

Parent and Peer Relationships and Relational Spirituality in Adolescents and Young Adults

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Research showing the protective qualities of Relational Spirituality, the experience of an ongoing dynamic personal relationship with G-d, against psychopathology in adolescents prompted the current investigation of its developmental correlates. Relational Spirituality in adolescence has been shown to have an unfolding heritable contribution and to be intertwined with a process of spiritual individuation, to which the current study adds the contribution of parents and peers to the developmental process. Participants were 615 adolescents and young adults representing a diverse range of ethnicities and religious affiliations. To measure parenting and friend variables, the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI), Parental Spiritual Support Scale, and Friends Spiritual Support Scale were utilized. Relational Spirituality was measured using items from several subscales of the Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness/Spirituality to obtain a composite score. Findings of multivariate regression analyses indicated that Maternal Spiritual Support, Paternal Care, and Friends Spiritual Support were significantly positively associated with Relational Spirituality, with Maternal Spiritual Support influencing the selection of peers who offer Friends Spiritual Support. These results underscore the importance of parents and peers in facilitating the development of Relational Spirituality, particularly through maternal openness to discussion about spirituality/religiosity and through paternal affection.

Keywords: spirituality, religiosity, adolescents, parents, peers

While a range of spiritual and religious dimensions have demonstrated protective qualities in adolescents and young adults, an overview of the literature suggests that a direct, personal relationship with G-d is one of the most robust protective factors against prevalent forms of psychopathology during this developmental period, specifically, depression and alcohol use (Desrosiers & Miller, 2007; Desrosiers & Miller, 2008; Miller, Davies, & Greenwald, 2000; Miller & Gur, 2002). In an effort to encompass consistent findings from previous studies underscoring the protective effects of a personal connection with

G-d, Desrosiers and Miller (2007) explored the notion of Relational Spirituality. Specifically, Relational Spirituality is defined by the authors as the self in relationship with G-d or the Universe (broadening the definition to include non-theists). A sense of Relational Spirituality is characterized by a dynamic, personal relationship with G-d, a tendency to turn to G-d or the Universe for guidance, and the belief that G-d is ever-present in daily life experience. Within this framework of understanding, Relational Spirituality can also extend to shape daily relationships with fellow humans through the practice of forgiveness, where forgiveness is conceptualized as a spiritual approach toward interpersonal relationships (Krumrie, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2008; McCullough, Bono, & Root, 2005).

Relational Spirituality and Adolescent Spiritual Development

A substantial body of research and theory has examined adolescence as a developmental win-

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dow for cultivation of an explicitly personal relationship to G-d (i.e., Relational Spirituality), a process which transpires through questioning and exploring spiritual/religious beliefs and practices (Fowler, 1981; Good & Willoughby, 2008; Kelley, Athan, & Miller, 2007; Marcia, 1980; Ozorak, 1989), and can culminate in a personally chosen spirituality that tends to persist into adulthood (Good & Willoughby, 2008; Kendler, Gardener, & Prescott, 1997; Kendler et al., 2003; Mirola, 1999). Viewed from the developmental stage models of Fowler (1981) and Marcia (1980), the process of clarifying spiritual/religious questions and developing a personally meaningful sense of relation with G-d may be fostered through familial and social contexts.

The burgeoning of a capacity for a personal relationship with G-d during adolescence, which may in part be attributable to broad heritability (Kendler et al., 1997; Kendler et al., 1999), also appears to be associated with the biological advent of puberty and, if nurtured, to operate as a unique protective factor against several prevalent forms of psychopathology. Miller and Gur (2002) investigated Groeschel's (1983) notion of "Spiritual Awakening" in adolescence, as expressed through relationship with G-d, and found that within a large sample of adolescents (the North Carolina Ad-Health study), biological secondary sexual characteristics were associated with augmented protective qualities of relational spirituality against depression. In a large sample of adolescents and young adults, Desrosiers and Miller (2007) similarly found that relational spirituality was strongly inversely associated with depression in females and with substance use in females and males (Desrosiers & Miller, 2008; Miller et al., 2000). The authors proposed that the deepening spiritual faculty of adolescents, left unsupported or negated, may generate vulnerability for depression or substance use disorders. Findings might then be extended to highlight the need for a spiritual individuation process during adolescence and early adulthood that engages a direct, personal relationship with G-d. Findings also underscore the importance of identifying specific psychosocial factors that may facilitate the flourishing of relational spirituality within this developmental period.

Relational Spirituality and Developmental Supports

Previous research has demonstrated both parents and friends to be highly significant contributors to spiritual/religious development in adolescents (Boyatzis, Dollahite, & Marks, 2006; DeVaus, 1983; Kelley, Athan, & Miller, 2007; Myers, 1996; Regenerus, Smith, & Smith, 2004; Schwartz, Bukowski, & Aoki, 2006). Integrated with current findings on the partial heritability of the augmented capacity for relational spirituality, the authors from this research team propose that parents can serve as facilitators of spiritual development by offering spiritual support throughout the adolescent individuation process. This spiritual foundation may also prompt adolescents to find friendships which include support of spirituality, and in the absence of a parental guide, adolescents may still find spiritual support through friendships or community (Kelley et al., 2007; Oetting, Deffenbacher, & Donnermeyer, 1998).

