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Relationships with God, Relationships with Others, and Health: Associations Among First-Year College Students

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Abstract

When students transition away from their homes and into higher education, they enter a social environment where they are free, if not encouraged, to question and explore their values and beliefs, including their beliefs of God. Practicing Christians often report having a relationship with God, a conception that implies a dynamic and social process at work. This longitudinal study had two goals: (a) examine collegians' relationship with God in terms of their God image, His involvement in their lives, and the importance of their faith, at two time points in their first year of college; (b) examine how these God relational dimensions interplay with student relationships and health. Results suggest that not only do a majority of students hold a strong relational view of God, but that their views are increasingly associated with their health over time. The implications of these findings as well as future research directions are discussed.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”
Matthew 22:37-40

It is widely accepted that we love people better when we love God well. Could it also be that God teaches us to love Him better when we learn to love others well? As it is in the faith vs. deeds discussion highlighted through comparisons of Romans and James, we live with a symbiotic relationship between loving God and loving others.

God began to show us this truth at Pepperdine University in the fall of 2005, when the first ever Relationship IQ event was held. In the years that followed, we noticed an exhilarating trend: As we gave young adults tools and information to improve their relationships with others, we saw that they also improved their relationships with God. Individual after individual, whether they were close to or far from God, would draw closer to Him after they learned more about how to love each other well. We decided to learn more. And so, what do universities do when we get curious – we research. The current study aimed to examine these associations. Our central question is: How are relationships with others connected to our relationship with God?

Young Adulthood

Young adulthood (YA), a term often interchangeable with emerging adulthood, refers to a distinct developmental stage or period that “18- to 29-year olds in industrialized societies [undergo]” (Arnett et al., 2011, p.14). Typically beginning with their launch away from their context of dependence, individuals within this period are characterized by their independence from committed adult roles “such as marriage, childbearing, and establishing a new career” (Amato, 2011, p. 27). For the many young adults who enroll in higher education, they enter into an environment that is ideal for adult role moratorium. On one hand, many higher education practices are grounded in philosophical and literary traditions that promote the journey toward learning about oneself (Astin et al., 2011). On the other hand, higher education offers a plethora of majors, courses, career choices, relationship opportunities, and worldviews from which to choose. In response to these incentives, many young adults sample a variety of adult roles and life experiences in a self-focused identity quest. From a developmental standpoint,

the outcomes of this exploratory process for better or worse are social in nature; in addition to connecting with faculty and staff members that care about the student's development and well-being, other tasks include reorienting their relationship with parents (Arnett, 2004; McGoldrick et al., 2011) while moving toward their peers, friends, dating or intimate partners, and new communities with greater intimacy and relational reciprocity (Chow et al. 2011; Fincham et al., 2011; Smetana et al., 2006).

God-Image

Given the developmental and relational shifts during this period, researchers have been interested in the nature of spiritual growth during this time. One focus of this line of research is on God-image in young adults (e.g., Froese & Bader, 2007; Hoge, Johnson, & Luidens, 1993; Maynard, Gorsuch, & Bjorck, 2001; Wong-McDonald, & Gorsuch, 2004). God-image refers to the "personal schemas people hold about the nature and characteristics of God" (Steenwyk et al., 2010, p. 86). Most researchers who have studied God-images for the past 50 years observe that people often describe God in parental and relational terms such as nurturing, controlling, judging, and loving (Dickie et al., 2006; Dickie et al., 1997). A body of literature suggests that in addition to religious teachings, God-image is initially developed from parent modeling, a process that builds an image of God on parental qualities (Cassibba, Granqvist, Costantini, & Gatto, 2008; Dickie et al., 2006; Gnaulati & Heine, 1997; Granqvist, Ivarsson, Broberg, & Hagekull, 2007). According to Bowlby (1973), individuals form mental representations of themselves and others based on repeated experiences with their caregivers. These representations or internal working models are a template for later relationships including ones with God. It is presumed that in addition to guiding the interpretation and anticipation of others' behaviors, internal working models include information of the "characteristics of the attachment figure, particularly characteristics relevant to interactions between the attachment figure and the self" (Zhal & Gibson, 2012, p. 218).

