

SOUL SISTERS AND BROTHERS:
SANCTIFICATION AND SPIRITUAL INTIMACY AS PREDICTORS OF FRIENDSHIP
QUALITY BETWEEN CLOSE FRIENDS IN A COLLEGE SAMPLE

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ABSTRACT

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Researchers in the field of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality (R/S) have begun to examine if holding specific spiritual beliefs or engaging in shared spiritual activities with another person is tied to relationship quality in marital and parent-child relationships, and the current project extends this line of research to friendships. I could locate no controlled psychological research that has examined the link between specific R/S factors and close friendship quality. The purpose of this investigation was to launch a novel program of research that concentrates on the role of sanctification of friendship and spiritual intimacy between friends and how they were linked to the quality of close friendships amongst college students. This was a cross-sectional study that recruited 634 college students from a university in the Midwest. Prevalence rates were collected and reported. Bivariate correlations showed that higher scores on the Manifestation of God (MG) subscale were associated with greater positivity in friendship ($r=.09$, $p<.05$), but not emotional intimacy. Higher scores on the Sacred Qualities (SQ) subscale were correlated with greater emotional intimacy ($r=.21$, $P<.001$), and positivity in friendship ($r=.20$, $p<.001$). Neither MG or SQ were correlated with negative friendship quality. Greater spiritual intimacy was related to greater positivity in friendship ($r=.24$, $p<.001$) and emotional intimacy ($r=.3$, $p<.001$), and to less negative friendship quality ($r=-.27$, $p<.001$). Hierarchical regressions were conducted to examine the unique effects of each sanctification subscale while controlling for important demographic variables. Greater endorsement of SQ in one's friendship still uniquely predicted higher emotional intimacy ($B=.36$, $p<.001$) and positivity in friendship ($B=.31$, $p<.001$). Unexpectedly, greater MG

uniquely predicted lower emotional intimacy ($B=-.24$, $p<.001$) and positivity in friendship ($B=-.17$, $p<.01$). After controlling for emotional intimacy, hierarchical regressions showed that greater spiritual intimacy predicted less negative friendship quality ($B=-.24$, $p<.001$), but no longer predicted positivity in friendship. This unique study highlights the importance of spiritual beliefs and behaviors centered on close friendships in young adults and how they can be potential resources tied to higher relationship functioning beyond the context of the family.

Key words: sanctification; spiritual intimacy; friendship quality

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INTRODUCTION

Relationships are fascinating and essential adventures in the lives of all humans, offering rich emotional, mental, and spiritual experiences. As social creatures, humans thrive on building and maintaining relationships to fill their intrinsic need for connecting with others. All across the globe, we can bear witness to people communicating through traditional and innovative displays of play, touch, conversation, and spending time together. It's no wonder that psychologists are invested in identifying key constructs that predict the quality of close relationships. In the past two decades, an important and new domain of inquiry about interpersonal relationships in the fields of Psychology and Sociology is whether holding certain spiritual beliefs about a particular relationship and engaging in shared spiritual activities with another person is tied to an individual's appraisal of their relationship quality. In the past 20 years, researchers have begun to examine these questions when it comes to marital and parent-child relationships, and the current project extended this line of research to friendships.

Through a spiritual lens, relationships are commonly described in poetically mysterious and profound ways. Lovers may describe their coming together as destiny or fate and label their union as one of "soulmates" or being "spiritually bound." They may expand by saying that there has been (or is) a divine plan designed for their union. Parents, too, use spiritual expressions to describe becoming a parent, reporting that their child was a "gift from God," "a perfect angel" or "God's miracle." Friends who feel spiritually-guided to one another have similar descriptions and labels that imply their relationship possesses a spiritual dimension. Some friends call their connection that of "kindred spirits," while others consider each other "spiritual brothers" or "spiritual sisters." These latter terms seem to embody friendships with the same status and qualities quite often assigned to a biological family, like permanence, unconditional love, and

primary importance. Yet, while the psychology of Religion and Spirituality (R/S)¹ has begun to make inroads on better understanding the role that R/S plays in intimate partner and parent-child relationships, I could locate no controlled psychological research that has closely examined how specific R/S factors are linked to close friendship quality at any stage of life, including in young adulthood which was the focus of this project. Nevertheless, sociological studies suggest that such work would be fruitful and relevant. For example, greater involvement in organized religion has been shown to help shape the friendship networks of teens and young adults (Barry & Abo-Zena, 2014; Smith & Snell, 2009). The purpose of this investigation was to launch a novel program of research that concentrates on the role of R/S for college students' close friendships. In particular, I focused on two specific spiritual constructs – namely, the perceived sanctity of a close friendship and spiritual intimacy with a close friend – because I expected both of these spiritual constructs to be associated with greater quality of a close friendship. To show why a deeper look into close friendship bonds is warranted and the stage for this line of work, the following paragraphs will summarize relevant R/S research in peer, intimate partner and parent-child relationships.

Summary of Literature and Project Goals

In 2003 and then again in 2005 and 2008, Smith and colleagues gathered longitudinal data in a project called the National Survey of Youth and Religion (NSYR). These sociological

¹ R/S: Throughout this paper, “R” stands for religion and “S” stands spirituality. While ontological debates about religion and spirituality are outside the scope of this paper and better left to theological discourse, this paper frequently discusses results of psychological research founded on the assessment of religion and spirituality. To be clear, competing definitions and subsequent assessments of religion and spirituality still exist in the field. Though religion's central theme and tenet is to foster spirituality, it is also bound to and guided by institutional allegiance, organized participation, and shared acceptance of certain doctrines, beliefs and principles. Spirituality, on the other hand, is characterized by an individual's personal beliefs of and experiences with God and/or the transcendent, their search for the sacred, and their spiritual practices, that may or may not be in an allegiance to organized or institutionalized religious groups. For the purposes of this paper, when the assessment of religion and/or spirituality is discussed, the assessment parameters will be made clear when possible and/or relevant.

surveys offer valuable data on how general markers of involvement in religious groups, such as religious attendance or affiliation, are tied to friendship factors as well as how they interact with one another to shape the lives of youth from adolescence into young adulthood (Smith & Snell, 2009). For example, out of the 27% of young adults who felt their religiosity increased over time (i.e., a response to a one item question about overall change in felt religiosity), 16% of them deemed friends among the few important people who acted as a main catalyst for their greater commitment to and investment in R/S (Denton, Pearce, & Smith, 2008). In conversations with one another, 49% of emerging adults reported to converse with close friends about R/S beliefs and experiences (Smith & Snell, 2009). Other studies have found that friends are specifically sought out for spiritual dialogue as well as spiritual support which, in turn, was found in a separate study to promote further individual spiritual development (Desrosiers, Kelley, & Miller, 2011; Astin and Astin, 2004). While this research is enlightening about how friendships enhance people's experiences of R/S, it is unknown whether and how these spiritual experiences affected the quality of those friendships. The only study I could locate that directly pursued links between a R/S variable and friendship quality was conducted by Mattis and colleagues (2001). In a quantitative study focused on African-American men, those who rated themselves as more highly religious in a single-item measure also reported greater rates of emotional disclosures with their close friends (Mattis, Murray, Hatcher, Hearn, Lawhon, Murphy, & Washington, 2001). From this study, however, we don't know what specific parts of the participants' experience of "general spirituality" motivated their emotional disclosures, how overall friendship quality was impacted beyond the facet of emotional disclosures, nor if the quantity of emotional disclosures was connected to an experience of greater relational functioning.

Although there is a paucity of research on whether and how various aspects of R/S

are tied to the quality of friendships, prior research on how general R/S cognitions and behaviors are tied to the quality of marriage and parent-child relationships offers promising findings that may extend to the realm of close friendships between dyads who are not bound together by formal family ties. With general indicators (e.g., religious attendance, prayer frequency), the NSYR project found that married parents who participated in more joint religious activity and prayer with their families experienced more positive marital relationships as perceived and reported on by their adolescent children, even after controlling for several important demographic and socioeconomic elements (Smith & Kim, 2003b). In parent-child dyads, the NSYR found that, compared to families with non-religious ties, families with religious involvement had adolescents that reported stronger quality relationships with their parents, who attended more family activities such as eating dinner together, and were less likely to run away from home (Smith & Kim, 2003a). These connections are consistent with comprehensive reviews of approximately 280 peer-reviewed studies published between 1980-2010 that address various ways R/S may be tied to an aspect of family life. These reviews have shown that there are meaningful links between global R/S factors, like overall frequency of religious attendance or salience of religion, and marital and parent-child outcomes (Mahoney et al., 2001; Mahoney, 2010).

Research has also shown that the two specific R/S constructs that were the focus of this study – sanctification and spiritual intimacy – are linked to one's evaluations of relational quality in marriages. For example, multiple studies have highlighted that perceiving one's marital union as having spiritual significance and character (i.e., sanctification of marriage) is linked to peoples' reports of higher levels of marital satisfaction (Ellison, Henderson, Glenn, & Harkrider, 2011; Lichter & Carmalt, 2009; Mahoney et al., 1999; Rusu, Hilpert, Beach, Turliuc,

& Bodenmann, 2015; Sabey, Rauer, & Jensen, 2014; Stafford, David, & McPherson, 2014), greater use of dyadic coping strategies (Rusu et al., 2015), greater global marital adjustment (Mahoney et al., 1999), higher relationship commitment (Lichter & Carmalt, 2009; Mahoney et al., 1999), greater positive emotion and/or intimacy (Ellison et al., 2011; Lichter & Carmalt, 2009), more bonding (Ellison et al., 2011), lower negative emotion (Ellison et al., 2011) and marital conflict (Lichter & Carmalt, 2009), higher rates of fidelity (Fincham, Lambert, & Beach, 2010), and greater protection from harmful effects of perceived inequities in marriage (DeMaris, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2010). Further, subjective reports of sanctification of marriage are associated with greater use of adaptive communication strategies during observed marital interactions, even after using fixed effects modeling that controls for time invariant characteristics of spouses, such as personality traits (Kusner, Mahoney, Pargament, & DeMaris, 2014).

In parent-child dyads, greater sanctification has also been linked to facets of parent-child relationship quality. For example, adolescent children's reports of greater sanctification of the parent-child relationship is linked to the adolescent's reports of relationship satisfaction with both parents and to their fathers' use of open communication (Brelsford, 2013). Further, greater sanctification of the parent-child bond by parents has been linked to the mother's report of less verbal aggression, more parental consistency (Murray-Swank, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2006) and greater parental investment (Dumas & Nissley-Tsiopinis, 2006), and to both parents' report of greater use of positive parenting strategies to elicit moral conduct in their children (Volling, Mahoney, & Rauer, 2009). In sum, to date, sanctification research suggests that people who sanctify their relationships are more willing to take steps to try to protect and preserve their bonds by adapting to relational challenges in a constructive manner, which allows them to

experience comparatively better or more fulfilling relationships and, reciprocally, that better relational functioning may feed into and reinforce perceiving a relationship as sanctified.

Though spiritual intimacy in married and parent-child relationships has been studied less, emerging new findings show that it is also linked to important facets of relationship quality. In one study of marital couples, spiritual intimacy predicted more observed positive and less negative behaviors by both spouses when discussing conflict-prone topics, even after the researchers used fixed effects modeling to control for all stable and time invariant characteristics of the couples (e.g., personality, history, intelligence, image management) and time varying “third variables” (e.g., couple reports of their ongoing communication tactics, marital love, and sanctification) that could have accounted for these linkages (Kusner et al., 2014). In parent-child studies, higher rates of spiritual disclosures, one key facet of spiritual intimacy, have been connected to higher levels of relational functioning including increased satisfaction, greater use of more adaptive conflict resolution strategies such as higher collaboration and less verbal aggression, higher general self-disclosures, as well as less dysfunctional communication patterns, and more open family communication (Brelsford, 2010; Brelsford & Mahoney, 2008). Higher rates of investment, commitment, support, and value are all outcomes we would expect to find between friends when spiritual disclosure and empathy occurs. Thus, when measured by behavioral reports and observations, spiritual intimacy appears to be directly connected to healthier relationship functioning.

Taken together, the data indicate that religion and spirituality influence people’s relationship experiences as spouses and parents, but no studies currently demonstrate whether these findings extend to friendships. However, just as research demonstrates that R/S involvement and practices are linked to cognitions and actual behaviors between partners and

parent-child dyads that are more positive, desired, and healthier for their relationships, it is possible that faith may shape friendships—another meaningful relationship that plays a prominent role in people's' lives. In fact, across all ages, friendships are rated as an experience that matters most to people (Hartup & Stevens, 1999) and are found in all human societies—with no definition or expression of a friend-like bond looking exactly the same (Hruschka, 2006). The topic of friendship has been investigated by social scientists for more than a century, and before then, deeply contemplated by acclaimed historical philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato. Given the data on these other important relationships and R/S determinants, close friendships deserve inspection through a spiritual lens. A few goals were established for this Master's thesis in order to increase attention to and research in the field of relational spirituality, with a primary focus on spirituality in close friendships.

An overarching goal of this study was to move the R/S literature forward by examining the intersection between R/S and the topic of friendship in an in-depth manner. Building on a handful of findings on how friendships influences general levels of R/S, this study assessed how two specific R/S beliefs (i.e., sanctity of a close friendship) and behaviors (i.e., spiritually intimacy with a close friend) in one's friendship were tied to the quality of that close friendship. One major goal was to determine prevalence rates for how much the sanctification of one's closest friendship occurred, and the extent to which close friends engaged in spiritual intimacy (i.e. spiritually intimate dialogue). Sanctification is “perceiving an aspect of life as having divine significance and character” (Mahoney, Pargament, & Hernandez, 2013). Thus, the sanctification of friendship is when we perceive a sacred quality in our friendships. Spiritual intimacy is considered a specific form of intimacy involving the extent to which an individual discloses and provides support to someone, revealing sensitive information to each other about their own

spiritual experiences, beliefs and identity. Studying the sanctity of friendship and spiritual intimacy between friends was new terrain, informing us of the extent to which close friends sanctify and are spiritual intimate in their close friendships.

A second major goal was to assess the correlations between sanctification of friendship, spiritual intimacy and the positive and negative dimensions of friendship quality in a close friend dyad. Thus far, the findings on sanctification and spiritual intimacy in other close relationships suggest that they act as significant motivators for spouses and parent-child dyads to protect and preserve their relationships. Extending these predictive findings to close friendships was also new ground evaluated in this thesis.