Parental facilitation of relational spirituality may manifest as spiritual support through interest and discussion around the adolescent's direct spiritual experience and questioning. Alternatively, or quite possibly in addition, parental facilitation of relational spirituality may occur through the microcosm experience of parental love and affection. In support of the second possibility, the quality of parental relationships is increasingly thought to serve as a conduit for the intergenerational transmission of religious beliefs and practices and to establish a context in which personal spiritual exploration in adolescents may be either embraced and supported or negated (Kelley et al., 2007; Smith, 2005). Through sanctification of parenting and the family (Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001), parents may infuse child rearing with spiritual meaning and place a high value on developing warm, affectionate parent-child bonds and relationships that enable transmission and/or cultivation of spirituality in their children. For example, parental warmth and emotional closeness have been positively correlated with adolescent religiosity and adoption of parental religious practices (Ozorak, 1989; Potvin & Lee, 1982), and parental acceptance has been shown to mod-

erate the transmission of parental religious beliefs and practices (Bao, Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Conger, 1999). In a study on religious involvement in rural youth, King, Elder, and Whitbeck (1997) reported that highly religious youth are more strongly identified with their parents and experience higher levels of parental warmth than their less religious or nonreligious peers. Moreover, authoritative parenting has consistently been positively associated with intrinsic religious commitment and general religiosity among adolescents (Giesbrecht, 1995; Gunnoe, Hetherington, & Reiss, 1999; Weigert & Thomas, 1972; Wilcox, 1998).

With respect to parental facilitation through the context of spiritual support and conversation, parental openness to discussion and questioning has been shown to play a vital role in adolescent spiritual and religious development (Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003; Dollahite & Marks, 2005; Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008; Kelley et al., 2007; Schwartz, 2006). In a study investigating adolescents' personal experience of G-d (experiencing G-d's forgiveness and help) and importance of faith, family communication demonstrated the strongest predictive power in relation to importance of religion and experience of G-d (King, Furrow, & Roth, 2002). Similarly, Flor and Knap (2001) found that sustained discourse on religion between parents and adolescents was strongly related to how the adolescent felt about religion, namely, parental dyadic discussions predicted religious behavior and importance of religion in adolescents. Kelley (2008), using the sample described in this study, found that the association between maternal care on the Parental Bonding Instrument and life satisfaction in adolescents and young adults was significantly mediated by parental spiritual support and transparency. Finally, the retrospective reports of both adults and college students indicate that conversations about religion in childhood were important in developing and internalizing their religious beliefs (Dudley & Wisbey, 2000; Milevsky, Szuchman, & Milevsky, 2008).

In studies differentiating the influence of mothers and fathers on adolescent spirituality, mothers have often emerged as the primary vehicle of religious transmission (Bao et al., 1999; Boyatzis et al., 2006; Gunnoe & Moore, 2002; Hayes & Pittelkow, 1993; Hertel & Do-

nahue, 1995; Miller, Warner, Wickramaratne, & Weissman, 1997). In part, this may be due to overall higher levels of spirituality/religiosity in women as compared with men (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2003; Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2003), but also because mothers are more likely to talk to their children about highly personal or emotional topics and are more involved in conversations about religion when fathers are also present (see Boyatzis et al., 2006). Additionally, recent findings emphasize the broader significance of spiritual dialogue with mothers in that mutual disclosure of spiritual beliefs and practices, specifically within older adolescent-mother relationships, has been linked with greater overall relationship satisfaction and healthier communication patterns (Brelsford & Mahoney, 2008).

Regarding friends, though religious behavior in peers has been shown to predict religious behavior in adolescents (Regenerus et al., 2004), openness to engaging in dialogue about spirituality/religiosity in the context of friendships seems to be a more robust facilitator of spiritual development in adolescents and young adults (Kelley et al., 2007). In comparison to parental influences, peer influences (through discussion about spirituality) have been found in some cases to be of similar magnitude, and in other cases, to exert a stronger effect. For example, in a study of mainly Protestant adolescents, communication about spiritual/religious issues with peers and parents were equally important in explaining adolescent religiousness (King et al., 2002). In contrast, studying a large group of Christian adolescents, Schwartz (2006) found that faith dialogue with friends accounted for a significant portion of the variance in adolescent religious faith beyond that accounted for by faith dialogue with parents. Conversations about faith with friends have also been found to mediate the influence of parental faith support on adolescent faith (Martin, White, & Perlman, 2001; Schwartz, 2006). Dialogue with friends about religion may support adolescent spiritual growth directly, or friendships solidified by a shared value system and the capacity to discuss spiritual/religious questions may serve to deepen spirituality in adolescents through providing an opportunity to cultivate capacities for empa-

thy and forgiveness, which are strongly liked to spiritual development (McCullough, Thoresen, & Pargament, 2001).

Purpose

Given that Relational Spirituality has been consistently shown to be highly protective against some of the more prevalent forms of psychopathology in adolescents, particularly those for which adolescence marks the window of onset for life-time course of disorder, it is highly pertinent to understand which contextual factors might facilitate the development of Relational Spirituality in adolescents. That being said, the present study examines the relative contributions of mothers, fathers and peers to the development of Relational Spirituality in adolescents and young adults and endeavors to answer the question: might mothers and fathers offer differential contributions toward Relational Spirituality and selection of peers with Relational Spirituality? Additionally, in response to criticisms of previous investigations, the current study includes a highly diverse sample in terms of ethnicity and religious affiliation in attempt to improve understanding of findings across religious and ethnic identities.