God-Image and Young Adults

Dickie and colleagues (2006) suggested that as young adults physically and emotionally separate themselves from their parents, God may become an important figure, particularly as they engage in a self-directed process of exploring and building their personalized worldview, a critical identity-related task during this period (Arnett, 2004). Along the same vein, Dickie et al. (2006) further suggested that God-image and other related God concepts shift away from parental relation etiology and toward the self. In support of the latter argument, a body of literature documents God-image as being more strongly associated with

young adults' self-esteem, commitment to religion (Spilka & Mullin, 1977), and self-regarding attitudes (Joey & Taulbee, 1986) rather than the quality of their relationship with their parents.

Researchers investigating God-image have primarily focused on understanding the relationship between God-image and a variety of outcome variables (Miller & Kelley, 2006). In order to further develop the study of God-image, investigations need to pursue two underexplored yet promising frontiers: (a) the cognitive structure of God-image, and (b) how it changes or matures across the lifespan. Presently, there is semantic ambiguity surrounding God image-related terms in empirical literature (Davis et al., 2013). The confusion stems from the many competing definitions of God-image, which have ranged from human attachment (Davis, 2010) to theological grounding (Gibson 2006; Hall, 2004). Practicing Christians often report having a “relationship” with God (Pew Research Center, 2008) rather than just a particular view of Him. For instance, in factor analytic studies (e.g., Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008), researchers found that practicing Christians tended to view God in relational terms rather than doctrinal ones (Benson & Spilka, 1973; Gorsuch, 1968; Lawrence, 1991; Schaap-Jonker, Eurelings-Bontekoe, Zock, & Jonker, 2008). It may be strategic for higher education researchers and practitioners to adapt a relational-cognitive framework of God-image. Doing so would address the social nature of the home to college transition as well as help bring conceptual clarity and definitional consensus to the term; important semantic milestones that will help grow and mature God-image research among collegians and young adults (Davis et al., 2013). Furthermore, it is assumed within the God-image and God-concept literature that God-images are “context-sensitive, belief-laden mental/neural representations” (Davis et al., 2013, p. 52). Studying how young adults' God-images grow and change in relation to the many relational confluxes during the transition between social contexts will provide vital information on the unfolding needs of collegians for higher education institutes and churches.

Religion and Health

An important development in the study of religion over the past two decades is its connection with health (Oman & Thoresen, 2006). For example, in their meta-analysis of 40 independent samples, McCullough and colleagues (2000) found an association with religious involvement and longevity. Although physical health and mental health are dichotomized in research and in practice, they are interrelated constructs. Further, there is documentation that “physical health benefits from religion are often mediated by gains in mental health correlates such as improved social relationships, coping ability, and health behaviors” (Oman & Thoresen, 2006, p. 435).

Researchers that have examined the effects of religion and spirituality on health often find themselves forced to tease out narrow dimensions of religion or spirituality (i.e., God-image) in order to examine its connection with a range of clinical symptomatology and health indicators. Although this body of work has uncovered many important connections, it also brings into focus a chronic methodological problem of oversimplifying faith for research purposes (Miller & Kelley, 2006). This is problematic when examining faith over time, especially during young adulthood where it is expected that many will be reexamining and exploring their worldview. A review of the literature finds no longitudinal studies that examine the interrelation between faith and health outcomes for young adults.

God Relationship and Interpersonal Confidence

It is widely recognized that social relationships have a powerful influence on physical and mental health (Merino, 2014; Oman & Thoresen, 2006). Social belonging, a key variable in well-being, has been found by researchers to be mediated through individuals' perceptions of their social network and their relationship with God (Freeze & DiTommaso, 2015; Oman & Thoresen, 2006). Evidence of the interplay between social relationship, God, and health can be found in the literature that documents religion playing an important role in networking and garnering social support among adolescents and adults (Merino, 2014; Miller & Kelley, 2006). Relatively few studies exist that have examined the associations between young adults' relationship with God, their confidence in their social skills, and their perception of their interpersonal or physical well-being. What can be drawn from the limited literature is that positive views of God have been linked with more positive coping and self-confidence, implying a similar association between God-image and interpersonal health and confidence (Benson & Spilka, 1973; Newton & McIntosh, 2010; Pargament, Ensing, Falgout, & Olsen, 1990; Weigand & Weiss, 2006).