A third goal was to explore if spiritual intimacy predicts friendship quality between close friends beyond general emotional intimacy. Emotional intimacy can be measured in several ways, such as by assessing private self-disclosures, observing nonverbal language, and noting sexual or affectionate behaviors. For the purposes of this study, intimacy was conceptualized as the extent to which people experience a sense of “closeness, warmth, and shared affection” often emerging from self-disclosures of private, sensitive information (e.g., fears, embarrassments, hopes, secrets), that lends itself to the possibility of rejection or acceptance by the listener, but that is ultimately achieved when the disclosure is reinforced and the listener responds to the discloser in a supportive and non-judgmental manner (Cordova & Scott, 2001). Because “spiritual intimacy” and “emotional intimacy” involve engaging in and supporting personal disclosures of sensitive information, it’s likely that they will be correlated. This study examined whether spiritual intimacy uniquely contributes to friendship quality beyond the general level of intimacy experienced in the close friend dyad. In order to successfully distinguish between emotional and spiritual intimacy and their significance in predicting higher friendship quality,

spiritual intimacy will need to predict greater friendship quality after emotional intimacy is parsed out of the dependent variable. Without doing this, there is no way to know if it is the emotionally intimate part of spiritual intimacy that is predicting higher levels of positive and lower levels of negative friendship quality. This distinction is further detailed in the methods section.

With this overview, I turn to providing a more in-depth review of the literature on the prevalence of R/S, the basic framework used in this research to ground the links between R/S and relationship quality, and the argument for the significance of assessing a spiritual component in friendships. Specifically, I discuss the research to-date regarding the value of religion and spirituality in the lives of Americans as well as the R/S constructs in this study – sanctification of friendship and spiritual intimacy – and their connection to relationship quality facets pertinent to this study. Following the literature review is a discussion on the importance of friendship and the existence and relevance of its spiritual component, ending with a brief overview of the focal criterion variables that make up friendship quality.

In-Depth Literature Review

Religion and Spirituality

Prevalence and framework. For over 25 years, national surveys show that religion and/or spirituality continue to be vital aspects of people's lives (Pew Study, 2014; UCLA, 2011; Gallup, 1994; Gallup & Castelli, 1989). The most recent survey showed that a majority of American college students hold religious/spiritual beliefs and practices: 83% believe in God, 77% engage in prayer while 52% meditate, 69% participate in religious services, and 83% report feeling spiritual peace and well-being. Further, national studies demonstrate that 58% of college students believe that spirituality is highly important to integrate into their everyday lives (Bryant,

Choi, & Yasuno, 2003). Though a more recent analysis of college Freshman has shown declines in the reports of religious affiliation, 85% to 72% from 2000 to 2013, a majority of incoming college students still consider themselves religious (Twenge, Exline, Grubbs, Sastry, & Campbell, 2015). The data show that religion and spirituality are very much present in people's beliefs and practices, however these global bits of information do not identify the specific aspects of R/S that people use on a daily basis during decision-making processes and in their perceptions of and behaviors in their relational lives. To encourage deeper inquiries, Mahoney and colleagues conducted reviews of literature from 1980-1999 (Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001) and from 2000-2009 (Mahoney, 2010). In the process, Mahoney developed a "relational spirituality" framework to organize key findings on R/S variables in the functioning of close relationships. Questions that guided and continue to inspire these deeper inquiries about the connection between R/S and relational functioning include, "What is it about attending services more or saying you're more religious that is most beneficial to maintaining healthy relationship functioning? What is it about people's relationship with God or a higher being, and integrating spirituality into their lives, that influences how individuals behave in their relationships?" With only global measures of religious involvement, we know very little about how specific R/S cognitions and behaviors are connected to relational well-being, for better or worse. For example, one study by Ellison and colleagues (2011) found that sanctification mediated the relationship between overall religiousness (i.e., composite score of felt religiosity and religious attendance) and marital quality; and further, when sanctification was controlled for, markers of higher overall religiousness were linked to reports of lower marital quality – inverting the relationship between overall religiousness and marital quality. To state explicitly, when sanctification was accounted for, overall religiousness was linked to much lower levels of

relationship commitment and bonding and higher levels of negative emotion. This means that sanctification may represent a large portion of what is healthy and helpful about religious participation and, after removing this element from the picture (i.e., suppressor effects), greater religious engagement could reflect a variety of maladaptive processes that undermine relationships—although, it is unclear what those risky interpersonal processes are (e.g., possibly higher negative judgments, social coercion, rigidity, or in-out group dynamics).

Thus, the relational spirituality framework was developed to organize research literature on the role R/S plays in family relationships, but it encompasses any close relationship, and so this thesis extended that theory to friendships. The two spiritual constructs targeted in this thesis—sanctification and spiritual intimacy—were developed by Mahoney, Pargament and colleagues to take R/S assessments beyond surface level global indicators, to identify specific R/S perceptions and behaviors that may enhance relationships. One caveat to make before proceeding is that although this thesis focused on specific spiritual factors that are hypothesized to be tied to higher quality friendship and positive friendship dynamics, other R/S variables, such as interpersonal disagreement about R/S issues, have been found to disrupt close relationships; such undesirable R/S processes are not the focus of this project (see Hawley & Mahoney, 2013; Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2011; Mahoney, 2010; Mahoney, & Pargament, 2009; Pargament, Magyar, Benore, & Mahoney, 2005).

Sanctification of close relationships. Sanctification is a psychospiritual construct and a lens through which individuals may view their relationships as a manifestation of God and/or as having sacred qualities that can be theistic or non-theistic in nature. An initial sanctification of marriage measure was created by Mahoney, Pargament and colleagues for a 1999 study, discussed shortly. Examples of theistic sanctification included statements such as, “God played a

role in how I ended up be married to my spouse” and “I feel God at work in my marriage.” Non-theistic sanctification was operationalized by asking participants about the extent to which they applied sacred qualities to their marriage, such as “sacred,” “holy,” “blessed,” and “spiritual,” without the inclusion of God in statements. This measure was subsequently modified and adapted to assess the sanctity of other relationships (e.g., parenting, consensual sexual relationships in a committed union). In addition, the sanctification of marriage measure was adapted to a slightly revised version to better assess both theistic and non-theistic perceptions of marriage (Mahoney, Pargament & DeMaris, 2009).

Assessing if and how a relationship is viewed as sacred represents one possible R/S mechanism that could shape an individual’s cognitive processes about a relationship and their conduct toward a partner. Theoretically speaking, individuals who sanctify their relationships will take several measurable actions to protect and preserve their bond, such as give more thoughtful consideration to their responses while in verbal conflict, practice kindness, spend more time together, and focus their attention on the positive qualities of the other person and the relationship. These motivated actions are capable of enhancing relationship quality and one’s evaluations of the relationship in general (Mahoney et al., 1999). Sanctification has already been shown to exist in several relational domains, demonstrating a positive connection between it and important relationship quality factors such as satisfaction, investment and commitment. The domain of research most informative to friendship quality stems from research on sanctification in married couples and parent-child dyads. A meta-analysis on sanctification identified several studies measuring the sanctification of intimate relationships (Pomerleau, Wong, & Mahoney, 2014, unpublished). Investigations from this meta-analysis, newer research, as well as other

related investigations are discussed next to shed light on the parallel benefits we may expect from sanctifying friendships.

Over the last 16 years, research in sanctification and relationship quality has replicated the initial cross-sectional findings of Mahoney and colleagues from 1999, including numerous cross-sectional quantitative studies, multiple qualitative studies, and a few rigorous longitudinal studies focused on close relationships. These 33 studies, along with another 25 studies on the sanctity of life aspects other than relationships (e.g., striving, one's body, and the environment) provide evidence that helps us understand how one R/S process precisely weaves its way through people's beliefs and behaviors in relationships. There are multiple ways researchers have tried to link sanctification to positive and negative dimensions of relationship quality in marital couples and parent-child dyads. Depending on the study, relational quality was measured by examining overall relationship satisfaction based on one to two global indicators, while other times more specific facets of relationship quality (e.g., commitment, conflict, time spent together) were assessed using multiple-item measures. Fortunately, the first study on sanctification of a close relationship examined several specific facets of relationship quality, both positive and negative, setting the stage for replication by other researchers, as well as encouraging investigators to extend the pattern of findings to unstudied relationship quality facets.

The initial study on sanctification and relationship quality was assessed in married couples and conducted in 1999 by Mahoney and colleagues (Mahoney et al., 1999). The "sanctification of marriage" questionnaire was the first of its kind and measured theistic (i.e., manifestation of God) and nontheistic (i.e., sacred qualities) forms of sanctification. The former was assessed by evaluating statements such as "My marriage is a reflection of God's will," and the latter was assessed by providing nine pairs of opposing adjectives (e.g. holy-unholy,

inspiring-uninspiring, heavenly-earthly, everlasting-temporary) that were evaluated on a 7-point scale designed to tap into the spiritual nature of relationships without referencing God. This groundbreaking study assessed the following relationship quality subcomponents: subjective marital satisfaction, global marital adjustment, commitment, conflict, and methods of problem solving. The researchers found that higher sanctification was linked to greater marital satisfaction and global marital adjustment for both spouses; also, the wives' report of greater sanctification was tied to higher rates of their commitment and use of collaborative problem solving as well as less verbal aggression and conflict; and, husbands' report of higher sanctification was connected to their report of lower rates of avoidance during conflict and lower stalemate usage in problem-solving. Further, these results were significant even when controlling for demographic variables and general religiousness.

Other studies have bolstered these original findings. For example, the tie between greater sanctification and higher subjective relationship satisfaction in marriages has been replicated (DeMaris et al., 2010; Ellison et al., 2011; Lichter & Carmalt, 2009; Rusu et al., 2015; Sabey et al., 2014; Stafford et al., 2014) and the link has also been extended to parent-child dyads in a study where college-aged children's non-theistic sanctification was positively correlated with their own and their mother's and father's report of parent-child relationship satisfaction. (Brelsford & Mahoney, 2008). The link between sanctification and relationship commitment has also been replicated in married couples as measured by self-report felt commitment between spouses (Ellison et al., 2011; Lichter & Carmalt, 2009) and to one's children (Lichter & Carmalt, 2009), as well as by measuring commitment by assessing fidelity (Fincham et al., 2010). This latter longitudinal study by Fincham and colleagues (2010) found that sanctification was shown to be an important indicator of whether or not praying for a partner was connected to later

infidelity—both emotional infidelity, as measured by thoughts about another person, attraction, emotional engagement, and physical arousal, as well as physical infidelity, as measured by physical acts of intimacy. The results showed that lower ratings of sanctification, despite prayer for their partner, predicted the occurrence of later infidelity. Not only did a spouse have to pray for their significant other, but they had to do it with a higher sacred appraisal of the relationship in order to reap the benefits of having a loyal and committed partner.

Also, a handful of studies have replicated the link between higher sanctification and greater use of more adaptive communication strategies during conflict using different indicators of healthier conflict processes in both married couples and parent-child dyads. Murray-Swank and colleagues (2006) found that greater sanctification of parenting was related to less verbal aggression by both theologically liberal and conservative mothers and less corporal punishment by mothers with liberal biblical beliefs (Murray-Swank et al., 2006). In one study, Lichter and Carmalt (2008) were able to find a significant link using a shortened version of the sanctification of marriage scale, showing that higher sanctification of marriage was related to reported use of more positive conflict resolution processes and more positive conflict behaviors, as assessed by questions involving the extent of blame, silent treatment tactics, conflict intensity, yelling/screaming, and inferior treatment by a spouse. In assessing the effects of sanctification on the consequences of perceived marital inequity, DeMaris, Mahoney, and Pargament (2010) found that higher sanctification neutralized the tendency of marital inequity to be tied to greater marital conflict, especially for wives who felt they were receiving more benefits from husbands than they were giving to husbands. This last finding could likely translate to friendships as lengthier close friendships go through periods of unequal give and take that can be either detrimental or safeguarded by relational perceptions, such as sanctification. In another study that

used “dyadic coping strategies” during conflict as a criterion measure, couples who rated their marriage as more sanctified also reported greater use of dyadic coping strategies, such as helping to reframe difficult situations and find solutions to their problems, along with lending more emotional support in the process (Rusu et al., 2015). In one of the most methodologically sound longitudinal projects to date, levels of sanctification reported by over 160 couples undergoing the transition to parenthood were connected to behavioral differences during conflict actually observed by the researchers, rather than measured by self-reports (Kusner et al., 2014). By observing couples discuss major conflict-prone topics, investigators found that higher sanctification ratings predicted more positive behaviors and less negative behaviors in one or both spouses, after controlling for marital love, collaborative communication skills, and demographic factors. Specifically, these conflict behavioral assessments accounted for negative conflict attributes, such as the amount of domineering-coercive control, verbal aggression, complaining, nonverbal negative emotion, and invalidation, as well as positive conflict attributes, such as collaborative problem-solving and affection.

Other researchers have tied sanctification to facets of relationship quality not assessed in the original study. For example, three studies have shown that sanctification was linked to healthier communication strategies in married couples and parent-child dyads. In one study, higher sanctification of marriage has been tied to healthier communication in married couples by examining the extent to which spouses communicate with one another before making important decisions and how much each spouse feels a general sense of ease when bringing up sensitive topics (Lichter & Carmalt, 2009). In parent-child dyad studies, greater sanctification of the parent-child bond has been linked to the college-aged child’s report of father’s open communication (Brelsford, 2013) and the use of more positive parenting communication

strategies by mothers and fathers, like praise and inductive reasoning, to guide their child's moral conduct (Volling et al., 2009). Two studies have also linked greater sanctification to higher self-reported (Lichter & Carmalt, 2009) and observed (Padgett, 2016) emotional intimacy in married couples. This latter study used longitudinal data from video-taped marital couples undergoing the transition to parenthood with their first child and they found that sanctification at T1 increased the amount of emotionally intimate behaviors over time (Padgett, 2016). Sanctification of parenting studies have also found that higher sanctification was linked to greater parental investment (Dumas & Nissley-Tsiopinis, 2006) as well as higher rates of positive mother-child interactions by conservative mothers, which assessed the extent to which the parent and child showed affection, laughed together, and/or put each other in a good mood (Murray-Swank et al., 2006). To date, sanctification research suggests that people who assign sacred qualities to their relationships are willing to try to protect and preserve them by adapting to relational challenges in a constructive manner as well as investing their resources in building a healthy relationship, thereby allowing them to experience comparatively better or more fulfilling relationships. Reciprocally, experiencing better or more fulfilling relationships may be tied to greater likelihood of viewing a relationship through a positive sacred lens. Given that relationship quality components are similar across different relationships, including facets such as communication, conflict, intimacy, satisfaction, bonding, and others that have been mentioned, in the current cross-sectional study, I expected that links between greater sanctification and higher positive and lower negative dimensions of relationship quality in marriages and parent-child dyads would extend to close friendships.