Methods

Participants

Participants were 615 adolescents and young adults representing a broad range of ethnicities (Caucasian, African American, Asian American, Latino, and multiracial, and other) and religious denominations (Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Atheist, Agnostic, Buddhist, and other) (see Table 1). The age of participants ranged from 11–23 years ($M = 15.73$ years, $SD = 2.22$). The inclusion of the 60 participants aged 19–23 is justified by research suggesting that the issues and transitions characteristic of adolescents are continuing into the early 20s and to bridge research on adolescent religion/spirituality with literature on “emerging adulthood” (Arnett, 2000; Arnett & Tanner, 2006). The sample included 190 adolescents (31%) who completed the questionnaire online and 425 adolescents (69%) who completed a paper and pencil version. No differences in reporting were found based on method of survey comple-

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Characteristic	%	<i>N</i>
Gender		
Female	58.7	361
Male	41.0	252
Age		
11 yrs	1.8	11
12 yrs	10.6	65
13 yrs	10.2	63
14 yrs	11.6	71
15 yrs	14.6	90
16 yrs	16.6	102
17 yrs	11.4	70
18 yrs	13.5	83
19–23 yrs	9.8	60
Ethnicity		
White	42.6	262
African-American	14.6	90
Asian-American	17.7	109
Latino	14.6	90
Mixed	5.4	33
Other	3.4	21
Religious affiliation		
Catholic	18.4	113
Protestant	27.8	171
Jewish	12.2	75
Muslim	5.7	35
Agnostic	8.5	52
Buddhist	10.2	63
Other	14.1	87
Household income (annual)		
Less than \$30,000	16.7	103
\$30,000–49,000	16.1	99
\$50,000–75,000	15.9	98
\$75,000 and above	18.9	116

tion, but online participants represented a higher socioeconomic bracket (Desrosiers & Miller, 2007).

Procedure

Participants were recruited from various church groups, youth organizations, schools and camps primarily in the New York City Metropolitan area, New Jersey, Illinois, and San Francisco. The sample was purposefully targeted in attempt to reflect diversity in religious affiliation, ethnicity, age and socioeconomic status, and therefore oversampled minority ethnic and religious groups. Youth leaders, principals, camp counselors or other relevant administrative personnel were contacted via a letter explaining the purpose and intent of the study.

Before completing the questionnaire, all participants provided informed consent and signed a participant's rights form, and participants were treated in accordance with APA ethics and institutional review board (IRB) approval (American Psychological Association, 2002). Adolescents who volunteered for the study received compensation in the form of a \$10 book store gift card (funding provided by the William T. Grant Foundation). Online participants were ascertained through the personal and professional networks of research assistants supervised by the Principal Investigator, as well as through advertisements posted on search engines and popular teen religion websites. Internet subjects were not remunerated.

Measures

Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI). The PBI (Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979) is a 25-item self-report measure designed to assess parent-child relationships on two domains: care and overprotection. The care subscale encompasses warmth, empathy, and involvement at one end of the spectrum and indifference and rejection at the other end, while overprotection embraces control, overprotection, and intrusion at one pole and encouragement of independence at the other. Respondents rate their perception of each parent on 12 care items (i.e., speaks to me with a warm and friendly voice, is affectionate to me) and 13 overprotection items (i.e., lets me decide things for myself, is overprotective of me) using a Likert scale from 1 to 4, where 1 is "very likely," 2 is "moderately likely," 3 is "moderately unlikely," and 4 is "very unlikely," yielding a maximum total of 36 on care and 39 on overprotection for mothers and fathers, respectively. Test-retest and split-half reliabilities for the instrument are both high ($p < .001$) and norms have been obtained (Parker et al., 1979).

Parental Spiritual Support Scale. The Parental Spiritual Support Scale was developed for the purposes of this study to assess adolescent perceptions of their parents' willingness and openness to discuss and support the development of their religiosity and spirituality and their level of comfort having those discussions. The development of the items included in the scale was driven by

qualitative interview data described in Kelley, Athan, and Miller (2007), and by theoretical assumptions generalized from extant research on the influence of parenting qualities on adolescent spiritual development. The scale consists of six items, with three assessing maternal support and three assessing paternal support. Participants indicate how comfortable they feel discussing religion and spirituality with their mothers and fathers (e.g., "How comfortable do you feel talking to your mother about religious/spiritual issues or concerns?") on a 7-point Likert scale with responses ranging from "very uncomfortable" to "very comfortable," and they indicate how often they have these discussions using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from "never" to "nearly every day." Participants also report how interested and supportive each parent is in their religious/spiritual development (e.g., "How interested and supportive is your father in your spiritual questioning and exploration?") using a 7-point Likert scale. Scores are computed for mothers and fathers separately by obtaining the mean. Internal Reliability was high for Maternal ($\alpha = .79$) and Paternal Spiritual Support ($\alpha = .85$).

Friends Spiritual Support Scale. The Friends Spiritual Support Scale is comprised of two items intended to assess adolescent perceptions of their friends' willingness to engage in conversations about their spirituality and religiosity. Similar to the Parental Spiritual Support Scale, items were formulated based on qualitative data (Kelley et al., 2007) and previously established associations between peer/friend interaction characteristics and adolescent spiritual development. Participants indicate how comfortable they feel discussing religion and spirituality with their friends on a 7-point Likert scale with responses ranging from "very uncomfortable" to "very comfortable," and they report how frequently they partake in these discussions on a 6-point Likert scale with responses ranging from "never" to "nearly every day." Internal reliability was moderately high ($\alpha = .71$).

