

Article

Religiosity and Relationship Quality of Dating Relationships: Examining Relationship Religiosity as a Mediator

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Abstract: Individual and romantic partner religiosity are positively associated with marital quality. However, many studies focus on married couples, rather than examining dating relationships, and rely on single-item measures of religiosity. More importantly, few studies have examined the importance of relationship religiosity in the context of dating, despite the theoretical importance of this construct. Relationship religiosity is defined as participating in and discussing religiosity and spirituality with a current romantic partner. The goal of this study is to test relationship religiosity as a mediator between individual and partner religiosity for relationship quality of dating relationships using stringent measures of centrality of religiosity. Data for this study comes from 119 participants who were in dating relationships (74.8% female; mean age: 23.2 years). Participants completed a survey regarding their religiosity, their partners' religiosity, the religiosity of their relationships, and the quality of their dating relationships. Mediation analyses via linear regression showed that relationship religiosity fully mediated the relationship between individual religiosity and relationship satisfaction and fully mediated the relationship between partner religiosity and relationship satisfaction. However, relationship religiosity was not associated with commitment. Results from the study emphasize the importance of dyadic religious activities for dating couples. Further implications will be discussed.

Keywords: religiosity; centrality of religiosity; dating; relationship quality

1. Introduction

Religion plays an important role in the maintenance of romantic relationships (Allgood et al. 2009; Reiter and Gee 2008; Stafford 2016). Research to date has outlined how religiosity positively impacts the quality and stability of married couples through high frequency and quality of individual prayer (Spilka and Ladd 2013), high levels of spouse religiosity (Perry 2015), and increased frequency of attending church together or praying together (Braithwaite et al. 2015; Ellison et al. 2010; Lambert and Dollahite 2008). However, not much is known concerning the role of religiosity for the quality of dating relationships that commonly precede marital relationships. Additionally, past studies have primarily focused on individual religiosity (Lambert and Dollahite 2008; Lichter and Carmalt 2009) and romantic partner religiosity (Braithwaite et al. 2015; Fincham et al. 2011), leaving a gap in understanding the centrality of religiosity within romantic relationships. We refer to this construct as *relationship religiosity*, and define it as participating in and discussing religiosity and spirituality with a current romantic partner. Theoretically, dyadic participation in religious activities while dating is likely to be related to increased quality of dating relationships. Subsequently, few studies have used precise measures of couples' religiosity; rather, many studies use single-item measures for what a couple would do together religiously, such as whether or not a couple attends church together, as indicators of religiosity. The goal of this study is to test relationship religiosity as a mediator between

individual and partner religiosity for the quality of dating relationships using stringent measures of centrality of religiosity.

1.1. Religiosity and Romantic Relationships

Religiosity plays a significant role in romantic relationship maintenance for married couples. Studies have examined religious affiliation (Braithwaite et al. 2015), attendance to religious services (Fincham et al. 2011; Larson and Goltz 1989), and individual religious activities, such as praying (Ellison et al. 2010) as important for maintaining or raising marital quality. Most of this literature focuses on implications of an individual's religiosity or their romantic partner's religiosity for relationship development and maintenance. For example, previous studies found a correlation between an individual attending religious services with lower divorce rates and higher marital commitment (Allgood et al. 2009; Lopez et al. 2011; Ellison et al. 2010; Lambert and Dollahite 2008). Further, researchers have noted that married couples who have the same religious affiliation, commonly referred to as homogamous couples, are more satisfied within their marriages (Braithwaite et al. 2015). Fincham et al. (2011) found that within a large group of African American couples, husbands' religiosity was not only important for relationship satisfaction, but also to their wives' relationship satisfaction. Additionally, Allgood and colleagues (Allgood et al. 2009) found that individual religiosity was associated with higher levels of dedication to romantic partners and higher levels of moral obligation to the relationship, which was also related to increased commitment to the relationship.

Other studies have examined partner religiosity for the quality of marital relationships. For instance, Perry (2015) found a link between having a religious spouse and relationship quality. However, research on the influence of partner religiosity for relationship quality have produced mixed results. While some studies demonstrated that partners' religiosity was positively associated with relationship quality (Clements et al. 2004; Perry 2015), other studies displayed no significant effects of partner religiosity for relationship quality (Mahoney 2010; Mahoney et al. 2001). Gender appears to provide an explanation for this discrepancy, as some studies illustrated that women benefited more from having religious partners than men who have religious partners (Lopez et al. 2011). Generally, there is some evidence that partner religiosity is positively associated with relationship quality, but this finding may be attributable more to women than men.

