commitment, work satisfaction, intention to quit, job involvement, and organization based self esteem. Alignment of values, or an individual’s desire to work for an organization with a high sense of ethics and integrity, also correlated strongly with organizational commitment and intention to quit. The authors suggested that community, meaning, and values are all important components of an individual’s spirituality, and that when these are congruent with a work environment, both the employees and employers experience more positive outcomes (Millman, Czaplewski, & Ferguson, 2003). Other similar studies have examined how spiritual individuals are able to cope with their work environments. Csiernik and Adams (2002) surveyed 154 individuals in helping professions, such as nurses, educators, clergy, and social workers. Results revealed that

those respondents who reported higher levels of spiritual well being also reported less workplace stressors ( $r = -.52$ ) and greater organizational health ( $r = .19$ )

It is clear that the current conception of spirituality as it relates to the workplace has less to do with a traditional definition tied to a higher power or powers and more to do with value systems and community. An argument can be made that variables such as values and community are their own unique constructs and do not fall under a global spirituality dimension which is most often tied to a higher power or religion. Still, while these researchers may not have explicitly linked these sets of values and sense of community to an individual's relationship with a higher power, such a relationship may in fact account for the development of these values in some workers. However, as the assessment of spirituality remains a distinct challenge to researchers, it may be prudent to accept multiple definitions and components until a global definition is agreed upon.

In contrast to the confusion surrounding the definition of spirituality, researchers examining religion in the workplace have generally adhered to traditional definitions of religiousness, which has also been shown to play a role in the workplace. An exploratory study was completed on the relationship between work values and religious values in a sample of 172 Christian, undergraduate student volunteers (Lewis & Hardin, 2002). Results revealed that those who espoused extrinsic work values, such as advancement, prestige, and economic rewards, were more likely to espouse extrinsic religious values, such as attending religious services for social rewards and status. Other studies have revealed that the majority of business people report their religious values play an important role in their business decisions and career values (Childs, 1995; Lewis, 2001). Based on this initial research, it is evident that an individual's spiritual and religious

background may have important relationships to their work environment and satisfaction both as a value base and coping mechanism for dealing with workplace stress. These studies examining the interplay between spirituality, religiousness, and work within the management and organizational literature represent the bulk of research in this area to date. However, counseling and developmental researchers have recently taken a greater interest in the role that spirituality and religiousness play in career development.

### Spirituality and Religion in Career Development

The interface of spirituality, religion, and career development has been studied from a theoretical and research perspective. Duffy (2006) reviewed the literature in this area and found a number of theoretical models that have been put forth to explain if and to what extent spirituality or religion play a role in career development. Two of these models will be discussed here. Brewer (2001) developed a model proposing that a person's life is guided by three basic principles: meaning, being, and doing. Meaning is the "what" of life and defines one's values; being is who one is; and doing is the action or "how" of life. Brewer identified four types of work, or doing: job, occupation, career, and vocation. Here, a job referred to non-permanent, financially-driven work; an occupation referred to a steady way of obtaining financial support for oneself and others; a career was characterized as a complete commitment and investment to a certain type of work; and a vocation referred to a personally significant path that serves as the highest nature of work. For Brewer, the highest form of work, or vocation, is something people are called to do by the Creator; it also expresses their true selves rather than extrinsic incentives like earning fame or money. She also introduced the idea that even though we all have a

propensity for a vocation, it may not necessarily be obtained through an occupation but rather through work that we do outside of income-earning work.

Brewer suggested that in order for individuals to have stability in their lives, the three principles of meaning, being, and doing need to be in equilibrium for them. She used Jungian precepts of energy to explain that when these three core principles are in disequilibrium, an excessive amount of energy is spent trying to repair this fracture. In contrast, if individuals are able to align their work (doing) with who they are as people (being) and what they value (meaning), obstructive boundaries between work and non-work can dissolve, creating a free flow of energy throughout the system. Brewer contended that work, meaning, and being match most often in a vocation.

Bloch's (2004) theory regarding the connection between spirituality and career development was founded in complexity theory. Essentially, complexity theory posits that in any system, such as a person or an environment, each component is directly or indirectly affected by the other components. Each system is composed of a certain amount of energy to be shared among all components and is in constant change and flux. Within this system, spirituality and work are connected through seven principles that were developed by Bloch and Richmond (1998). Included in these principles are ideas explored in previous research such as viewing work as a calling, believing work has a purpose beyond earning money, working in a setting consistent with one's values, and experiencing community and companionship at work. Bloch argued that people who see their work as spiritual also consider their contribution to the world, avoid self-centeredness, and integrate their work lives with their personal lives.



Bloch extended this framework to career counseling, where counselors are asked to prepare students or clients for their life journey (Bloch, 2004). Tying back to complexity theory, Bloch urged career counselors to help clients acknowledge the great amount of change that occurs within career transitions and to help them to develop tools to face these changes. As clients often enter these transitions with little outside support, counselors need to help clients understand that they are part of a large community of workers and to value all the potential resources within this community. In addition, counselors should actively address with students not only the types of careers they feel drawn to but the reasons behind these feelings, in hopes of helping clients to discern if they feel called to a certain career or if they have a life purpose, as opposed to simply determining their most convenient or lucrative career opportunities. Finally, Bloch encouraged counselors to help clients realize what types of careers are most in harmony or union not only with their skills and interests, but also with their values and sense of self. While Bloch's extensions to counseling were meant primarily for students entering the workplace, her research speaks to the potential benefits of incorporating values and purpose into decisions made at any point in one's career.

The common theme among both of these theoretical approaches is that spirituality and career issues are connected by way of an overall developmental or holistic system. As such, this connection ideally plays out in the general tasks of career development including career decision-making, job satisfaction, and work values. In each of the models the authors regard the integration of spirituality and career decision-making as desirable, but not as something that occurs within every individual. Though neither of these models addresses the role of religious community support and God support to

career development, they speak to the notion that these variables may be connected in some way. Several empirical studies have been completed to explore other ways these variables may be connected.

Currently, research in the area of spirituality, religion, and career development has been limited, likely due to the connections among these variables not being clearly evident. However, the work that has been done has primarily focused on understanding the degree to which spirituality and religion relate to the way individuals navigate career-specific tasks. However, there have only been a limited number of empirical studies that have explored this relationship. Duffy and Blustein (2005) surveyed a sample of 144 college students to investigate how religiousness and spirituality relate to career choice commitment and career decision self-efficacy. Spiritual awareness, defined as the awareness of God in one's life, and intrinsic religiousness, defined as practicing religion for religion's sake, produced small correlations with career decision self efficacy ( $r = .26, .23$ ), and spiritual awareness was also positively correlated with vocational exploration and commitment (.20). The authors concluded that the existence of these relationships may be due to spiritual and religious people feeling more supported which contributes to confidence in decision making.