Relational Spirituality Scale. The Relational Spirituality Scale is comprised of three subscales from the Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness/Spirituality (Idler et al., 2003): Daily Spiritual Experiences, Forgiveness, and Positive Religious Coping,

which have been shown previously to reflect a more personal, experiential connection with a higher power (Desrosiers & Miller, 2007; Desrosiers & Miller, 2008). Additionally, Desrosiers (2009) examined the factor structure of this scale more extensively, and results of principal component analysis showed all items to load onto a single factor, with an eigenvalue = 6.27. Internal reliability for the scale was also found to be very high ($\alpha = .91$). Total scores were calculated by obtaining the sum of items from the three subscales and computing the mean.

The Daily Spiritual Experiences subscale is composed of 6 items that are ranked on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from "never or almost never" to "many times a day." Items are designed to measure personal emotional involvement and interaction with the transcendent in daily life (e.g., I feel G-d's presence; I desire to be closer to or in unison with G-d; I feel G-d's love for me directly, or through others; I find strength and comfort in my religion; I feel deep inner peace or harmony).

The subscale of Forgiveness contains 3 items intended to assess the extent to which spiritual and religious beliefs impact forgiveness (e.g., Because of my religious or spiritual beliefs I have forgiven those who hurt me; Because of my religious or spiritual beliefs I have forgiven myself for things that I have done wrong; Because of my religious or spiritual beliefs I know G-d forgives me). Items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "never" to "always or almost always."

Positive Religious Coping subscale measures the degree to which individuals use religion or spirituality to deal with adverse circumstances and to seek consolation and a sense of meaning (e.g., I think about how my life is part of a larger spiritual force; I work together with G-d as partners; I look to G-d for strength, support and guidance). There are three items rated on a 4-point Likert scale with response choices ranging from "not at all" to "a great deal."

Data analysis strategy. Means and standard deviations were calculated for the entire sample and for boys and girls separately. Independent samples *t* tests were conducted to distinguish significant differences between boys and girls on all variables, and Pearson *r* correlations were computed to examine asso-

ciations between all continuous variables. To explore internal reliability and factor structure of Maternal Spiritual Support and Paternal Spiritual Support, principal component analysis was performed and coefficient alphas were obtained. A series of univariate regression analyses were then performed to investigate distinct contributions of parenting and friends variables to the variance in Relational Spirituality. Finally, multivariate regression analyses were conducted to ascertain which independent variables remained significant predictors of Relational Spirituality in the presence of all predictors, and potential gender effects were examined. All scale scores were converted to *z*-scores and demographic variables (gender, age, socioeconomic status [SES], religious affiliation, and ethnicity) were controlled for in all analyses.

Results

Descriptives

Means and standard deviations for all variables are exhibited in Table 2. Females scored significantly higher than males on Relational Spirituality $t(532) = 2.86, p < .005$ and Paternal Overprotection $t(445) = 4.43, p < .005$.

Table 3 displays results of analysis of variance for religious affiliation. Significant main effects were found for religious affiliation on Relational Spirituality $F(6, 523) = 30.15, p < .005$, Friends Spiritual Support, $F(6, 563) = 5.50, p < .005$, Maternal Care, $F(6, 450) = 2.29, p < .05$, Maternal Overprotection, $F(6, 469) = 4.72, p < .005$, and Paternal Overprotection, $F(6, 438) = 5.08, p < .005$. Post hoc Bonferroni mean comparisons revealed multiple significant ($p < .05$) differences between religious affiliations, including: Protestants reported higher Relational Spirituality than Catholics, Jews, Agnostics, and Buddhists, and "Other;" with Catholics reporting higher Relational Spirituality than Jews, Agnostics, and Buddhists; and Muslims reporting higher levels than Agnostics and Buddhists. For Friends Spiritual Support, Protestants reported higher levels than Catholics and Buddhists, and Jews reported higher levels than Catholics. For Maternal Care, Jews were higher than Buddhists, and for Maternal Overprotection, Catholics, Muslims, and Buddhists were all higher than Jews.

Table 2
Mean Scores for Total Sample and Males and Females

Spirituality scales	Total sample		Males		Females	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Relational spirituality total****	3.17	0.96	3.03	0.94	3.27	0.97
Maternal care	26.46	7.78	26.64	7.18	26.31	8.19
Maternal overprotection	14.52	7.81	13.89	7.50	14.97	8.01
Paternal care	23.55	8.70	23.68	7.82	23.45	9.30
Paternal overprotection***	12.69	7.93	10.66	7.22	13.99	8.12
Maternal spiritual support	4.53	1.59	4.42	1.57	4.61	1.59
Paternal spiritual support	3.98	1.76	4.07	1.64	3.93	1.84
Friends spiritual support	4.23	1.56	4.11	1.66	4.32	1.47

Note. *N* = 615 for the total sample. Mean age for participants = 15.7 years.

**** *p* < .005.

Finally, for Paternal Overprotection, Catholics scored significantly higher than Protestants, Jews, and Agnostics.

Results of analysis of variance for ethnicity are displayed in Table 4. There was a significant main effect for ethnicity on Relational Spirituality, $F(5, 259) = 2.66, p < .05$, Friends Spiritual Support, $F(5, 572) = 7.38, p < .005$, Maternal Overprotection, $F(5, 473) = 9.72, p < .005$, and Paternal Overprotection, $F(5, 443) = 11.39, p < .005$. Post hoc Bonferroni mean comparisons indicated that African Americans reported higher Relational Spirituality than Asian Americans, and Caucasians reported higher Friends Spiritual Support than African Americans and Latinos. Additionally,

for both Maternal Overprotection and Paternal Overprotection, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos reported higher levels than Caucasians.