The Present Study

Although the existing literature suggests that a majority of young adults see God as important in their lives (Astin et al., 2011; Foubert et al., 2015), few studies have examined this variable longitudinally in young adulthood. In addition to examining how young adults' relationship with God changes over the course of their first year in college, this study seeks to understand how these changes interplay with a variety of outcome variables related to successful student development. The questions that the study aims to answer are the following:

1. What are students' views of God?
2. How much do students see God being involved in their lives?

3. How important is faith to students while they are in college?
4. How are young adults' relationships with God related to their relationship quality, relationship confidence, and several dimensions of health?

Methods

Procedures

For two consecutive years (fall semester 2012 and 2013), incoming university students were invited to complete a survey at their new student orientation. Students completed the survey again toward the end of their first year of college. These two successive cohorts of first-year students were combined into one sample.

Participants

The sample consists of 268 university students at a private Christian university in southern California who completed the survey at both time points, beginning and end of their first year of college. There were 175 females (64.6%) and 97 males (35.4%) (the college gender split is 60% female and 40% male). Mean age was 17.92, SD = 0.45 at orientation and 18.61, SD = .69 at spring. There were no significant differences between the two cohorts in gender composition or age. The university has a racial/ethnic composition of 45.1% White, 15.1% Hispanic/Latino, 12.4% Asian, 8.4% Non-resident alien, 6.8% Black/African American, 0.6% American Indian/Alaska Native, 0.5% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 4.9% two or more races, and 6.3% Unknown. Student-reported religious affiliations at the university consist of 57.4% Christian, 1% Sectarian, 1.1% Eastern Religions, 3.2% Non-Christian Monotheist religions, 4% no religious affiliation, and 33.1% not reported.

Measures

The survey was constructed specifically for this project based on the research questions, available literature on each construct, and the content and mission of Relationship IQ. The survey items used in the current study, and the constructs they were designed to measure, are described here.

View of God. Students were asked “Which of these statements most closely describes your view of God currently?” Choices included Respected voice to consider, Close/personal friend, Distant/ powerful authority, God doesn't exist, I'm trying to figure it out, I don't know, and Other (please describe).

God's Influence. Students were asked “How do you rate God's influence in your life currently?” Choices included Very involved, Somewhat involved, Rarely involved, and Not part of my life.

Health. Students rated their physical, mental, and spiritual health, separately on 4-point scales of Poor, Fair, Good, or Excellent.

Relationship Quality. Students rated their relationships with father, mother, and friends separately on 4-point scales of Poor, Fair, Good, or Excellent.

Relationship Confidence. Students used 4-point scales of Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Somewhat agree, and Strongly agree to rate their confidence in three areas: conflict and communication (4 items), having models of healthy relationships (2 items), and choices and abilities (4 items). Examples of items include “It is hard for me to resolve conflict in friendships” (reverse-scored), “I choose friends that help me be the best version of myself,” and “I feel confident in my ability to form healthy romantic relationships.”

Results

The results were organized around four major themes (1) changes in relationship with God, (2) overall health, (3) relationship quality, and (4) relationship confidence.

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Change in Relationship with God

Students’ relationship with God was operationalized to have three separate yet interlocking parts: God-image, God involvement, and importance of faith. Descriptive data for each of these variables are presented in table 1.1

Table 1.1 God Image, Involvement, and Faith Frequencies

Variable	n	At Orientation		End of First Year	
		n	%	n	%
God image	Respected Voice	53	20.2	50	18.4
	Close & Personal Friend	150	55.1	144	52.9
	Cultural Myth (Atheist)	8	2.9	12	4.4
	Powerful Yet Distant	18	6.6	20	7.4
	Trying Figure it Out	31	11.4	34	12.5
	I Don't Know	3	1.1	5	1.8
	Missing	9	3.3	7	2.6
	Total	272	100	272	100
God Involvement	Very Involved	130	47.8	138	50.7
	Somewhat	105	38.6	92	33.8
	Rarely	18	6.6	18	6.6
	No Part	7	2.6	11	4
	Missing	12	4.4	13	4.8
	Total	272	100	272	100
	Importance of Faith	Very Important	152	55.9	168
Somewhat Important		99	36.4	80	29.4
Not Important		21	7.7	24	8.8
Total		272	100	272	100

At orientation, a majority of students reported seeing God as a close and personal friend (55.1%), very or somewhat involved in their lives (86.4%), and considered their faith as very or somewhat important to them (92.3%). Similarly, at the end of the spring semester, 52.9% viewed God as a close and personal friend, 86.4% saw God as somewhat or very involved in their lives, and 91.2% reported that their faith is very important to them. A closer examination found a reduction in those who saw God as somewhat involved (-4.7%) and faith being somewhat important (-6.99%), but a rise in those who saw God as very involved (+2.9%) and those reporting faith to be very important (+5.9%). These results fall in line with emerging literature finding that over half of young adults value their religious and spiritual lives while in college and felt more committed over time (e.g., Astin et al., 2011; Levenson, Aldwin, & Mello, 2006).