Despite advances in the literature, most of the research on individual and partner religiosity was conducted with married couples as opposed to individuals who are dating. Despite the relatively consistent findings with individual religiosity and quality of marriages, there has been a call for research to examine religiosity in the context of premarital relationships (e.g., Braithwaite et al. 2015). Given the positive association between individual religiosity and the quality of married relationships, presumably individual religiosity will also be positively associated with the quality of dating relationships. Individuals who subscribe to higher levels of religiosity are generally meticulous when it comes to choosing friends and romantic partners (Miller 2012). In these instances, individuals that are more religious may report higher quality relationships since they are more selective with dating partners. There is some theoretical support for the notion that individual and partner religiosity would be positively associated with the quality of dating relationships. Sullivan (2001) theorized that religiosity can either have direct, indirect, or compensative effects for marital quality. Sullivan's (2001) direct model stated that religiosity can directly impact marital relationships, and this model has been tested in other studies (e.g., Lopez et al. 2011). Consistent with Sullivan's (2001) direct model of religiosity and the literature on individual and partner religiosity for marital quality of dating relationships, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. *In the context of dating relationships, individual religiosity will be positively associated to relationship satisfaction and commitment.*

Hypothesis 2. *In the context of dating relationships, partner's religiosity will be positively associated with relationship satisfaction and commitment.*

1.2. Relationship Religiosity

Although the literature on partner and individual religiosity is commonly associated with higher quality relationships, another variable for investigating the relationship between religiosity and relationship quality is relationship religiosity. For the current study, we define relationship religiosity as the active and cognitive participation of couples in romantic activities, such as talking about religious issues with romantic partners, learning about religion with romantic partners, praying or meditating with romantic partners, attending religious services together with romantic partners, and connecting through religiosity with romantic partners. There is some evidence that joint religious participation and being actively engaged in faith communities is beneficial for relationship quality in married and unmarried couples (Ellison et al. 2010; Fincham et al. 2011). For example, Ellison and colleagues (Ellison et al. 2010) found that going to church together was beneficial for romantic quality. Additionally, married couples who discussed how to follow God's will with each other was positively associated with marital quality (Mahoney et al. 1999).

There is theoretical support for the importance of dyadic religious activity. First, discussing religious issues and activities in romantic relationships can be beneficial for couples according to social penetration theory. According to social penetration theory (Altman and Taylor 1973), in order for relationships to become more intimate, individuals need to self-disclose on a deeper level to their romantic partners. Religion is a meaningful topic for dating couples to discuss, and by discussing religious issues and topics, couples may be more satisfied based on tenets of this theory. Additionally, according to the stimulus-value-role theory (Murstein 1970), during relationship initiation, couples seek similarity regarding stimulus attributes, such as age, looks, and educational level. Over time, couples seek similarity in values, which includes attitudes, political perspectives, and religiosity. Participating in religious activities together may provide evidence of similarity in value, which is likely to be associated with increased relationship satisfaction. Third, relationship religiosity has implications for social exchange theory. According to social exchange theory (Burgess and Huston 1979), romantic relationships thrive when rewards of the relationship outweigh costs. For dating couples, participating in religious activities may be perceived as rewards in romantic relationships. By participating in religious activities, both passively and actively, couples increase their satisfaction in their relationships, by maximizing the rewards they receive in their relationships.

