The belief in a higher power has been a topic for consideration and debate since very early in human history. For instance, ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (1999) described God as the unmoved or prime mover, or the force that causes everything in the universe. Because this concept is considered a core component of the human condition, it became a topic of interest to social scientists in the early 1900s. One of the most influential researchers was William James, whose 1902 book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* was foundational in the fields of psychology and religion (James & Richardson, 2010). In this book, James explored the idea of religion as an experience someone has, rather than just an organizational affiliation.

In later decades, social scientists began to discuss spirituality as well as religion. For instance, Maslow (1971) believed spirituality was a vital aspect of the human experience. He viewed it as the process of achieving a person’s highest personal potential through self-actualization. Similarly, Rogers (1961) greatly valued spirituality. As a therapist, he encouraged his clients to attend to their spiritual health and saw it as crucial to their mental health. Rogers argued that spirituality could help replace negative feelings with more positive emotions.

Although many saw religion and spirituality as intertwined, Hill et al. (2000) argued that the terms *religion* and *spirituality* were different concepts. Much of Western society now views religion and spirituality as two separate entities (Marler & Hadaway, 2002; Pargament, 1999; Selvam, 2013). However, this goes against what many scholars have suggested, who saw religion and spirituality as overlapping concepts (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Hill et al., 2000; Zinnbauer et al., 1997).

Although many have suggested that religion and spirituality are seen as different in general,
little empirical research has looked at what specific values and characteristics people view as different between the two. Therefore, the goal of the current study was to analyze the values people expect of religious people in comparison to what people expect of spiritual people. This way, we could see in what ways these groups are seen as different as well as how their values are seen as overlapping.

Religion and Spirituality

Although heavily studied, there is not one definition of religion or spirituality that is agreed upon by all researchers. Scholars have argued that the definitions are unclear (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2013; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). This may be due to disagreement among scholars in the field, but it may also be due to the multidimensional nature of the concepts. In other words, both religion and spirituality encompass a number of different factors and characteristics (Smith, 2007). For this reason, Hill et al. (2000) advised against determining one definitive definition and instead suggested focusing on the multidimensionality of the constructs.

When discussing the different dimensions of religion and spirituality, it becomes obvious that there is overlap between these two concepts. For instance, both religious and spiritual people value a connection to God or a higher power (Lun, 2015; Smith, 2007; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2013; Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999). In addition to having an internal relationship with God or a higher power, both religion and spirituality also place an emphasis on personal beliefs and inner experiences (Donahue, 1985; Smith, 2007; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). But besides these internal aspects, both also place an emphasis on connections and relationships with other people (Burkhart & Solaris-Twadell, 2001; Smith, 2007; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2013) such as looking for harmony with other people, and seeking meaning and purpose in their communities. In addition to overlap in the values of religious and spiritual people, there can also be overlap in how people self-identify. In other words, many people see themselves as both spiritual and religious (Marler & Hadaway, 2002; Shahabi et al., 2002; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). People are not forced to choose one over the other.

Despite the overlap, religion and spirituality are often seen as distinct from each other (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Marler & Hadaway, 2002; Smith, 2007; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Although some researchers have argued that religion and spirituality could be distinct concepts (Del Rio & White, 2012; Helminiak, 2001; Legere, 1984), many have argued that seeing them as separate can cause problems in operationalizing their definitions (Hill et al., 2000; Smith, 2007). Selvam (2013) suggested that viewing these two concepts as separate is particularly predominant in Western cultures; in other cultures, the concepts of religion and spirituality are the same.

Some experts have studied the stereotypes and beliefs about religious individuals (Galen, Williams, & Ver Wey, 2014; Zafar & Ross, 2015) as well as beliefs about different religions (Hodge, Baughman, & Cummings, 2006). Additionally, researchers have studied what people expect of nonreligious individuals (Harper, 2007; Saroglou, Yzerbyt, & Kaschten, 2011). Less research has looked at the stereotypes and expectations people hold about spiritual individuals. Some have looked at beliefs about spirituality in relation to something else such as how spirituality can play a role in counseling (Cornish, Wade, & Post 2012; Henriksen, Polonyi, Bornsheuer-Boswell, Greger, & Watts, 2015). Overall, most of the research on stereotypes has focused on who is viewed favorably and who is viewed unfavorably.