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the differences between orientation and the end of the first year in the frequencies of each variable. Frequencies of perceived involvement of God were significantly different at the two time points $\chi^2(9) = 175.71, p < .01$. Frequencies of the importance of faith also showed a significant difference across time, $\chi^2(4, N = 272) = 140.20, p < .01$, suggesting that students experienced a change in God involvement and their importance of faith over the course of their first year. In our study sample, the number of students reporting God to be very involved and faith as important in their lives increased over the first year. Although statistically significant, the analysis of changes in God-image remained inconclusive given the large differences in group sizes and that view of God barely changed over the course of the year. The size of the student groups reporting a nonexistent God-image were so small compared to the groups reporting Close and personal friend and Respected voice that it is difficult to make statistical comparisons between the groups.

Health

Each of the three dimensions of God relationship (God-image, God involvement, and Importance of faith) were examined separately to examine main effects on health, relationship quality, and interpersonal confidence. An analysis of variance showed that at orientation differences in God-image were associated with differences in overall health $F(5, 256) = 4.02, p < .01$. Post-hoc analyses found that those who saw God as a Close and personal friend ($M = 9.77, SD = 1.46$) scored significantly higher in health than those who saw God as a Respected voice ($M = 9.0, SD = 1.71$) and those who were Trying to figure out who God was to them ($M = 8.73, SD = 1.5$). It is worth noting that those who were trying to determine who God was to them, but who were not atheists, reported the lowest health among the group

God's involvement was also associated with differences in health at orientation, $F(3, 255) = 14.87, p < .01$. Post-hoc analyses found that the group reporting God as Very involved ($M = 9.97, SD = 1.31$) scored significantly higher in health than the Somewhat ($M = 9.09, SD = 1.59$) and Rarely ($M = 7.78, SD = 1.77$) groups.

There was also a statistical difference in health between participants reporting differing levels of the importance of their faith, $F(2, 268) = 15.59, p < .01$. Post-hoc analyses found that those reporting their faith as Very important ($M = 9.89, SD = 1.44$) scored significantly higher in health than the Somewhat important ($M = 8.88, SD = 1.63$) and Not important ($M = 8.68, SD = 1.76$) groups.

At the end of the first year, analyses of variance found collegians' God-image, $F(5, 257) = 6.76, p < .01$; God involvement, $F(3, 253) = 6.90, p < .01$; and Importance of faith, $F(2, 267) = 10.52, p < .01$ were still associated with

differences in their overall health. For God-image, post-hoc analyses indicated that those who saw God as a Close and personal friend ($M = 9.52$, $SD = 1.75$) or a Respected voice ($M = 9.47$, $SD = 1.77$) scored significantly higher in health than the group who was Trying to figure out who God is ($M = 7.81$, $SD = 2.24$). In terms of how influential or how involved God was in their lives, those who reported God as Very involved/influential in their lives ($M = 9.51$, $SD = 1.72$) scored significantly higher in health than those who saw God as Rarely involved ($M = 7.39$, $SD = 2.33$). Those who reported their faith as Very important ($M = 9.58$, $SD = 1.63$) scored significantly higher in health than the other two groups.

Relationship Quality

Analyses of variance found no main effects of the three God relationship dimensions on participants' relationship quality at orientation. In the spring, the analysis of variance found only a main effect of God-image on relationship quality, $F(5, 231) = 3.23$, $p < .01$. Post-hoc analyses found that those who saw God as a Close and personal friend ($M = 10.93$, $SD = 1.33$) and Respected voice ($M = 10.98$, $SD = 1.49$) scored significantly higher in relationship quality than those who were Trying to figure out who God was to them ($M = 9.86$, $SD = 1.62$).