Spiritual intimacy. In general, emotional intimacy usually results when two people engage in the revealing of and listening to private information about vulnerable or sensitive

experiences (e.g., hopes, fears, embarrassment, values) while being supportive and non-judgmental. This process creates a sense of acceptance and validation between companions and a mutual understanding which leads to an affectionate feeling toward the union (Cordova & Scott, 2001; Hudson, 2013). Spiritual intimacy—a specific form of emotional intimacy—is an interpersonal, psychospiritual construct that calls for people to engage in sharing and supporting one another in this same non-judgmental manner, but while revealing and listening to personal information exclusively concerned with one’s spiritual journey or identity, and the questions, doubts, practices and revelations that go along with it (Brelsford & Ciarrocchi, 2013; Brelsford & Mahoney, 2008; Hudson, 2013; Kusner et al., 2014). It may seem difficult to draw distinction between emotional and spiritual intimacy given that the two constructs are likely to be correlated because of their similar properties and function. Nevertheless, R/S researchers have tried to define spiritual intimacy in ways that shed light on how it moves us beyond the conventional realm of emotional closeness, which is typically characterized by sharing more relatable feelings and life experiences. For example, Mahoney (2013) and Hudson (2013) assert that spiritual disclosures tap into sharing one’s religiously and spiritually based desires, values, and ultimate concerns, including how God or the divine is involved in one’s life in a very personal manner. Some researchers have explained it as the revealing of one’s *true* self to another human (Balswick & Balkwell, 1977). Other investigators describe it as a process that leads to individual healing (Healey, 1990), or a “sharing of beliefs” that has the potential to deepen a close bond, despite the risks of exposing oneself to a potentially negative impact on the friendship if the listener is not responsive (Brelsford, Marinelli, & Ciarrocchi, 2009). One researcher described it as forging a “sense of union” between companions (Hudson, 2013). Each of these

conceptualizations is attempting to assess for a unique sense of closeness beyond bonds formed from general emotional intimacy.

The reason it is important to delineate between emotional and spiritual intimacy is due to their differential and possible additive impacts on relational quality. That is, by engaging in spiritual intimacy, one may experience a deeper bond that then leads them to perceive the relationship as higher in quality. Further, they may engage in more self-disclosures, both emotional and spiritual, as well as more positive interpersonal behaviors that show increased commitment to the relationship. Finally, the individual could be more likely to report more investment of one's time and energy. Given the normative cyclical relationship of cause and effect variables, examining the specific effect of spiritual intimacy in the experience of a higher quality relationship is warranted. Why would spiritual intimacy be tied to higher relational quality? R/S theorists stress that religious and spiritual experiences have been labeled exceptionally private (Crossman, 2015; Healey, 1990), historically meant only for oneself or a religious leader to hear (Healey, 1990), whereas general emotional disclosures are more widely accepted and expected in growing intimate relationships. Thus, due to their metaphysical nature, R/S experiences can be contentious when made public, or even when shared with a significant other, and may result in miscommunication or disapproval by others (Brelsford & Mahoney, 2008). The potential for controversy in making R/S disclosures may drive people to be reluctant to share personal spiritual information, in fear of being rejected or told that their deepest contemplations are mistaken or misguided (Crossman, 2015; Mahoney, 2013). As follows, if two people do engage in spiritual disclosures that are received well, it is reasonable to suggest that they will benefit by experiencing new and distinctive levels of trust, companionship, and commitment to one another—all major facets of friendship quality. In like manner with

sanctification, spiritual intimacy would inspire people to invest more time and resources into their friendships, and as a result, individuals would experience higher levels of friendship quality.

Though spiritual intimacy and its connection to relational outcomes has been studied much less than sanctification, four studies in married couples and parent-child relations provided promising parallels to what we can expect when examining spiritual intimacy in friendship. A fifth study assessed spiritual intimacy in married couples as part of a larger construct called “joint religious communication,” which included one item of praying together, a spiritual behavior not typically contained in the operational definition of spiritual intimacy. Other studies provided information on the dynamic nature of spiritual intimacy between friends and thus opened a gateway to what can be suggested when investigating spiritual intimacy between friends.

The first study to assess relational quality and spiritual intimacy was investigated in college students and their mothers (Brelsford & Mahoney, 2008). For this study, Brelsford & Mahoney (2008) developed a measure of spiritual intimacy that reflected the component of spiritual disclosure, or the “disclosure of personal religious and spiritual beliefs and practices between two or more individuals.” The results showed that higher levels of spiritual disclosures were connected to higher levels of relational functioning according to both mothers and their adolescent children, including increased satisfaction, greater use of more adaptive conflict resolution strategies such as higher collaboration and less verbal aggression, higher general self-disclosure, as well as less dysfunctional communication patterns. Further, after controlling for general self-disclosure, spiritual disclosures predicted unique variance in collaborative conflict resolution strategies, showing the power that spiritual dialogue has on guiding relational

interactions. Brelsford's (2010) second study measuring spiritual disclosure between college-aged children and their fathers showed that greater spiritual disclosures were linked to greater relationship satisfaction and more open family communication (Brelsford, 2010). The third study that assessed relational quality facets and spiritual intimacy was investigated in married couples expecting their first child (Kusner et al., 2014). In this study, Kusner and colleagues further developed the spiritual intimacy scale created by Brelsford and Mahoney (2008) by including a spiritual support component that assessed supportively listening to a partner's spiritual disclosures and being supportively listened to by one's spouse. These results come from the same longitudinal study that used observational methods and complex statistical analyses discussed in the section on sanctification. They showed that reports of spiritual intimacy from both spouses predicted more positive and less negative behaviors by both spouses, even after controlling for general religiousness and other fixed factors over time, such as demographics and personality traits. More specifically, engaging in more spiritual intimacy led to more affection and collaborative problem-solving, and less domineering-coercive control, verbal aggression, complaining, nonverbal negative emotion, and invalidation. In a fourth study, David and Stafford (2015) assessed for a link between spiritual dialogue and marital satisfaction in couples by using a subscale called "joint religious communication" from a larger measure, named Joint Religious Activities Scale. This subscale assessed for communication about spiritual topics, with the following four items, "My spouse and I pray together," "My spouse and I talk about how to live out God's will," "My spouse and I talk about our personal, moral, and spiritual issues," and "My spouse and I talk about God's role in our marriage." Although there is one item assessing joint prayer, endorsing the rest of the items implies some level of spiritual disclosure and responding to that disclosure. Results showed that self-report, but not spousal report, of greater joint

religious communication was linked to reports of higher marital satisfaction. Moreover, joint religious communication fully mediated the relationship between one's individual relationship with God and their report of marital satisfaction. A final study, already mentioned in the section on sanctification, comes from Padgett (2016) who also measured the effects of spiritual intimacy on emotional intimacy among married couples pregnant with their first child. Just as with sanctification, she found that higher spiritual intimacy at T1 predicted greater emotional intimacy during the transition to parenthood across time. In sum, these handful of studies show that spiritual intimacy could operate as a spiritual resource for couples and parent-child dyads in challenging times by allowed them to think and act in ways that safeguard their bond to experience healthier relationships. Reciprocally better relationship functioning between family members may promote higher spiritual intimacy.

Researchers have also assessed how spiritual intimacy affects interpersonal behaviors in influential ways even outside of the context of family relationships. For example, close significant others who engaged in more spiritual disclosures also engaged in more generativity-based thoughts and actions, even after controlling for general self-disclosures, personality, and intrapersonal aspects of religion and spirituality (Brelsford, Marinelli, Ciarrochi, & Dy-Liacco, 2009). This shows that individuals who feel close to others do engage in spiritual intimacy and that it has measurable effects on how they interact with others in an investment and commitment like way. The limitation of this study is that the status of the "close significant other" is unknown—whether the participant chose a friend, partner, or parent. In an analysis of spiritual disclosure in the workplace, something reported as taboo by participants in the study, employees who engaged in spiritual self-disclosures experienced support in their identities, a stronger commitment to their workplace organization, and an increased sense of safety in and value for

the work space (Crossman, 2015). Higher rates of positive features of relationship quality, such as investment, commitment, support, and value, are all interpersonal outcomes we would expect to find between friends when spiritual intimacy occurs.

Taken together, when measured by behavioral reports and observations, spiritual intimacy is directly connected to healthier relationship functioning by being linked to greater positive and lower negative dimensions of relationship quality. Overall, these findings show that spiritual intimacy is an influential factor in determining interpersonal behaviors by being connected to an individual's level of thoughtful care for, commitment and investment to, and satisfaction with their bonds.

Why sanctification and spiritual intimacy would occur in friendship. To what extent do friends incorporate religion and spirituality into their perceptions of friendship and how strongly do these perceptions guide their friendship related behavior? Although gaining further insight into friendships seems warranted, there is reason to consider why spiritual variables would be as relevant to friendship functioning as they've shown to be in marital and parent-child relationships. Marriage has been considered sacred across world religions for thousands of years. In religious doctrines, weekly services, scripture, and discussions, members are reminded that marriage is holy. They are taught that the bond created by marriage holds the highest rank compared to all other relationships and thus deserves the most investment. These teachings culminate in ceremonial marriage rituals that, although vary widely by religion, bestow spiritual significance upon a couple's intimate partnership, are typically blessed by a higher power, and contain couples' vows of fortitude and endurance under all circumstances. Even today, a social response of concern and disapproval can be observed toward couples who marry nonchalantly, such as in some courthouse marriages or by eloping. Still receiving criticism and opposition, too,

are couples who engage in marriage-related social behaviors, like having children or agreeing to long-term cohabitation without being bound by marital ceremonial procedures. Thus, it's fairly easy to argue that sanctity and spiritual intimacy may be tied to marital or parental functioning because religious groups outwardly and formally acknowledge marriage and familial ties as being salient and sacred to human functioning. As a result of religions' focus on marriage and family, it may at first suggest that sanctification and spiritual intimacy would be non-applicable to friendships, simply because people aren't directed by clergy or religious traditions to think of friendships with such a prioritized spiritual perspective. Or, if people do acknowledge that sanctification of friendship and spiritual intimacy occurs among friends as the sociological and psychological literature suggests, it may be assumed that these spiritual perceptions and behaviors have a more peripheral, and therefore, less meaningful effect in people's lives. These underlying assumptions may be exactly why the spiritual side of friendships has been studied in only a general way, such as whether or not spiritual dialogue occurs among friends, or for secondary purposes, such as to understand its impact on one's religious and spiritual commitment. There are two strong, observable perspectives, though, why sanctification and spiritual intimacy likely occur in friendships and why specific findings from family relationship quality studies would extend to friendships. First, a modern approach to viewing the significance of friendship will be discussed. Second, there is evidence showing that, for millennia, just as major world religions indoctrinated spiritual axioms for family life, so too did they prescribe sacred status to friendships, often comparing family to friends and even elevating friendship in relational status.

A modern analysis of family and friend relationships shows that we are likely to find that friendships hold a central and spiritually important role in an individual's life. First, although

biological ties (and thus marriage) have been historically viewed with primary importance, the cultural milieu of relationships has vastly changed in the United States in last 50 years.

Relational ties among biological kin are more strained and/or less primary in families across the nation due to a rise in unstable homes (e.g., divorced, single-parent, merged families; Pew Research Study, 2015), more geographic distance between parents and their adult children (Compton & Pollak, 2013), new social realities created by technology that allow for more frequent time spent interacting with nonfamilial others from a young age, more work hours per year and/or an increase in the amount of households with two working parents (Jacobs & Gerson, 2001), and safer environments (US Crime Statistics, 2015). These cultural changes open up the possibility for more time spent with and reliance on friends over immediate family at different ages across the lifespan.

Second, as civil rights for children and women grew in importance in America, a new status-quo was adopted by modern Americans stating that the emotional and physical proximity of family relationships is optional if harmful to one's physical or psychological well-being ("History of VAWA | Legal Momentum," n.d.; Myers, 2008). This accepted attitude has permeated our legal system doctrines which advise and/or advocate that adults and children alike should seriously reconsider family ties when individual harm exists. Further, when legal and psychological counsel is sought to break family ties, professionals are typically trained to assess for the type and strength of friend support during safety and transitional planning. To defend and aid these attitudes and life-style changes, over the last 50 to 75 years, government, non-profit, and private agencies have been set up to support people when spouses or family members mistreat, distance themselves from, or abandon their partners or relatives.

Third, it is a well-known aspect of developmental maturity in American culture that teenagers and emerging adults shift strongly from parental to peer influence (Barry & Abo-Zena, 2014). Some common phrases this author found while searching the internet for expressions about adolescent friendship include, “Family is blood because they have to be, but friends are blood because they want to be,” and “Friends are the family you pick out for yourself.” While again, no research has been conducted to explore the prevalence of and explain the intention behind these statements, the sentiments imply that from a young age, individuals internally recognize and explicitly state the prominence of their friendships. At this point in the modern approach perspective, some people may assert that there are also plenty of families who are not unstable nor have dysfunction in kin relationships detrimental enough to force individuals to shift their primary relationship perspectives or sacred affiliations onto friends. Are the only individuals able to experience a primary and spiritual component in friendships those who also experience poor family relations? While the first three points in the modern perspective make adversaries out of friend and family relations, there is reason to believe that there is enough room for both kinds of relations to hold a central place and a spiritual component in people’s lives.