Despite advances in the literature concerning joint religious participation, many studies restricted how they measured dyadic religiosity, often using single item measures or scales of religiosity that had not been validated. For example, some studies measured religiosity through single-item measures regarding how religious individuals felt, how often individuals or couples attended religious services, and how often individuals or romantic partners pray. Recently, more precise, valid measures of religiosity have been published. For example, Vallerand (1997) created the Hierarchical Religious Motivations Scale (HRMS), which examines the motivations behind why (or why not) individuals pray, attend religious services, and why they are religious generally. This scale is based on seven different motivations for religiosity: it makes you happy (Happiness); it gives you a sense of purpose in life (Purpose); it helps you form a connection with God or higher power (Connection with Divinity); it secures a place in the afterlife (Afterlife); because you enjoy the social aspects of it (Social); because you derive comfort in times of hardship (Comfort); because you were brought up that way (Inertia); and you do not do it/are not religious (Atheist). Another example is Huber and Huber's (2012) Centrality of Religiosity scale. This scale identifies five dimensional measures to examine individual religiosity: intellect (how interested are you in learning more about religious topics?), ideology (to what extent do you believe that God or something divine exists?), public practice (how important is it for you to be connected to a religious community), private practice (how often do you try to connect to the divine spontaneously when inspired by daily situations?), and experience (how often do you experience

situations in which you have the feeling that you are touched by a divine power?). This scale is an in-depth examination of religiosity that has been used over 100 times in 25 different countries across the world, providing evidence of its validity (Stiftung 2009).

Regardless of the recent advancements in measuring religiosity, there are still some limitations regarding the measurement of this construct in the context of romantic relationships. First, few studies have examined romantic partner religiosity in-depth, focusing instead on a single item identifying how religious one's partner is or identifying the frequency of prayer by a romantic partner. What might potentially explain the inconsistent findings of partner religiosity for relationship quality is the measure used for romantic partners' religiosity. More importantly, few studies to date have developed scales that measure relationship religiosity.

Therefore, the current study examines the relationship between individual, partner, and relationship religiosity and the quality of dating relationships using stringent measures of religiosity. Given the relatively consistent links between individual and partner religiosity with relationship quality, it is possible that these variables might be associated with higher levels of relationship religiosity, and high relationship religiosity might be associated with high relationship quality. In other words, relationship religiosity may mediate the association between individual and partner religiosity with relationship quality. This mediation may also explain the inconsistent findings regarding the association between romantic partner religiosity and relationship quality. In order to achieve the goals of this study, we use Huber and Huber's (2012) Centrality of Religiosity scale to measure individual religiosity and adapt the scale for romantic partners' religiosity and relationship religiosity, given that this scale is a valid, precise measure of religiosity. Consequently, we propose the following hypotheses and research question:

Hypothesis 3. *The relationship between individual religiosity and relationship satisfaction will be mediated by relationship religiosity; the relationship between individual religiosity and commitment will be mediated by relationship religiosity.*

Hypothesis 4. *The relationship between partner's religiosity and relationship satisfaction will be mediated by relationship religiosity; the relationship between partner's religiosity and relationship satisfaction will be mediated by relationship religiosity.*

Hypothesis 5. *What is related to relationship quality the most: individual religiosity, partner's religiosity, or relationship religiosity?*

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

Data for this study comes from an online survey of young adults from a region in the Midwestern United States. Participants were recruited through advertisements on local Facebook pages associated with the city of recruitment, which resulted in a sample of 318 participants. Descriptive statistics for this sample are presented in Table 1. The only requirement for participation was to be a legal adult (at least 18 years of age or older). Participants were predominantly female (73.1%) and approximately 23.2 years old ($SD = 7.75$). Ethnic composition for participants in this sample was 93.1% White/Caucasian, 4.0% Hispanic, 1.3% Black/African American, 1.3% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.3% were American Indian. The average education for participants in the current study was a junior in college. For the current study, 159 individuals were single, 27 were casually dating, 92 were seriously dating, and 40 were married. This sample was representative of the emerging adult population from the area in which they were recruited. Given the focus on dating relationships for this study, only participants in non-married romantic relationships were included ($N = 119$).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for entire sample (N = 318).