Few have studied stereotyped expectations of religion and spirituality in the same study. Hodge et al. (2006) studied the stereotypes of religion and spirituality in social work textbooks, but did not differentiate between the two. This may have been because the social work textbooks endorse the idea that religion and spirituality are defined as the same (Marler & Hadaway, 2002; Shahabi et al., 2002; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Lun (2015) analyzed the qualitative responses of 28 students about how they perceived the concept of religion and spirituality. They found many trends in the responses. For example, some respondents noted that Christianity is associated with icons such as the cross and Bible. Both religion and spirituality were associated with giving meaning to life. Similar to Hodge et al. (2006), Lun (2015) seemed to treat religion and spirituality somewhat interchangeably and not as separate concepts.

Although some research has looked at stereotypes of religious and spiritual people, less research has analyzed the specific stereotypes of what religious and spiritual people value. However, there is one trend that emerged. Religion is often viewed as an external phenomenon, but spirituality is viewed as an internal phenomenon (Hyman & Handal, 2006; Smith, 2007; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). In other words, religion is often associated with external...
activities such as church attendance, but spirituality is thought of as an internal experience. Lun’s (2015) research did look at some characteristics of religiosity and spirituality because she examined expectations of both groups in her study. Although Lun’s (2015) qualitative research design gave an in-depth picture of how these people are viewed, it did not allow for strong statements as to how these groups are seen as similar and different. The question of how religion and spirituality are expected is especially important to ask among young adults because many have become interested in spirituality in addition to traditional religion (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Therefore, the current study aimed to examine the expectations of what young adults believed spiritual and religious people valued.

Values and Characteristics People Expect of Religious and Spiritual People
Religion is often expected to be a stereotypically external phenomenon (Hyman & Handal, 2006; Smith, 2007; Zinnbauer et al., 1997), and one common aspect frequently associated with religiosity is church or temple attendance. For instance, in studies of self-identified religious and/or spiritual people, individuals have been asked to define what religion and spirituality mean to them (Shahabi et al., 2002; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). In the studies, participants included church attendance in their personal definitions of religion, but not in their definitions of spirituality. Similarly, Hyman and Handal (2006) asked religious professionals to define the two terms, and they associated church attendance with religiosity more so than with spirituality. Finally, in a review of how the research literature defines the terms, church attendance is more often associated with religion than with spirituality (Smith, 2007).

There are many reasons why attendance at church or temple is associated more with religion and less with spirituality. Attendance at some kind of church or temple is part of most major world religions. For instance, meeting with others is discussed in the Bible (Hebrews 10:25 New International Version). Attendance at services is a way to externally demonstrate an individual’s commitment to religion. It is also a way to build a religious community, which provides social support (Burkhart & Solari-Twadell, 2001; Hummer, Rogers, Nam, & Ellison, 1999; Smith, 2007; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2013). Spirituality, on the other hand, is often thought of as a private and individual experience (Helminiak, 2001; Richards & Bergin, 1997). This may lead to people not associating spirituality with attending church. People who view spirituality as an internal phenomenon may not believe there is a need for spiritual individuals to attend church. Therefore, the first hypothesis of the current study was that religious individuals would be expected to attend church services or temple on a regular basis more than spiritual individuals.

A logical extension to church attendance is the beliefs and doctrine that go along with church. Because of this, many have associated religiosity with an organized set of doctrine and beliefs (Del Rio & White, 2012; Meagher & Kenny, 2013; Smith, 2007). Similar to church attendance, many studies have also found that people generally include doctrine and beliefs in their definitions of religion as opposed to their definitions of spirituality (Hyman & Handal, 2006; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). One study even found that people who were connected to a church valued obedience to doctrine and beliefs over many other factors including intellectual autonomy (Ellison & Sherkat, 1993).

Although religions often have a set of doctrine associated with them, the concept of spirituality does not have one set of beliefs associated with it. Koenig, McCullough, and Larson (2001) suggested that spirituality is more subjective than religiosity. Instead of there being only one objective form, spirituality can be seen as the subjective beliefs of the individual person. This can lead to multiple expectations about spirituality among different types of people. Therefore, for our second hypothesis, we suggested that religious individuals would be expected to place importance on adhering to doctrine or rules more than spiritual individuals.

