

## **Religiosity, Spirituality, and the Subjective Quality of African American Men's Friendships: An Exploratory Study**

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The present study fills a crucial gap in literature surrounding the lives of African American men by exploring factors that shape the quality of these men's friendships. Drawing on data from a sample of 171 African American men, the study examines the relative utility of subjective religiosity, subjective spirituality, advice exchange, and affective sharing as predictors of the level of perceived support from male and female friends. Findings reveal age differences in subjective religiosity, subjective spirituality, and in level of advice and affective exchange in men's same-sex as well as cross-sex friendships. Age differences emerged in men's perceptions of the supportiveness of their friendships with women but not with men. Age was not a predictor of perceived supportiveness of same-sex or cross-sex friendships. Subjective religiosity did not predict support in same-sex or cross-sex friendships. Subjective spirituality positively predicted perceived support in men's same-sex friendships but not in cross-sex friendships. Implications of these findings are discussed.

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Over the past three decades social scientists have dedicated an increasing amount of attention to the study of religiosity and spirituality, and to the examination of the social relationships of African American men. However, these bodies of work have developed orthogonally. The failure to critically integrate these literatures has left the social sciences with a skewed vision of the quality of African American men's relationships, and has limited our ability to examine the functional significance of religion and spirituality in the relational lives of these men. In this study, we endeavor both to link and broaden the empirical discourses about spirituality and African American male relational life by exploring the extent to which subjective religiosity and subjective spirituality inform the quality of African American men's friendships.

Friendship is one of the most important domains of human relationship. Indeed, the capacity to establish and sustain friendships is a critical indicator of healthy psychological development (Fehr, 1996). Despite the importance attached to these relationships, however, relatively little research has been conducted on the friendships of adults. Particularly notable is the absence of empirical research on the friendships of African American men (Franklin, 1992). To date, much of the literature on African American men's social behavior has tended to be pathologizing, and generally has focused on the relationships of socially marginalized men including men who are entrenched in gang culture (Harris, 1992; Mac An Ghail, 1994). Consequently, we know very little about the factors that influence normative friendship construction among African American men. Further, we know very little about the factors that lead "ordinary" African American men to perceive their friendships as supportive.

The small body of work that does focus on friendships has found that the level of support that

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individuals receive from their friends is associated with a range of positive outcomes including improved physical and mental health, coping efficacy, and improved self-esteem (Brown & Gary, 1987; Fehr, 1996). Among African Americans, friends play particularly important roles in addressing emotional and affiliative concerns (Brown & Gary, 1987; Gary, 1981). In fact, in times of personal and interpersonal difficulty African Americans rely more heavily on informal social support networks that include family, church members, and friends than they do on professional services (Brown & Gary, 1987; Neighbors, 1997). Although these studies have highlighted the important functions that social support networks have in the lives of African Americans generally, they do not explicitly examine the factors that lead African American men to experience their friendships as supportive.

In the social science literature, social support is defined in a number of different ways. Among these, two of the most common are enacted (i.e., received) support and perceived (i.e., anticipated) support. Enacted support refers to the emotional, informational as well as instrumental supports offered by significant others. Perceived support is defined as the individual's subjective sense of satisfaction with support, and his/her ability to anticipate support from others (see Rhodes & Lakey, 1999 for a review). Enacted support, as measured by emotional (i.e., affective sharing) and informational help (i.e., advice exchange), has been shown to be positively related to perceived support (Krause, Liang, & Keith, 1990; Rhodes & Lakey, 1999).

Importantly, perceived support does not occur as a simple function of uni-directional disclosures of thoughts and affect. Relational theory (Genero, Miller, Surrey, & Baldwin, 1992; Miller, 1988) and the more general social support literature (see Krause et al., 1990), suggest that reciprocity is a crucial basis of successful social ties. Relationships that are high in reciprocity are likely to involve mutual exchanges of feelings and advice (Genero et al., 1992). Individuals who are in reciprocal relationships tend to feel supported by such relationships (Genero et al., 1992; Nagle, 1989). However, there is a dearth of information about the relationship between these forms of reciprocal support in the lives of men, particularly African American men.