Relationship Confidence

Analyses of variance at orientation detected no significant main effects of the three God relationship variables on relationship confidence. Analysis of variance at the end of the first year detected that God-image, $F(5, 252) = 4.43$, $p < .01$; God involvement, $F(3, 248) = 4.51$, $p < .01$; and Importance of faith $F(2, 262) = 5.04$, $p > .01$ had main effects on relationship confidence. For God-image, post-hoc analyses found that those who saw God as a Close and personal friend ($M = 21.09$, $SD = 2.50$) scored significantly higher in relationship confidence than those who were Trying to figure out who God is ($M = 19.10$, $SD = 3.27$). The group who reported God as Rarely involved in their lives ($M = 18.83$, $SD = 2.85$) scored significantly lower in relationship confidence than the Somewhat ($M = 20.04$, $SD = 3.03$) and Very involved ($M = 21.00$, $SD = 2.62$) groups. Post-hoc analyses found that the group who reported their faith as Very important ($M = 20.86$, $SD = 2.69$) reported significantly higher relationship confidence than the other groups.

Table 2.1a Descriptives of God Relationship Variables Across Health, Relationship Quality, and Relationship Confidence at Orientation

Grouped Independent variables		Health				Rel. Quality				Rel. Confidence			
		n	M	SE	F	n	M	SE	F	n	M	SE	F
God Image	Respected Voice	53	9	0.23	4.02**	47	10.5	0.18	1.41	52	19.88	0.44	0.22
	Close & Personal Friend	150	9.77	0.12		136	10.67	0.12		149	20.06	0.28	
	Cultural Myth (Atheist)	7	8.71	0.97		6	11.5	0.34		8	21.63	1.22	
	Powerful but Distant	18	9.56	0.42		18	10.94	0.3		18	20.44	0.64	
	Trying to Figure it Out	31	8.73	0.27		30	10.3	0.29		31	20.32	0.45	
	Don't Know	3	9.43	0.33		3	9.67	1.45		3	20	2.52	
God Involvement	Very	130	9.67	1.14	14.87**	118	10.84	0.12	2.32	128	20.39	2.8	1
	Somewhat	105	9.09	0.42		98	10.38	0.15		105	19.87	0.31	
	Rarely	18	7.78	0.16		15	10.4	0.39		18	19.44	0.57	
	No Part	6	8.83	0.12		5	11	0.77		7	21	1.43	
Importance of Faith	Very	152	9.89	0.12	15.59**	135	10.7	0.11	0.78	150	20.1	0.27	0.39
	Somewhat	99	8.88	0.16			10.51	0.15		99	19.99	0.3	
	Not Important	20	8.67	0.39			10.83	0.29		21	20.67	0.64	

ANOVA = analysis of variance.

** p < .01

Table 2.1b Descriptives of God Relationship Variables Across Health, Relationship Quality, and Relationship Confidence at Spring

Grouped Independent variables		Health				Rel. Quality				Rel. Confidence			
		n	M	SE	F	n	M	SE	F	n	M	SE	F
God Image	Respected Voice	50	9.47	0.25	5.76**	42	10.98	0.23	3.23**	48	20.42	0.42	4.43**
	Close & Personal Friend	144	9.52	0.15		133	10.93	0.12		142	21.09	0.21	
	Cultural Myth (Atheist)	10	8.3	1.06		11	10.18	0.66		12	18.41	0.98	
	Powerful but Distant	20	8.25	0.5		18	10.67	0.36		20	20.15	0.62	
	Trying to Figure it Out	34	7.81	0.38		29	9.86	0.3		31	19.1	0.59	
	Don't Know	3	9.4	0.81		4	11.25	0.48		5	20	1.1	
God Involvement	Very	138	9.51	0.15	6.9**	123	10.95	0.12	1.93	134	21	0.23	4.51**
	Somewhat	92	8.91	0.22		82	10.62	0.18		89	20.04	0.32	
	Rarely	18	7.39	0.55		17	10.35	0.42		18	18.33	0.67	
	No Part	9	9.11	1.02		11	10.18	0.57		11	19.91	0.84	
Importance of Faith	Very	168	9.58	0.13	10.52**	152	10.91	0.11	2.38	165	20.86	0.21	5.04**
	Somewhat	80	8.49	0.26		69	10.59	0.19		76	20.07	0.34	
	Not Important	22	8.36	0.57		23	10.3	0.37		24	19.17	0.6	

** p < .01

Summary of Findings

Overall, a majority of collegians reported that their faith was very important to them, that they saw God as a close and personal friend, and considered Him very involved in their lives. Across these God relationship dimensions was a positive association with relationship confidence, relational quality, and personal health, which became more significant over the first year of college.