Even when family relationships are healthy, some people may see friendships as having primary spiritual significance. This means that an unhealthy family life doesn’t have to be the catalyst for close friends to achieve a special status. An attitude and behavior described in few scholarly literatures that this author could find (Paul & Pevalin, 2005; Shippy, Cantor, & Brennan, 2004), but that is more frequently discussed in popular press writings (MacMillan, 2016; Tanner, 2016; Rova, B., 2016; Jacobson, B., 2016; Kraft, 2011) suggests that close friends become family and will be prioritized as such. Insightful passages that stand out from these sources include, “Married people say friendship is more than five times as important as physical

intimacy within marriage,” “My friendships have always sustained me...In fact, they rank as high on the importance scale as do my husband and children...I have no doubt that this is a near-universal experience,” and lastly, “But the really surprising thing was that, in a lot of ways, relationships with friends had a similar effect as those with family—and in others, they surpassed them.” Further, youth from different familial backgrounds seem to partake in their own rituals elevating friendships in status, such as by wearing matching necklaces, creating “blood brother” handshakes, getting matching tattoos, or engaging in some other activity that becomes uniquely bonding in a “forever way” for the pair. It is clear that making friendships and family synonymous in the U.S. is experiential, though research has not caught up with this essential part of people’s lives. No research statistics to date have been collected that state prevalence rates or compare the attitudes and behaviors surrounding friendship versus family ties, and when or why it’s appropriate to prioritize friendship relationships to the same degree as or over kin.

Thus far in the discussion, friends can be equated to family, but do friendships possess a spiritual dimension? Even well into maturity, women in particular have used expressions endorsing the significance of friendship and its ties to spirituality. These expressions can be found displayed on social media and even written in birthday and holiday cards (both paper and electronic): “God made us friends because he knew our parents couldn’t handle us as sisters,” “not sisters by blood, but sisters by heart,” and “a best friend is a sister that destiny forgot to give you.” All of these excerpts discernibly connect the spiritual realm with friendship and soften the categorical differences between the spirituality of family versus friends. Thus, at least some people are likely to have multiple healthy relationships in their lives that contain spiritual significance. In conclusion, these modern examples fit well with the idea that people today are “finding their more intimate relationships within the context of friendship rather than the family

constellation,” as one researcher suggests (Behrendt, 1995). If a modern analysis of spirituality in friendship still leaves one wondering about its broad applicability, I now turn to accounts from religion and philosophy that root the modern expression of spiritual friendships in historical literature.

Further supports for studying friendship from a spiritual perspective comes from Bible passages, excerpts from Buddhist teachings, and from writings by historically respected and recognized members of society. Although at first glance the importance of friendship seems relatively less visible in formal religious teachings, the Bible contains several important precepts about friendship. Given that the U.S. population remains disproportionately Christian, the following Bible verses offer nice illustrations that call to people’s deep sense that friendships are essential to human functioning:

“Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.”

-Ecclesiastes-

“A sweet friendship refreshes the soul.”

-Proverbs 279-

“A faithful friend is the medicine of life.”

-Bible verse unknown-

“My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

-John 15:12 to13-

“Friends love through all kinds of weather, and families stick together in all kinds of trouble.”

-Proverbs 17:17-

“There are ‘friends’ who destroy each other, but a real friend sticks closer than a brother.”

-Proverbs 18:24-

“A friend will be a friend in times of all kinds.

-Proverbs-

Buddhist teachings also highlight the potential spiritual significance of friendship. For example:

“Friendship is the only cure for hatred, the only guarantee of peace.”

-Gautama Buddha-

“Spiritual friendship is the whole of the spiritual life.”

-Gautama Buddha-

“Spiritual friendship is a kind of womb or matrix from which all aspects of the spiritual life – even wisdom – emerge. It is not something we leave behind after our spiritual apprenticeship. The qualities, attitudes, habits, and skills that we need to attain enlightenment will appear gradually and progressively within the medium of spiritual friendship.”

-Subhuti & Subhamati-

“It seems that friendship belongs not only to the path [of enlightenment], but also to the goal of the spiritual life, or to put in another way, the path and the goal merge with one another, and spiritual friendship is woven into the fabric of both. It is important to grasp this point, because when we understand spiritual friendship only in terms of the path, we are in danger of cultivating friendship not for itself, but ‘for the sake of spiritual development.’”

-Subhuti & Subhamati-

“We can only experience genuine spiritual friendship when we see it as an end in itself...”

-Subhuti & Subhamati-

Here, recognized philosophers and writers from past centuries relate similar experiences concerning friendship:

“There is nothing on this earth more to be prized than true friendship.”

-Thomas Aquinas-

“Friends are God’s apology for relations.”

-Hugh Kingsmill-

“No better relation than a prudent and faithful friend.”

-Benjamin Franklin-

“Your wealth is where your friends are.”

-Plautus-

“Of all the things which wisdom provides to make us entirely happy, much of the greatest is the possession of friendship.”

-Epicurus-

Two acclaimed historical philosophers, Aristotle and Plato, deeply contemplated friendship in their extraordinary writings. In one of his famous works, Nichomachean Ethics, Aristotle described three types of friendship (e.g., utility, pleasure and virtue), with the highest form being a friendship of virtue. He asserted that this kind of friendship is even superior to the virtue of justice, that the love experienced in it is higher than the virtue of honor, and that it is vital to the harmony of the human species because friendship “holds cities together” (Aristotle & Sachs, 2002). According to Plato, true friendship ignites the search for living true and full lives, during which friends reveal themselves to one another and point out character flaws in one another’s

belief systems. Plato believed that this continued exchange between friends is known as the “process of becoming” one’s truest self (Plato & Jowett, 1892). Thus, after years of contemplation and observation, both philosophers came to believe that friendship is most necessary to life; and to Aristotle, no one would choose to live if void of friends, even if they had access to all other resources that make life seem valuable and worthwhile (e.g., money, food, power, a career, or a home).

These religious and philosophical passages are chalk-full of meaning and perspective, with any single expression capable of inspiring endless discourse. It is uncomplicated to understand then, why friendship through a spiritual lens deserves to be empirically examined. The experiences and lessons of our cultural heritage and religious underpinnings coupled with our modern experiences and observations of friendship, indicates that friendship can be perceived as central *and* as having a spiritual dimension. It can be prized beyond all other earthly experiences and is an important indicator of spiritual wealth. Some would say that friendships, indeed, could be perceived as sacred and with spiritual discourse abound, and the effects of this would be beneficial to relational health by having a positive influence on their friendship functioning.

Defining Friendship

Sociologists and psychologists who have already established theory and empirical research on the value of friendship claim it to be an important indicator of human functioning. Although Aristotle came to believe that friendship was too complex to be defined, today’s social scientists have come up with various definitions in an attempt to study friendship empirically. Echoing Aristotle in 2006, Hruschka (2006) compiled friendship descriptions in a succinct message that combined observations from various investigators, defining friendship as “informal

and ambiguous matter, privately forged by its participants, largely invisible to the legal system, and yet potentially powerful in its capacity to promote solidarity and cooperative action.”

According to Hayes (1988), a well-known researcher of friendships, friendship is defined as a “voluntary interdependence between two persons over time, that is intended to facilitate socio-emotional goals of the participants, and may involve varying types and degrees of companionship, intimacy, affection and mutual assistance” (cited from Demir, Orthel-Clark, Özdemir, & Bayram Özdemir, 2015). These latter concepts (e.g., companionship) are just a few components or features described in the friendship literature as belonging to the category of overall “friendship quality” (FQUA), which can be conceptualized as having positive and negative dimensions. Researchers have demonstrated that quality of friendship has consistently produced more significant associations with and predictions of social health (Demir, 2007; Hartup, 1997; Way & Silverman, 2012). As follows, factors that can predict the positive and negative dimensions of friendship quality should be understood and examined so that usefulness can be maximized.

Friendship quality: Positive and negative dimensions. Just like other relationships, adult friendships vary in perceived quality. As an interpersonal psychological construct, friendship quality is a complex domain that includes multiple facets (e.g., companionship, conflict) that can be organized into positive and negative dimensions. Which facets and/or dimension(s) are considered in the making or use of a measure is determined by the purposes of the research, the investigators’ theoretical model, and their subsequent hypotheses. For example, if researchers are only interested in the facet of emotional support, they will equate friendship quality to the perceived level of support a friend provides. If researchers are uninterested in differentiating among various friendship quality facets, a respondent’s subjective level of

satisfaction with the friendship is often considered a reflection of overall friendship quality too. In some psychological studies and especially in sociological research, these two facets – overall satisfaction with the friendship or level of social support a particular friend provides – are assessed using a one to three item measure and are considered general or single-faceted assessments of friendship quality. However, the common methodology among researchers interested in distinguishing characteristic differences in friendships involves assessing the specific functions of a friendship in finer detail (i.e., exploring multiple facets).

Friendship functions are examined by asking respondents several questions in various domains of relationship quality that address the extent to which a friend meets certain friendship criteria or fulfills the friendship needs of an individual. In these studies, researchers employ multi-faceted models of friendship quality where numerous sub-components of friendship are delineated and loosely organized into desirable (i.e., positive) and undesirable (i.e., negative) dimensions. Usually, these positive and negative dimension subscale scores are then summed to generate separate dimension or total composite scores that reflects the extent to which that particular friendship is of higher or lower quality. For example, the following elements are typically cast as positively-valenced components (i.e., facets or needs) of friendship that people should strive toward: companionship (i.e., time spent together), intimacy, and emotional support. Conversely, the following elements are typically cast as negatively-valenced components or facets of friendship that people should avoid: dominance, verbal aggression, and exclusion from activities. The number and type of friendship components that are identified as theoretically distinctive depends on the conceptual model and corresponding measure being used by the researcher.

When using a multi-faceted approach to friendship quality assessment, another way researchers conceptualize and measure friendship quality is by distinguishing between peoples' attitudes or various emotions tied to a friendship versus peoples' reports of concrete actions or behaviors that friends direct toward one another. Attitude and emotion items often begin with or imply "I feel," "I think," and "I believe," whereas general behaviorally-anchored questions begin with "how much" or "how often." Which approach a researcher takes, again, tends to be based on their conceptual stance and hypotheses underlying the purposes of their research. Some researchers have found that behavioral rather than attitudinal reports of friendship functions are a more accurate account of one's experiences due to its more discernable or tangible nature (Buhrmester & Furman, 2008; Furman, 1996) as well as its ability to "provide a broader scope" and better representation of a mature adult relationship (Mendelson & Aboud, 2012).

Given that this study was interested in specific friendship quality differences based on the extent to which adult friendships have a spiritual component, I focused on respondents' reports of a particular close friendship and the extent to which the respondent and his/her friend engage in behaviors that reflect actions typically evaluated by society as desirable and positive (i.e., companionship, intimate disclosure, emotional support, approval, satisfaction) or undesirable and negative (i.e., conflict/quarreling, criticism, pressure, dominance, exclusion). Accordingly, I focused on three key dependent or criterion constructs: positivity in the friendship, emotional intimacy, and negative friendship behaviors as exhibited in the dyad. "Positivity in friendship" and "emotional intimacy" both belong to the positive dimension of friendship quality, but are being separated for research purposes. Positivity in friendship is a construct that combines companionship, approval, and satisfaction, whereas emotional intimacy combines the facets of emotional support and intimate disclosure. The purpose of splitting positive friendship quality

into these two variables is so that emotional intimacy can be controlled for when assessing for the effects of spiritual intimacy. It's important to determine whether spiritual intimacy is a unique aspect of friendships that is distinctive from emotional intimacy, and further to show that it predicts negativity and positivity in friendships beyond emotional intimacy, despite the high overlap between emotional intimacy and the other positive characteristics of friendship. The best measure I have found to assess friendship quality was created by Buhrmester and Furman (2008) because it provides a comprehensive account of both the positive and negative dimensions of friendship and is a behaviorally-anchored scale from which participants rate theirs or their friend's actions in the relationship. A wealth of knowledge and significantly useful information can be tapped into by studying the effects of specific R/S factors—namely, sanctification and spiritual intimacy—on friendship quality.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were examined in this study based on the above literature review:

(1a) Significant bivariate correlations were expected between higher scores on two sub-scales of sanctification of a close friendship (i.e., manifestation of God and sacred qualities of friendship) and higher levels of positive friendship quality (i.e., combined score from companionship, satisfaction, and approval sub-scales) and emotional intimacy (i.e., combined score from intimate disclosure and emotional support sub-scales), as well as lower levels of negativity (i.e., combined score from pressure, conflict, criticism, dominance, and exclusion in the friendship sub-scales). (1b) These linkages were expected to remain significant after controlling for demographic variables that were likely to be significantly tied to friendship outcomes (e.g., gender ethnicity, friendship length) using partial correlation coefficients. (1c) Finally, hierarchical regressions were conducted to determine if each type of sanctification

would uniquely contribute to greater positivity and emotional intimacy and lower friendship negativity after controlling for each other and any significant demographic variables also tied to friendship quality.

(2a) College students who report higher spiritual intimacy skills with a close friend were expected to report higher levels of positivity in friendship and emotional intimacy and lower levels of negativity. (2b) Further, it was expected that in follow-up hierarchical regression analyses, spiritual intimacy would uniquely contribute to positivity and negativity in friendship, even after controlling for emotional intimacy and any relevant demographic variables.

Finally, this study intentionally focuses on college students for the following reasons. Emerging adults from a university sample are transitioning to college, which is a well-known, highly stressful experience in their lives. During this transition, emerging adults are learning how to maintain previous friendships and create new ones, while taking on higher academic workloads and living outside their family homes for the first time. In fact, most college institutions promote the principle of creating a strong social network. Universities help students fulfill this goal by providing several organized social structures, so that individuals can be exposed to and become acquainted with various personalities. This process allows students to have relational options from which to form intimate friendships and gain support during college-related pressures, general life stress, and one's personal afflictions during emerging adulthood. The perception of higher quality friendships during college transitions has been shown to be a critical protective factor that increases the likelihood of academic success (e.g., GPA, retention, successful graduation; Ashwin, 2003; Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Lapsley, Rice, & FitzGerald, 1990; Rayle, Kurpius, & Arredondo, 2006) and psychological well-being (e.g. less depression, anxiety, and anger, and greater self-esteem and adjustment; Chow, Roelse,

Burhmeister, & Underwood, 2011; Mounts, Valentiner, Anderson, & Boswell, 2006; Rodriguez, Mira, Myers, Morris, & Cardoza, 2003). Therefore, investigating factors that may predict the experience of higher quality friendships is important for successful maturation in this subpopulation of emerging adults.