There is evidence that for men the link between perceived support and enacted support (affective and informational sharing) is quite complex. It generally has been accepted that men neither expect nor typically engage in relationships character-

ized by affective sharing or self-disclosure. This pattern of relating, it is argued, results from male gender socialization (Lewis, 1978; Seidler, 1992). However, drawing on data from a qualitative study of African American men, Franklin (1992) suggests that for African American men, an ability to talk about "everything in their lives with their friends" leads to friendships that are "warmer and more intimate." Such friendships are assumed to be satisfying and supportive. In short, Franklin's findings suggest that although gender socialization may predispose many men to avoid some forms of sharing, those African American men who do experience affective and informational exchanges in their friendships tend to experience those friendships as particularly supportive.

There is evidence, however, that the level of sharing in which men engage may be determined, in part, by the gender of the friends with whom they are communicating. Research regarding men's disclosures suggests that men are less likely to disclose vulnerabilities and weaknesses to other men (Aries & Johnson, 1983; Hacker, 1981) and are more inclined to have superficial, nonintimate conversations with their male friends (Aries & Johnson, 1983; Davidson & Duberman, 1982; Hacker, 1981). In contrast, men may tend to feel more comfortable discussing intimate and personally meaningful topics with platonic female friends than with their male friends (Hacker, 1981; Werking 1997). Werking (1997) has found that many men attribute their perceptions of support and satisfaction in cross-sex (i.e., male-female) friendships to the freedom they have to talk openly with their female friends.

In this study, we endeavor to empirically examine the relationship between affective sharing, advice exchange, and perceived support in African American men's same-sex and cross-sex platonic friendships. Taken together, the findings of existing research on friendship and social support suggest that the reciprocal sharing of affect and advice should be associated with a greater degree of perceived support. It is anticipated that these results will be especially evident in men's friendships with women (cross-sex friendships).

## **RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY, AND SOCIAL SUPPORT**

Research has established that religiosity is associated with a greater degree of experienced as well as perceived support (Bowman, 1990; Ellison, 1997; Griffith, Young, & Smith, 1984; Lincoln & Mamiya,

1990; Tinney, 1981). However, much of this work has focused on the support that men receive or perceive as coming from their families (Bowman, 1990; Brody, Stoneman, Flor, & McCrary, 1994) and from religious institutions (Tinney, 1981). No empirical research exists that explicitly examines the relationship between religiosity, spirituality, and friendship support among African American men.

Importantly, any first step toward filling this gap in the literature calls us to think carefully about what might be the most appropriate indices of religiosity and spirituality for examining perceived support among African American men. Levin, Taylor, and Chatters (1995) have emphasized the distinction between organizational religious involvement (i.e., church membership and attendance), nonorganizational religious involvement (i.e., private devotional behaviors such as prayer), and subjective religiosity (i.e., perceptions and attitudes regarding religion). African American men score lower than their female counterparts on all three dimensions of religious involvement (Levin, Taylor, & Chatters, 1994; Levin et al., 1995; Taylor & Chatters, 1991; Taylor, Mattis, & Chatters, 1999). Nonetheless, the fact that the majority of African American men experience themselves as religious is well established (e.g., Taylor & Chatters, 1991). Tinney (1981) argues that although African American men are religious, these men's religious and secular socialization experiences may significantly diminish the likelihood that they will participate in organized religious activities. The limited participation of presumably religious African American men in organized religion (Levin et al., 1994; Tinney, 1981) suggests that the subjective experience of religiosity may be a more useful index of male religiosity than organized religious involvement. As such, in this study we assess the link between subjective religiosity and perceived friendship support.

There is good reason to believe that there is a link between individuals' subjective experience of themselves as religious and their perceptions of the quality of their relationships. Religion provides a sense of meaning, and offers strength and guidance in the face of life's challenges (Frankl, 1967/1992; Geertz, 1973; Pargament, 1997). Further, religions often proffer values and teachings that underscore the importance of loving, forgiving, and caring for others. Individuals who self-define as religious, and who internalize a particular commitment to this orientation toward loving and caring for others, may place particular emphasis on constructing relationships that are characterized by greater levels of kindness, openness, loving

reciprocity and mutuality. This notion is partially supported by the findings of the work of Ellison (1992). Ellison found that African American adults who define themselves as religious tend to be rated as more likeable and more open than their less subjectively religious counterparts.

