As a function of frequent socialization away from home, young adulthood in the United States becomes a time in which young men and women are affected by friendships with peers (Cheadle & Schwadel, 2012; Desrosiers et al., 2011). Horizontal relationships with friends become increasingly instrumental in young adults’ individual development, which can provide benefits to an individual’s overall well-being (Cheadle & Schwadel, 2012; Desrosiers et al., 2011). For example, friendships that provide a high degree of support and intimacy, and meet other psychological needs are related to happiness, health, well-being, and self-esteem (Demir & Davidson, 2013; Olson & Perl, 2011). Given the benefits of friendship, it is important to examine factors that can potentially enrich the quality of friendships including the level of support, conflict, and depth within a friendship (Pierce, Sarason & Sarason, 1991).

Although research on friendship in adulthood is limited, scientific support exists for the idea that friendships play important roles in influencing people’s sense of self, skills, and priorities in life (Anye, Gallien, Bian, & Moulton, 2013; Demir & Davidson, 2013; Flora, 2013; Sawatzky, Gadermann, & Pesut, 2009). To examine the relationship between religiousness and friendship quality in young adults, this study utilized relational theory as its foundational basis. Relational theory, proposed by Hill and Pargament (2008), was based on Martin Buber’s writings on the connection between relationship and religion (Simpson, Newman & Fuqua, 2008). According to relational theory, an individual’s religious pursuit of the sacred fundamentally includes the pursuit of relationship, not only in hopes of creating a connection with God (vertical relationship), but also a connection with others (horizontal relationship; Hill & Pargament, 2008; Simpson et al., 2008). Within this framework, how individuals personally relate to and maintain a relationship with God impacts their approach toward interpersonal relationships.

**The Relationship Between Religiousness and Friendship Quality**

**Namele Gutierrez, Elizabeth J. Krumrei-Mancuso*, and Cindy Miller-Perrin**

**Pepperdine University**

**ABSTRACT.** The aim of the present study was to examine a possible relationship between religiousness and friendship quality through relational theory. We hypothesized that higher levels of religiousness would be positively correlated with friendship quality. Young adults (n = 118) from a small, Christian university participated in an online survey. We observed a main effect for religiousness of the participant and religiousness of the best friend being associated with greater support and depth in friendship, as well as an interaction between participants’ religiousness and best friends’ religiousness in regard to friendship support. The results indicated that participants’ best friends’ religiousness was a significant, positive predictor of support in friendships ($r^2 = .08$). In addition, an interaction was observed between participants’ religiousness and their best friends’ religiousness in predicting support ($r^2 = .05$). For participants low in religiousness, having a friend with higher levels of religiousness was associated with more support and depth in friendship, but for participants high in religiousness, having a friend with higher levels of religiousness was not associated with friendship qualities. Because friendship is instrumental in young adults’ development, it is important to evaluate religiousness as a possible factor that can positively impact friendships at this life stage.
and vice versa (Desrosiers, Kelley, & Miller, 2011; Simpson et al., 2008). It suggests that optimal human functioning involves an interconnectedness between the psychological and spiritual, and that compartmentalizing these aspects of life negates the benefits of taking a more holistic approach. Relational theory focuses on how religion can act as a guide to form, sustain, and shape people’s closest relationships. Essentially, the theory describes a pursuit of the sacred as it relates to pursuing intimate interpersonal relationships (Simpson et al., 2008). Therefore, this study aimed to understand how young adults’ relationship with God (vertical relationship) connects with their relationship with their friends (horizontal relationship).

**Relational Functioning on the Horizontal and Vertical Level**

One potential factor that can contribute to friendship quality is religion. Although there has been a general lack of agreement among researchers in regard to defining religiousness, the present study defined the construct as an individual’s pursuit of the sacred within well-established communities and traditions that incorporate common beliefs and practices (Davis, Hook, Van Tongeren, Gartner & Worthington, 2012). Within this definition, the sacred is comprised of a connection with God or a dedication to a religious purpose. Therefore, this study aimed to understand how young adults’ relationship with God (vertical relationship) connects with their relationship with their friends (horizontal relationship).