Factor Analysis of Parental Spiritual Support

Table 5 displays results of principal component analysis for Maternal Spiritual Support items and Paternal Spiritual Support items. For Maternal Spiritual Support, all items loaded onto a single factor with a total eigenvalue of 2.12, explaining 70.79% of the variance. Coefficient alpha for Maternal Spiritual support was moderately high ($\alpha = .79$). For Paternal

Table 3
Analysis of Variance for Ethnicity, Relational Spirituality, and Parenting Variables

Variables	White, <i>M (SD)</i>	African- American, <i>M (SD)</i>	Asian- American, <i>M (SD)</i>	Latino, <i>M (SD)</i>	Mixed, <i>M (SD)</i>	Other, <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>F</i> value
Relational spirituality, total	3.09 (1.07)	3.46 (.83)	3.00 (.91)	3.28 (.85)	3.17 (.93)	3.24 (.76)	2.66*
Maternal care	27.09 (8.28)	26.34 (7.01)	24.92 (7.27)	27.53 (6.48)	25.40 (7.51)	24.79 (10.50)	1.44
Paternal care	24.59 (9.29)	22.86 (7.75)	22.06 (8.11)	23.02 (8.57)	23.84 (7.36)	22.44 (9.97)	1.28
Maternal overprotection	12.07 (7.59)	15.93 (7.40)	17.76 (6.75)	16.35 (7.75)	16.16 (7.82)	14.92 (8.48)	9.72**
Paternal overprotection	10.00 (7.06)	14.69 (8.08)	14.65 (7.60)	17.21 (9.01)	13.00 (6.47)	15.00 (6.59)	11.39**
Maternal spiritual support	4.59 (1.47)	4.69 (1.71)	4.37 (1.64)	4.47 (1.67)	4.48 (1.64)	4.49 (1.74)	.44
Paternal spiritual support	4.19 (1.72)	3.72 (1.92)	3.68 (1.65)	3.54 (1.92)	3.83 (1.77)	4.31 (1.43)	1.86
Friends spiritual support	4.63 (1.45)	3.77 (1.68)	4.13 (1.31)	3.72 (1.66)	3.86 (1.64)	4.23 (1.71)	7.38**

* *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01.

Table 4
Analysis of Variance for Religious Affiliation, Relational Spirituality, and Parenting Variables

Variables	Catholic, M (SD)	Protestant, M (SD)	Jewish, M (SD)	Buddhist, M (SD)	Agnostic, M (SD)	Muslim, M (SD)	Other, M (SD)	F value
Relational spirituality, total	3.30 (.81)	3.80 (.72)	2.71 (.84)	2.63 (.81)	2.22 (.87)	3.32 (.78)	3.13 (1.05)	30.15**
Maternal care	26.87 (6.67)	26.04 (8.78)	29.10 (5.89)	24.49 (7.84)	25.81 (8.58)	27.83 (7.42)	25.58 (7.91)	2.29*
Paternal care	22.63 (8.26)	24.86 (9.19)	25.55 (8.02)	21.98 (7.77)	22.00 (8.26)	24.32 (8.45)	21.86 (9.82)	2.10
Maternal overprotection	15.45 (6.90)	14.41 (7.74)	11.05 (7.07)	17.07 (8.00)	15.21 (8.18)	17.59 (6.70)	13.14 (8.47)	4.72**
Paternal overprotection	15.70 (8.02)	11.92 (6.95)	9.66 (7.22)	14.71 (8.51)	10.73 (8.32)	14.00 (7.07)	11.69 (8.08)	5.08**
Maternal spiritual support	4.32 (1.72)	4.81 (1.53)	4.82 (1.08)	4.24 (1.59)	4.16 (1.51)	4.95 (1.46)	4.46 (1.77)	2.51
Paternal spiritual support	3.61 (1.80)	4.33 (1.86)	4.33 (1.42)	3.92 (1.57)	3.76 (1.78)	4.21 (1.51)	3.62 (1.84)	2.66
Friends spiritual support	3.76 (1.61)	4.67 (1.56)	4.63 (1.40)	3.87 (1.45)	4.02 (1.42)	4.37 (1.44)	4.18 (1.50)	5.50**

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

Spiritual Support, all items also loaded onto a single factor with a total eigenvalue of 2.33, which accounted for 77.67% of the total variance. Internal reliability for Paternal Spiritual Support was high ($\alpha = .85$).

Correlates of Relational Spirituality

Bivariate correlations are exhibited in Table 6. Relational Spirituality was significantly positively correlated with Maternal Care ($r = .14, p < .01$), Paternal Care, ($r = .22, p < .01$), Maternal Spiritual Support ($r = .36, p < .01$), Paternal Spiritual Support ($r = .32, p < .01$), and Friends Spiritual Support ($r = .29, p < .01$). Also of interest, Maternal Spiritual Support was significantly positively correlated with Maternal Care ($r = .56, p < .01$), Paternal Care ($r = .32, p < .01$) and Friends Spiritual Support ($r = .61, p < .01$) and Friends Spiritual Support ($r = .33, p < .01$), and significantly negatively correlated with Maternal Overprotection ($r = -.24, p < .01$) and Paternal Overprotection ($r = -.15, p < .01$). Displaying a similar pattern, Paternal Spiritual Support was significantly positively correlated with Maternal Care ($r = .36, p < .01$), Paternal Care ($r = .60, p < .01$) and Friends Spiritual Support ($r = .31, p < .01$), and significantly negatively correlated with Maternal Overprotection ($r = -.10, p < .05$) and Paternal Overprotection ($r = -.15, p < .05$).