Further, individuals who experience themselves as religious, and those who have a positive conception of, and a positive relationship with God, tend to report having more positive interpersonal relationships (Benson & Spilka, 1973; Seegobin, Reyes, Starner, Nissley, & Hart, 1999). The experience of believing in and feeling able to rely on God may decrease an individual's sense of burden in life. Those who are less burdened may feel more available to engage in intimate and reciprocal ways with others. Consistent with relational and social support theory, it is reasonable to expect a link between higher levels of intimacy and reciprocity and greater levels of perceived support from others.

The extant literature on African American religiosity provides us with insights into the potential role of subjective religiosity in the friendships of African American men. However, the limited research on African American male spirituality provides us with little empirical foundation for speculating about the role of spirituality in male relational life. Although much of the literature on religiosity and spirituality has tended to use these terms interchangeably, in contemporary social scientific literature there is growing emphasis on distinguishing between these two constructs. Empirical work using rudimentary close-ended indices of subjective religiosity and subjective spirituality demonstrate that men and women make distinctions between these two constructs (see Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Further, the qualitative work of Zinnbauer et al. (1997) and Mattis (2000) demonstrates that while "religiosity" refers to individuals' adherence to beliefs outlined in religious (i.e., sacred) doctrines, "spirituality" refers to a belief that there is a sacred and transcendent dimension to life. These studies help to delineate the meanings and importance assigned to these two terms; however, within the social sciences little emphasis has been placed on empirically exploring the distinct functions of spirituality and religiosity in relational life.

The nascent literature on spirituality suggests that this construct may have particular value for exploring the quality of interpersonal relationships. Qualitative findings indicate that "spirituality" manifests in a self-critical, self-reflective quest for goodness (e.g., altruism), closeness, interdependence, and

intimacy in interpersonal relationships (Mattis, 2000; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Consequently, individuals who embrace spiritual values may behave in ways that promote mutuality and support in relationships. We anticipate that African American men who self-define as spiritual will behave in ways that will leave them feeling supported by their male and female friends.

In sum, we broaden existing discourse on African American men's friendships by examining factors that predict African American men's perceptions of their friendships as supportive. We pay attention to the relationship between enacted support (affective sharing and advice exchange), subjective religiosity, subjective spirituality, and perceived friendship support for a sample of African American men. We examine the extent to which there are age differences in men's scores on subjective religiosity, subjective spirituality, and each of the indices of friendship quality. In keeping with the findings of Chatters and Taylor (1989) and Taylor and Chatters (1991) we anticipate that older men will rate themselves as more religious and more spiritual. No specific hypotheses are posed with regard to age differences in men's ratings of the quality of their friendships. Given the findings of existing research, we hypothesize that higher levels of subjective religiosity and subjective spirituality, and greater levels of affective sharing and advice exchange will be associated with higher levels of perceived support in men's same-sex as well as cross-sex platonic friendships.

## METHOD

### Participants

Participants in this study were recruited from urban areas in Georgia, Maryland, Michigan, New York, and Virginia. Recruitment was conducted by African American investigators who had established community contacts in the cities being sampled. Means of recruitment included paper fliers, electronic mail, public announcements, and word-of-mouth/snowball techniques. Surveys were distributed to African American men in a number of settings, including college campuses (both historically Black and predominately White), community centers, and predominately African American businesses and religious institutions. Each participant was paid a small monetary compensation (\$5) for completing and returning the survey. Recruitment efforts resulted

in a final convenience sample of 171 urban residing African American men.