METHODS

Participants

I recruited 634 individuals to participate in this study from the northern Ohio area (university sample). Inclusion criteria constituted being a young adult and college student in between the ages of 18-25, and the individual must have identified someone that they considered to be their closest friend, based on a given broad definition (see below). Other individual and R/S demographic variables were gathered and included: gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, relationship status, education level, income level, religious denomination, overall religiosity and spirituality, and frequencies of R/S practices. Descriptive questions about the friendship included friend's age, length of friendship, and whether or not the friendship was maintained long-distance (see table 3 below for friendship characteristics). The following data reflect important demographics of this sample (see Table 1 below and Appendix A for item list): with regards to gender and age, 72% of participants were female; 89% were between the ages of 18–20, while the rest were between the ages of 21–25. Concerning ethnicity, 84% of participants were Caucasian and 11% were Black, while the remaining 5% comprised other ethnicities. Regarding sexual orientation, 81% of participants were heterosexual, 8% were asexual or pansexual, 7% were bisexual, and 4% were homosexual. First year undergraduates made up a majority of the sample (58%) and 65% were single. With regard to R/S variables (see Table 2 below), 57% of the participants reported being either religious or spiritual, while 31% reported to be neither, and 12% reported being unsure. The following prevalence rates for this study appear to be reflective of national norms for adults between the ages of 18 – 29 (Pew Research Study, 2015): Concerning religious affiliation: 71% were affiliated with Christianity, 23% were not affiliated

with any religion, and the remaining 6% comprised other faiths. Regarding religious practices, 18% attended religious services at least once a week, while 18% prayed at least daily.

Decisions for choosing the age range, 18 through 25 were consistent with developmental research on emerging adulthood. Choosing one's "closest friend" as opposed to reporting on any close friendship was due to previous studies finding that relationship quality with best friends predicted several important psychological outcomes that other close friendships did not (e.g., happiness, perceived social support, self-esteem, loneliness, and depressive symptoms). For that reason, this research project followed suit to ensure that connections between spiritual predictors and friendship health variables were uncovered if they exist.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Variables	<i>Self %Endorsed</i>	<i>Friend % Endorsed</i>
<i>Age</i>		
<i>15 – 17</i>	-	4%
<i>18 - 20</i>	89%	79%
<i>21 – 25</i>	11%	14%
<i>above 25</i>	-	3%
Gender (Female)	72%	69%
<i>Ethnicity</i>		
<i>Black/Afr.Am/African</i>	11%	11%
<i>Caucasian/European</i>	84%	83%
<i>Other (ethnicities less than 5%)</i>	5%	6%
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>		
<i>Asexual/Pansexual/Other</i>	8%	9%
<i>Bisexual</i>	7%	6%
<i>Heterosexual</i>	81%	81%
<i>Homosexual</i>	4%	4%
<i>Education Status</i>		
<i>1st year</i>	58%	37%
<i>2nd year</i>	23%	23%

<i>3rd year</i>	11%	8%
<i>4th year</i>	7%	8%
<i>Graduate School</i>	<1%	1%
<i>Highschool Graduate</i>	<1%	15%
<i>In High School</i>	-	8%
Relationship Status		
<i>Single, not dating</i>	44%	44%
<i>Single, dating</i>	21%	21%
<i>In Relationship</i>	31%	28%
<i>Cohabiting/Engaged/Married</i>	4%	7%

Table 2
Religious and Spiritual Characteristics of the Sample

Variables	M (SD)	Ranges	%'s
Report on own R/S			
Global Religiosity	3.6(1.9)	1 - 7	
Consider self R or S?			
<i>Yes</i>			57.2%
<i>No</i>			30.6%
<i>Unsure</i>			12.2%
Global Spirituality	3.7(1.7)	1 - 7	
R/S Frequencies			
Attends Services	1.4(1.2)	0 - 4	
<i>Not at all</i>			33.7%
<i>Less than monthly</i>			30.2%
<i>Monthly</i>			15.5%
<i>Once a week</i>			17.6%
<i>Several times a week</i>			2.8%
<i>Daily</i>			0.2%
Meditation	.55 (1.1)	0 - 5	
<i>Not at all</i>			63.6%
<i>Less than monthly</i>			17.4%
<i>Monthly</i>			7.0%
<i>Once a week</i>			6.9%
<i>Several times a week</i>			3.5%
<i>Daily</i>			1.5%
Prayer	3.9(1.8)	1 - 5	
<i>Not at all</i>			27.5%

<i>Less than monthly</i>		15.3%
<i>Monthly</i>		13.6%
<i>Once a week</i>		13.3%
<i>Several times a week</i>		12.4%
<i>Daily</i>		17.9%
Atheism/Agnosticism		
Belief in God's Existence	6.8 (3.5)	0 - 10
<i>Atheist</i>		8.9%
Doubts God's Existence	4 (3.8)	0 - 10
<i>Not at all</i>		28.9%
1 - 5		35.9%
6 - 10		35.1%
Religious Affiliation		
<i>No Religion</i>		23.2%
<i>Christian</i>		
<i>Non-specified Christian</i>		35.0%
<i>Roman Catholic</i>		17.4%
<i>Baptist</i>		5.1%
<i>Mainline Christian</i>		
<i>Methodist</i>		3.7%
<i>Lutheran</i>		4.5%
<i>Presbyterian</i>		0.9%
<i>Church of Christ</i>		3.4%
<i>Episcopalian</i>		0.6%
<i>Jewish</i>		0.5%
<i>Buddhist</i>		0.9%
<i>Eastern Orthodox</i>		0.8%
<i>Islamic</i>		0.6%
<i>Latter-Day Saints</i>		0.2%
<i>Other</i>		3.4%
Report on Friend's R/S		
Religiosity	4.4(2.2)	1 - 7
Spirituality	4.4 (2.3)	1 - 7
Friend R or S?		
<i>Yes</i>		55.5%
<i>No</i>		27.8%
<i>I don't know</i>		16.7%
R/S Frequencies		

Attends Services	2.4 (1.2)	1 - 4	
<i>Not at all</i>			35.4%
<i>Less than monthly</i>			21.9%
<i>Monthly</i>			16.7%
<i>Once a week</i>			21.3%
<i>Several times a week</i>			4.4%
<i>Daily</i>			0.4%
Meditation	1.7 (1.3)	1 - 5	
<i>Not at all</i>			72.7%
<i>Less than monthly</i>			9.7%
<i>Monthly</i>			6.2%
<i>Once a week</i>			5.6%
<i>Several times a week</i>			3.2%
<i>Daily</i>			2.7%
Prayer	3.0 (1.9)	1 - 5	
<i>Not at all</i>			37.9%
<i>Less than monthly</i>			14.1%
<i>Monthly</i>			8.9%
<i>Once a week</i>			9.2%
<i>Several times a week</i>			14.9%
<i>Daily</i>			14.9%
Atheism/Agnosticism			
Belief in God's Existence	6.5 (3.4)	0 - 10	
Doubts God's Existence	3.3 (3.2)	0 - 10	
Religious Affiliation			
<i>No Religion</i>			21.9%
<i>Christian</i>			
<i>Non-specified Christian</i>			38.9%
<i>Roman Catholic</i>			19.0%
<i>Baptist</i>			3.0%
<i>Mainline Christian</i>			
<i>Methodist</i>			2.5%
<i>United Church of Christ</i>			0.4%
<i>Lutheran</i>			3.9%
<i>Presbyterian</i>			0.7%
<i>Church of Christ</i>			4.3%
<i>Episcopalian</i>			0.2%

<i>Jewish</i>	0.9%
<i>Buddhist</i>	0.9%
<i>Eastern Orthodox</i>	0.2%
<i>Islamic</i>	0.9%
<i>Latter-Day Saints</i>	0.2%
<i>Other</i>	2.2%

Table 3

Descriptive Data of Friendship Variables

Variables	% Endorsed
FSP In Town	57%
FSP Long Distance	43%
FSP Length	
<i>between 1 - 5 yrs</i>	26%
<i>between 5 - 10 yrs</i>	37%
<i>between 11 - 15 yrs</i>	12%
<i>between 16 - 25 yrs</i>	9.3%

Procedure

Individuals were emerging adults drawn from a university sample, from Bowling Green State University, in a midsized, Midwestern city. Each individual read and completed consent forms for the project, which were approved by the university's institutional review board. Individuals participated in self-report measures distributed online through Qualtrics, a data collection and research company.

First, the participants were given a general statement as to the purposes of the study. They were informed that the researchers are interested in learning more information about the depth of friendships in college students and how religion and/or spiritual experiences may manifest in and affect friendships. Before they began the self-report process, participants were given the following prompt about friendships: "Please bring to mind the relationship you have with your closest friend, someone who is not currently and hasn't been a romantic partner and

someone who is not a family member. When responding to the following questions about a close friendship, please continue to think of that close friend while assessing if a statement you read is or is not reflective of your closest friendship.” It was important not to give a more concrete definition of friendship for two reasons, both built on the intent of being data rather than theory driven: (1) So that participants were not primed or lead to think of a specific kind of friend, where the researchers rather than participants defined what it means to have a “closest friend.” We wanted to make sure that each participant’s choice of their “closest friend” (i.e., the data) actually reflected what research suggests a close friend is supposed to be (i.e., fulfilling certain friendship roles) before giving them the definition (i.e., theory). This gave the current researcher the ability to provide an empirical check and report on if the perceived closest friendship is also one that reflects the operational definition of being a higher quality friendship. If we defined friendship in more detailed terms, such as by listing what a close friend does or how a close friend should treat you (as some other researchers have done), we would have been asking participants to choose their closest friend who only meets certain standards, thereby setting them up to respond to our idea rather than their idea of their closest friend. This, in turn, may have lead them to choose someone who is not the person they’d call their closest friend; (2) It may be that one’s closest friend does not fulfill all of the friendship needs outlined by our friendship quality measure, and if this is the case, it would be informative to describe how sanctification and/or spiritual intimacy does or does not play a role in deciding if that friendship is perceived as “the closest,” regardless of if their closest friend fulfills all their friendship needs.

After being asked to think of their closest non-romantic and non-familial friend, the participants completed the measures for this study. To limit participants’ awareness of the intent of the study and social desirability bias, the measures were completed in the following order:

participants first reported on the quality of their friendship, followed by sanctification (both subscales), and ended with spiritual intimacy. The reason we began with friendship quality was to prevent participants from being primed with spiritual appraisals that may have led to inflation or deflation of their friendship evaluations. Though one can argue that assessing for spiritual cognitions and behaviors may actually help inform a more accurate assessment of their closest friendship, due to complete lack of prevalence rates and assessment in this area, the researcher felt it was best to be conservative about “leading” the participants.

Measures

Sanctification of Friendship: Manifestation of God and Sacred Qualities

The sanctification of one’s closest friendship was investigated by using two separate subscales of a slightly modified version of the Revised Sanctification of Marriage measure (Mahoney et al., 2009), to assess the manifestation of God and sacred qualities in friendship. In all items, the word “marriage” was replaced with “close friendship” to assess each individual’s level of sanctification of their closest friendship. All items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The “Manifestation of God” (MG) subscale consisted of 10 items that are theistic in nature, as they directly mentioned God as having a role in the friendship. Example items from the MG subscale included, “God has been a guiding force in my close friendship,” “I feel God at work in my close friendship,” and “In mysterious ways, my close friendship is touched by God.” Responses to all 10 items were averaged to create a total MQ subscale score. The “Sacred Qualities” (SQ) subscale consisted of 10 items that are non-theistic in nature, as they do not mention a specific deity, though they each use descriptive terms or concepts to describe prototypical qualities that people tend to attribute to deities or transcendent reality. Example items from the SQ scale included, “My close friendship

reveals the deepest truths of life to me,” “My close friendship seems like a miracle to me,” and “My close friendship connected my close friend and me to something greater than ourselves.”

Responses to all 10 items were averaged to create a total SQ subscale score. High internal consistency, convergent validity, and construct validity were found in previous literature assessing sanctification of marriage (see Appendix C for measure).

Spiritual Intimacy in Friendship

Spiritual intimacy was examined using an 8-item measure that was adapted from Kusner and colleagues (2014). The wording of items was changed to reflect spiritual intimacy between closest friends, by exchanging the word “mother” with “closest friend” to assess each individual’s experience of spiritual intimacy in the friendship. These 8 items assessed both spiritual disclosures and spiritual support (i.e., providing warmth and empathy) as reported on by an individual about the self and on their friend. Examples of items directed at the self, included, “I feel safe being completely open and honest with my spouse about my spirituality,” “I tend to keep my spiritual side private and separate from my close friendship,” and “I try not to be judgmental or critical when my close friend shares his/her ideas about my spirituality.” Items directed at the assessment of one’s friend, included, “My close friend doesn’t disclose his/her thoughts or feelings about spirituality with me,” “My close friend shares his/her spiritual questions or struggles with me,” “My close friend really knows how to listen when I talk about my spiritual needs, thoughts and feelings,” and “My close friend is supportive when I reveal my spiritual questions or struggles to him/her.” Items were rated on a Likert-scale from not at all (0) to a great deal (3). The items directed at self and the report of one’s friend were averaged to create a total score on spiritual intimacy skills within the close friendship. Previous internal consistencies reported for spiritual disclosure was .96 and .95 for college students and their

mothers, respectively (Brelsford & Mahoney, 2008); previous internal consistency reported for spiritual support ranged from .67 to .70 across four time-points in a longitudinal study (Kusner et al., 2014). From the longitudinal study by Kusner and colleagues (2014), inter-rater reliability between wives and their husbands was high, showing that both the husbands and wives report of spiritual intimacy predicted similar significant patterns in observed negativity and observed positivity in reports of spousal behavior. This is impressive and serves as evidentiary support that the report of one partner's perception of the other partner's behaviors, and vice versa, is perceptively accurate (see Appendix D for measure).