Prayer is defined as connecting and communicating with God or some sort of higher being (Gubi, 2001) and is often associated with religion. For instance, people often include prayer in their definitions of religion but not spirituality (Shahabi et al., 2002; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). This association between religion and prayer is so common that it is often used to measure people’s religiosity (Ap Siôn & Nash, 2013; Breslin & Lewis, 2008; Meraviglia, 1999).

There are reasons why people may expect prayer to be associated with religion more than spirituality. Prayer is an external action often, though not exclusively, performed as part of church or temple ceremonies (Lewis & Malbty, 1996; Zinnbauer et al., 1997), which as discussed, are often associated with religion (Hyman & Handal, 2006; Smith, 2007; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). An in-depth picture of how people value spirituality may lead some to believe that prayer is an important aspect of spirituality. This may lead to people believing prayer is an important aspect of spirituality even if they do not think it is an important aspect of religion. Thus, prayer may be associated with spirituality even if it is not associated with religion.
2006; Shahabi et al., 2002; Smith, 2007). Spiritual people may also be expected to pray (Meravignia, 1999), but the word *prayer* is often less associated with spirituality. Instead, the word *meditation* is more commonly associated with spirituality (Wachholtz & Pargament, 2005; Zumeta, 1993). Although there is much overlap between prayer and meditation, the stereotype about the word *prayer* is still more closely associated with religiosity. Therefore, the third hypothesis of the current study was that religious individuals would be expected to place importance on prayer more than spiritual individuals.

Spirituality is often discussed in relation to the sacred, which is the pursuit of a divine or supernatural power (Hill et al., 2000; Pargament, 1999). Many have argued that connection with God is a core component of spirituality (Del Rio & White, 2012; Meravignia, 1999). In Hyman and Handal’s (2006) study of religious professionals, they included “connection to God” in their definitions of spirituality, but not religiosity. In Smith’s (2007) review of how the research literature defines the terms, *connectedness,* which may include both a connection to God as well as a connection to others, is associated with spirituality. However, no equivalent term is associated with religion. Hill and Pargament (2003) listed four scales that measure “closeness to God.” Interestingly, three of the scales had *spirituality* in the title but only one measure had *religion* in the title. Although it is likely that these authors saw an overlap between religion and spirituality, it does suggest that there is an association between spirituality and a connection to God or higher power.

However, this association is not exclusively with spirituality; many have linked religion to a connection with God as well. Allport and Ross (1967) discussed the importance of *internal religiousness,* which refers to personal beliefs about God. This was compared to *external religiousness,* or the institutional aspects of religion, and suggested that a connection with God or a higher power is an important part of religiosity. Also, in Zinnbauer et al.’s (1997) study of how people defined religion and spirituality, connection to God was associated with both. Therefore, there have been arguments that closeness to God is part of both religion and spirituality. However, because of the stereotype that religion is more external than internal (Hyman & Handal, 2006; Smith, 2007; Zinnbauer et al., 1997), it is likely that people will expect a connection to God to be more associated with spirituality than with religion. Therefore, for our fourth hypothesis, we predicted that spiritual individuals would be expected to place an importance on a close connection to God more than religious individuals.

Thus far, we have discussed four important values associated with religion and spirituality: church/service attendance, adherence to doctrine, prayer, and connection to God. However, there are many other values associated with these topics. For instance, previous research has highlighted conversion and sharing one’s beliefs (Rambo & Farhadian, 2014), regret and repentance (Randall, 2013), and altruism (Huber & MacDonald, 2012). Religious education (and more generally, gaining knowledge and wisdom about ones’ beliefs) is important enough to warrant its own association (“Religious Education Association,” n.d.). Although these values are often associated with religion and/or spirituality, there is no rationale to suggest that any of them would be associated more so with one concept over the other. Therefore, as exploratory hypotheses, we also examined the expectations participants had about religious and spiritual people with regard to these other variables.

**The Current Study**

The goal of the current study was to measure the expectations young adults have about values of religious people and spiritual people. Participants randomly completed one of two surveys. In one survey, participants characterized religious individuals, whereas in the other survey, participants characterized spiritual individuals. In addition to expectations about the hypothesized variables, we also studied exploratory variables to develop a broader understanding of what young adults expected about these two groups.