Two additional studies examined the relationship between spirituality and career development qualitatively. In one study, a group of 16 adults between the ages of 40 and 50 were interviewed regarding their spirituality and career behavior. Four major themes emerged. Respondents felt spirituality influenced their work through promoting the developing and becoming of self, unity with others, expressing self, and serving others (Lips-Wiersma, 2002). Respondents felt that spirituality played a large role in how they

made sense of their lives and also acted as a source of meaning and purpose, in particular as it relates to their careers. A number of respondents also noted that their spiritual and work lives produced a sense of life balance. The author concluded that those who are spiritual try to seek work environments that are consistent with their spirituality and, if unable to find these environments, will incorporate aspects of their spirituality into work life.

Another study interviewed 10 undergraduate students who were diverse according to major, year in school, and religious background. Common themes that emerged in the interviews were the role that one's spirituality had on career values, promoting a sense of vocation or calling, and a desire to do meaningful work. Here, a calling was most typically described as a sense of purpose to serve others. Also, six of the ten interviewees recognized a moment in their career planning process where they thought about the importance of their spirituality in relation to their professional development. Finally, students reported that thinking about their spirituality and career development simultaneously caused them to place a greater focus on the role of their career in enhancing the community rather than just their own lives (Royce-Davis & Stewart, 2001).

The notion of striving for work that is consistent with one's spiritual or religious beliefs can be understood as striving for a vocation. A number of theoretical articles have been written describing what vocation means. Greenbalt and Greenbalt (2001) described vocation as being called to something larger than oneself, based in the classic meaning of vocation referring to a religious calling. Fine (2003) viewed vocation as an overwhelming sense to find meaning in our lives through our work, which is tied to more contemporary

definitions of spirituality based in life meaning and values. Finally, Dalton (2001) argued that the goal for college students should be understanding the work that best coincides with their personal calling, which he defines as a summons by God to pursue a certain type of work. Though these definitions differ slightly from one another, each of the authors noted the importance of using work or a vocation to serve the greater good.

There has been a small amount of research examining individuals who view their career as a vocation or calling. Though definitions clearly vary among theorists, these terms often pertain to careers that are not chiefly financially motivated and that are for the greater good of a higher power or of society. In one of the first studies to measure these constructs empirically, a sample of 1869 Catholics and Protestants were surveyed regarding how they viewed their careers (Davidson & Caddell, 1994). The authors first asked participants to read three paragraphs which described a job, career, and a calling and to choose one which best coincides with their own work. A job referred to non-permanent, financially driven work; a career referred to a job attained throughout a lifetime where the setting may change but type of work remains the same; and a calling referred to something which people feel put on the Earth to do. The authors analyzed group differences, based on responses to these three paragraphs, in work and life satisfaction. They found that individuals who viewed their career as a calling, or a career chosen for them by God, were more likely to espouse social justice beliefs and to report better job security and satisfaction than those who did not. Other interesting findings from this study indicated that males were more likely than females to view their job as a calling; that individuals who worked with people as opposed to things were twice as likely to view their job as a calling; and that as educational level increased, so did a sense

of calling. One limitation of this study was that participants were required to choose only one of three work categories, where individuals may feel that none of these categories, or some combination of them, apply to their views of working.

A similar study was completed by Wrzesniewski et al. (1997) examining how people view their work. The authors surveyed 196 workers who were either in administrative assistant or professional positions. They employed a comparable methodology to Davidson and Caddell (1994), asking participants to agree with one of three statements classified as a job, a career, or a calling. The authors defined a job as something which is primarily done to make money and often the work an individual would like to do; a career, which is moderately fulfilling but involves a constant process of trying to get promoted; or a calling, which is valuable as an end in itself and serves the greater good. The definition of calling differed in this study as it was less tied to a calling by a higher power and more tied to a calling by society or for the societal good. The authors analyzed group differences, based on responses to these paragraphs, in demographic and well being variables. The group of respondents who viewed their work as a calling reported significantly higher levels of well-being than those in the job or career groups, as assessed by work satisfaction and life satisfaction (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). The authors also identified three results which they felt were somewhat surprising. First, they noticed a relatively even percentage of participants who viewed their work as a job, career, or calling. Second, people who viewed their work as a career and were primarily concerned with advancement did not report significantly higher well-being than those who viewed their work as a job. Finally, satisfaction with work or life may be more dependent on how an individual views their work than their income or work prestige. The

authors found that the job versus calling differences in satisfaction and well-being were similar in the administrative assistant and professional groups, though the latter reported higher income and prestige.

The theoretical models presented combined with the limited amount of research in this area provide a solid base from which a great deal of research can be completed. While the role that spirituality and religion play in the workplace is not this study's primary concern, research in these areas suggest the value of studying such variables in the context of career development. Presently, the goal of this study is to build upon the limited empirical research as well as the vast amount of research done with social support to understand if and how God support and religious community support may relate to a number of important career development tasks.

#### Limitations

The current state of research connecting career variables to aspects of spirituality and religion is limited both in the amount of studies completed and the types of analyses used in these studies. In the management and organizational literature, researchers have often used definitions of spirituality to operationalize their constructs which seem at odds with accepted definitions in the literature (Adams & Csiernik, 2002; Millman, Czaplewski, & Ferguson, 2003) Apart from the management and organizational literature, there has only been one study which has related continuous spirituality and religion variables with continuous career variables (Duffy & Blustein, 2005). Two studies that examined the relation of feeling called to a certain career to work satisfaction did so by forcing respondents to choose one of three work types and then basing analyses on these categorical responses (Davidson & Caddell, 1994; Wrzesniewski et al. 1997). Even

theoretical statements about the relationship between an individual's spirituality, religion, and career development have been inconsistent and difficult to operationalize in research (Bloch, 2005; Brewer, 2004).

Given the weaknesses of research in this area, the general question needing to be addressed is if, and to what extent, an individual's spirituality and religion affects their career development. Several research directions are subsumed under this general question, including understanding how spirituality and religion relate to career interests, exploring how spirituality and religion can be used as coping mechanisms during times of job stress and transition, and investigating how support received through spirituality and religion relates to a host of tasks fundamental to career decision making. The goal of this study is to explore one of these research directions specifically to develop a better understanding of the role of God support and religious community support in the career development of undergraduate students. Previous career theory has proposed that career exploration may serve as a mediator to career decision self efficacy, as from a developmental perspective the ability to explore oneself or the career world would precede feelings of confidence in one's ability to make career decisions (Turner & Lapan, 2005). In a sense, without having knowledge about the world of work or attractive careers, it would be difficult for an individual to even be in the decision making process. Thus, it was proposed that career exploration would mediate the relationship between each of the support indices and career decision self efficacy.

The hypothesized predictive relations are shown in Figure 1.