Friendship Quality: Positive and Negative Dimensions

Friendship quality was assessed using The Network of Relationships Questionnaire (NRQ): The Relationship Qualities Version (NRQ-RQ, Furman & Buhrmester, 2009). The NRQ-RQ is a 30-item measure that assesses the negative and positive dimensions of friendship quality by querying about 10 different facets or domains using a 5-point Likert scale (1=Never or hardly at all; 2=Seldom or not too much; 3=Sometimes or somewhat; 4=often or very much; 5=Always or extremely much). In past research, the positive dimension of friendship quality combined the following five subscales into a composite score (15 items, 3 items per subscale): companionship, intimate disclosure, emotional support, approval, and satisfaction. For the purposes of this study, the positive dimension of friendship quality was separated into two composite scores, and thus two separate variables, though they are still both reflections of positive friendship quality: one subscale combined companionship, approval, and satisfaction, and was termed "positivity in friendship;" and a second subscale combined intimate disclosure and emotional support, which was termed "emotional intimacy." As a reminder, the reason for separating these components of positive friendship quality was so that emotional intimacy could be controlled for given that

researchers in this field theorize that emotional intimacy is “part of” spiritual intimacy, and therefore needs to be parceled out before a study can definitively show that the spiritual component of spiritual intimacy uniquely predicts outcomes. Otherwise, it’s unclear as to whether the emotional intimate portion of spiritual intimacy is “carrying” the variable and masking an insignificant effect of the spiritual component. As in previous research using this measure, the negative or problematic dimensions of friendship quality were assessed by combining the following five subscales into a composite score (15 items; 3 items per subscale): conflict/quarreling, criticism, pressure, dominance, and exclusion. An example question from each domain included: “How often do you spend fun time with this person?” (Companionship); “How often do you share secrets and private feelings with this person?” (Intimate Disclosure); “How often do you depend on this person for help, advice, or sympathy?” (Emotional Support); “How often does this person seem really proud of you?” (Approval); “How much do you like the way things are between you and this person?” (Satisfaction); “How often do you and this person get mad at or get in fights with each other?” (Conflict/Quarreling); “How often does this person point out your faults or put you down?” (Criticism); “How often does this person push you to do things that you don’t want to do?” (Pressure); “How often does this person get their way when you two do not agree about what to do?” (Dominance); and lastly, “How often does this person not include you in activities?” (Exclusion). The measure was scored by averaging the positive facets of companionship, approval, and satisfaction into a “positivity in friendship” composite score and the positive facets of emotional support and intimate disclosure into a composite score of “emotional intimacy,” and by averaging the negative facets to produce a negative dimension score (see Appendix B for measure).

This measure was chosen because it is one of the few friendship quality measures that is grounded in behavioral analysis while simultaneously collecting information on the breadth and depth of positive and negative dimensions of relationship quality. Previous reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) for each sub-scale was obtained in a sample of 223 participants, ages 11-12 years-old from suburban public schools in Texas. Reliabilities range from .52 (exclusion) to .92 (disclosure), with four scales at or above .89 (companionship, disclosure, satisfaction, and emotional support), five scales at or above .68 (conflict, criticism, approval, pressure and dominance), and only one scale (exclusion) below this marking the low end of the range. Notably, the alpha coefficients that will be reported in this study will be for all of the positive sub-scales combined and all of the negative sub-scales combined. The authors of this measure clearly recommend that researchers combine the sub-scales into two omnibus indices of "positivity" and "negativity" in their manual that they created for this measure which I obtained a copy of. Although, I could not locate alpha coefficients for the broad-band measures, these two alpha coefficient should be satisfactory based on the alphas of each sub-scale. Alpha coefficients for the three scales of friendship quality for the current study can be located in Table 2 (.81 – .92).

RESULTS

SPSS version 24 (2015) was used for the analyses.

Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive Statistics

First, preliminary data analyses were conducted to collect descriptive statistics on the following sets of variables in order to adequately describe the sample: (1) the friendship demographic variables of (a) length of friendship and (b) whether the close friend lives in or out of town (i.e., long-distance friendship), (2) various religious demographics such as religious affiliation, general religiousness and spirituality, and the frequencies of engaging in R/S activities (e.g., how often one prays, meditates, and attends religious services), and (3) individual demographic variables. Preliminary analyses were also conducted to assess the ranges, means, standard deviations, and alpha coefficients (i.e., internal consistencies) of all primary variables (manifestation of God, sacred qualities, spiritual intimacy, emotional intimacy, positivity in friendship, and overall negativity in friendship) to ensure that the distributions of scores did not require transformations and/or to remove extreme outliers. Based on these analyses, all variables had an acceptable internal consistency (.74 – .98), with no distributions requiring transformations nor a removal of outliers. See Table 4 below for descriptive statistics on primary variables, and see a Table 3 and Table 2 above, for friendship and R/S demographics, respectively.

Table 4
Descriptive Data of Predictor and Criterion Variables

Variables	Mean (SD)	Ranges	Alpha's	Skewness
Sanc: Manifestation of God	3.28(1.98)	1 - 7	.98	.28
Sanc: Sacred Qualities	3.53 (1.62)	1 - 7	.94	.07
Spiritual Intimacy	2.23 (.55)	1 - 3	.74	-.49
Positivity in FSP	4.0 (.60)	1 - 5	.81	-.77
Negative FQUA	1.98 (.56)	1 - 5	.87	-.80
Emotional Intimacy	3.97 (.85)	1 - 5	.92	.94

Bivariate Correlations

Second, preliminary analyses included running bivariate correlations among the dependent variables (positivity in friendship, emotional intimacy, and overall negativity in friendship) to ensure these variables could be treated as separate constructs (see Table 5 below).

In addition, bivariate correlations were conducted between demographic control variables (age, race/ethnicity, gender, age, length of friendship and whether or not it's a long-distance friendship) and the three dependent variables to detect any demographic factors that should be controlled for in subsequent analyses involving partial correlations or hierarchical regressions (see Table 5 below). The analyses showed that gender and friendship distance were significantly correlated with at least one of the criterion variables (see table 5 for all correlations between demographic and primary variables). Below, Table 6 displays the bivariate correlations between the independent variables. "Manifestation of God" and "Sacred Qualities" were correlated at $r = .77$, and $r = .19$ and $r = .27$ with spiritual intimacy, respectively.

Table 5

Intercorrelations Among Demographic and Criterion Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	-	.06	.03	-.11**	.01	0	-.02	0
2. Gender		-	.08	-.01	.04	-.17**	-.33**	.10**
3. Ethnicity			-	-.03	-.03	.03	-.02	.01
4. FSP Length				-	.08*	.06	-.04	-.02
5. FSP Distance					-	.08*	.02	.03
6. Positivity in FSP						-	.71**	-.26**
7. Emotional Intimacy							-	-.18**
8. Negativity in FSP								-

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

Primary Analyses

Prevalence Rates of Spirituality Variables

The prevalence rates for the sanctification of one's closest friendships and spiritual intimacy between close friends was collected, and as has been done with prior research, they are reported in the following ways: (1) the percentage of cases at three anchor points of disagree, neutral, and agree are listed from the most to least endorsed for sanctification's Manifestation of God and Sacred Qualities subscales, (2) as are the percentage of cases at each anchor point for spiritual intimacy. Table 6 and 7 provide these prevalence rates with some salient findings highlighted here. Although 77% of participants endorsed "a great deal" for feeling safe to be completely open and honest with their closest friend about R/S matters (spiritual intimacy), 47% of them also said that they tended to keep their spiritual side private. Another interesting finding is that participants tended to rate their own ability to be supportive and non-judgmental of their friend's spiritual disclosures more highly than they rated their friend's ability to reciprocate the same level of care (75-77% compared to 42-48%, respectively). The three highest prevalence rates in the SQ subscale were also the most endorsed between the two sanctification subscales. These included, "my friendship...": "...is sacred to me" (58%), "...reveals the deepest truths"

(47%), and "...is a miracle" (45%). In the SQ subscale, the three items endorsed the least described the friendship as holy (18%), a spiritual experience (21%), and eternal (25%). The three highest prevalence rates from the MG subscale were between 29%–31% and included seeing the friendship as God's handiwork (31%), God at work (30.5%), and God playing a role in it (29%). The three lowest prevalence rates were viewing the friendship as: God guiding it (27%), God living through it (26%), and, an experience of God (22%). It's interesting that out of all the sanctification items, those with the lowest prevalence rates appear to contain language that could be viewed as more religious or "God-like" speech.

Table 6

Frequency of Sanctification Items (descending order by subscales)

Items	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
<i>MG subscale</i>			
7. God's handiwork	46.8%	22.2%	31%
5. God at work	41.8%	27.8%	30.5%
1. God played a role	50.0%	20.9%	29.1%
2. God's presence	47.4%	24.1%	28.5%
3. God's will	46.8%	24.7%	28.5%
10. Touched by God	46.2%	25.3%	28.5%
9. Strong Connection w/ God	47.4%	24.7%	27.9%
6. God guiding force	46.8%	26.6%	26.6%
8. God lives through	46.2%	27.8%	26%
4. Experience God	48.1%	29.7%	22.2%
<i>SQ subscale</i>			
15. Sacred to me	23.5%	19.0%	57.6%
17. Deepest Truths	30.4%	22.8%	46.9%
18. Miracle	31.6%	23.4%	44.9%
16. Something Greater	36.7%	30.4%	32.9%
20. Creative power	41.1%	26.6%	32.3%
13. Spiritual Plan	45.8%	22.9%	31.2%
19. Deepest mysteries	41.2%	29.7%	29.1%
14. Eternal	51.9%	22.8%	25.3%
12. Spiritual Exp.	53.1%	25.9%	20.9%
11. Holy	53.8%	28.5%	17.8%

Table 7
Frequency of Spiritual Intimacy Items

<i>Items</i> (from most to least endorsed)	Percentage (%) Endorsed			
	Not at All (0)	1	2	A Great Deal (3)
1. I feel safe being completely open and honest.	0%	5%	18%	77%
4. I try to be supportive when my close friend discloses	0%	4%	19%	77%
3. I try not to be judgmental or critical	4%	4%	16%	75%
8. My close friend is supportive when I reveal...	1.0%	14.0%	37.0%	48.0%
2. I tend to keep my spiritual side private	11%	17%	24%	47%
7. My close friend really knows how to listen...	4.0%	19.0%	35.0%	42.0%
6. My close friend doesn't disclose...	18.0%	17.0%	31.0%	34.0%
5. My close friend shares...	17%	20%	31%	32%

Bivariate and Partial Correlations

Hypotheses 1a and 2a were tested by running Pearson correlation analyses between the independent variables of (a) manifestation of God in friendship, (b) sacred qualities in friendship, and (c) spiritual intimacy in friendship, and the dependent variables of (d) positivity in friendship (i.e., companionship, satisfaction, and approval), (e) emotional intimacy, and (f) overall negativity in the friendship, while hypothesis 1b was tested by running partial correlations analyses that controlled for the significant demographic variables (see Table 8 below for bivariate and partial correlation analyses). Hypotheses 1a was partially supported. Higher scores on the Manifestation of God subscale were significantly associated with greater positivity in friendship (.09, $p < .05$), but not with emotional intimacy (.07, ns) or negative friendship quality

(.03, ns). Higher scores on the Sacred Qualities subscale were significantly correlated with greater positivity in friendship (.20, $p < .01$) and greater emotional intimacy (.21, $p < .001$), but not with negative friendship quality (.006, ns). Hypothesis 2a was fully supported. Higher scores on spiritual intimacy were significantly related to greater positivity in friendship (.24, $p < .01$) and emotional intimacy (.30, $p < .01$), and also to less negative friendship quality (-.27, $p < .01$).

Hypothesis 1b was also partially supported. Higher scores on MG still predicted positivity in friendship (.07, $p < .05$) and greater endorsement of SQ continued to predict higher positivity in friendship (.18, $p < .001$) and emotional intimacy (.17, $p < .001$) after controlling for significant demographics. Not surprisingly, null linkages persisted between MG and emotional intimacy (.03, ns) and negative friendship quality (.04, ns), as well as between SC and negativity in friendship (.02, ns). Spiritual intimacy continued to predict greater positivity in friendship (.23, $p < .001$) and emotional intimacy (.28, $p < .001$), and less negativity in the friendship (-.26, $p < .001$) after controlling for significant demographics.

Table 8

Bivariate and Partial Correlations Among Predictor and Criterion Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Sanctification MG	-	.77**	.19**	.07	.09*	.03
2. Sanctification SQ	.77**	-	.27**	.21**	.2**	.006
3. Spiritual Intimacy	.18*	.25***	-	.3**	.24**	-.27**
4. Emotional Intimacy	.03	.17***	.28***	-	.71**	-.18**
5. Pos in FSP	.07*	.18***	.23***	.71**	-	-.26**
6. Neg in FSP	.04	.02	-.26***	-.15**	-.025**	-

*= $p < .05$, **= $p < .01$, ***= $p < .001$

Top panel contains bivariate correlations; bottom panel contains partial correlations.

Hierarchical Regression Analyses

Hypotheses 1c, which stated that higher scores on both sanctification subscales would contribute uniquely to greater positivity in friendship and emotional intimacy and to less negative friendship quality after controlling for one another, was tested by running hierarchical regression analyses whereby each subscale was entered simultaneously after controlling for demographic factors (see table 9 below for sanctification regressions). The importance of this was to gain maximum insight into the two alternative but overlapping sanctification processes. Notably, the total amount of variance accounted for when both sub-scores are entered into one step in a regression model provides information about the variance the two combined scales would account for with beta's, thereby showing if either made a unique contribution to friendship outcomes after controlling for the other index of sanctification.

Hypothesis 1c was partially supported. In step one, gender and friendship distance were entered into the equation. In step two, Manifestation of God and Sacred Qualities were entered into the equation. After controlling for demographic factors, step 2 still predicted both emotional intimacy (R^2 change=.05, $F=18.9$ (2, 630) $p<.001$) and positivity in friendship (R^2 change=.04, $F=13.9$ (2, 630), $p<.001$). In terms of unique effects, greater Sacred Qualities predicted more emotional intimacy ($B=.35$, $p<.001$) and positivity in the friendship ($B=.30$, $p<.001$) after controlling for Manifestation of God. Surprisingly, however, greater Manifestation of God in the friendship uniquely predicted lower emotional intimacy ($B=-.24$, $p<.001$) and less positivity in friendship ($B=-.16$, $p=.007$) after controlling for Sacred Qualities.

Predictor variables	Criterion Factors					
	Emotional Intimacy		Positivity in FSP		Negativity in FSP	
	Beta	R ² Chg	Beta	R ² Chg	Beta	R ² Chg
Step 1 Demographics		.12*** (F=42.2)		.04*** (F=11.6)		.01* (F=3.8)
Gender	-.34***		-.17***		.11**	
Friendship Distance	.03		.08**		.02	
Step 2 Sanctification		.05*** (F=18.9)		.04*** (F=13.9)		.002 (F=.56)
MG	-.24***		-.16**		.06	
SQ	0.35***		.30***		-.02	

*=p<.05, **p<.01, ***=p<.001
Note: All analyses controlled for effects of gender and friendship distance.