Results of univariate regression analyses, with each parenting variable used independently to predict Relational Spirituality are given in Table 7. Mirroring results of correlation analyses, higher scores on Maternal Care ($\beta = .13, p < .01$), Paternal Care ($\beta = .21, p < .01$), Maternal Spiritual Support ($\beta = .31, p < .005$), Paternal Spiritual Support ($\beta = .28, p < .005$), and Friends Spiritual Support ($\beta = .32, p < .005$) were significantly associated with higher levels of Relational Spirituality, with Maternal Spiritual Support, Paternal Spiritual Support, and Friends Spiritual Support demonstrating the strongest associations. No significant associations were found between Maternal or Paternal Overprotection and Relational Spirituality.

Multivariate regression analysis was then conducted with all parenting variables entered simultaneously to identify which qualities of parenting emerged as the strongest predictors of

Table 5
Principal Component Analysis for Maternal and Paternal Spiritual Support Items

Support item	Factor 1 (Spiritual Support)
Maternal ^a	
How comfortable talking to mom about religious/spiritual issues	.86
How often talk to mom about religious/spiritual issues	.82
How interested/supportive is mom in your spiritual exploration	.84
Paternal ^b	
How comfortable talking to dad about religious/spiritual issues	.90
How often talk to dad about religious/spiritual issues	.88
How interested/supportive is dad in your spiritual exploration	.87

^a Total eigenvalue = 2.12, percent of total variance explained = 70.79. Coefficient alpha = .79. ^b Total eigenvalue = 2.33, percent of total variance explained = 77.67. Coefficient alpha = .85.

the variance in Relational Spirituality (see Table 7). Results revealed that when accounting for the contribution of all parenting variables concurrently, Maternal Spiritual Support ($\beta = .27, p < .005$), Friends Spiritual Support ($\beta = .23, p < .005$), and Paternal Care ($\beta = .15, p < .005$) remained significantly associated with Relational Spirituality, with Maternal Spiritual Support exhibiting the strongest relationship. Additionally, Maternal Care, Paternal Care, Maternal Overprotection, Paternal Overprotection, Maternal Spiritual Support, Paternal Spiritual Support, and Friends Spiritual Support together explained 21% of the variance in Relational Spirituality scores ($R^2 = .21$). Findings suggest that with respect to the development of Relational Spirituality in offspring, the experience of relationships with mothers and friends characterized by openness toward dis-

cussion of spirituality/religion may be of central importance.

Based on results of bivariate correlations, a post hoc hypothesis that experiencing spiritual support from mothers would be significantly associated with development of friendships that are spiritually supportive was examined by conducting univariate regression analysis. Results supported the hypothesis in that higher levels of Maternal Spiritual Support were related to higher levels of Friends Spiritual support ($\beta = .29, p < .005$).

Finally, as some previous studies have found differences in the intergenerational transmission of religious faith/belief according to gender, and considering that girls scored significantly higher on Relational Spirituality than boys, the presence of gender effects was examined with respect to the three variables found to be signifi-

Table 6
Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Relational spirituality, total	—									
Maternal care	.14**	—								
Maternal overprotection	-.09	-.44**	—							
Paternal care	.22**	.43**	-.21**	—						
Paternal overprotection	.02	-.23**	.50**	-.49**	—					
Maternal spiritual support	.36**	.56**	-.24**	.32**	-.15**	—				
Paternal spiritual support	.32**	.36**	-.10*	.60**	-.22**	.61**	—			
Friends spiritual support	.29**	.03	-.11*	.12**	-.14**	.33**	.31**	—		
Age	-.10*	-.01	-.14**	.04	-.24**	.04	.05	.26**	—	
Socioeconomic status	-.15**	.13*	-.08	.15**	-.09	-.01	.07	.10	.06	—

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

Table 7
Summary of Univariate and Multivariate Regression Analyses for Relational Spirituality

Variable	Univariate			Multivariate		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Maternal care	.15	.05	.13**	-.05	.05	-.05
Maternal overprotection	-.05	.05	-.04	.00	.06	.00
Paternal care	.23	.04	.21**	.18	.06	.15****
Paternal overprotection	-.05	.06	-.04	.11	.06	.08
Maternal spiritual support	.27	.03	.31***	.23	.05	.27***
Paternal spiritual support	.24	.03	.28***	.08	.05	.10
Friends' spiritual support	.25	.03	.32***	.18	.03	.23***

Note. All scale scores were converted to Z scores. Gender, SES, age, ethnicity and religious affiliation were controlled for in each regression equation.

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .005$.

cant predictors of Relational Spirituality in the multivariate analysis (Table 7). Interaction terms were generated for gender and Maternal Spiritual Support, Friends Spiritual Support, and Paternal Care, respectively. In Model 1, gender, Maternal Spiritual Support, and control variables were entered as predictors, and in Model 2, the interaction of gender and Maternal Spiritual Support was entered. This analysis was then replicated for Friends Spiritual Support and Paternal Care, and change in R^2 was assessed. Results revealed that change in R^2 was not significant for the interaction of gender and Maternal Spiritual Support ($\Delta R^2 = .00$, $p = .30$), Friends Spiritual Support ($\Delta R^2 = .00$, $p = .87$), and Paternal Care ($\Delta R^2 = .00$, $p = .74$), suggesting that there are not significant gender differences in the contribution of parent and peer relationship quality to levels of Relational Spirituality, or possibly, spiritual individuation.