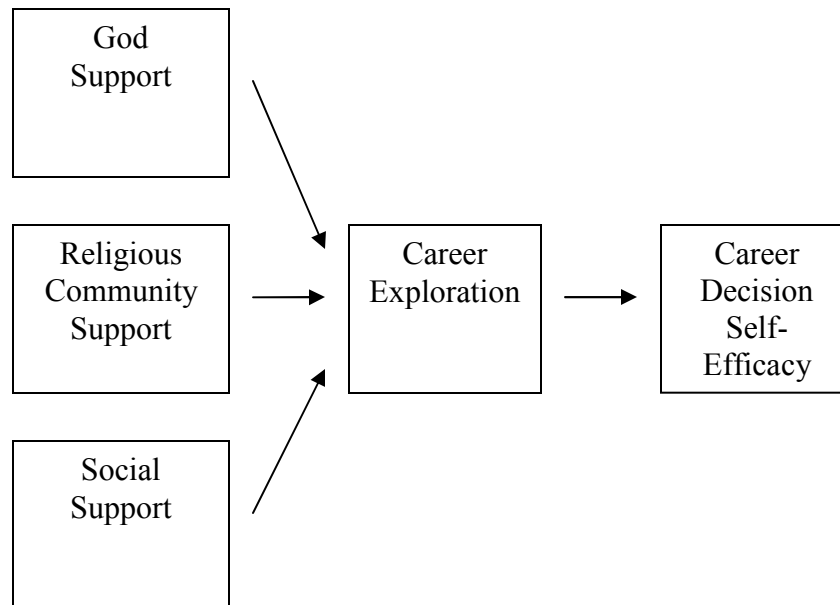


Figure 1: Proposed relationships of God support, religious community support, and social support to career development tasks.

Hypothesis 1: There will be significant positive bivariate relations between career decision self efficacy and each of the following variables:

- a) Career exploration
- b) God support
- c) Religious community support
- d) Social support

Hypothesis 2: There will be significant positive bivariate relations between career exploration and each of the following variables:

- a) God support



- b) Religious community support
- c) Social support

Hypothesis 3: There will be significant positive bivariate relations between God support and:

- a) Religious community support
- b) Social support

Hypothesis 4: Religious community support will correlate positively with social support.

Hypothesis 5: The relation of God support to career self efficacy will be substantially reduced or eliminated after controlling for career exploration

Hypothesis 6: The relation of religious community support to career decision self efficacy will be substantially reduced or eliminated after controlling for career exploration

Hypothesis 7: The relation of social support to career decision self efficacy will be substantially reduced or eliminated after controlling for career exploration.

Research Question 1: Are the scales used to assess God Support, Religious Community Support, Social Support, Career exploration, and Career Decision Self Efficacy significantly skewed or kurtotic?

Research Question 2: Do social support, God support, and religious community support each add unique variance in the prediction of CDSE?

## Chapter 3: Method

### Sample

The sample for this study consisted of 137 undergraduate students at the University of Maryland who were involved in religious organizations on campus. A power analysis was completed based on Cohen's (1992) article to determine the sample size necessary to have a power of .80 with a significance level of .01. To find medium effect sizes ( $R^2 > .09$ ) using multiple regression analyses with five independent variables, Cohen suggests a sample size of 126. Thus, the total number of participants for this study meets these criteria. The sample consisted of 67 males (49%) and 67 females (49%), with three participants not reporting gender. One hundred and three of the participants were White (75%), 23 were African American (17%), 5 were Asian American (3.6%), 2 were Latino/a (1.5%), and 1 was Native American. Finally, 61 (45%) of the sample was Catholic, 42 (31%) was Protestant, 24 (18%) was Jewish, 3 (2.2%) were other religions, 1 was Hindu, 1 was Atheist, 1 reported no religious preference, and 2 participants did not answer the item. As this study was looking specifically at religious students, participants who were atheist, not religious, and did not answer the item were excluded from the analyses. A final total of 133 participants were included in the analyses.

### Measures

*Religious Community Support.* Two subscales of the Religious Support Scale (RSS) (Fiala et al. 2002; see Appendix B) were used to assess the degree to which participants feel supported by their religious community. The two subscales of the RSS measure, Church Leadership Support and Congregational Support, consist of 7 items each. Participants were asked to respond to each statement on a five point Likert scale

ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. A sample item from the Church Leadership Support subscale is, “I can turn to church leadership for advice when I have problems.” A sample item from the Congregational Support subscale is, “Others in my congregation care about my life and situation.” In the instrument development study reliability coefficients for the two subscales, Congregational Support and Church Leadership Support, were .91, and .90, respectively. Congregational Support and Church Leadership Support subscales each related to general social support ( $r = .31, .23$ ) and life satisfaction ( $r = .36, .28$ ). The subscales were also found to be highly correlated ( $r = .73$ ) and therefore will be combined to assess one construct of religious community support in this study. For the current study, the reliability coefficient for the religious community support scale was .94.

*God Support.* Support received through a relationship with God was assessed using the God Support subscale from the Religious Support Scale (RSS) (Fiala et al. 2002; see Appendix B). The God Support subscale is composed of seven items measuring the degree to which participants feel supported by God in their lives. Similar to the other two RSS subscales, participants were asked to respond to each statement on a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. A sample item is, “I can turn to God for advice when I have problems.” Fiala et al. (2002) reported an internal reliability estimate for the God support subscale of .75. The God Support subscale also related positively to general social support and life satisfaction (.51, .34), respectively. The God Support construct appears to be distinct from church leadership support and congregational support, as the intercorrelations are relatively low (.21, .26,

respectively). For the current study, the reliability coefficient of the God Support subscale was .92

*Social Support.* The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; see Appendix C) was used to measure the degree to which an individual feels supported in their life (Zimet et al, 1988). The 12-item scale consists of three 4-item subscales assessing family support, friend support, and significant other support. Participants were asked to respond to each of these items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Examples of items include, “I get the emotional support and help I need from my family” and “My friends really try to help me.” A group of 275 undergraduate students was used to obtain normative data and test the reliability and validity of the scale (Zimet et al. 1988). Reliability estimates for the total scale and friends, family, and significant other subscales were .88, .85, .87, and .91, respectively. Test-retest reliabilities after 2 to 3 months of the initial survey were .75 for the Friends subscale, .85 for the Family subscale, .72 for the Significant Other subscale, and .85 for the Total scale. In terms of construct validity, family support was negatively related to anxiety ( $r = -.18$ ) and depressive symptoms ( $r = -.24$ ), friend support was negatively related to depressive symptoms ( $r = -.24$ ), and significant other support and the total scale scores were negatively related to depressive symptoms ( $r = -.13, -.25$ , respectively). More recent research has confirmed these findings as total scores were found to correlate negatively with scores on the Beck Depression Inventory ( $-.44$ ) and Inventory to Diagnose Depression ( $-.28$ ) (Clara et al., 2003). For the current study, the reliability coefficient of this scale was .72.