Given that significant bivariate and partial correlations emerged between spiritual intimacy and emotional intimacy (.30, $p<.01$ and .28, $p<.001$, respectively), it was important to run separate follow-up hierarchical analyses that controlled for emotional intimacy to examine whether the associations between spiritual intimacy and the remaining two dependent variables (positivity in friendship and negative friendship quality) stayed significant (see Table 10 below for spiritual intimacy regressions). Again, the importance of this is due to the conservative assumption that emotional intimacy is “part of” the function of spiritual intimacy. Thus, by parceling out emotional intimacy, the effects of the spiritual component of spiritually intimacy could be determined. In step one, gender and friendship length (i.e., the demographic variable significantly correlated to spiritual intimacy) and emotional intimacy were entered into the equation. In step two, spiritual intimacy was entered into the equation to determine if spiritual intimacy uniquely contributed to positivity in friendship and negative friendship quality after controlling for emotional intimacy. Regression analyses results showed that spiritual intimacy was no longer significantly associated with positivity in friendship ($R^2\text{change}=.001$, $B=.04$, $F=1.56$ (1, 629), $p=.21$), however the correlation was still significant for negative friendship quality ($R^2\text{change}=.05$, $B=-.23$, $F=34.2$ (1,629), $p<.001$), indicating that hypothesis 2b was partially supported.

Table 10
Hierarchical Regressions on Spiritual Intimacy and Friendship

Predictor Categories	Criterion Factors			
	Positivity in FSP		Negative FQUA	
	Beta	R ² Chg	Beta	R ² Chg
Step 1 Demographics		.51*** (F=222.1)		.03*** (F=7.2)
Gender	.08**		.05	
Friendship Distance	.06*		.03	
Emot. Intimacy	.74***		-.16***	
Step 2 Spir. Intimacy		.001 (F=1.56)		.05*** (F=34.2)
SI	.04		-.23***	

*=p<.05, **p<.01, ***=p<.001

Note: All analyses controlled for effects of gender.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to assess if and how specific spiritual cognitions and behaviors functioned in close friendships for the better—what has been referred to in this paper as “the light side of friendship.” More particularly, this researcher was interested in elucidating (1) the extent to which young adults perceive sacred components in their close friendships and engage in spiritually intimate behaviors by sharing with and supporting one another during self-disclosures of a spiritual nature, and (2) the degree to which these spiritual components were significantly related to experiencing a higher quality friendship. These primary goals were undertaken by collecting prevalence rates on sanctification of a closest friendship (i.e., manifestation of God and sacred qualities) and spiritual intimacy between close friends, and then by running bivariate correlation analyses between these three spiritual variables and the three dependent variables of friendship quality, namely positivity in friendship (comprised of companionship, satisfaction, and approval), emotional intimacy between close friends (comprised of emotional support and intimate disclosure), and negative friendship quality (comprised of pressure, conflict, criticism, dominance, and exclusion). Follow-up partial correlation analyses were conducted to control for relevant demographics. Lastly, hierarchical regression analyses was performed to assess (1) how the separate subscales of sanctification uniquely contributed to friendship quality after controlling for demographic variables and each other, and (2) whether or not spiritual intimacy uniquely contributed to the experience of higher quality friendships after emotional intimacy was controlled for, given that emotional and spiritual intimacy overlap in their conceptual definitions and functions.

Prevalence Rates

Importantly, this was the first study of its kind to collect and discuss the prevalence rates of these specific spiritual variables as they are experienced in a close friendship. Recent sociological and psychological research backed by several historical religious, spiritual, and philosophical teachings have recognized and even venerated the imperative role of friendship in people's lives. Further, these historical literatures have heavily discussed the notion that friendships are capable of being characterized by religious or spiritual elements. Thus far, sociological and psychological researchers have generally found that friends discuss spirituality, but whether or not and the extent to which close friends experience specific spiritual cognitions or engage in spiritually intimate behaviors in their close friendships was still unknown.

This particular study uncovered that close friends do sanctify their friendships as well as engage in spiritual intimacy with one another. Sanctification items ranged from 18% to 58% endorsement. Perhaps not surprisingly, these prevalence figures reflect less endorsement and larger variation in the spiritual perceptions people readily apply to their close friendships compared to higher rates found in studies of parent-child and spousal relationships. Participants also seems less prone to ascribing God terminology to their close friendships, even if they believed that there is something spiritually active within the relationship. The variations in how one perceives their close friendship as sacred could reflect what was already discussed in the introduction: that close friendships, and friendships in general, are often not discussed nor studied as having a strong or central spiritual component, with no public rituals to emphasize the spiritual nature of the friendship, and no modern cognitive scripts or models to serve as the basis by which friends could evaluate their friendships (at least in the U.S.). On the other hand, it's clear that sanctification by assigning sacred qualities to a close friendship resonated with a

notable percentage of young adults. This could mean that friendships are perceived as more spiritual than religious, in that “God” terminology is more directly associated with religion, whereas non-theistic terms like “sacred,” “something greater,” and “deepest truths” could be perceived as further removed from religious affiliation. Thus, sacred qualities could be more acceptable to even religious people who do not associate close friendships with God.

Nevertheless, even with the lower endorsement of items compared to sacred qualities, 29% (averaged across items) of participants endorsed perceiving the manifestation of God in their friendship. This means that almost 1/3rd of participants were comfortable ascribing God language to their close friendships. This is important considering the fact that spiritual friendships are underdiscussed and lack a niche in psychological research.

Approximately 75% of participants rated themselves as practicing spiritual intimacy with their close friend “a great deal” of the time, whether it was self-disclosing or listening to self-disclosures. Despite this, there appears to be a discrepancy between how often one “feels” they can be open and honest about spiritual matters (77% endorsed “a great deal”) and how often they actually disclose their spiritual side (47% endorsed keeping their spirituality private). These results may indicate that there is a significant difference between the potential for and then the action of spiritual intimacy. Given that spirituality is often endorsed as highly private and sensitive, it makes sense that there is a more complex relationship with how it is experienced between people. It appears that, on average, participants rated their closest friend as being less skilled in spiritual intimacy when the participant self-disclosed their spiritual side, and further, they rated their close friend as being more private about spiritual matters. This could indicate a participant bias in over-rating their own ability to be skilled in handling spiritually sensitive information, whereby participants are evaluating their own skills to be better than what their

friend's ratings may be of the participants' abilities. Concerning the close friend being more private about spiritual matters, an explanation could be that participants are unaware of the discrepancy between the amount of information shared with the participant and the content that's kept private by the close friend. Participants are limited to their own estimation, which is based on their experiences with the close friend as well as how often they versus their close friend discuss spiritual matters. It's possible that people over-estimate how much they themselves share because of how sensitive they feel to evaluation, criticism, or rejection when revealing their private spiritual side. Because of this, the participants can recall their own self-disclosures more readily than when their friend shared something similarly. Since we did not collect the close friend's ratings of the participants, we have no way of knowing how to interpret this interesting finding.

Sanctification and Spiritual Intimacy Predicting Friendship Quality

Up until this point in modern psychological research, the bulk of research on sanctification and spiritual intimacy in relationships and how they impact relational functioning has been conducted on parent-child and marital relationships. Both sanctification and spiritual intimacy have shown to be related to greater relational functioning in these close, intimate relationships. This study has successfully extended that line of research by showing that close friends do in fact perceive their friendship as having spiritual elements and that they do discuss important and personal R/S matters with their closest friend. More importantly, this study showed that, for the most part, spiritual cognitions and behaviors are tied to friendship quality in various ways for the better—by either being tied to less negativity in friendships or to greater positivity. Before providing an interpretation of the results, it's important to note that ties between predictor and criterion factors, especially as they concern interpersonal relationships,

are likely bi-directional or reciprocal over the lifespan. This means that it's just as plausible, if not normative, that better relational health would also lead to or cause increases in spiritual perceptions and behaviors. This researcher acknowledges that spiritual predictors like sanctification and spiritual intimacy can be impacted by the quality of relational health as it is experienced by close friends and also maintains awareness that there is a need to examine bi-directionality in dynamic processes of this kind. That being said, the hypotheses and linear statistical analyses for this study stem from a theory that suggests spiritual cognitions and behaviors are tied to and predict better relationship health. Therefore, interpretations of these results are based on one segment of the process of relational interactions, which suggests that greater sanctification and spiritual intimacy may be tied to and predict increases in positive friendship quality and decreases in negative friendship quality.

Though neither scale of sanctification was tied to negativity in friendship, both were connected to positivity in friendship in the initial correlation analyses, while assigning sacred qualities to one's closest friendship further related to emotional intimacy. This indicates that sanctifying friendships allows close friends to experience comparatively more supportive and beneficial relationships as characterized by positive markers of relational functioning. Given that the manifestation of God was not tied to emotional intimacy, it's possible that seeing God at work in the relationship is "not enough" to be willing to engage in emotionally intimate behaviors, or, it's possible that sacred qualities are more proximal indicators of emotional intimacy.

It's interesting that sanctification was not strong enough to predict negative friendship quality given that previous sanctification research measuring relational functioning suggested that it would. It's possible that sanctification acts as a strengthener of positive qualities, without

necessarily reducing negativity all together. Also, given that negative friendship quality combined five different components, it's possible that a specific component was responsible for flattening the effect of the connection between sanctification and negative friendship quality. For example, although "conflict" is typically viewed as a negative experience, past research has shown that conflict is more prevalent in close friendships and other important relationships than in less intimate bonds. This indicates that the quality of conflict and their conflict resolution strategies may be more important than how often conflict occurs, which may mean that solving the conflict and exhibiting trust in one another to effectively solve problems could actually lead to better relational functioning. Thus, including conflict as part of negative friendship quality in this study may be making it difficult to assess if sanctification does actually have a significant negative relationship with other undesirable aspects of friendship. Uncovering the extent to which negative friendship quality components are differentially tied to spiritual predictors could be a fruitful line of future research in spiritual friendships, especially if using other conflict scales that may provide more depth and breadth in the quality of conflict. A final thought on negative friendship quality concerns the floor effect. This study was interested in predictions about one's closest friendship, and it seems likely that a closest friendship experiences the least amount of negativity compared to other friendships. Negativity in friendship could have been endorsed at such a low rate in this sample ($M=1.98$, $SD=.56$, range of 1–5) that it resulted in an inability to distinguish variance in participant reports concerning the negative dimension of relational health.

Although the sanctification regression analyses showed that perceiving God as manifested in one's closest friendship predicted less emotional intimacy and positivity in the friendship after controlling for sacred qualities, these results may be uninterpretable and instead

could be a reflection of systematic error. Initially, one might assume that a suppressor effect has been uncovered, in that, once the fairly high overlap between sacred qualities and manifestation of God is taken into account, additional variation in scores on the manifestation of God scale reversed effect and became linked to less positive friendship behaviors. The reason why this result may instead be uninterpretable concerns taking into account the correlative relationship between each subscale and their respective reliability coefficients. Statistically speaking, the correlation between two variables can only be as high as the average of their reliabilities. As mentioned previously, r equals .77 between MG and SQ, and the average of their reliabilities is .92, leaving only .15 to account for systematic error and any possible unique contribution of MG. Unfortunately, this study's statistical analyses weren't sophisticated enough to confidently interpret this part of the regression results and therefore this researcher is practicing caution. Thus, future studies using more sophisticated data analysis techniques, like structural equation or latent variable modeling, are important for determining if these results are spurious or a true, unique effect of MG after controlling for SQ. If they do indicate that MG contributes negatively to relationship quality, it would go against the bulk of research indicating that sanctification primarily acts as a significant contributor to positive aspects of relational health, which would be an interesting distinction to examine in close friendships.

This next session discusses the results of spiritual intimacy. Similar to past research, endorsement of more spiritually intimate behaviors was tied to more positivity and emotional intimacy in the close friendship. Once controlling for emotional intimacy, the regressions showed that spiritual intimacy could only significantly predict negative friendship quality. This finding warrants a number of interpretations. First, it suggests that engaging in spiritually intimate behaviors is powerful enough to uniquely thwart an individual from engaging in

behaviors that would distress or harm the close friendship, even after controlling for a strong predictor of greater friendship quality. Notably, emotional intimacy was strongly associated with overall positivity in friendship, which included the facets of companionship, satisfaction, and approval, with $r = .70$. Perhaps it is not surprising then that spiritual intimacy no longer contributed to positivity after controlling for emotional intimacy. Other explanations are plausible. These results may indicate that spiritual intimacy skills in a close friendship (without emotional intimacy) may reduce all negative friendship behaviors, but suggests that it may not necessarily be tied to an increase in positive exchanges. While there may be a number of conceivable reasons why this could be the case, one specific explanation will be highlighted here that focuses on the negative dimension of friendship. First, exhibiting spiritual intimacy skills may have allowed the close friends to develop a level of respect for one another's spiritual life journey's. This may include honoring how their close friend's spiritual meaning-making processes have impacted past, current, and future life decisions, to the extent that the close friends inhibit their inclination to impose on each other their own viewpoints or try to control their friend with the assumption that they know best. Although more research needs to be done to examine what is shared during spiritually intimate experiences between close friends, it's possible that they are sharing about God's plan for their lives, how they are each connected to something greater than themselves that's guiding them, how they've made spiritual meaning of their triumphs and tribulations, and how those meaning-making stories impact their current functioning and orientations to life. Looking closely at the negative friendship quality scales, they include behaviors such as dominance, conflict, pressure, criticism, and exclusion. It's possible that close friends with higher spiritual intimacy skills learn to respect each other's choices, which behaviorally looks like exhibiting less pressure, criticism, and domination,

starting less conflict, and excluding them less over superficial or unspoken grievances in the friendship, likely because they have come to know and accept how and why the other person operates the way that they do at a deeper and more meaningful level. Another explanation of the results could be that having higher spiritual intimacy skills in a close friendship serves as a coping mechanism for when dominance, conflict, exclusion, criticism, or pressure occur, whereby the close friends may be more likely to discuss and desist these maladaptive behaviors given that they already discuss R/S matters of a highly sensitive and personal nature and may understand their friends point of view more readily.

Now I'll turn the focus to an explanation that involves the positive dimension of friendship. Just because spiritual intimacy is tied to less negative relationship functioning patterns, doesn't mean that the friends would also engage in more positivity in the friendship. Looking closely at the positivity in friendship scales, it includes behaviors such as companionship and approval, and an experience of felt satisfaction with the friendship. First, even if spiritually intimate friends respect one another enough to not engage in negative interpersonal patterns, that doesn't mean that they will approve of their close friend's behaviors and choices. Companionship could have been impacted by whether or not the friend was long-distance (which half the sample endorsed) and also could be limited by the friends' time availability or by having larger social networks given that these are emerging adults on a college campus. However, given that we did not parcel out each facet of positivity and assess how it related to spiritual intimacy, we can't be certain how they are connected. Again, this would be another fruitful line of future research. Overall, despite not completely mirroring results from other studies on relational functioning and spiritual intimacy, these findings fit in nicely with the

relational quality outcome studies that suggest specific R/S factors can have a beneficial and protective effect on one's relationship, namely their closest friendship.