Discussion

For adolescents and young adults, relational spirituality is associated with the experience of parental relationships, with specific contributions from mothers and fathers. From mothers, spiritual support in the form of discussion and spiritual transparency was positively associated with adolescent relational spirituality, whereas from fathers, the experience of an affectionate relationship was positively associated with relational spirituality. Post hoc regression analysis further supported that adolescents and young adults whose mothers offer support for spiritual individuation tend to find friends who offer support for spiritual individuation, suggesting

that maternal spiritual support may also exert indirect effects through peer spiritual support of relational spirituality.

The current study represents a unique attempt to further understand spiritual development during adolescence and early adulthood by examining the contribution of specific aspects of relationships with parents and peers across a diverse range of ethnicities, religious affiliations, and socioeconomic brackets. In contrast to previous studies which have investigated the influence of parent and peer relationship characteristics (i.e., parental warmth, strictness, openness to discussion; peer openness to discussion) on adolescent spiritual beliefs and/or practices, the present study sought as the focus of spiritual development, the personal, experiential, and intrinsic sense of spirituality: Relational Spirituality.

Taken together, the three before-mentioned parenting and peer variables (maternal spiritual support, paternal affection, and peer spiritual support) accounted for over 20% of the variance in level of relational spirituality, underscoring the importance of these immediate psychosocial factors in either cultivating or impeding spiritual individuation in adolescents. Previous research has shown that the capacity for a sense of relationship with G-d has a heritable contribution (Kendler et al., 1997; Kendler et al., 1999), which in magnitude of protective qualities has been shown to be augmented in adolescents as compared with in childhood or adulthood (Miller et al., 2000). Viewed with the current findings, a capacity for relational spirituality may emerge through a window of development in adolescence that can be facilitated by specific

contributions from relationships with parents and in turn peers. These findings also quantitatively support the qualitative data collected by this research team, in which adolescents and young adults described in vivid detail how parental and peer support or discouragement affected their spiritual development (Kelley et al., 2007). In that parental relationships support the burgeoning of an innate possibility for relational spirituality, parents have the opportunity to serve as facilitators or guides for the formation of relational spirituality. The discussion considers the unique contributions from mothers, fathers and peers, vis a vis the existing research.

Spiritual Individuation Support From Mothers

Consistent with previous investigations (Miller et al., 1997; Hayes & Pittelkow, 1993; Bao et al., 1999; Boyatzis et al., 2006), mothers, as compared to fathers, emerged as the primary channels transmitting spiritual support, which manifests largely through openness to engaging in dialogue about spiritual/religious questions and concerns, over and above the warmth of relationship. By displaying support and interest in desire for spiritual exploration, mothers may supply the scaffolding for the *spiritual individuation* process in adolescents, a process defined by the need for spiritual searching and exploring of spiritual experience, which may in turn lead to an increasingly direct and personal experience of the divine: Relational Spirituality.

Drawing from the literature on identity development in adolescents, active exploration and questioning is essential for achievement of a sense of identity based on individually chosen values and beliefs (Marcia, 1980; Erikson, 1968). Extending this developmental task to the spiritual level, adolescence may mark a critical period for the formulation of an explicitly personal relationship with God, one that resonates deeply with the self and transpires through the spiritual individuation process. Fowler (1981) proposed that late adolescence and early adulthood is characterized by movement toward a more personal, intrinsic faith commitment fostered by burgeoning abilities to critically reflect on particular beliefs (and self-concepts), to articulate them verbally, and to internalize them. Furthermore, if the tendency for adolescents to

be searching for meaning, purpose, and identity is unaddressed by social resources, youth may be at increased risk for depression and substance use disorders (Desrosiers & Miller, 2007; Marcia, 1980; Miller et al., 2000). Spiritual development during this life period therefore necessitates a supportive space for questioning and reflection about spirituality/religiosity with caring others, which also may hold the potential for a reciprocal, transactional influence on the larger family system (Kelley et al., 2007). Present findings illuminate the central role of mothers as supporters of the spiritual individuation process as well as the significance of this process for the development of Relational Spirituality.

Care and Affection From Fathers

Regarding the role of fathers in the development of Relational Spirituality, a warm, affectionate father-child relationship in general appears to be more influential than paternal support of spiritual individuation. Considering that women report higher levels of spirituality/religiosity than men, tend to conceptualize spirituality more in terms of relationship and connection (Miller et al., 2000; Ozorak, 1996; Slee, 2004), and participate in conversations about spirituality more often (Benson & Eklin, 1990; Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003), it is consistent that spiritual discussions with fathers would play a lesser role in the development of Relational Spirituality.