Past research has proposed a parallel process between how individuals think, feel, and behave in relationship with others and how they do so with God (Hall, 2007). When individuals express their relationship dynamic with God, it not only provides insight into their past relationship dynamics, but also into their “current...expectations of emotionally significant relationships” (Hall, 2007, p. 17). This has generally been understood and demonstrated through attachment theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). For example, those with secure attachment, consciously or unconsciously expect that those who are emotionally significant to them will be available, responsive, open to sharing positive and negative emotion, and sincerely take interest in them. Similarly, those with secure attachment will expect the same from their relationship with God and approach their relationship with God in the same way (Hall, 2007). On the other hand, individuals with a preoccupied attachment expect that both others and God will be unreliable, unstable, and unavailable (Hall, 2007). Those with preoccupied attachment tend to respond with desperate, clingy or help-seeking forms of prayer, just as they also use these responses within their relationships with others in order to achieve closeness (Hall, 2007). Moreover, those with fearful attachment style tend to view others as uncaring, hostile, or rejecting, and view themselves as unlovable or unworthy (Hall, 2007). Even though those with this attachment style long for close relationships, they tend to avoid them because they may feel that they cannot seek support from emotionally significant others. In a similar way, they may want a close relationship with God, but they feel unable to achieve such a relationship. Therefore, they may be less willing to share their pain through prayer to God just as they would be less willing to share their pain through verbal communication with others (Hall, 2007). However, individuals who do not identify as securely attached are not only more likely to experience a religious conversion and find new meaning in their relationship with God during adolescence or adulthood, but also self-report a greater increase in religiosity over time (Hall, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 1998).

**Connection Between Friendship and Religiousness**

Past research has extensively examined the role of religiousness within romantic relationships (McCurry, Schrodt & Ledbetter, 2012; Reiter & Gee, 2008) as well as family relationships (Bremsford & Mahoney, 2008) and found that religiousness has been positively associated with open communication, connection, and support, and can possibly mitigate feelings of relational uncertainty and distress (Bremsford, Marinelli, Giarrochi, & Dy-Liacco, 2009; McCurry et al., 2012; Reiter & Gee, 2008). Although findings have suggested religion’s positive impact on romantic and familial relationships, much less research has examined the positive role of religiousness in friendships (Mahoney, 2010).

The few studies that have assessed the relationship between religiousness and friendship have provided insightful trends. Both conflict resolution and forgiveness have been emphasized in the literature that assesses religion’s impact within interpersonal relationships. In a study that assessed 615 adolescents and young adults with a broad range of ethnicities and religious affiliations, forgiveness and empathy were suggested to be essential to openly speaking about religious and spiritual questions in
Religiousness and Friendship Quality

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friendships, which seemed to deepen friendships (Davis et al., 2012; Desrosiers et al., 2011). In addition, positive links have also been found between personal measures of religion such as individual religious practices and experiences, and spiritual disclosure and relationship satisfaction in friendships (Brelsford et al., 2009; Sawatzky et al., 2009). This result suggests a possible relationship between individuals who identify as religious and the level of friendship quality they experience because they may be more able to disclose and discuss religious values and ideas with their close friends. A study conducted among well-educated African American men also confirmed this finding (Mattis et al., 2001). After controlling for education, income, age, and advice offering, the results of Mattis et al. (2001) indicated that men’s subjective spirituality positively affected how supportive they viewed their same-sex friends.

The Current Study

Based on previous research on marriages, families, and friendships, the relational theory framework helps address the influence of religiousness on relationships. Religiousness has been linked with both conflict resolution and supportive, deep relationships. Thus far, the research has assessed the positive association between religiousness and friendship has done so only indirectly by assessing social or community networks, overall quality of life, or the specific ability to forgive or have spiritual disclosure. Therefore, the current study focused on expanding understanding about how religiousness relates to friendship quality directly. In addition, it was a goal of the current study to consider levels of religiousness of participants’ best friends in addition to their own levels of religiousness. We hypothesized that individuals’ religiousness, their ratings of their best friends’ religiousness, and the interaction between both would be positively correlated to friendship quality defined as high social support and depth of values and ideas in friendship, and low amounts of conflict experienced in the friendship.