	Male	Female	Total	F (2, 317)	χ ² (2, 317)
N	92	226	318		
Age	22.64 (7.62)	23.42 (7.81)	23.19 (7.75)	0.66	-
Education ^a	4.97 (1.82)	5.08 (1.80)	5.05 (1.81)	0.27	-
Ethnicity					
White/Caucasian	87 (94.6)	209 (92.5)	296 (93.1)	-	2.12
Black/African American	0 (0.0)	4 (1.8)	4 (1.3)		
Asian/Pacific Islander	1 (1.0)	3 (1.3)	4 (1.3)		
Hispanic	4 (4.4)	9 (4.0)	13 (4.0)		
American Indian	0 (0.0)	1 (0.4)	1 (0.3)		
Relationship Status					
Single	50 (54.3)	109 (48.2)	159 (50.0)	-	5.41
Casually Dating	11 (12.0)	16 (7.1)	27 (8.5)		
Serious Dating	19 (20.7)	73 (32.3)	92 (28.9)		
Married	12 (13.0)	28 (12.4)	40 (12.6)		
Religious Variables ^b					
How often do you go to church?	3.34 (1.27)	3.28 (1.42)	3.30 (1.38)	0.13	-
How often do you pray?	3.41 (1.23)	3.44 (1.29)	3.43 (1.27)	0.05	-
How often do you read a religious text?	2.76 (1.33)	2.70 (1.37)	2.72 (1.36)	0.16	-
To what extent do you think God exists?	4.58 (1.00)	4.50 (0.99)	4.52 (0.99)	0.45	-
Individual Religiosity	3.23 (0.854)	3.17 (0.898)	3.19 (0.885)	0.264	-
Romantic Partner Religiosity	3.53 (1.097)	2.62 (1.104)	2.85 (1.167)	18.80 ***	-
Religiosity of the Relationship	2.80 (0.982)	2.49 (1.031)	2.57 (1.025)	2.55	-
Relationship Quality ^c					
Relationship Satisfaction	3.99 (0.84)	4.28 (0.69)	4.21 (0.74)	4.33 *	-
Commitment	3.76 (1.02)	4.05 (0.87)	3.98 (0.92)	2.96	-

Notes: Grade, ethnicity, and relationship status are presented as counts with column percentages in parentheses; all other information is presented as averages with standard deviation in parentheses. ^a Education is measured on a scale from 1 (*less than high school*) to 10 (*graduate degree*); ^b Religious variables are measured on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). ^c Relationship quality is measured on a scale from 1 to 5, with higher numbers signifying higher relationship quality; *** $p < 0.001$; * $p < 0.05$.

2.2. Procedures

The second author posted advertisements on local Facebook pages associated with the city of recruitment. These advertisements described the goal of the study (to examine relationships between religiosity and quality of relationships), what the study entailed (completing an online survey that would last approximately 30 min), the requirement to participate (be at least 18 years of age or older), and the e-mail address for the second author. Interested participants contacted the second author in order to participate in the study, which resulted in a total of 359 interested participants. Interested participants were sent a link to an online survey. Out of the 359 interested participants, 319 completed the online survey (88.9% response rate). The first page of the online survey was the informed consent form describing the purpose of the study, eligibility requirements, and participant rights. Participants could only begin the survey if they selected “I agree to participate in this study” on the first page. This online survey was hosted by Qualtrics (www.qualtrics.com), and assessed individual religiosity, romantic partner religiosity, relationship religiosity, and romantic relationship quality (relationship satisfaction and commitment). The survey took about 30 minutes to complete and participants were not compensated to complete the study. The current investigation was approved by the appropriate Institutional Review Board.

2.3. Measures

Individual Religiosity. Individual religiosity was calculated using the Centrality of Religiosity scale (Huber and Huber 2012). This scale is comprised of 17 items asking individuals to rate how central religiosity is to their interpersonal lives. Example items include, “How interested are you in learning more about religious topics?” and “How important is it for you to be connected to a religious community?”. Responses for each item ranged from 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Very much*). The scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.93) and the average level of individual religiosity was 3.19 (SD = 0.88).

Romantic Partner Religiosity. Romantic partner religiosity was calculated using an adapted version of the Centrality of Religiosity scale (Huber and Huber 2012). This scale was composed of 13 items, such as “How often does your romantic partner attend religious services?” and “How often does your romantic partner pray?”, with responses ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Very much*). The scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.90) and the average level of partner religiosity was 2.85 (SD = 1.17).

Relationship Religiosity. Relationship religiosity was calculated using an adapted version of the Centrality of Religiosity scale (Huber and Huber 2012). This scale was composed of 13 items, such as “How often do you talk about religious issues with your partner?” and “How often do you pray with your partner?”, with responses ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Very much*). The scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.95) and the average level of relationship religiosity was 2.57 (SD = 1.02).