**Method**

**Participants**

Two hundred forty-four participants were recruited. Nineteen participants were removed from the sample due to missing data, resulting in 225 participants in the final sample. Sixty-nine percent of participants identified as women, 26.5% identified as men, and 4.5% marked “other/prefer not to answer.” The sample was primarily White (66.4%), followed by Hispanic (9.3%), Asian (8%), Black (5.3%), mixed race/other (7.1%), Middle Eastern (1.3%), Pacific Islander (1.3%), and 1.3% who chose not to respond. The mean age was 19.54 (SD = 2.32). Participants identified as Christian...
(70.4%), spiritual (5.3%), nonaffiliated (4.4%),
other (4.4%), Atheist (4%), Jewish (3.5%),
Agnostic (3.5%), Muslim (1.8%), Buddhist (1.3%),
and Hindu (0.4%). Some chose not to identify
their religious or spiritual affiliation (0.9%). The
political identity of participants was also collected,
which included liberal (33.7%), “in-the-middle”
(29.6%), other (23%), conservative (13.3%), and
0.4% who chose not to respond.

Materials
The current study was a between-subjects design.
The independent variable was the usage of the
word religious or the usage of the word spiritual. The
first survey asked participants what they believed to
be the values of religious individuals. The second
survey asked to characterize spiritual people. One
hundred twelve participants took the religious
people survey and the other 113 took the spiritual
people survey. See Table 1 for the 11 Likert-type
scale questions related to the four main study
hypotheses as well as the exploratory hypotheses.

These questions were derived from research on
the topic as previously discussed, and also resulted
from a consultation with a local religious authority
(N. Grevas, personal communication, March 1, 2014). He discussed the survey with us, suggested
what values were important, and generally gave
input on how to best analyze religion and spirituality.

For each of the 11 questions, participants were
asked “How important is each of the following for
a (religious/spiritual) person?” On the response scale, 1 indicated strongly disagree and 7 indicated strongly agree. In addition to the close-ended questions, an open-ended question asked, “In
the box below, please describe what it means
to be a religious/spiritual person. What are the
characteristics and behaviors of a religious/
spiritual person? Feel free to be as brief or descrip
tive as you desire.” The end of the survey asked
demographic questions regarding participant’s
sex, race, age, religious affiliation, and political
ideology.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Religious individuals</th>
<th>Spiritual individuals</th>
<th>t test</th>
<th>95% CI of the difference</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Should attend church service or temple on a regular basis</td>
<td>4.41 ± 1.78</td>
<td>3.58 ± 1.80</td>
<td>t(223) = 3.47, p = .001</td>
<td>[0.38, 1.23]</td>
<td>d = .46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adhere to the doctrine/rules of whatever the beliefs the person is most affiliated with</td>
<td>5.16 ± 1.35</td>
<td>4.82 ± 1.56</td>
<td>t(223) = 1.73, p = .08</td>
<td>[-0.05, 0.72]</td>
<td>d = .23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer</td>
<td>5.47 ± 1.15</td>
<td>4.59 ± 1.69</td>
<td>t(222) = 4.53, p &lt; .001</td>
<td>[0.50, 1.26]</td>
<td>d = .61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be exposed to some kind of (religious/spiritual) education</td>
<td>5.00 ± 1.45</td>
<td>4.53 ± 1.51</td>
<td>t(221) = 2.36, p = .02</td>
<td>[0.08, 0.86]</td>
<td>d = .32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perform good deeds and altruistic actions</td>
<td>5.04 ± 1.39</td>
<td>4.63 ± 1.57</td>
<td>t(223) = 2.11, p = .04</td>
<td>[0.03, 0.81]</td>
<td>d = .28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repent</td>
<td>5.14 ± 1.36</td>
<td>4.84 ± 1.51</td>
<td>t(223) = 1.58, p = .12</td>
<td>[-0.08, 0.68]</td>
<td>d = .21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe they have a close connection to God</td>
<td>5.02 ± 1.54</td>
<td>4.35 ± 1.91</td>
<td>t(223) = 2.91, p = .004</td>
<td>[0.22, 1.23]</td>
<td>d = .39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel regret for wrongdoings</td>
<td>5.08 ± 1.48</td>
<td>5.04 ± 1.45</td>
<td>t(223) = .23, p = .82</td>
<td>[-0.34, 0.43]</td>
<td>d = .03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convert other people to their (religious/spiritual) affiliation</td>
<td>2.46 ± 1.52</td>
<td>2.33 ± 1.53</td>
<td>t(223) = .63, p = .53</td>
<td>[-0.27, 0.53]</td>
<td>d = .08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain knowledge and wisdom</td>
<td>5.35 ± 1.24</td>
<td>5.49 ± 1.30</td>
<td>t(221) = .78, p = .44</td>
<td>[-0.47, 0.20]</td>
<td>d = .10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share views</td>
<td>3.22 ± 1.67</td>
<td>3.50 ± 1.74</td>
<td>t(223) = 1.20, p = .23</td>
<td>[-0.72, 0.18]</td>
<td>d = .16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *Participants were asked “How important is each of the following for a (religious/spiritual) person?”*
Procedure
Institutional review board approval was received for the current study (IRB #184). To recruit participants, students in Introductory Psychology courses received academic credit for participation using the Psychology Subject Pool. The surveys were completed electronically using the online survey website Qualtrics®. Participants were not required to complete the survey in the lab but were instead allowed to complete it wherever they wished. The survey began with an informed consent form explaining the study to participants. Next, participants were randomly assigned to one of the two surveys. Their survey included all the questions stated above in the Materials section. Finally, they were debriefed and thanked.