Participants range in age from 17 to 79 years ( $M = 30.63$ ,  $SD = 16.12$ ), with a median age of 22 years. Sixty-nine percent of the respondents report that they are single and have never been married. Twenty-six percent report being currently married, and another 4% identify themselves as divorced or widowed. Although participants' annual household incomes range from "less than \$10,000" to "\$80,000 or higher," the median annual income range is \$50,000-\$59,999. The sample is also highly educated, with less than 1% reporting educational backgrounds of less than a high school (HS) diploma. Twelve percent have earned a HS diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (GED), 56% have completed some college, 14% have earned a college degree, and 18% have earned a professional degree. This represents a somewhat different distribution than that found in United States census data, which reported that 39% of African Americans have earned HS diplomas, 19% have completed some college without obtaining a degree, 17.2% have earned a college degree, and 4% have earned advanced degrees (Statistical Abstracts of the United States, 1998). Census data also show that in 1996 the median household income for African American families was only \$26,522. Relative to these findings, the present sample would qualify as middle to upper-middle class.

### Independent Measures

*Affective Sharing:* Men were asked to indicate the likelihood that they would share each of 10 emotions with their male friends ("How likely are you to share each of the following feelings or experiences with your male friends?"). Sample items include "Sadness," "Frustration," "Empathy," and "Vulnerability." Each item was measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all likely* to 5 = *very likely*). Affective sharing with males was measured as an average of individuals' scores on these 10 items.

Affective sharing with female friends was assessed via an average of men's responses to the same 10 items. In the effort to assess affective sharing with female friends, men were asked: "How likely are you to share each of the following feelings or experiences with your female friends?"

Advice exchange was measured as the likelihood that men would ask for advice from or give advice to their friends. Men were asked to indicate the

likelihood that they would ask for advice from their male friends about a list of eight items. They were then asked to indicate the likelihood that they would give advice to their male friends on the same eight items. Advice exchange with male friends was calculated as an average of men's scores on these 16 items. Sample items include "Financial matters," "Emotional problem," "Family," and "Career." Each item was measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all likely* to 5 = *very likely*).

Advice exchange with female friends was assessed using a parallel measure of the likelihood of giving advice to as well as asking for such advice from female friends.

In keeping with the findings of Levin et al. (1995) and Taylor et al. (1999), subjective religiosity was measured using three items: "How religious are you?" (1 = *not at all religious* to 5 = *very religious*), "How important is religion in your life today?" (1 = *not at all important* to 5 = *very important*), and "How important is it for African Americans to take or send their children to religious services?" (1 = *not at all important* to 5 = *very important*). Subjective religiosity was measured as an average of individuals' scores on these three items. An alpha reliability coefficient of .87 was achieved for the subjective religiosity scale.

Finally, a single item was used to assess the subjective spirituality of the respondent: "How spiritual are you?" This item was scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very*).

### Dependent Measures

The quality of men's friendships was measured by assessing levels of perceived support from male friends and perceived support from female friends. Perceived support from male friends was assessed using an average of participants' responses to four statements: "My male friends are supportive," "My male friends understand me," "My male friends are dependable," and "My male friends are there for me in a crisis." Each item was scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all true* to 5 = *very true*). Perceived support from female friends was assessed using an average of participants' responses to the same four statements: "My female friends are supportive," "My female friends understand me," "My female friends are dependable," and "My female friends are there for me in a crisis." Alphas of .89 and .93 were calculated for perceived support of male friends and female friends respectively.

### RESULTS

In general, the participants in this study identified themselves as religious ( $M = 4.03$ ,  $SD = 1.0$ ) and spiritual ( $M = 4.22$ ,  $SD = .88$ ). Further, they perceived their male friends and female friends to be generally supportive ( $M = 3.98$ ,  $SD = .88$  and  $M = 3.91$ ,  $SD = .98$ , respectively).

*T* tests were used to examine age differences in men's mean scores on each of the independent as well as dependent variables. Men were divided into three age groups: 17–20 years ( $n = 55$ ), 21–34 years ( $n = 59$ ), and 35–79 years ( $n = 49$ ). *T* tests revealed that 17–20 year olds scored somewhat higher on the measure of subjective religiosity than did their 21–34 year-old counterparts ( $t$ , 112 = 1.91;  $p = .059$ ). There were no significant differences between 17–20 and 21–34 year olds on any of the remaining variables. Relative to men who were 35–79 year olds, men in the 17–20 year-old group scored significantly higher on sharing advice with male friends ( $t$ , 99 = 3.61;  $p < .000$ ), and female friends ( $t$ , 97 = 4.12;  $p < .000$ ), sharing feelings with female friends ( $t$ , 97 = 3.72;  $p < .000$ ), and perceived support from female friends ( $t$ , 90 = 2.56;  $p < .01$ ). However, men in the 17–20 year-old age group scored significantly lower on spirituality ( $t$ , 90 = 1.98;  $p = .05$ ) and subjective religiosity than 35–79 year olds ( $t$ , 102 = -3.95;  $p < .000$ ).