*Career Exploration.* Consistent with past research, two subscales were used from the Career Exploration Survey (Stumpf, Colarelli, & Hartman, 1983) to assess self exploration and environment exploration (Appendix D). Both the self exploration (SE) and environmental exploration (EE) subscales are scored on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from a little to a great deal) that asks participants to select how often they had performed specific activities over the past three months. On the 6 item EE subscale, these activities are related to occupation and jobs, whereas on the 5 item SE these activities are related to self assessment. A sample item on the SE is, “Focused on my thoughts on me as a person” and on the EE is, “Investigated career possibilities.” In past studies, internal consistency reliability estimates have been acceptable for each of the subscales, .86 (EE) and .83 (SE) (Blustein, 1988; Blustein, Devenis, & Kidney, 1989). Test-retest reliabilities over a two week period of .85 for EE and .83 for SE have also been found (Blustein et al., 1989). In terms of construct validity, EE and SE were found to correlate, respectively, with employment outlook (.32, .23), certainty of career outcomes (.24, .10), and beliefs that exploring the environment (.31, .22), exploring past career behavior (.21, .46), being systematic (.39, .25), and placing importance in career decisions (.22, .19) would lead to obtaining career goals (Stumpf et al., 1983). For the current study, reliability coefficients for the EE was .92 and for the SE was .89; the reliability coefficient for the total scale was .92.

*Career Decision Self Efficacy.* The Career Decision Self-Efficacy-Short Form (CDSE-SF; see Appendix E) scale was used to measure the degree to which an individual believes he or she can successfully complete tasks that are necessary in making career decisions (Betz, Klein, & Taylor, 1996). It consists of five subscales: accurate self

appraisal, gathering occupational information, goal selection, making plans for the future, and problem solving (Betz, et al. 1996). Participants are asked to respond to statements on a 10-point confidence continuum ranging from no confidence at all to complete confidence, where higher scores correspond with higher levels of career decision self-efficacy. Sample items include, “How much confidence do you have that you could determine what your ideal job would be” and “How much confidence do you have that you could choose a career that fits with your lifestyle”. The CDSE-SF has been used in a wide range of career related studies and has consistently produced an internal reliability around .94 (Betz, Harmon, & Borgen, 1996; Betz & Klein, 1996). The CDSE-SF has been positively correlated with student self efficacy, or the belief in ability to manage tasks related to the student role ( $r = .69$ ) (Quimby & O’Brien, 2004). It has also been negatively correlated with fear of commitment ( $r = -.52$ ) and lack of confidence in performing job tasks ( $r = -.14$ ) (Wolfe & Betz, 2004). For the current study, the reliability coefficient of this scale was .93.

### Procedure

This survey was administered to undergraduate students involved in religious organizations at The University of Maryland. In order to ensure a sample of students currently involved in religious groups, staff leaders of these organizations were contacted and asked for permission for the primary investigator to distribute the surveys. Leaders of the Jewish, Lutheran, Baptist, and Jewish groups on campus all agreed to this proposal; surveys were distributed to the Catholic and Baptist groups at large social gatherings, and the leaders of the Protestant and Jewish groups distributed the surveys independent of the primary investigator. Overall, one hundred and ninety surveys were distributed and, of

these, 145 were returned. Eighty of the surveys were distributed directly to participants by the lead investigator, while the other 110 were sent to the group leaders to distribute when they best saw fit. The survey contained a consent form explaining the nature of the survey and ensuring that each participant was 18 years old. If the participant agreed with the consent form, he or she proceeded to answer a series of instruments beginning with a demographic form and then measures assessing religious, career, support, and control variables. Each of the measures contained directions to allow the participant to take the survey without a proctor.

## Chapter 4: Results

Research Question 1: Are the scales used to assess God Support, Religious Community Support, Social Support, Career exploration, and Career Decision Self Efficacy significantly skewed or kurtotic? Each of the five variables were found to be significantly different from the normal curve using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality. The God Support and Social Support scales in particular were found to be negatively skewed and positively kurtotic, indicating a leptokurtic distribution (see Table 1). Scale transformations were completed for all scales using square root transformations (Micceri, 1989) and a correlation table based on these transformed scores is presented in Appendix G. These transformations yielded correlations at similar levels to those using the untransformed values. Thus, the untransformed values were used for the analyses and discussion.

Table 1  
*Skewness and Kurtosis of CDSE, Career Exploration, God Support, Religious Community Support, and Social Support*

	Skewness	SE	Kurtosis	SE	Test of Normality		
					Statistic	df	Sig.
1. CDSE	-.05	.21	-1.01	.42	.09	133	.02
2. Career Exploration	.01	.21	-1.01	.42	.08	132	.03
3. God Support	-1.6	.21	2.45	.42	.20	133	.00
4. Community Support	-.61	.21	-.46	.42	.12	133	.00
5. Social Support	-1.2	.21	1.03	.42	.16	133	.00



The correlations testing hypotheses 1-4 and reliability coefficients of all five measures are shown in Table 2.

Hypothesis 1a: There will be a significant positive bivariate relation between career decision self efficacy and career exploration. The correlation of career decision self efficacy and career exploration was  $r = .38$ , indicating that career decision self efficacy and career exploration are moderately positively correlated. Thus, Hypothesis 1a was supported.

Hypothesis 1b: There will be a significant positive bivariate relation between career decision self efficacy and God support. The correlation of career decision self efficacy and God Support was  $r = .28$ , indicating that career decision self efficacy and God support are weakly positively correlated. Thus, Hypothesis 1b was supported.

Hypothesis 1c: There will be a significant positive bivariate relation between career decision self efficacy and religious community support. The correlation of career decision self efficacy and religious community support was  $r = .21$ , indicating that career decision self efficacy and religious community support are weakly positively correlated. Thus, Hypothesis 1c was supported.

Hypothesis 1d: There will be a significant positive bivariate relation between career decision self efficacy and social support. The correlation of career decision self efficacy and social support was  $r = .22$ , indicating that career decision self efficacy and social support are weakly positively correlated. Thus, Hypothesis 1d was supported.

Hypothesis 2a: There will be a significant positive bivariate relation between career exploration and God support. The correlation of career exploration and God

support was  $r = .10$  ( $p > .05$ ), a small, non significant correlation. Thus, Hypothesis 2a was not supported.

Hypothesis 2b: There will be a significant positive bivariate relation between career exploration and religious community support. The correlation of career exploration and religious community support was  $r = .03$  ( $p > .05$ ), indicating that career exploration and religious community support were not significantly correlated. Thus, Hypothesis 2b was not supported.

Hypothesis 2c: There will be a significant positive bivariate relation between career exploration and social support. The correlation of career exploration and social support was  $r = .12$  ( $p > .05$ ), indicating that career exploration and social support were not significantly correlated. Thus, Hypothesis 2c was not supported.

Hypothesis 3a: There will be a significant positive bivariate relation between God support and religious community support. The correlation of God support and religious community support was  $r = .46$ , indicating that God support and religious community support are moderately positively correlated. Thus, Hypothesis 3a was supported.

Hypothesis 3b: There will be a significant positive bivariate relation between God support and social support. The correlation of God support and social support was  $r = .29$ , indicating that God support and social support are weakly positively correlated. Thus, Hypothesis 3b was supported.