To receive academic credit, participants were directed to a second survey automatically after they finished the survey. This second survey asked their name, what psychology class they were taking, and what instructor taught the course. When the respondent finished the second survey, they were able to receive academic credit. Because this information was in a separate survey, the participants’ names were not attached to the survey that asked the main study questions. Therefore, we could not identify individual responses, ensuring the participants’ survey responses remained confidential.

Results
Before testing the hypotheses, we compared the two conditions (i.e., being presented with the word religious or being presented with the word spiritual) to see if they differed in any demographics. There were no differences across the two conditions in sex, race, age, religious affiliation, or political ideology. Therefore, this suggested that the conditions were equivalent in these factors (and therefore the only difference was likely the independent variable).

Table 1 shows the t-test results for all values examined in the present study. Due to the high number of statistical tests conducted, a lower p value (.01) was used to determine significance. Hypothesis 1, which suggested that religious individuals would be expected to attend church services or temple on a regular basis more than spiritual individuals, was supported. Hypothesis 2 was not supported. There was no difference in the expected importance of adhering to doctrine or rules between religious and spiritual individuals. Hypothesis 3 was supported. Religious individuals were expected to place importance on prayer more than spiritual individuals. Finally, Hypothesis 4 was not supported. We hypothesized that spiritual individuals would be expected to believe they have a close connection to God more than religious individuals. Instead, this t test was significant in the opposite direction of what was hypothesized. Religious individuals were expected to place significantly more importance on a connection to God than spiritual individuals.

Table 1 also shows the results of the exploratory hypotheses. As stated, these hypotheses explored values often associated with religion and/or spirituality, but previous literature does not indicate that one concept would value these traits over the other. Most of these values did not result in significant differences across the two conditions. The exceptions were the value of a religious/spiritual education as well as the value altruism. For both of these variables, participants expected religious people to value them more than they expected spiritual people to do so.

Discussion
The purpose of the present study was to see if young adults expected the core values of religious people to be different than the core values of spiritual people. In particular, this study looked at how religiosity and spirituality was associated with the following: church attendance, adherence to religious doctrine, prayer, and connection to God or a higher power. Three out of the four hypotheses resulted in statistically significant differences, although some of the results were unexpected. In addition, exploratory hypotheses found that there are many values expected to be similar in both religious and spiritual people. Therefore, these findings could lead to some insight regarding the expectations of religion and spirituality.