Men in the 35–79 year-old age group scored significantly higher than 21–34 year olds on subjective religiosity ( $t$ , 81 = -5.98;  $p < .000$ ), but these two groups were not significantly different in their score on the spirituality index. Relative to older men (35–79 year olds) the 21–34 year olds scored significantly higher on sharing advice with male friends ( $t$ , 78 = 3.01;  $p < .01$ ), sharing advice with female friends ( $t$ , 80 = 3.90;  $p < .000$ ), sharing feelings with male friends ( $t$ , 100 = 2.53;  $p < .000$ ), sharing feelings with female friends ( $t$ , 100 = 3.75;  $p < .000$ ), and perceived support from female friends ( $t$ , 96 = 2.18;  $p < .05$ ).

Intercorrelations of the independent and dependent variables are reported in Table I. A marginally significant negative relationship emerged between age and perceived support from female friends ( $r = -.16$ ,  $p = .055$ ). However, age, combined household income, and educational attainment were not significantly related to perceived support from friends generally, or from male friends. Advice exchange with male friends ( $r = .42$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ) and affective sharing with male friends ( $r = .49$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ) were positively and significantly related to perceived supportiveness of male friends. Likewise, advice exchange with

**Table I.** Intercorrelations of Independent and Dependent Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Age	—									
2. Income	.17*	—								
3. Education	.59***	.24**	—							
4. Advice exchange (same-sex friends)	-.34***	-.07	-.15††	—						
5. Advice exchange (cross-sex-friends)	-.36***	-.10	-.12	.71***	—					
6. Affective sharing (same-sex friends)	-.18*	-.08	-.08	.56***	.52***	—				
7. Affective sharing (cross-sex friends)	-.33***	-.03	-.09	.45***	.73***	.53***	—			
8. Subjective religiosity	.32***	.04	.13	.09	.01	-.01	-.10	—		
9. Subjective spirituality	.15	.01	.15	.15	.14	.28***	.14	.43***	—	
10. Perceived support (same-sex friends)	-.02	.04	.04	.42***	.34***	.49***	.23**	.07	.34***	—
11. Perceived support (cross-sex friends)	-.16†	-.08	-.07	.37***	.58***	.37***	.52***	-.07	.13	.36***

†  $p = .055$ . ††  $p = .057$ .

\*  $p \leq .05$ . \*\*  $p \leq .01$ . \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

female friends ( $r = .58, p \leq .001$ ) and affective sharing with female friends ( $r = .52, p \leq .001$ ) were both systematically related to perceived supportiveness of female friends.

Subjective religiosity was not significantly related to advice exchange with male or female friends, nor was it significantly related to affective sharing with friends of either sex. Subjective religiosity was not significantly related to perceived supportiveness of same-sex or cross-sex friendships. In contrast, higher subjective spirituality scores were significantly and positively related to the likelihood that men would share feelings with their male friends ( $r = .28, p \leq .001$ ). Subjective spirituality was also positively and significantly related to perceived support from same-sex friendships ( $r = .34, p \leq .001$ ). Subjective spirituality was not significantly related to perceived support in cross-sex friendships.

Multiple regression analyses were performed to further examine the relationship between religiosity, spirituality, advice exchange, affective sharing, and perceived supportiveness of male and female friends (see Tables II and III). Age, household income, level of education, subjective religiosity, spirituality, advice exchange, and affective sharing served as the independent variables in each equation. Men were divided into three age groups (17–20; 21–34; 35–79). In each equation the late adolescent (17–20 year old) and adult (21–34 year old) age groups were dummy coded. The older group of adults (35–79 year olds) served as the reference age group. In the first equation, perceived support from male friends was used as the dependent variable. In the second equation, the dependent variable was perceived support from female friends. In each regression model the independent variables were entered as a block. Eight men were excluded from the model of perceived

supportiveness of male friends, and five men were excluded from the model of support from female friends because they were identified as multivariate outliers.