Hypothesis 4: Religious community support will correlate positively with social support. The correlation of religious community support and social support was  $r = .27$ , indicating that religious community support and social support are weakly positively correlated. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

Table 2  
*Correlations, Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliability Coefficients of the Predictors and Dependent Variables*

	1	2	3	4	5
1. CDSE	-				
2. Career Exploration	.38**	-			
3. God Support	.28**	.10	-		
4. Community Support	.21*	.03	.46**	-	
5. Social Support	.22**	.12	.29**	.27**	-
M	102.95	35.36	30.79	58.58	52.42
SD	15.24	10.62	5.02	9.30	7.52
Possible Scale Range	25-130	11-55	7-35	14-70	12-60
Obtained Scale Range	69-130	14-55	12-35	34-70	27-60
$\alpha$	.93	.92	.92	.94	.72

\* Correlations  $p > .05$  \*\* Correlations  $p > .01$

Hypothesis 5: The relation of God support to career self efficacy will be substantially reduced or eliminated after controlling for career exploration. In a hierarchical regression, the relation of God support to career decision self efficacy was not substantially reduced or eliminated after controlling for career exploration (see Table 3). Thus, Hypothesis 5 was not supported.

Hypothesis 6: The relation of religious community support to career decision self efficacy will be substantially reduced or eliminated after controlling for career exploration. In a hierarchical regression, the relation of religious community support to career decision self efficacy was not substantially reduced or eliminated after controlling for career exploration (see Table 4). Thus, Hypothesis 6 was not supported.

Hypothesis 7: The relation of social support to career decision self efficacy will be substantially reduced or eliminated after controlling for career exploration. In a hierarchical regression, the relation of social support to career decision self efficacy was not substantially reduced or eliminated after controlling for career exploration (see Table 5). Thus, Hypothesis 7 was not supported.

Research Question 2: Do social support, God support, and religious community support each add unique variance in the prediction of CDSE? In a stepwise regression, God support and social support added unique variance in the prediction of CDSE while religious community support did not (see Table 6).

Table 3

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing Career Exploration as a Mediator between God Support and Career Decision Self Efficacy*

	Predictors	R	$\Delta R^2$	df	$\Delta F$	$\beta$
Step 1	God Support	.27	.08	1, 130	10.66**	.28**
Step 2	God Support	.45	.13	2, 129	20.50**	.24**
	Career Exploration					.36**

\*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*  $p < .01$

Table 4

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing Career Exploration as a Mediator between Religious Community Support and Career Decision Self Efficacy*

	Predictors	R	$\Delta R^2$	df	$\Delta F$	$\beta$
Step 1	Community Support	.20	.04	1, 130	5.61*	.20*
Step 2	Community Support	.43	.14	2, 129	22.34**	.19*
	Career Exploration					.38**

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 5

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing Career Exploration as a Mediator between Social Support and Career Decision Self Efficacy*

	Predictors	R	$\Delta R^2$	df	$\Delta F$	$\beta$
Step 1	Social Support	.19	.04	1, 130	5.08*	.22*
Step 2	Social Support	.41	.13	2, 129	20.27**	.19*
	Career Exploration					.36**

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 6  
*Summary of Stepwise Regression Analysis Testing Social Support, God Support, and Religious Support as Predictors of Career Decision Self Efficacy*

	Predictors	<i>R</i>	$\Delta R^2$	<i>df</i>	$\Delta F$	$\beta$
Step 1	God Support	.28	.08	1, 131	11.21**	.28**
Step 2	God Support	.32	.03	2, 130	4.10**	.23**
	Social Support					.17*
	Religious Community Support					.08

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$ .

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The goal of the current study was to explore the relationships of social support, religious community support, and God support to career exploration and career decision self efficacy. As little research has been completed to understand the role of religious variables in an individual's career development, emphasis will be placed on discussing the meaning of these relationships. Based on this discussion, implications will be presented for future research, theory, and career counseling practice.

Initial analyses were conducted to examine the normality of each of the five measures used in this study. All five of these measures were found to be significantly skewed, with the measures of God support and social support found to be negatively skewed by more than one standard deviation. This indicates that these measures were more likely to be answered at the high end, where most of this group of students responded as having above average levels of social support and God support. In attempts to adjust for all of the skewed measures, normalized scores were created and correlations based on these scores can be seen in Appendix G. However, correlations based on the normalized values differ only slightly from the non-normalized correlation values. Thus, for the following discussion each of the hypotheses will be considered using the original values, even though they were significantly skewed.

Overall, the hypotheses were partially confirmed by the results. In line with the bivariate hypotheses, significant, positive relationships were found between career decision self efficacy and all four of the independent variables: career exploration, social support, religious community support, and God support. However, apart from the moderate correlation between career exploration and CDSE, the strength of these

relationships is weak and the support variables likely account for a minimal amount of variance in CDSE scores. Given these findings, the relationships of career exploration and social support to career decision self efficacy have been noted in previous research (Betz & Voyten, 1997; Ochs & Roessler, 2004; Quimby & O'Brien, 2004). Individuals who are more supported by family, friends, and significant others appear to have greater confidence in dealing with career-related challenges such as finding a major, learning about the world of work, and developing career goals. Also, those who have explored both themselves and work environments seem to have greater career decision self efficacy. This is likely due to these individuals having greater self and environment knowledge which makes them more confident in career related tasks. While these findings are not new, they add to the growing career literature that suggests that, for individuals in the process of making career decisions, it is important to have a strong support network and self knowledge.

The relationships of religious community support and God support to career decision self efficacy may function similarly to social support. Essentially, God support and religious community support can be viewed as forms of social support, where individuals reporting high degrees of support in these areas may feel they can turn to God or those in their religious community in times of stress or for general guidance. However, the correlations of God support and religious community support to CDSE were especially small. God support is defined as feeling close to God and having the ability to turn to God in times of trouble. Throughout much of the social support literature, support received through a relationship with God has been overlooked, perhaps due to the mystery and uniqueness of one's relationship with a higher power (Fiala et al., 2002).

However, for religious individuals, this relationship may be equally as important to their overall support network as more traditional groups such as friends, family, or significant others. Results of the current study support this notion, as similar correlations were found between God support and CDSE and between social support and CDSE.

Religious community support is defined as feeling close to the members of one's religious community, including both those in the congregation and religious leaders. While the correlation of religious community support to CDSE was slightly lower than social support, this difference is negligible. For many students, college may be the first time they are in a new environment where their family, friends, and significant others from home are not nearby for support. Thus, the supportive network that can be provided by a college religious community may be equally as helpful as other supportive relationships. For students who are members of a religious community, they may feel able to turn to their religious leaders in times of stress and struggle, including difficulties related to one's career choice. Similarly, a student's congregation may be a support source composed of individuals with similar beliefs, values, and goals, and may be very different from those they encounter in class or the residence halls. Thus, the camaraderie and closeness students feel with those in their religious community may be unique and therefore important to take into account when understanding an individual's full scope of social support. Again, however, the significance of this relationship needs to be taken very cautiously given the low correlation value.