Study Findings
Some of our hypotheses were supported. Hypothesis 1 was supported, which stated that religious people would be expected to attend church services or temple on a regular basis more than spiritual people. Hypothesis 3 was also supported, which stated that religious people would be expected to place importance on prayer more than spiritual individuals. These findings supported previous research, which suggested that religion is often associated with church attendance (Hyman & Handal, 2006; Shahabi et al., 2002; Smith, 2007; Zinnbauer et al., 1997) as well as prayer (Ap Siôn & Nash, 2013; Breslin & Lewis, 2008; Meraviglia,
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1999; Shahabi et al., 2002; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Although religious individuals were expected to place more importance on church attendance and prayer than spiritual individuals, the current study did not claim that spirituality was expected to be unrelated to church attendance or prayer. In our study, we found that respondents did expect these activities to be important to spiritual people, but less than for religious people. This supported the suggestion that religion and spirituality may have similar central traits of characterization (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Hill et al., 2000; Zinnbauer et al., 1997).

However, not all our hypotheses were supported. For instance, Hypothesis 2 suggested that religious individuals would be expected to place more importance on adhering to doctrine or rules than spiritual individuals, but our results found no difference between the two groups. We predicted this because many researchers have argued that adherence to tradition or an external belief system is a crucial element to religiosity (Del Rio & White, 2012; Ellison & Sherkat, 1993; Hyman & Handal, 2006; Meagher & Kenny, 2013; Smith, 2007; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Researchers often associate spirituality more with pursuing the sacred and less on doctrines and beliefs (Hyman & Handal, 2006; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). When participants were asked to characterize spirituality, some expected spiritual people to have less structure in their belief system. Specifically, one said, “To me, anyone who believes in something as vague as a ‘force’ like fate or karma is spiritual.” Another participant noted that for spirituality “there are no rules.”

However, the prediction about doctrine and beliefs was not supported; the two groups were seen as placing the same amount of importance on this characteristic. This could be for several reasons. Just because some have suggested that spirituality is somewhat subjective (Koenig et al., 2001) does not mean that spiritual people are expected to have no beliefs. As stated, spirituality is often thought of as private and individualistic (Helminiak, 2001; Richards & Bergin, 1997). Perhaps spiritual people are expected to have their own private and individually defined set of beliefs and adhere to them to the same degree that religious people adhere to the beliefs of their church or temple. Another possible reason why the two groups were seen as placing the same amount of importance on doctrine could be a wording issue. Doctrine is a word not commonly used among young adults, and some participants mentioned that this word was confusing. Perhaps if a different word was used, the results would be different.

Hypothesis 4 was also not supported. We predicted that participants would expect spiritual individuals to have a closer connection to God than religious individuals. However, the opposite was found. Religious individuals were expected to have a close connection to God significantly more than spiritual individuals. This hypothesis was based on the notion that connecting with some kind of sacred or higher power is often seen as a crucial aspect of spirituality (Emmons & Crumpler, 1999; Hill et al., 2000; Marler & Hadaway, 2002). In the open-ended question that asked participants to characterize spirituality, many participants viewed spirituality as a connection to some general higher force. In fact, one respondent noted that a spiritual person “believes and feels the presence of an unseen being or life form that he or she holds to some sacred regard.”

However, as discussed, many have argued that a connection to God is also important to religious people (Allport & Ross, 1967; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). In our findings, some respondents said they characterized religious people as having a connection to God. One responded reported “I feel that a religious person is one who has a personal relationship with God.” It appears that, in our sample, the association between religion and a connection to God was stronger than the association between spirituality and a connection to God. Another possible reason for this might have been a wording issue. In our survey, we asked about a connection to “God.” This is a phrase that research has connected with spirituality and religion, but our participants might have associated “God” with “religion.” We might have found different results if we had asked about a connection to “God or a higher power.”

Our exploratory hypotheses also yielded interesting results. For instance, there were no differences in expectations of how religious and spiritual people were characterized with the following: valuing regret of wrongdoing, sharing views, converting others, gaining knowledge, or repenting of wrongdoings. This supported the idea that religion and spirituality are not always seen as separate from each other. This was not surprising because many researchers have argued that they are not completely different from each other (Zinnbauer et al., 1997), and many people identify as both (Marler & Hadaway, 2002; Shahabi et al., 2002; Zinnbauer et al., 1997).
Ultimately, these hypotheses help reinforce several conclusions. First, religious and spiritual people can be seen as having overlapping characterizations. In our study, many values were seen as important to both religious and spiritual people. Many have argued that society views these concepts as separate from each other (Marler & Hadaway, 2002; Pargament, 1999; Selvam, 2013). Our results seemed to suggest that people may agree with previous scholars who believe there is overlap in the definitions of these concepts (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Hill et al., 2000; Zinnbauer et al., 1997).