Method

Participants

Young adults (18–32 years old; M = 19.17, SD = 1.74) from a small, Christian university in southern California participated. The sample consisted of 118 students (67.80% women, 33.20% men). The racial and ethnic self-identifications were as follows: 51.7% identified as non-Hispanic White or Euro-American, 22.9% as Asian/Pacific Islander, 9.3% as Latino or Hispanic, 5.9% as African or African American, 5.1% as Other, 3.4% as Middle Eastern or Arab American, 0.8% as Native American or American Indian, and .8% preferred not to respond. The religious self-identifications were as follows: 86.4% identified as Christian, 6.8% as Atheist, 2.5% as Agnostic, 1.7% as Muslim, 1.7% as Jewish, and .8% as Mormon.

Materials

Demographic Questionnaire. Demographic information was gathered, including age, sex, racial group, and religious affiliation.

Religiosity Measure. This study involved participants rating their own religiousness and their best friends’ religiousness with the Religiosity Measure (Aalsma et al., 2013), a self-report measure consisting of four items, each rated on a 3-point Likert-type scale (not important, important, or very important). Example items include “How important is it to you to believe in God?” and “How important is it to you to rely on religious teachings when you have a problem?” Higher scores indicate greater religiousness (range = 4–12). The internal consistency has been reported as adequate (α = .83; Aalsma et al., 2013). This 4-item measure was completed twice by participants, once about themselves and once about their best friend. This approach was based on previous research, which has shown the quality of self versus other ratings of both internal and external characteristics such as intellect, positivity, and sociability to be fairly to highly accurate, meaning that, when other people rate someone on a personal characteristic, they rate that person closely to how the person rates themselves (Connelly & Ones, 2010; Kenny, 1994; Rauthmann et al., 2014). For the current study, internal consistency was good for both participants’ religiosity (4 items; α = .92) and their best friends’ religiosity (4 items; α = .93).

The Quality of Relationships Inventory (QRI). The QRI (Pierce et al., 1991) is a self-report measure used to assess relational quality through 25 items, each rated on a 5-point scale from 1 (not much) to 5 (a great deal). The questionnaire was divided into three subscales: Support (8 items, α = .85; range = 16–37), Conflict (9 items, α = .91; range = 9–37), and Depth (8 items, α = .84; range = 17–39). Support involves the ability to offer approval, comfort, or encouragement to another person. An example item is “To what extent could you count on this person for help with a problem?”
Conflict relates to disagreements, arguments, or a clash of opposing needs or wishes. An example item is “How critical of you is this person?” Depth is associated with the complexity and profundity of thoughts or ideas able to be discussed. An example item is “To what extent can you count on this person to give you honest feedback, even if you might not want to hear it?” Items from the conflict subscale are reverse scored so that higher scores indicate greater friendship quality (range = 25–125). For the current study, internal consistency for all subscales was adequate: Support (7 items; α = .82), Conflict (12 items; α = .76), and Depth (6 items; α = .80).

Procedure
This study was approved by Pepperdine University’s institutional review board. A convenience sample of participants from a small, Christian university was recruited. Participants accessed the study through the university’s online survey system that requires students’ assigned login information in order to gain access. All participants provided informed consent online prior to completing any measures. First, participants completed demographic information. Participants then completed the Religiosity Measure via self-report. They were then asked to respond to the Religiosity Measure according to how they would expect their best friend to respond to the questionnaire. Participants then completed the QRI. There were no missing data. As compensation, participants were given research credit for a psychology class.

Results
Preliminary Analyses
Descriptive analyses were conducted on all measures (see Table 1). Religiousness scores ranged from 4 to 12 among both participants’ ratings of themselves and their best friends. Participants’ self-reported levels of religiousness were relatively high (M = 9.48, SD = 2.56) as were the best friends’ levels of religiousness (M = 8.63, SD = 2.92). Relationship quality scores ranged from 52 to 110. Relationship quality scores were also relatively high (M = 80.06, SD = 9.54). In general, friends experienced high degrees of support (M = 31.71, SD = 3.76) and depth (M = 31.65, SD = 4.47), while maintaining low levels of conflict (M = 16.69, SD = 5.60).