Though all three support-related variables significantly related to career decision self efficacy, hypotheses 5, 6, and 7 were disconfirmed as social support, God support, and religious community support did not relate significantly to career exploration. Career



exploration pertains to the ability to explore how one's self and environment relate to one's career. Based on previous theory and research, it was hypothesized that those who felt more supported would feel more comfortable exploring themselves and their environment. The fact that no significant relationships existed among these variables may be due to a number of issues which will be explored further. First, it is possible that these relationships do not exist. Second, it is possible that they do exist and were not found due to the uniqueness of the sample surveyed or methodological problems.

Though no research has been completed relating religious support to career exploration, and in the current study no significant relationship existed, a few studies have shown significant correlations between indices of social support and career exploration. These past correlation values have ranged from .14 to .31 (Ketterson & Blustein, 1997; Kracke, 1997; Turner et al, 2006). It is possible that issues with the current study's sample may have confounded the results, as this sample was specifically composed of religious individuals and, thus, potentially was more homogeneous than the more general college population. In particular, surveys were distributed to students directly involved with various religious groups or services on campus, and therefore these students may be unique in the college community. Finally, the instrument measuring career exploration may have confounded the results. Though this instrument has been used in a great number of studies over the past 20 years, including Ketterson and Blustein (1997), many of the questions may have been confusing for undergraduate students. For example, one question asked students how often they have "been retrospective in thinking about my career," and another asks students if they have, "understood a new relevance of past behavior for my future career". These questions may have been difficult

for the participants, who may have little past career experience to think about. However, in the planning stages for the current study, this instrument seemed to be the best fit as it measured general career exploration, had been used in numerous career related studies, and had been shown to be valid and reliable. In light of these potential problems, further examination is needed to understand the true extent of the relationship between support and career exploration.

The third set of relationships examined by this study were the connections between the three support variables: social support, God support, and religious community support. Small correlations were found between social support and each index of religious support; a moderate correlation was found between God support and religious community support. These results suggest that those who feel more supported by their friends, family, and significant others are more likely to feel support by God or their religious community, though these relationships are based on small correlation values and need to be considered cautiously. One reason for this connection may be that for religious individuals, many of their friends or significant others may also be part of their religious community. The overlap of God support and social support is less clear, as these two forms of support are dissimilar. However, it is likely that those who feel supported in any area, such as God support, are more likely to feel supported in other areas, such as family or friend support; this notion has been confirmed by previous theory and research (Uchino et al., 1996). Finally, the correlation between God Support and religious community support speaks to each of these variables being strongly related to religiousness in general. However, while the correlation between these variables is moderate, it does not nearly approach a level where it could be assumed to be measuring

the same construct. Thus, it is likely that God support and religious community support are distinct but overlapping variables and should be treated as such. Similarly, each of these variables is distinct from general social support

To further explore the predictive ability of support and exploration to CDSE, three additional hypotheses proposed that career exploration would mediate the relationship between each of the support variables and CDSE. While each of the support variables significantly related to CDSE, none related to exploration. Thus, the relationships between each of the support variables and CDSE did not change when exploration was entered into the equation, and none of the proposed mediating hypotheses were confirmed. This lack of relationship suggests that God support, social support, and religious community support are either directly related to CDSE or that their relationship to CDSE is mediated by other variables not explored in this study. Even when entering exploration into the equation, each support variable still accounted for significant variance in predicting CDSE.

This finding is important as it seems, based on the current results with the current population studied, that support may not directly relate to career exploration, which is at odds with research in other areas of psychology finding that support is significantly related to exploration (Feeney, 2004; Henderson, 1984). Perhaps the secure base which may be provided by social support does not relate to the tasks and processes involved in career exploration, even though research has shown that children who receive social support are more likely to explore their environment through questions and comments, and adults with higher levels of social support have a greater willingness to challenge themselves and try new things (Feeney, 2004; Henderson, 1984). In sum, though reports

are mixed with regard to the relation of support to career exploratory behavior, it is possible that its connection to CDSE is not mediated by exploration, but is either direct or mediated by other variables, at least with the current population.

Finally, an additional research question was posed to understand if God support and religious community support contribute unique variance in predicting CDSE over and above social support. The reason this relationship was explored post hoc was due to each form of support significantly relating to CDSE separately and the necessity to understand if these variables were measuring different forms of support or just social support in general. Results revealed that God support and social support each accounted for unique variance in CDSE while religious community support did not. This suggests that the relationship of religious community support to CDSE is made insignificant when God support and social support are included in the prediction equation. The fact that God support and social support each add unique variance to CDSE suggests that these variables are measuring different support constructs that are minimally overlapping. Similarly, as religious community support does significantly overlap with the other support variables, it is likely that this may be a component of God support and not unique. However the variance accounted for in CDSE by both God support and social support is only 11%, indicating that these variables have only a minimal relationship to CSDE. Even though the strength of relationships is low, these findings speak to the utility of including support received by God as a distinct aspect of overall support, especially with religious samples.

Implications for Research, Theory, and Practice

Overall, the results of this study provide useful implications for research, theory, and practice. As highlighted in the preceding sections, this study speaks to the importance of including religious support variables in research that is exploring overall social support for religious populations. While both of these variables only minimally related to career outcomes, the strength of their relationships were similar. It is suggested that for future researchers interested in measuring the full extent of a person's perceived social support, religious forms of support should be included. For religious groups of individuals in particular, this study underscores that the support they receive through God and their religious community can be related to feeling confident about their career development process. Religious individuals may rely just as heavily on God or their religious community as their friends, family, and significant others. According to this study, the support participants received from each of these groups related similarly to their general levels of CDSE. Similarly, it is possible that the support one receives through their religion may function differently than the support one receives through their friends, family and significant others. For example, an individual's relationship with God may allow one to feel watched over and protected while an individual's relationship with friends or family may provide one with people to turn to for advice or guidance.

For future research specifically in vocational psychology, it is recommended that further exploration be completed to understand the role that religion may play in a person's career process. Though the current study explored one facet of this in religious support, a number of other angles should be investigated, including how religion may relate to an individual's career interests, work values, and goals. Similarly, additional studies could explore how important religious support is in the career outcomes of adults

currently in the work world, where there may be connections between the degree an individual feels supported by God or their religious community and variables such as job satisfaction, performance, and adaptability. Also, religious support may function as a buffering mechanism in times of career stress and transition. A series of studies have found religion to be a useful coping mechanism in times of stress (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005), and work related stress specifically (Case & McMinn, 2001).

Finally, future research might investigate potential mediators and moderators, other than exploration, which connect religious support and CDSE. For example, a student's career identity or developmental status may moderate the relationship of various forms of religious support to CDSE, where these supports may be more salient for students who are more mature or currently in the choice making process. Also, the link between one's level of religious support and CDSE may be mediated by one's general level of self confidence, where religious support may relate more strongly to students' overall levels of confidence and in turn to their CDSE. Similarly, the relationships between religious support and CDSE may have been strengthened if this study if student's were given content specific religious support measures, whereby questions pertained to the degree they felt supported by their religion when it comes to their career. Each of these hypotheses speak to the number of complex ways one's religion and career development may be linked. As research understanding the connection between these variables is in its infancy, additional work is needed to understand the full scope of this relationship.