Clearly friendship quality has two different dimensions, positive and negative, as evidenced by the R/S variables differentially predicting the extent to which each dimension was associated with either sanctification or spiritual intimacy. It's also clear that positive friendship quality appears to be more impacted by sanctification than does negative friendship quality, which is interesting given that sanctification theoretically serves as a motivator for a close friend to do their best to regularly inhibit relationally disruptive behaviors and not just strengthen the friendship bond with affirming behaviors. Thus, there may be other moderating or mediating variables impacting how sanctification interacts with negative friendship quality. On the other hand, regression analyses showed that spiritual intimacy did serve as a protective factor in friendship quality by being connected to lower negative attributes, so it's possible that spiritual behaviors are more likely to predict inhibition of negativity.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study was the first of its kind to examine sanctification and spiritual intimacy in close friendships to discover whether or not and the extent to which closest friends experience and are impacted by spirituality in their friendships. While this study was successful at both fulfilling its aims and notably adding to the R/S field of research, the nature of the study and its outcomes highlighted a number of limitations that can also serve to inspire future research concerning the relationship between friendships and spirituality. First and foremost, this study was cross-sectional, which means that predicting and discussing a causal relationship between spiritual perceptions and behaviors and the quality of close friendships is theoretical at best. Because this project collected prevalence rates for spiritual friendships, thereby establishing a

foundation for continued research in this area, longitudinal studies would be fruitful in helping us better understand the nature of these relationships. On a similar note, and as I mentioned previously, another worthwhile line of research involves examining bi-directional or reciprocal causal relationships between spiritual predictors like sanctification and spiritual intimacy and important relational health outcomes, especially given that in intimate relationships these factors may serve as agents of change for one another. Another limitation concerns external validity. The data for this study was purposefully limited to closest friendships in emerging adulthood, but it was also a convenient college sample from one university with a majority of participants gathered from general psychology courses. Future research could test these hypotheses in other emerging adult populations including collecting a more nationally representative sample, as well as collecting data from close friendships in older age ranges where other circumstances could impact spirituality in close friendship such as marriage, children, and work. Additionally, although the sample's demographic characteristics (i.e., largely female, Christian, and Caucasian) reflect similar prevalence rates compared to other college samples across the country, that doesn't necessarily mean that these results are illustrative of what would be found in larger samples consisting primarily of minority or underrepresented groups (e.g., males, African Americans, non-Christian or eastern religious affiliates, etc). In my view, it's important that this research line (and all psychological research) is extended by examining specific spiritual predictors and relational outcomes in samples of underrepresented groups.

An interesting area of research in spiritual friendships could be to understand the differences in friendship quality between close friends for those who engage in both sanctification and spiritual intimacy, or who only practice one or the other, especially when trying to evaluate "how much" spiritual connection and from what source(s) will add to the

experience of higher relational functioning. Throughout this study, it seemed difficult to explain or interpret the results in one area without thinking about the other as part of the spiritual picture of the friendship, meaning that these cognitions and behaviors might be tied to each other in complex ways. Undertaking this particular research path could help us better understand the degree to which and how spiritual cognitions and behaviors interact to inform relational health. Including other spiritual perceptions and behaviors (e.g., praying or attending church together) could also be interesting variables to assess when examining the quality of the spiritual connection and how it relates to the quality of one's close friendships.

Another area of future research concerns investigating the role of conflict in negative friendship quality when attempting to associate it with spiritual variables, especially given that past research shows a complex relationship between conflict and relational functioning. It's possible that excluding conflict from the negative friendship quality dimension may allow sanctification and spirituality intimacy to have a stronger relationship with negativity in friendships; or, that measuring it as a separate construct would allow researchers to uncover possible moderating or mediating factors, allowing us to understand how conflict functions in close friendships and if it's different or similar from how it operates in parent-child and marital relationships.

Another fruitful course for research deals with examining the dark side of spirituality in close friendships. Moving in this direction could help to uncover whether and how any distressing spiritual factors (e.g., spiritual triangulation, spiritual one-upmanship, sacred loss and desecration) may impact friendship quality. The dark side of spirituality and how it affects relationships and individuals has already been established in marital and non-marital romantic relationships (Krumrei, Mahoney & Pargament, 2009; Hawley & Mahoney, 2013), however

these variables might perform differently in friendships. For example, unlike marriages, people are permitted to have multiple close friendships and they likely have a resource pool of potential close friends to draw from should their closest friendship dissolve or become untenable. Also, it's possible that close friends are aware of their disintegrating relationships ahead of time, and thus have already begun the process of increasing the quality of other close friendships so as to not be left without valuable social support. Since marital and parent-child relationships tend to operate by different cultural rules that are more rigid and in which loss may be more prominent and substantial, individuals and their close friendships could be buffered from spiritual struggles in a way that parent-child and marital relationships are not.

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APPENDIX A DEMOGRAPHIC AND R/S INFORMATION

Participant's Background:

1. **Age:** are you between the ages of 18 and 25? (choose one) **Yes** **No**

2. **Ethnicity (choose one):**

American Indian	Black/African/African American	White/Caucasian/Euro pean, Multiethnic (please specify): _____.
Alaskan Native	American	
Asian/South Asian/Asian American	Hispanic/Latino(a)/Chi cano(a), Middle Eastern/Middle Eastern American	
Native Hawaiian		
Caribbean/West Indian		

3. **Sexual Orientation (choose one):**

Asexual	Lesbian	Straight/Heter- osexual	Other (please specify)_____.
Bisexual	Pansexual		
Gay			

4. **Level of Education (choose one):**

Undergraduate
1st year, 2nd year, 3rd year, 4th year

Graduate
1st year, 2nd year, 3rd year, 4th year, 5th year.

5. **Gender (choose one):**

woman/ciswoman, man/cisman, genderqueer/gender nonconforming, transgender	other (please specify) _____.
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6. **What is the total estimate of your household income** (Select the option that best applies):

unemployed	\$50,001-\$75k	don't know
less than \$10k	\$75,001-100k	prefer not to respond.
\$10,000 - \$20k	\$100,001k or more	
\$20,001-\$50k	student loans only	

7. **Current Relationship Status:**

Single	Domestic partner (legal definition)	Divorced
Dating	Engaged	Divorced and dating
In relationship(s)	Married	Widowed
Cohabiting	Separated	Other (please specify) _____.

Participant's Religious Background:

11. Do you consider yourself religious or spiritual? (choose one) Yes No

12. Religiosity: How religious do you consider yourself?

Not at All			Somewhat			Extremely
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

13. Spirituality: How spiritual do you consider yourself?

Not at All			Somewhat			Extremely
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

14. How often do you attend religious services?

Daily	Several times/week	Once/week	Monthly	Less than monthly	Not at all
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15. How often do you attend spiritual services/gatherings?

Daily	Several times/week	Once/week	Monthly	Less than monthly	Not at all
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16. How often do you pray?

Daily	Several times/week	Once/week	Monthly	Less than monthly	Not at all
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17. If yes, why do you pray? (Mark one for each item):

Not at All	Occasionally	Frequently
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For help in solving problems
 To be in communion with God
 To express gratitude

For emotional strength
 For forgiveness
 To relieve the suffering of others.

18. How often do you meditate?

Daily	Several times/week	Once/week	Monthly	Less than monthly	Not at all
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19. How often do you read sacred texts?

Daily	Several times/week	Once/week	Monthly	Less than monthly	Not at all
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20. How often do you read other religious/spiritual texts?

Daily	Several times/week	Once/week	Monthly	Less than monthly	Not at all
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21. Religious Preferences:

Roman Catholic	Church of Christ	United Church of	Other Religion:
Baptist	Episcopalian	Christ	please
Christian	Jewish	Latter-Day Saints	specify_____.
Methodist	Buddhist	(Mormon) 7 th Day	No Religion
Lutheran	Eastern Orthodox	Adventist	
Presbyterian	Hindu	Unitarian	
	Islamic	Quaker	

22. Which of the following best characterizes your conception of or experience with God?

Universal spirit
 Higher power
 Love
 Source of all existence
 Divine mystery
 Supreme being
 None of the above
 other _____

Prompt to participants describing friendship

“Please bring to mind the relationship you have with your closest friend, someone who is not a romantic partner and not a family member, and who is of the same sex/gender as you. When responding to the following questions about a close friendship, please continue to think of that close friend while assessing if a statement you read is or is not reflective of your close friendship.”

Close Friendship Background:

19. How long have you been friends? (Please specify weeks, months, or years) _____

20. How old is he/she? (in years) _____

21. Long-distance friendship or in town? (circle one) Long Distance In-Town

APPENDIX B FRIENDSHIP QUALITY

The Network of Relationships – Relational Quality Version (NRQ-RQ, Furman & Buhrmester, 2009)

This measure will be used to assess Relationship Quality of a close friendship.

Never or Hardly at All	Seldom or Not Too Much	Sometimes or Somewhat	Often or Very Much	ALWAYS or EXTREMELY much
1	2	3	4	5

Companionship (COM)

- 1 How often do you spend fun time with this person?
- 11 How often do you and this person go places and do things together?
- 21 How often do you play around and have fun with this person?

Intimate Disclosure (DIS)

- 2 How often do you tell this person things that you don't want others to know?
- 12 How often do you tell this person everything that you are going through?
- 22 How often do you share secrets and private feelings with this person?

Pressure (PRE)

- 3 How often does this person push you to do things that you don't want to do?
- 13 How often does this person try to get you to do things that you don't like?
- 23 How often does this person pressure you to do the things that he or she wants?

Satisfaction (SAT)

- 4 How happy are you with your relationship with this person?
- 14 How much do you like the way things are between you and this person?
- 24 How satisfied are you with your relationship with this person?

Conflict (CON)

- 5 How often do you and this person disagree and quarrel with each other?
- 15 How often do you and this person get mad at or get in fights with each other?
- 25 How often do you and this person argue with each other?

Emotional Support (SUP)

- 6 How often do you turn to this person for support with personal problems?
- 16 How often do you depend on this person for help, advice, or sympathy?
- 26 When you are feeling down or upset, how often do you depend on this person to cheer things up?

Criticism (CRI)

- 7 How often does this person point out your faults or put you down?
- 17 How often does this person criticize you?
- 27 How often does this person say mean or harsh things to you?

Approval (APP)

- 8 How often does this person praise you for the kind of person you are?
- 18 How often does this person seem really proud of you?
- 28 How much does this person like or approve of the things you do?

Dominance (DOM)

- 9 How often does this person get their way when you two do not agree about what to do?
- 19 How often does this person end up being the one who makes the decisions for both of you?
- 29 How often does this person get you to do things their way?

Exclusion (EXC)

- 10 How often does this person *not* include you in activities?
- 20 How often does it seem like this person ignores you?
- 30 How often does it seem like this person *does not* give you the amount of attention that you want?

Scoring. Scales are scored by averaging the 3 items making up the scale. Two additional factors will be computed:

Positive Dimension of Friendship Quality (Closeness): the mean of the companionship, disclosure, emotional support, approval, and satisfaction scales.

Negative Dimension of Friendship Quality (Discord): the mean of the conflict, criticism, pressure, exclusion and dominance scales.

APPENDIX C SANCTIFICATION OF A CLOSE FRIENDSHIP

Adapted from the Revised Sanctification of Marriage Scale (Mahoney, Pargament, & DeMaris, 2009)

This measure will be used to assess sanctification of a close friendship.

Directions: Some of the following questions use the word "God." Different people use different terms for God, such as "Higher Power," "Divine Spirit," "Spiritual Force," "Holy Spirit," "Yahweh," "Allah," "Buddha", or "Goddess." Please feel free to substitute your own word for God when answering any of the questions that follow. Also, some people do not believe in God. If this is the case for you, please feel free to choose the "strongly disagree" response when needed.

Strongly Disagree			Neutral			Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Manifestation of God (Theistic subscale)

1. God played a role in how we ended up being close friends.
2. I sense God's presence in my relationship with my close friend.
3. My close friendship is a reflection of God's will.
4. I experience God through my close friendship.
5. I feel God at work in my close friendship.
6. God has been a guiding force in my close friendship.
7. I see God's handiwork in my close friendship.
8. God lives through my close friendship.
9. There are moments when I feel a strong connection with God in my close friendship.
10. In mysterious ways, my close friendship is touched by God.

Sacred Qualities of Friendship (Non-Theistic subscale)

1. My close friendship is holy.
2. Being with my close friend feels like a deeply spiritual experience.
3. This close friendship is part of a larger spiritual plan.
4. When I am with my close friend, there are moments when time stands still and I feel I am part of something eternal.
5. My close friendship is sacred to me.
6. My close friendship connects my close friend and me to something greater than ourselves.
7. My close friendship reveals the deepest truths of life to me.
8. My close friendship seems like a miracle to me.
9. My close friendship puts me in touch with the deepest mysteries of life.
10. At moments, my close friendship makes me very aware of a creative power beyond us.

Scoring: The sanctification of a close friendship scale is scored by summing the responses to the 20 items making up the scale.

APPENDIX D SPIRITUAL INTIMACY IN A CLOSE FRIENDSHIPAdapted from the Revised Spiritual Intimacy Scale (Mahoney, 2014)*This measure will be used to assess spiritual intimacy between close friends.*

Please indicate how true the following statements are for you.

Not at All			A Great Deal
0	1	2	3

Spiritually Intimate Behavior – Self reports

1. I feel safe being completely open and honest with my spouse about my faith.
2. I tend to keep my spiritual side private and separate from my marriage. (reverse scored)
3. I try not to be judgmental or critical when my spouse shares his/her ideas about spirituality.
4. I try to be supportive when my spouse discloses spiritual questions or struggles.

Spiritual Intimate Behavior - Partner reports

5. My spouse shares his/her spiritual questions or struggles with me.
6. My spouse doesn't disclose his/her thoughts or feelings about spirituality with me. (reverse scored)
7. My spouse really knows how to listen when I talk about my spiritual needs, thoughts, and feelings.
8. My spouse is supportive when I reveal my spiritual questions or struggles to him/her.

Scoring: The spiritual intimacy scale is scored by summing the responses to the 8 items making up the scale.