Relationship Satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction was measured using the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; Hendrick 1988). Examples of this 7-item scale include, “How good is your relationship compared to others?” and “How much do you love your partner?”. Responses for each item ranged from 1 (*Low*) to 5 (*High*). This scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.87) and the average level of satisfaction reported by participants was 4.21 (SD = 0.74).

Commitment. Commitment was measured using Stanley and Markman’s (1992) measure of commitment, which asked participants to respond to four items on a scale from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). Example items were “My relationship with my romantic partner is more important to me than almost anything else in my life” and “I want this relationship to stay strong no matter what rough times we may encounter”. Internal consistency was acceptable for this measure (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.87) and the average commitment reported by participants was 3.98 (SD = 0.92). Table 2 presents correlations across all study variables.

Control Variables. For all analyses, we controlled for participants’ sex, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, education, relationship length, relationship status (casually or seriously dating), and whether the relationship was long-distance. Ethnicity was dichotomized for analyses (0 = white; 1 = non-white). Sexual orientation (0 = heterosexual; 1 = other) and long-distance relationship (0 = No; 1 = Yes) were also dichotomized for analyses. Education was measured on a scale from 1 (*less than high school*) to 10 (*graduate degree or higher*).

Table 2. Correlation across study variables.

Study Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Relationship Satisfaction	-	0.70 **	0.01	0.24 *	0.27 **
2. Commitment	0.85 **	-	-0.04	0.14	0.12
3. Individual Religiosity	0.35 *	0.26	-	0.65 **	0.79 **
4. Partner’s Religiosity	0.15	0.18	0.59 **	-	0.80 **
5. Relationship Religiosity	0.42 *	0.35 *	0.88 **	0.69 **	-

Note: Female participants are above the diagonal and male participants are below the diagonal. ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

2.4. Analytic Approach

For the first two hypotheses, we conducted regression analyses. Separate models were conducted for relationship satisfaction and commitment. Control variables were entered in Step 1 (age, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, education, relationship length, relationship status (casually or seriously dating), and whether the relationship was long-distance) and predictor variables (individual religiosity or romantic partner religiosity) was entered in Step 2. Hypotheses 3 and 4 were analyzed using mediation analysis, which applies the following steps: (1) confirm a significant relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable; (2) confirm a significant relationship between independent variable and mediator; (3) confirm a significant relationship between the mediator and the dependent variable in the presence of the independent variable; and (4) confirm an insignificant

relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable in the presence of a mediator (Little et al. 2007). For these hypotheses, we utilized regression analyses; Step 1 included control variables and Step 2 included the predictor variable according to the step of mediation, and the dependent variable included either the mediator (relationship religiosity) or indicator of relationship quality (relationship satisfaction or commitment). For the research question, all three measures of religiosity (individual, partner, and relationship) were included as predictor variables in a regression analysis predicting relationship satisfaction and commitment. As with previous regression analyses, control variables were included in Step 1. For all analyses, we examined changes in R^2 between Step 1 and Step 2 for each model to measure variance beyond the control variables.

3. Results

The first hypothesis of the current study predicted a positive association between individual religiosity and relationship quality. The results of this hypothesis are presented in the top row (Step 1) of Table 3. Individual religiosity was positively associated with relationship satisfaction, but not related to commitment. Based on measures in changes of R^2 , three percent of the variance was explained by the addition of individual religiosity to the control variables in the regression model for relationship satisfaction. The second hypothesis predicted a positive association between romantic partners’ religiosity and relationship quality. The results of this hypothesis are presented in the top row (Step 1) of Table 4. Partner religiosity was positively associated with relationship satisfaction, but not with commitment. For the model examining relationship satisfaction, 5.7% of the variance was explained by including partner religiosity.

Table 3. Mediation analyses for individual religiosity for relationship quality ($N = 119$).