Future research connecting religion and career development can be informed by theory. Currently, there are a number of theoretical frameworks that have proposed a

relationship between a person's religiousness and his or her career, suggesting that religiousness may inform an individual's career choice and relate to a desire to help others through work (Bloch, 2004; Brewer, 2001). The current study adds an additional piece to these theoretical frameworks by proposing that an individual's religion may provide him or her with support which may make the career decision process easier due to an increase in career decision confidence. Here, it is important to differentiate between the actual career decisions that students end up making and the process itself of making these decisions. The link of religious support to the career decision process suggests that perhaps this support may relate to a host of other career processes, including goal formation and career adaptability. Though these links cannot be established until further research is completed, these ideas speak to the possibility of religious support influencing a person's career across the lifespan.

The research and theoretical implications from the results of this study may be relevant to career counseling practice, even though the results provide only tenuous connections. Perhaps the most important point for career counselors to take away from this study is that religiousness may in some ways relate to career development. It is suggested that if counselors begin to explore with clients what their support networks look like or what drove them to a certain career decision, they might address a client's religious framework and simply question if this has played any role in their career process. For many clients, they may not be religious or may not view their religiousness as connected to their career in any way. However, other clients may have a strong religious support network which counselors can build upon and point clients to in times of stress involving their career decision making. Also, some clients may view their

religion as an important, and perhaps even primary, factor in the work they wish to pursue. While a religious motivation for choosing a certain career was not examined in this study, it is likely that a certain percentage of college aged students feel that their career is a religiously orientated “calling” or “vocation” and seek work in line with their religious principles.

For these types of clients, it may be helpful for counselors to explore the specific ways in which the client feels their religion is pointing them in a certain career direction and explore how this fits in with their own interests and values. Most of the major career development theories suggest that students should make career decisions based on their personal interests, skills, and values, where little emphasis is placed on a career that may be in line with their religion per se. As such, working with clients whose priority it is to find work in line with their religion, over and above personal interests and skills, may be less typical for counselors. However, it is suggested that counselors work to explore the full range of factors contributing to a client’s career choice, which may include their religious background. In sum, counselors are encouraged to explore if and to what extent a client’s religion plays an important role in their life. If a client is religious, it is possible that their relationship with God or religious community may be used by the client as a form of support or guidance during their career decision making process.

#### Limitations

The results and discussion of this study need to be taken with considerable limitations. First, the sample was composed of students from one college campus where surveys were completed by participants who were actively engaged in religious activities or organizations. Thus, even though most college students are religious (Astin et al.,



2005), it would be difficult to extend these results to all college students, much less the general population. Not only were the students all part of religious organizations, but likely represented the upper tier of religious students on campus. It is also possible that the students who decided to participate in the survey were an especially acquiescent or rule following sample of religious students, thereby limiting extensions to religious students as a whole. Likewise, sampling from this specific group of undergraduates may have proven problematic due to the homogeneity of responses which limited variability, particularly among the religious measures. While this homogeneity allowed for the best initial examination of these variables, it likely decreased the meaningfulness of the results. On a similar note, 75 % of the students surveyed were White, which limits the extension of these results to members of multicultural groups. Another limitation concerns the breath of variables measured. Students were only given two career related measures and implications for the role of different forms of social support in the career development process could only be made concerning career exploration and CDSE. While this is a good first step, in the future it would be necessary to examine other important variables pertinent to college students, including career decidedness, career interests, and work values.

Finally, as touched on earlier, there were likely limitations in the instruments themselves, The measure used to assess career exploration may not have adequately assessed the exploration construct the author desired and, in order to make a more solid claim as to the relationship of support and exploration, use of a different measure would be recommended. Specifically, it would be beneficial to use a career exploration instrument distinctively designed for college students. Also, the instruments used to

assess social support and God support were heavily skewed in the negative direction, indicating that participants tended to score well above the expected average score on these measures. Similarly, scores on the social support and God support scales showed high levels of positive kurtosis, which indicates a leptokurtic distribution. These findings suggest that most of the participants tended to view their levels of social support and God support as very high and that scores for these scales tended to be bunched together, limiting the variability of the measures. Finally, the relationships between the support and criterion variables may have been stronger had the support instruments been linked to the career decision making itself rather than assessing general religious or social support.

### Conclusion

Despite these limitations, the overall results of this study speak to the potential value of religious support in the career development of college students. Especially for students who are religious and part of religious organizations, the support they receive through their religious communities and relationship with God may promote confidence in accomplishing important career related tasks such as decision making, goal setting, and information seeking. For researchers and theorists, it is suggested that indices of religious support be seriously considered when measuring overall social support, especially given recent national statistics suggesting that 95% of the population believes in a higher power and 60% report that religion is very important in their lives (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999; Miller & Thoresen, 2002). Also, it is suggested that future research examine more closely how religiousness may relate to an individual's career development. For counselors, it may be advisable to draw on these support networks with religious clients who are having difficulty in their career decision making process.

# Appendices

## APPENDIX A

### Demographics

**Age:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Gender** (circle one): Male Female

**Race or ethnic group** (Circle one):

Black or African American

Hispanic American

White or European American

Asian/Pacific Islander-American

Native American

Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**Religious Preference** (Circle one):

Atheist

Islamic

Agnostic

Jewish

Buddhist

Protestant (Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, etc.)

Catholic

Other

Hindu

No Preference

## APPENDIX B

### Religious Support Scale

#### SUPPORT QUESTIONNAIRE

We would like to learn about people's perceptions of support, related to their *life of faith*. Please rate the following items for the degree to which you feel each one applies to you in general. For these items, "**congregation**" refers to regular attendees of your current church. "**Church leaders**" refers to anyone in a leadership position within the congregation, including pastors, deacons, Sunday School teachers, etc. Please respond to items 1 to 21 using the following **5-point scale**:

**1 = Strongly Disagree   2 = Disagree   3 = Unsure   4 = Agree   5 = Strongly Agree**

1. I can turn to others in my congregation for advice when I have problems.

1   2   3   4   5

2. If something went wrong, my church leaders would give me assistance.

1   2   3   4   5

3. God gives me the sense that I belong.

1   2   3   4   5

4. Others in my congregation care about my life and situation.

1   2   3   4   5

5. I have worth in the eyes of my church leaders.

1   2   3   4   5

6. I feel appreciated by God.

1   2   3   4   5

7. I do not feel close to others in my congregation.

1   2   3   4   5

8. I can turn to church leadership for advice when I have problems.

1   2   3   4   5

9. If something went wrong, God would give me assistance.

1   2   3   4   5

10. Others in my congregation give me the sense that I belong.

1   2   3   4   5

11. My church leaders care about my life and situation.

1 2 3 4 5

12. I have worth in the eyes of God.

1 2 3 4 5

13. I feel appreciated by others in my congregation.

1 2 3 4 5

14. I do not feel close to my church leaders.

1 2 3 4 5

15. I can turn to God for advice when I have problems.

1 2 3 4 5

16. If something went wrong, others in my congregation would give me assistance.

1 2 3 4 5

17. My church leaders give me the sense that I belong.

1 2 3 4 5

18. God cares about my life and situation.

1 2 3 4 5

19. I have worth in the eyes of others in my congregation.

1 2 3 4 5

20. I feel appreciated by my church leaders.

1 2 3 4 5

21. I do not feel close to God.

1 2 3 4 5

## APPENDIX C

### Social Support Scale

Please circle one answer to the following statement based on this scale:

1=Strongly Disagree    2=Disagree    3=Unsure    4=Agree    5= Strongly Agree

1. There is a special person who is around when I am in need.  
1   2   3   4   5
2. There is a special person with whom I can share my joys and sorrows  
1   2   3   4   5
3. My family really tries to help me.  
1   2   3   4   5
4. I get the emotional help and support I need from my family.  
1   2   3   4   5
5. I have a special person who is a real source of comfort to me.  
1   2   3   4   5
6. My friends really try to help me.  
1   2   3   4   5
7. I can count on my friends when things go wrong.  
1   2   3   4   5
8. I can talk about my problems with my family.  
1   2   3   4   5
9. I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.  
1   2   3   4   5
10. There is a special person in my life who cares about my feelings.  
1   2   3   4   5
11. My family is willing to help me make decisions.  
1   2   3   4   5
12. I can talk about my problems with my friends.  
1   2   3   4   5

## APPENDIX D

### Career Exploration Scale

Please circle one answer to the following statements based on this scale:

1=A Little 2=Some 3=A Moderate Amount 4=A Great Deal 5=A Tremendous Amount

#### **To what extent have you behaved in the following ways over the past three months?**

1. Investigated career possibilities  
1 2 3 4 5
2. Went to various career orientation programs  
1 2 3 4 5
3. Obtained information on specific jobs or companies  
1 2 3 4 5
4. Initiated conversations with knowledgeable individuals in my career area.  
1 2 3 4 5
5. Obtained information on the labor market and general job opportunities in my career area.  
1 2 3 4 5
5. Sought information of specific areas of career interest.  
1 2 3 4 5

#### **To what extent have you done the following in the past three months?**

1. Reflected on how my past integrates with my future career.  
1 2 3 4 5
2. Focused my thoughts on me as a person  
1 2 3 4 5
3. Contemplated my past.  
1 2 3 4 5
4. Been retrospective in thinking about my career.  
1 2 3 4 5
5. Understood a new relevance of past behavior for my future career.  
1 2 3 4 5

## APPENDIX E

### Career Decision Self Efficacy Scale-Short Form

INSTRUCTIONS: For each statement below, please read carefully and indicate how much confidence you have that you could accomplish each of these tasks by marking your answer according to the key, Mark your answer by filling in the correct circle on the answer sheet.

1	2	3	4	5
No Confidence	Very Little	Moderate	Much	
Complete				
At All	Confidence	Confidence	Confidence	
Confidence				

HOW MUCH CONFIDENCE DO YOU HAVE THAT YOU COULD:

1. Find information in the library about occupations you are interested in.  
1 2 3 4 5
2. Select one major from a list of potential majors you are considering.  
1 2 3 4 5
3. Make a plan of your goals for the next five years.  
1 2 3 4 5
4. Determine the steps to take if you are having academic trouble with an aspect of your chosen major.  
1 2 3 4 5
5. Accurately assess your abilities.  
1 2 3 4 5
6. Select one occupation from a list of potential occupations you are considering.  
1 2 3 4 5
7. Determine the steps you need to take to successfully complete your chosen major.  
1 2 3 4 5
8. Persistently work at your major or career goal even when you get frustrated.  
1 2 3 4 5
9. Determine what your ideal job would be.  
1 2 3 4 5
10. Find out the employment trends for an occupation over the next ten years.  
1 2 3 4 5
11. Choose a career that will fit your preferred lifestyle.  
1 2 3 4 5
12. Prepare a good resume.  
1 2 3 4 5
13. Change majors if you did not like your first choice.  
1 2 3 4 5



14. Decide what you value most in an occupation.  
1 2 3 4 5
15. Find out about the average yearly earnings of people in an occupation.  
1 2 3 4 5
16. Make a career decision and then not worry whether it was right or wrong.  
1 2 3 4 5
17. Change occupations if you are not satisfied with the one you enter.  
1 2 3 4 5
18. Figure out what you are and are not ready to sacrifice to achieve your career goals.  
  
1 2 3 4 5
19. Talk with a person already employed in a field you are interested in.  
1 2 3 4 5
20. Choose a major or career that will fit your interests.  
1 2 3 4 5
21. Identify employers, firms, and institutions relevant to your career possibilities.  
1 2 3 4 5
22. Define the type of lifestyle you would like to live.  
1 2 3 4 5
23. Find information about graduate or professional schools.  
1 2 3 4 5
24. Successfully manage the job interview process.  
1 2 3 4 5
25. Identify some reasonable major or career alternatives if you are unable to get your first choice.  
1 2 3 4 5

## APPENDIX F

Dear Participant,

This is a research project being conducted by Ryan Duffy under the supervision of Dr. Robert Lent at the University of Maryland, College Park. The purpose of this research project is to examine religious and non-religious resources that people use in making career decisions with the goal of using this information to better counsel students on their career development. The procedures involve completing an approximately 15 minute survey.

To protect your confidentiality, you are asked to **not include** any identifying information such as name or social security number. All information collected from the survey will be kept confidential. All data collected will be stored in locked filing cabinets and password protected computers and only seen by the investigators. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will not be disclosed.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Ryan Duffy at: 0104 Shoemaker Hall, 301 314 7692, [rduf@umd.edu](mailto:rduf@umd.edu) or Dr. Robert Lent at: 3214 Benjamin Building, 301-405-2878, [boblent@umd.edu](mailto:boblent@umd.edu).

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: **Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) [irb@deans.umd.edu](mailto:irb@deans.umd.edu); (telephone) 301-405-0678**. This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

Your decision to participate will imply your informed consent.

APPENDIX G

*Correlations, Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliability Coefficients of the Predictors and Dependent Variables after being Normalized*

	1	2	3	4	5
1. CDSE	-				
2. Career Exploration	.38**	-			
3. God Support	.37**	.15	-		
4. Community Support	.22**	.05	.50**	-	
5. Social Support	.22**	.17	.33**	.26**	-
M	.03	.00	-.01	.02	.00
SD	.99	.99	.91	.96	.91
$\alpha$	.93	.92	.92	.94	.72

\*\* Correlations  $p > .01$

Note: Values were normalized using square root transformations

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