This finding might be further understood through a closer examination of the constituents of Paternal Care. Several Paternal Care scale items assess willingness and attitude of fathers toward talking to their children, broadly speaking (i.e., my father speaks to me with a warm and friendly voice; my father enjoys talking to me; my father appears to understand my problems and worries). Perhaps with fathers, exhibiting openness and pleasure in engaging in conversation about topics other than spirituality in the context of an emotionally close and loving relationship is more important for the development of Relational Spirituality in adolescents and young adults than nurturing spiritual individuation explicitly. Drawing from Erikson's (1968) first stage of identity development, trust and mistrust, to develop in spiritual faith requires trust in God and the universe; therefore,

one must feel that the world is generally a safe place. If youth have experienced warmth and love from their fathers over time, they may be more likely to trust the world, which then facilitates trust in a higher power. Research on identity development has also shown that experiencing both a secure emotional attachment to parents as well as the encouragement of strivings for independence foster healthy identity development in adolescents in a parallel manner (Benson, Harris, & Rogers, 1992; Campbell, Adams, & Dobson, 1984; Meeus, Iedeena, Maaseen, & Engels, 2005). With respect to *spiritual* identity development during adolescence, fathers may tend to be more important in providing the base (i.e., a secure attachment) from which spiritual individuation can evolve through mothers' encouragement and facilitation of spiritual exploration.

Friends Spiritual Support

While several prior studies have found the influence of peers to attenuate or supersede the influence of parents on spirituality in adolescents (Martin et al., 2001; Schwartz, 2006), current findings suggest the possibility of a more mutual, harmonious, and possibly reciprocal influence of parents and peers. In addition to support from mothers, spiritual support from friends appears to contribute distinctively to the spiritual individuation process, which has also been demonstrated previously (King et al., 2002; Kelley et al., 2007).

Results might be interpreted in light of Ozorak's (1989) cognitive-anchor theory, in that maternal receptivity to spiritual exploration and discussion may serve as a springboard from which adolescents seek to test their ideas with those of their peers. Along with facilitating spiritual individuation through supportive dialogue, friendships characterized by acceptance and sharing of thoughts about spirituality may also augment Relational Spirituality by deepening a sense of interpersonal connection (Grolnick, Ryan, & Deci, 1997). Considering that friendships become increasingly important during adolescence (Cooper & Cooper, 1992; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Hersch, 1998; Schwartz, 2006) and that one of the principal tasks of adolescence is developing a sense of autonomy while preserving a positive relationship with

parents (Rice & Mulkeen, 1995), it is not surprising that peers would play a unique role in adolescent spiritual development (that does not usurp that of parents). Present findings further substantiate this idea, as a significant, positive correlation was found between Friends Spiritual Support and age ($r = .26$, $p < .01$), suggesting that as adolescents gain more independence from parents, peers become more influential in the search for a personally meaningful and experiential connection with G-d.

While results of the present study highlight the potential influence of parents and peers in supporting the growth of relational spirituality in youth, as the data is correlational it is also necessary to consider that adolescents already higher on relational spirituality may be more likely to initiate and sustain interest in spiritual discourse with parents and close others. Additionally, adolescents and young adults who experience spirituality at a deeply felt relational level may be more inspired to cultivate interpersonal relationships that embody and reflect their experience of spiritual love and connection. The possible bidirectional nature of these associations is supported much of the current literature (Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003; Kelley et al., 2007; Kuczynski, 2003), in that parents both influence and are influenced by conversations about spirituality with their children. However, while the interactions of beliefs, experiences, and interpersonal relationships is undoubtedly complex and unfolding across time and context, this study suggests that parent and peer relationship quality (as measured by care, affection, and transparency around spiritual/religious topics) is strongly related to the experience of relational spirituality in adolescents.

Limitations

This study addresses some criticisms of previous investigations, namely: (1) the need for a relatively large sample to represent a broader range of religious and ethnic groups and (2) to conduct an analysis of associations between distinct dimensions maternal, paternal, and peer relationship and an intrinsic, experiential sense of spirituality (i.e., Relational Spirituality). However, some standard limitations in methodology are to be noted. First, due to the cross-sectional nature of the

data, no claims can be made regarding causality. For instance, adolescents who are already high in Relational Spirituality may be more predisposed to initiate and/or sustain interest in spiritual discourse with mothers or peers. Adolescents high on Relational Spirituality may also have an enhanced capacity to develop the type of deep and intimate friendships in which ideas and questions about spirituality can be safely explored. Additionally, the use of survey rather than multiple measures of personal experience allows for self-presentation bias, and the sample, while highly diverse, was not epidemiologically derived and therefore not generalizable. Finally, the inclusion of participants aged 19–23 holds the potential to skew results, though both theoretical work on “emerging adulthood,” and qualitative data describing the contexts of spiritual development in youth, suggest a developmental continuity, with both older adolescents and these young adults sharing many of the same familial and educational contexts, which may include similar challenges and goals of identity development (Arnett, 2000; Arnett & Tanner, 2006; Kelley et al., 2007).

Conclusion

The current study supports the importance of parents in the development of relational spirituality. For adolescents and young adults, the spiritual individuation process, culminating through a direct personal sense of relationship with G-d, may be substantially aided by maternal spiritual support, and then further augmented by a tendency to find friendships that also offer spiritual support. From fathers, it seems to be the experience of paternal affection that is associated with the development of a personal sense of relationship with G-d. Considering that Relational Spirituality has been associated with lower levels of adolescent (and young adult) depression and substance abuse (Desrosiers & Miller, 2007), as well as higher life satisfaction (Kelley & Miller, 2007), and that the synergistic, facilitating relationship between parental and peer relationships and Relational Spirituality has been described in interviews by a diverse qualitative sample of youths (Kelley et al., 2007), further research is necessary to better understand the interplay of inter-

personal, familial, and developmental factors on the cultivation of spirituality within this developmental period. For just as spirituality can be thought of as an individual's *relationship* to the divine, it seems that this transcendent relationship gains its potency from other significant interpersonal relationships, leading, when nurtured and encouraged, to a greater sense of well-being.

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