The regression model for perceived support from male friends was significant  $F(8, 153) = 5.30, p \leq .000$ , and the variables collectively accounted for 32% (28% adjusted) of the variance (see Table II). Advice exchange with male friends ( $\beta = .23, p \leq .01$ ) and sharing feelings with male friends ( $\beta = .25, p \leq .001$ ) emerged as independent, positive predictors of perceived support from male friends. Further, subjective spirituality emerged as an independent positive predictor of perceived support from male friends ( $\beta = .20, p \leq .01$ ). Advice exchange accounted for 4% of the unique variance in perceived support from male friends. Affective sharing independently accounted for 6% of the variance in perceived support from male friends. Subjective spirituality explained 4% of the unique variance in perceived support from male friends. The remaining parameter estimates were not

**Table II.** Regression Model Predicting Perceived Support in Same-Sex Friendships

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>sr</i> <sup>2</sup>
Age 17–20 <sup>a</sup>	-.06	.19	.00
Age 21–34 <sup>a</sup>	-.09	.17	.00
Income	.02	.02	.00
Education	.03	.07	.00
Advice exchange	.23**	.08	.04
Affective sharing	.25***	.07	.06
Subjective religiosity	-.06	.07	.00
Subjective spirituality	.20**	.07	.04
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.32***		
Adj. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.28***		

<sup>a</sup>35–79-year-old men serve as the reference group for these analyses.

\*\*  $p \leq .01$ . \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

**Table III.** Regression Model Predicting Perceived Support in Cross-Sex Friendships

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>sr</i> <sup>2</sup>
Age 17–20 <sup>a</sup>	–.14	.19	.00
Age 21–34 <sup>a</sup>	–.15	.18	.00
Income	–.01	.02	.00
Education	–.03	.08	.00
Advice exchange	.46***	.09	.10
Affective sharing	.16†	.09	.01
Subjective religiosity	–.09	.07	.01
Subjective spirituality	.07	.07	.00
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.37***		
Adj. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.33***		

<sup>a</sup>35–79-year-old men serve as the reference group for these analyses.

†  $p \leq .06$ . \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

significantly associated with the amount of support men perceive from their male friends.

The model for perceived support from female friends was also significant  $F(8, 156) = 11.20, p \leq .000$  (see Table III). The variables in this equation jointly accounted for 37% (33% adjusted) of the variance in perceived support from female friends. Exchanging advice with female friends ( $\beta = .46, p \leq .001$ ) emerged as an independent, positive predictor of perceived supportiveness of female friends. Sharing feelings with female friends ( $\beta = .16, p = .06$ ) was a marginally significant predictor of perceived support from female friends. Advice exchange accounted for 10% of the unique variance in perceived support from female friends. Affective sharing independently accounted for 1% of the variance in perceived support from female friends. The remaining parameter estimates were not significantly associated with perceived support from female friends.

## DISCUSSION

In the American popular imagination there are few images of caring, supportive friendships among African American men, or between these men and African American women. Indeed, African American men's relationships generally are characterized as superficial, violent, contentious, or otherwise pathological (Franklin, 1992). These skewed representations of African American male relational life are all the more powerful because of the relative absence of social scientific research on normative African American male social development. A significant contribution of this work is that it broadens empirical discourse about the relational lives of African American men by under-

scoring the reality that “ordinary” African American men develop and sustain relationships that they experience as caring and supportive. The findings suggest that patterns of religiosity, spirituality, affective sharing and advice exchange, and perceived support are influenced by age as well as by the gender profile of the friendship (same-sex versus cross-sex). Further, the findings of the study underscore the point that spirituality plays an important role in the interpersonal worlds of African American men.