Several analyses were conducted to examine whether demographic factors (i.e., age, sex, race) were significantly related to participants’ religiousness, their ratings of their best friends’ religiousness, friendship quality, and the three subscales of Support, Depth, and Conflict. First, correlation analyses indicated that age was not significantly correlated with participants’ self-rated religiousness (p = .12), participant’s best friend’s religiousness (p = .19), friendship quality (p = .77), the Support subscale (p = .25), the Depth subscale (p = .51), or the Conflict subscale (p = .42). Second, an independent-samples t-test indicated that women scored higher on religiousness (M = 9.86, SD = 2.32) than men (M = 8.65, SD = 3.00), t(116) = 2.44, p = .02. Finally, a multivariate analysis of variance indicated that none of the racial or ethnic groups differed significantly from one another on participants’ self-rated religiousness (p = .47), participant’s best friend’s religiousness (p = .64), friendship quality (p = .23), the Support subscale (p = .63), or the Conflict subscale (p = .15). On the basis of these analyses, sex was the only demographic variable controlled in the primary analyses.

Correlation analyses were conducted to examine direct links between predictor and outcome variables. Participants’ self-rated religiousness was correlated with their ratings of their best friends’ religiousness (r = .43, p < .001). Support in friendships was correlated with participants’ religiousness (r = .22, p = .01) and their best friends’ religiousness (r = .28, p = .002). Depth in friendships was correlated with the participants’ religiousness (r = .29, p < .01) and their best friends’ religiousness (r = .33, p < .01). Conflict in friendships was not correlated with either the participants’ religiousness (p = .08) or the best friends’ religiousness (p = .26).

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Note. SR = self-reported religiousness. BFR = best friend’s religiousness. QRI = Friendship Questionnaire. Support, conflict, and depth are the subscales of the QRI.

**Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).
***Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).
Hierarchical Regressions
Hierarchical regression analyses were used to examine the effect of participants' religiousness, their best friends' religiousness, and the interaction between these two variables on support and depth in friendships, while controlling for sex (see Table 2 and Table 3). The results indicated that participants' best friends' religiousness was a significant, positive predictor of support in friendships ($\beta = .27, p = .006; r^2 = .08$). In addition, an interaction was observed between participants' religiousness and their best friends' religiousness in predicting support ($\beta = -1.28, p = .009; r^2 = .05$). With regard to depth of friendship, only participants' best friends' religiousness was a significant predictor ($\beta = .28, p = .003; r^2 = .12$).

Post hoc probing of the significant interactions was conducted by testing the significance of separate regression lines for individuals high (1 SD above mean) versus low (1 SD below the mean) on religiousness after centering all variables to reduce multicollinearity. First, an interaction was observed for best friends' religiousness moderating the relationship between the participants' religiousness and the support in a friendship (see Figure 1). For participants low in religiousness, the slope for the regression line was: support = .50 (best friends' religiousness) + 31.97, $t(114) = 3.74, p < .001$, indicating that participants experienced significantly greater support in their friendships when they rated their best friends as being higher in religiousness. However, for those participants high in religiousness, the slope of the regression line was: support = .00 (best friends' religiousness) + 32.27, $t(114) = -.02, p = .99$, indicating that there was no significant relationship between best friends' religiousness and friendship support for participants high in religiousness. Thus, it seems that having a best friend who is higher in religiousness is associated with greater friendship support for individuals who themselves are low in religiousness, but not for individuals who

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$^*p < .05. ^{**}p < .01. ^{***}p < .001.$

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$^*p < .05. ^{**}p < .01. ^{***}p < .001.$
Similarly, the relationship between best friends’ religiousness and depth in a friendship differed significantly between participants with high versus low levels of religiousness (see Figure 2). The slope for those low in religiousness was: depth = .39 (best friends’ religiousness) + 2.90, t(114) = 2.90, p = .004, indicating that participants experienced significantly greater depth in their friendships when their best friends were higher in religiousness. On the other hand, the slope for those high in religiousness was: depth = .13 (best friends’ religiousness) + 32.55, t(114) = 1.01, p = .31, indicating that there was no significant relationship between best friends’ religiousness and friendship depth for participants high in religiousness. Thus, it seems that greater religiousness among best friends was associated with greater depth in relationships for individuals low in religiousness, but not for individuals high in religiousness.