Predictor Variable	Relationship Satisfaction			Commitment		
	Beta (SD)	R^2	ΔR^2	Beta (SD)	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1						
Individual Religiosity on Relationship Quality	0.18 (0.07) *	0.119	0.031 *	0.09 (0.09)	0.052	0.007
Step 2						
Individual Religiosity on Relationship Religiosity	0.81 (0.06) ***	0.688	0.615 ***	0.81 (0.06) ***	0.688	0.615 ***
Step 3						
Individual Religiosity on Relationship Quality	-0.25 (0.12)	0.148	0.118 ***	-0.19 (0.16)	0.083	0.044 *
Relationship Religiosity on Relationship Quality	0.53 (0.10) ***			0.34 (0.13) *		

Note: Statistics are standardized beta coefficients and presented as B (SD). Each “Step” as listed above refers to the step for mediation analysis. Each of these “Steps” represents a separate regression. For each of these regressions, control variables (sex, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, education, relationship length, relationship status [casually or seriously dating], and whether the relationship was long-distance) were included at step 1 of the regression (but not presented for conciseness), and the predictor variables presented above were included at step 2 of the regression. *** $p < 0.001$; * $p < 0.05$.

Table 4. Mediation analyses for partner religiosity for relationship quality ($N = 119$).

Predictor Variable	Relationship Satisfaction			Commitment		
	Beta (SD)	R^2	ΔR^2	Beta (SD)	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1						
Partner Religiosity on Relationship Quality	0.26 (0.06) **	0.091	0.057 **	0.16 (0.07)	0.066	0.021
Step 2						
Partner Religiosity on Relationship Quality	0.81 (0.05) ***	0.604	0.555 ***	0.83 (0.05) ***	0.604	0.555 ***
Step 3						
Partner Religiosity on Relationship Quality	0.00 (0.09)	0.187	0.099 **	0.01 (0.12)	0.134	0.033
Relationship Religiosity on Relationship Quality	0.33 (0.09) *			0.16 (0.12)		

Notes: Statistics are standardized beta coefficients and presented as B (SD). Each “Step” as listed above refers to the step for mediation analysis. Each of these “Steps” represents a separate regression. For each of these regressions, control variables (sex, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, education, relationship length, relationship status [casually or seriously dating], and whether the relationship was long-distance) were included at step 1 of the regression (but not presented for conciseness), and the predictor variables presented above were included at step 2 of the regression. *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

The third hypothesis predicted that relationship religiosity would mediate the relationship between individual religiosity and relationship quality. The results for this analysis are presented in Table 3. Our hypothesis was partially supported. Relationship religiosity fully mediated the relationship between individual religiosity and relationship satisfaction (see Figure 1). From this figure, the path between individual religiosity and relationship satisfaction becomes insignificant when relationship religiosity is included as the mediator. However, relationship religiosity did not mediate the relationship between individual religiosity and commitment. Yet, relationship religiosity was positively associated with commitment for this model. For these models, the changes in R^2 for relationship satisfaction ($\Delta R^2 = 0.12$; $p < 0.001$) and commitment ($\Delta R^2 = 0.04$; $p < 0.05$) were significant. The variance explained for the mediational model for relationship satisfaction was 15% and 8% of the variance was explained for the mediational model for commitment.

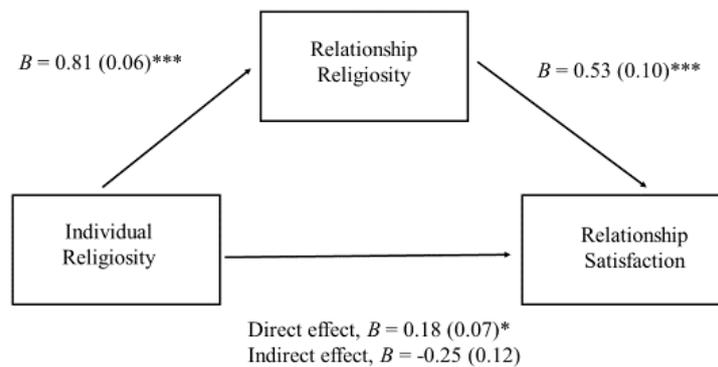


Figure 1. Mediation model for relationship religiosity and relationship satisfaction.

The fourth hypothesis predicted that relationship religiosity would mediate the relationship between romantic partner religiosity and relationship quality. The results of this hypothesis are presented in Table 4. We found partial support for this hypothesis. Relationship religiosity fully mediated the relationship between partner religiosity and relationship satisfaction (see Figure 2), but did not mediate the relationship between partner religiosity and commitment. According to this figure, the path between partner religiosity and relationship satisfaction becomes insignificant when including relationship religiosity as a mediator in this model. The change in R^2 for the model predicting relationship satisfaction was significant ($\Delta R^2 = 0.10$; $p < 0.01$), but not significant for the model predicting commitment. The variance explained for the mediational model for relationship satisfaction was 19%, and 13% of the variance was explained for the mediational model for commitment.