Another conclusion of our study was that religiosity can be seen as having both external and internal values. As stated, religion is often stereotyped as something that is external, and spirituality is often stereotyped as something that is internal (Hyman & Handal, 2006; Smith, 2007; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). In our study, we found these stereotypes to be invalid. For example, in our study, religion was more strongly associated with a connection to God, which could be argued to be more internal than external, than spirituality. Some have argued that religiosity can be associated with internal beliefs (Allport & Ross, 1967; Donahue, 1985; Emmons & Crumpler, 1999) and that attending church, which could be argued to be more external than internal, can be a spiritual experience (Hill et al., 2000). Therefore, our study supported researchers who have suggested that both religion and spirituality can have internal and external qualities.

A final conclusion of our study was about the relationship between religion and spirituality. Some have noted a hierarchy regarding religion and spirituality (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Selvam, 2013; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2013). Specifically, some have thought that spirituality is superior to religiosity because spirituality is tied with the internal (Hyman & Handal, 2006; Smith, 2007; Zinnbauer et al., 1997) and is considered superior to the external, which is associated with religion. They cautioned that this idea was biased, a value judgment, and not accurate. The findings of our study seemed to show that both religiosity and spirituality are expected to have important values. In fact, religious people were expected to place greater importance on the hypothesized values than spiritual people. We argue that these results reinforced the notion that one concept is in no way superior to the other.

Our findings were also interesting because the sample was young adults. We believe it is possible that young adults today feel differently about these topics than the young adults of previous years. The present study added to the research on the topic, and will possibly inspire future researchers to analyze the topics of religion and spirituality in young adults. According to Smith et al. (2003), many assumptions about young adults are not based on empirical data. We hoped to help bridge the gap between what researchers think about religion and spirituality, and what young adults think about the topic.

Limitations and Future Research

There were limitations to our study, which suggest ideas for future research. First, our study measured how people characterized religious or spiritual people, but it did not examine how young adults characterized people who are religious and spiritual. As previously discussed, many people personally identify as both (Marler & Hadaway, 2002; Shahabi et al., 2002; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). When answering the questions in our study, some might have thought of the two as the same. For instance, one participant noted, “The word spiritual always meant church and religion.” However, not everyone felt this way. Another participant said, “To be spiritual and religious are two very different things.” Therefore, a study that focuses on expectations of people who are both religious and spiritual would be beneficial to the research literature.

The outcome variables were also limitations to the current study. In this survey, only single-item responses were used to gauge the characteristics of religion and spirituality. This was done to quickly gain a broad understanding of what young adults believed religious and spiritual people valued. However, single-item measures can lead to limited or questionable reliability (Diamantopoulos, Sarstedt, Fuchs, Wilczynski, & Kaiser, 2012; Fisher, Matthews, & Gibbons, 2016). In the future, a study with multiple-item dependent variables would be beneficial.

Finally, another avenue for future research is to continue to study this topic qualitatively such as was conducted by Lun (2015). Although the present study had one qualitative question, the bulk of the research was a quantitative assessment. According to Smith (2010), it is important for researchers to contribute data that is a “sheer, accurate, rich description of social life” (p. 585). This means that future studies need to “go deeper” with how people self-identify or characterize religion and spirituality. In our study, one open-ended question
was not enough to give a detailed account of how young adults characterize religion and spirituality. In the future, focus groups or surveys that ask multiple open-ended questions could be used to accomplish this goal.

Conclusion

The definitions of religion and spirituality are complex, multidimensional, and overlapping (Hill et al., 2000; Smith, 2007). Our study found that people expect religious and spiritual people to have similarities and differences in what they value. This suggests that many people may not view religion and spirituality as completely distinct concepts. As discussed by previous researchers, many argue that people can be religious and spiritual. This study hopes to encourage future scholars to analyze specific traits related to religion and spirituality among young adults, along with analyzing specific stereotypes and expectations about these concepts.

References