Consistent with the findings of previous studies (Taylor et al., 1999; Taylor & Chatters, 1991), older men in this sample reported greater levels of spirituality than their younger counterparts. However, the pattern of subjective religiosity scores suggested a somewhat complex relationship between age and subjective religiosity. Analyses indicate that 21–34-year-old men are somewhat less religious than men in late adolescence (17–20 years old) or older men (35–79 years old). These findings suggest that for this sample of men the relationship between age and subjective religiosity may be nonlinear.

Tests of age differences in men's mean scores on the indices of friendship quality revealed an important pattern of findings. Seventeen to twenty and 21–34 year olds did not differ on the extent to which they exchanged advice or shared feelings with friends of either gender. The oldest group of men (35–79 year olds) scored significantly lower than younger men on advice sharing and on emotional sharing with male and female friends. There were no age differences in men's level of perceived support from male friends. However, relative to younger men, the oldest group of men reported that they experienced their friendships with women as less supportive. Taken together, these data indicate that older men (35–79 year olds) are generally more religious and more spiritual than their younger counterparts. However, these older men are less likely to engage in advice sharing and emotional exchanges with their male or female friends. These findings suggest the need for greater attention to the role of age in determining men's subjective evaluations of degree of reciprocity in their friendships as well as their evaluations of the quality of those relationships. In particular, there is a need for longitudinal data that will help to clarify whether these age-related findings represent developmental or cohort effects.

Using multivariate analyses we explored the extent to which age, enacted support, subjective religiosity, and subjective spirituality were associated with men's perceptions of the supportiveness of their

same-sex as well as cross-sex friends. As anticipated, we found that, in general, enacted support was predictive of perceived support in African American men's friendships. However, the pattern of results simultaneously reinforces and complicates the results of existing work on friendship support.

First, in keeping with the findings of existing research it appeared that the factors that predict perceived support are related to the gender composition (same-sex or cross-sex) of the friendship. In particular, it appears that sharing feelings and exchanging advice with their male friends are particularly important in men's perceptions of the supportiveness of their male friends. Conversely, although the exchange of advice was associated with greater perceived support from female friends, the sharing of emotions was only marginally predictive of this outcome.

Second, the findings reinforce the point that although men may be socialized in ways that delimit expressions of vulnerability, the effects of socialization are not absolute. That is, although men continue to be socialized to adapt traditional male gender roles, contemporary men—particularly younger men—may have access to a greater range of acceptable gender role identities than did men in the past. As such, while Hacker (1981), Davidson and Duberman (1982), and Aries and Johnson (1983) may be correct in their assertion that men tend to have more superficial and affectively limited friendships, the findings of this work are responsive to an alternative set of questions. We ask the following questions: Although, in general, men may be socialized in ways that are associated with more restrictive patterns of communication, what are the relational implications of being at the higher (or lower) end of the continuum of communication? In short, do men who share more or who engage in greater levels of advice exchange experience any benefits in terms of their perceptions of the quality of their friendships? Consistent with the results of Franklin's work (1992) the findings of this research suggest that among African American men a greater tendency to share feelings and advice is associated with a greater sense of being supported by friends. In sum, men who are at the higher end of the communication continuum appear to have a more positive experience of their relationships.

This finding is exciting when considered in the light of contemporary research on constructions of manhood among normative samples of African American men. For example, Hunter and Davis (1994) suggest that intimacy and caring are central in African American men's notions of what it means

to be a man. However, to date social scientists have failed to explore the ways in which various conceptualizations of African American manhood may shape the ways in which African American men experience and evaluate their relationships. We suggest that a crucial next step in studying the normative development of African American men must be the effort to examine the ways in which African American men's complex constructions of manhood influence the expectations that they hold for their relationships, their behavior toward significant others, and their subjective assessments of the quality of their interpersonal relationships.

A third contribution of this work is that it advances our knowledge of the role of religiosity and spirituality in men's friendships. The hypothesis that subjective religiosity would be a positive predictor of the quality of the men's friendships was not supported by the findings. The results of the bivariate analyses indicate that for this sample there was no systematic relationship between subjective religiosity and the indices of enacted support (i.e., affective sharing and advice exchange) or perceived support. Interestingly, the direction of the relationship between these variables suggests that men who score higher on subjective religiosity may be somewhat less willing to engage in affective sharing with their friends—particularly with their female friends. These findings, though statistically nonsignificant, do point to a need for attention to men's experiences of religiosity, and to the functions of religiosity in men's interpersonal lives. More specifically, there is a need to explore the extent to which religion may serve to reinforce values that are associated with affective reticence.