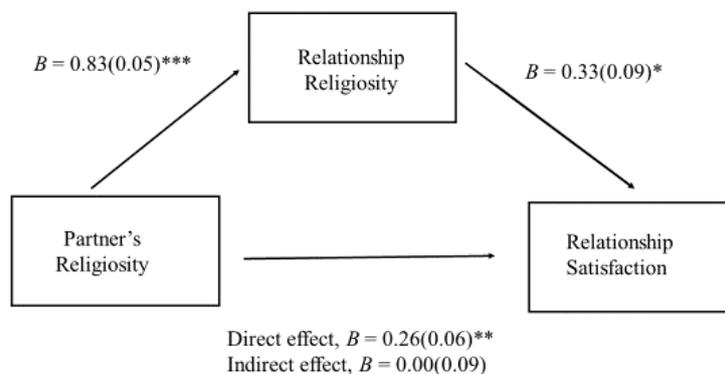


Figure 2. Mediation model for relationship religiosity and commitment.

The research question for this study sought to examine the associations of individual religiosity, partner religiosity, and relationship religiosity simultaneously with relationship quality. Results for

this analysis are presented in Table 5. Relationship religiosity was more significantly associated with relationship satisfaction than individual and partner religiosity. The change in R^2 for this model was significant ($\Delta R^2 = 0.14$; $p < 0.01$). However, none of the measures of religiosity significantly predicted changes in commitment.

Table 5. Hierarchical regression analyses examining religiosity for relationship quality ($N = 119$).

Predictor Variable	Relationship Satisfaction	Commitment
Individual Religiosity	−0.25 (0.12)	−0.19 (0.16)
Partner’s Religiosity	0.01 (0.09)	0.02 (0.12)
Relationship Religiosity	0.53 (0.12) **	0.33 (0.16)
ΔR^2	0.141 **	0.044

Notes: Statistics are standardized beta coefficients and presented as B (SD). The results of the predictor variables were included in the second step of the regression analyses. Control variables (sex, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, education, relationship length, relationship status [casually or seriously dating], and whether the relationship was long-distance) were included at the first step, but not presented for conciseness. ** $p < 0.01$.

4. Discussion

Based on the findings of this study, there is empirical evidence that participating in religious activities together as a dating couple is associated with increased romantic relationship quality. Results of the current study demonstrated that relationship religiosity significantly mediated the association between individual religiosity and relationship satisfaction, as well as partner religiosity and relationship satisfaction. Subsequently, spending time with romantic partners doing religious activities, whether active or passive, was associated more strongly with relationship quality than participants’ own religious behaviors and their partners’ religious behaviors, signifying the importance of relationship religiosity for dating couples.

Information from this study can explain the inconsistent findings of past studies examining partner religiosity for relationship quality. Past studies state that partner religiosity contributes to relationship quality (e.g., Clements et al. 2004), whereas other studies illustrate that partner religiosity does not influence relationship quality (e.g., Mahoney 2010). Although these studies focus on married couples, results of the current study illustrate the importance for dating couples to participate in religious activities together, rather than one of the coupled participants participating in religious activities. Based on the positive associations between relationship religiosity and relationship quality, dating partners who participate in religious activities together may be more likely to appear happier than couples who do not do religious activities together. These results support Sullivan’s (2001) indirect model, rather than the direct model, in that the relationship between religiosity and relationship quality is explained by potential mediators or moderators—in this case, relationship religiosity as a mediator.