Discussion

The current study’s objective was to examine a possible association between religiousness and friendship quality on the basis of relational theory. According to relational theory, an individual’s religious pursuit of the sacred fundamentally includes the pursuit of relationship, not only in hopes of creating a connection with God (vertical relationship), but also a connection with others (horizontal relationship; Hill & Pargament, 2008; Simpson et al., 2008). Within this framework, how individuals personally relate to and maintain a relationship with God impacts their approach toward interpersonal relationships (Desrosiers et al., 2011; Simpson et al., 2008). We hypothesized that religiousness, their ratings of their best friends’ religiousness, and the interaction between both would be positively correlated to friendship quality defined as high social support and depth of values and ideas in friendship, and low amounts of conflict experienced in the friendship. The results partially supported the hypotheses.

Participants’ ratings of their best friends’ religiousness significantly related to level of support and depth in a friendship, which is consistent with past research indicating that a friend’s religiousness can be positively linked to support in friendships (Brelsford et al., 2009; Mattis et al., 2001; Pierce et al., 1991). In addition, we observed a significant interaction between participants’ religiousness and their friends’ religiousness in relation to support within a friendship. Interestingly, it seems that higher levels of religiousness among a best friend is associated with better friendship quality for participants who themselves are low in religiousness, but not for those who themselves are high in religiousness. It may be that those who are higher in religiousness tend to gain or seek more support from God or the divine (vertical relationship), although those who are low in religiousness tend to do so from others such as their friends (horizontal relationships). No links were observed between religiousness and levels of conflict in relationships. This may be because mean levels of conflict were low within the sample overall, not leaving much room for improvement on the basis of religiosity.

On the basis of this study, we can conclude that religiousness or participants’ vertical relationship was associated with friendship quality or one of their horizontal relationships. It is possible that religiousness can strengthen friendships. For example, it may be that individuals who rate their best friends with higher levels of religiousness experience more support and depth in their friendships because these friends are more open to talking about deeper topics or caring for them during times of need, or they may simply perceive their friendships as such. Direct causality cannot be established on the basis of this correlational study. An alternative explanation for the findings is that religious values may overlap with values within friendships. For example, a religious value may be supporting loved ones, which a best friend usually does. Participants, then, may have been reporting on overlapping religious values and general friendship values such as love, connection, and treating others as they would like to be treated.

There should be caution in generalizing this study’s findings due to the fact that the study’s sample was a convenience sample of college students attending a small, private Christian university. With the overwhelming majority of students being Christian and religiously inclined, the study did not provide insight into the links between religiousness and friendship among individuals who do not identify as religious or who are of another religion. Participants’ self-reported levels of religiousness were relatively high (M = 9.4, SD = 2.5) as were ratings of the best friends’ levels of religiousness (M = 8.6, SD = 2.9). Another limitation of this study was that the measure used to assess religiousness was relatively short. A lengthier measure might have provided a more nuanced understanding of participants’ and their best friends’ religiousness. Religiousness has often been measured in a variety of ways.
Religiousness and Friendship Quality | Gutierrez, Krumrei-Mancuso, and Miller-Perrin

of ways, and having a measure that addresses both internal beliefs and outward action might have been better able to account for how individuals understand or express their religiousness. Additionally, the surveys used were self-report measures, which can sometimes be problematic when participants provide answers that are socially desirable.

Future research should consider replicating this study with a population that has larger religious variability, whether in the United States or internationally. In addition, it may be insightful to compare individuals at different ages, and to examine if changes occur in the relationship between religiousness and friendship quality throughout various developmental stages. Future research may also assess the level of relational satisfaction directly because it may be that those higher in relational satisfaction have different experiences of relational quality when religiousness is a mediating variable. Despite future research needed and the limitations of the current study, the conclusions add to the limited, but growing, body of knowledge of the impact of religiousness on interpersonal functioning, specifically within friendships.

References


Author Note. Namele Gutierrez, Pepperdine University; Elizabeth Krumrei Mancuso, Social Science Division, Pepperdine University; Cindy Miller-Perrin, Social Science Division, Pepperdine University.

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