The bivariate findings did not support the hypothesis that subjective spirituality would be significantly related to perceived support of men's friendships with women. However, the multivariate analyses did reveal that when age, income, education, advice exchange, affective sharing, and subjective religiosity were controlled, subjective spirituality had a direct, positive effect on men's perceptions of the supportiveness of their male friends. This pattern of findings highlights the point that spirituality plays a particularly important role in men's same-sex relationships. We assert that spirituality, with its focus on intimacy, sacredness, interdependence, and self-awareness (Mattis, 2000; Zinnbauer et al., 1997), may help men to effectively counteract socialization messages that encourage them to remain emotionally distant from their male friends. Men who self-identify as spiritual may be particularly open to risking, and may



be more willing to be vulnerable with the men in their friendship networks. This notion finds support in the pattern of bivariate results. The bivariate findings demonstrated that men who scored higher on subjective spirituality were significantly more likely to engage in affective sharing with male friends. Again, these findings extend existing work on friendship support by suggesting that although gender composition of men's friendships and the degree of enacted support are important in determining the quality of men's friendships, these factors should be considered in conjunction with men's level of spirituality.

This study has important limitations. When compared to other African American men nationwide, the participants in this study are relatively affluent and well educated. In future work it will be helpful to examine these issues with more demographically diverse samples of men. Further, in this study we employ a single item index of subjective spirituality. The limitations of using single item indices of religiosity and spirituality are well-articulated (Gorsuch & McFarland, 1972). However, in our analyses we found that multi-item measures of spirituality consistently failed to meet standards of adequate reliability. As such, in keeping with Gorsuch and McFarland (1972) who cautioned that "[a]ny single-item measure showing better validity than a multiple-item scale is sufficiently reliable to replace that scale" (p. 53), we elected to use a single, face-valid item to measure subjective spirituality. This strategy is consistent with the work of Zinnbauer et al. (1997) who successfully employed rudimentary single item indices to empirically assess their participants' levels of subjective spirituality and religiosity. Future research on the role of spirituality in the lives of African American men will, no doubt, benefit from the use of multi-item and multidimensional measures of spirituality. However, our work underscores the point that it is crucial that those measures of spirituality effectively reflect the particularized definitions of spirituality held by African American men.

Despite its limitations the study raises important points. First, the findings lend empirical weight to the argument that religiosity and spirituality are not synonymous constructs. Further, these findings suggest that the distinctions between religiosity and spirituality may not be solely semantic. It appears that religion and spirituality serve different functions in the lives of African American men. Previous research has demonstrated that among African American men subjective religiosity is associated with a greater focus on values of interdependence and social obligation

(Mattis et al., in press). However, this study suggests that spirituality (not religiosity) may be especially important for understanding the quality of African American men's interpersonal relationships. Taken together, these findings lend credence to the notion that while religiosity may be associated with particular value orientations (i.e., interdependence), spirituality may be associated with the practical expression of particular values in relational life.

Second, the findings of the study highlight the importance of attending to male spirituality. The fact that women outscore men on conventional indices of religiosity and spirituality has led some scholars to conclude that men are generally irreligious and not particularly spiritual. However, it is clear that spirituality does have functional significance in the everyday lives of African American men. Psychology may benefit from studies that attend to the ways in which men, including African American men, use spiritual beliefs to challenge and redefine restrictive social roles. Given the cultural importance attached to spirituality and religiosity in African American life, it is particularly important that researchers interested in the lives of these men pay close attention to the affective, behavioral, and cognitive functions of these constructs in the lives of these men (Mattis & Jagers, in press). Further, it is important that researchers explore the roles of religiosity and spirituality and their affective, cognitive, and behavioral correlates in the various domains of African American men's relational lives including their friendships, family relationships, and their relationships with more distal others within the community. These approaches promise to elucidate the complex relational functions of religion and spirituality.

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