The positive relationship between relationship quality and relationship religiosity are also supported by romantic relationship theories. First, discussing religious issues and activities in romantic relationships reflects deep meaningful self-disclosure that is beneficial for relationship development according to self-penetration theory (Altman and Taylor 1973). Discussing religious topics is likely to bring couples together given the seriousness of the topic of religion. Additionally, discussing and participating in dyadic religiosity represents the “value” stage during relationship initiation of the stimulus-value-role theory (Murstein 1970). This theory discusses the importance of similarity for dating couples for relationship development. During the value stage, couples seek similarity in values, which includes religiosity. Spending time together participating in religious activities provides an opportunity for individuals to measure similarity at this stage, which is connected to increased relationship satisfaction. Additionally, relationship religiosity may be viewed as a reward for romantic relationships according to social exchange theory (Burgess and Huston 1979). According to this theory, romantic relationships are satisfying when rewards outweigh the costs. For dating couples, participating in religious activities may be viewed as rewards in romantic relationships, which would explain the positive association between relationship religiosity and relationship satisfaction.

There are other explanations for the association between relationship religiosity and relationship satisfaction. As mentioned previously via the stimulus-value-role theory (Murstein 1970), individuals are likely to report increased relationship satisfaction when they date someone who is similar to them. Although couples may not be homogamous in terms of religion, dyadic activities, regardless of religion, may exemplify a different type of similarity that is related to relationship satisfaction. For example, rather than two individuals in a dating relationship going to different churches because of different beliefs, if couples attend church together, despite different religions, individuals may view attending church as a similarity that may be positively linked to relationship satisfaction (Vaaler et al. 2009). Engaging in religious activities together may be viewed as a significant step for dating couples (Braithwaite et al. 2015; McCurry et al. 2012), as some studies have demonstrated that dyadic religious activities increase feelings of security and stability (e.g., Lambert and Dollahite 2008). For dating couples, this sense of stability may explain the positive association between relationship religiosity and relationship quality.

There is additional empirical evidence regarding the importance of dyadic religious activities for romantic relationships. Individuals who attend religious services together are correlated with lower divorce rates and higher marital commitment (Allgood et al. 2009; Lambert and Dollahite 2008). Further, couples that pray together frequently report higher levels of relationship satisfaction and happiness than couples who do not pray together (Braithwaite et al. 2015; Ellison et al. 2010). Although relationship religiosity is important for marital commitment, results from the current study demonstrate that relationship religiosity is not related to commitment in dating relationships. Commitment is a multidimensional construct that is described as an intent to continue a relationship (Kelley 1983), moral obligation to persist with the relationship (Johnson 1999), and a focus on long-term orientation (Rusbult 1980). Variables that usually influence changes in commitment are alternative partners and investments in the relationship (Rusbult 1980, 1983). Relationship religiosity may not be related to alternative partners or investments in the relationship. Although going to church together and discussing religious topics are likely to increase relationship satisfaction, they may not represent investments that could relate to commitment. Investments that may be associated with dating couples' commitment are more likely to be time in the relationship or shared residences, rather than dyadic religious activities.

The current study also illustrates that relationship religiosity is more strongly correlated with relationship satisfaction than individual and partner religiosity. Engaging and interacting via religious activities and conversation may be more important than whether one of the two individuals is religious, prays, or attends church. Although studies have shown that religion is important for married couples, the current study illustrates that religion is also important for dating relationships. In addition, engaging in religious activities together is related to higher levels of relationship satisfaction for dating relationships. Based on these results, it might be beneficial for dating couples to discuss religious topics and participate in religious activities together to test compatibility. By engaging in these activities, couples may be more likely to report higher levels of satisfaction in their relationships.

5. Limitations and Conclusions

Although this study advances knowledge for religiosity and dating couples, no study is without limitations. First, only data from one person in a dating relationship was gathered. Next, data was only collected at one point in time. Due to these limitations, the sophistication of statistical analyses was limited. It is possible that more satisfied couples are more likely to participate in religious activities together, rather than vice versa. Future studies should examine relationship religiosity longitudinally in order to more precisely test the hypotheses of this investigation. Further, larger and more diverse samples would provide a more nuanced examination of the relationship between relationship religiosity and relationship quality. Despite these limitations, this study was one of the first to examine relationship religiosity in comparison to individual and partner religiosity with the quality of dating relationships using stringent measures of religiosity.

This study provides some evidence of the importance of relationship religiosity for the quality of dating relationships, a topic that has received limited attention in the literature. Results convey that participating in religious activities together, such as discussing religious topics with one another, reading holy texts together, and serving religious communities together, is linked to quality of dating relationships. Regardless of study limitations, this study advances knowledge of religiosity in the context of dating.

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