Discussion

An encouraging finding in the study, though not surprising, was how many collegians see God as important and involved in their lives throughout their first year. Praise God for his presence on our campus. Pepperdine University attracts students for its academic excellence, beautiful surroundings, and Christian mission. Though some come more for the beach than the rich Christian community, the data indicated that the majority of our students have a keen interest in God.

Another inspiring finding was that how students view God and rate his influence and involvement in their lives connects not just with relational health, but also with mental and physical health. Our students who reported God as Very involved, faith as Very important, and God as a Close and personal friend also reported the highest levels of physical, mental, and spiritual health.

The developmental shifts of the young adult years are ripe opportunities for changes in relationship with God and others. According to the statistical results, when these students began college there were no significant associations between relationship with God and students' confidence in their ability to be successful in relationships or between relationship with God and their reported relationship quality with parents and friends. But by the end of their first year there was marked change. Within just a few months' time, results show that their relationship with God was correlated with their confidence in their relational abilities and the quality of their relationships. In the spring, those with closer relationships with God score higher in all of these realms than those with distant or absent relationships with Him.

Our results can't tell us why this occurs, but we have some hypotheses based on our 11 years of working with young adults through Relationship IQ (rIQ), a relationship education ministry to students that helps them love God and love others well. For example, perhaps as young adults start to navigate life with less parental input, more independence, and recognition of their limitations, they start to rely more on others and God. Those who have Him to rely on then may begin to fare better relationally and emotionally. An intrapersonal incongruence our counseling center sees is that though some students report faith as very important in their lives, they do not connect their faith with their current struggles. Their relationship with God does not impact how they deal with life's challenges. The

integration of God into everyday life is part of the maturing process. One of the ways that God matures us is through navigating difficult relationships. As we learn better how to relate well with others, we are also prepared for right relationship with God. This growth process during the young adult years may set the stage for the trajectory of their lives for decades.

There were significant associations at the end of the year between relationship with God and relationship quality with parents and friends, as well as relationship confidence. Those who saw God as a Close and personal friend or Respected voice reported higher relationship quality than those who were still trying to figure out who God is. Some may look at this type of association and interpret it to mean that relationship with God improves our relationships with others. However, these associations do not imply a causal direction. One could also argue that better quality relationships with parents and friends helps young adults have a better relationship with God. Either way, we have consistently observed that those lost in their relationship with God also seem to be lost in their relationships with others. Those that reported they were trying to figure out who God is also reported the lowest levels of health and relationship quality. If we can move students in the quality of their relationships with others, is that another way for us to help students move towards God? Though this hypothesis is beyond the scope of the current study, it is an important area for future research.

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The present study found that overall frequencies of God-image did not significantly shift in the first year of college, while overall God involvement and influence increased. This was consistent with previous research (Cassibba, Granqvist, Costantini, & Gatto, 2008; Dickie et al., 2006; Gnaulati & Heine, 1997; Granqvist, Ivarsson, Broberg, & Hagekull, 2007), which saw God-image rooted in parental relational characteristics. As God-image is often enmeshed with the parental relationship, it tends to be slower to change. Anecdotally, through our interactions with students we have noticed that it is often in the later years of college that view of God tends to shift. One of the researchers will never forget the joy on a young man's face as he shared his realization that he had been relating to God as though God had the characteristics of his dad, who had demanded excellence out of his son before any relationship was offered. He shared with delight how he now realized that God did not demand excellence before relationship; God was calling him, imperfect him, to relationship now. This young man was a senior. It had taken time, new experiences with God and people, and distance from his dad for God to give him new eyes to see his Heavenly Father. A crucial way for young adults to experience God differently, learn who God is, and how to interact with him seems to be through relationship with others. Our consistent observation is that giving young adults greater relationship skill and understanding better prepares them for right relationship with God.

A limitation of the study was that we had a very small sample of students who reported their view of God to be a Cultural myth. This group also reported very low rates of health and relational quality. The sample size for this group was too small to understand more about these findings.

Within the Relationship IQ program, we have seen God transform students through conversations about sex, dating, healthy conflict, getting along with parents and roommates, navigating friendship, and establishing healthy boundaries. Anecdotally, people who were far from God drew closer when they learn how God created our brains to respond to sex and the relational implications of sexual choices. Students close to God learned more about intimacy with Christ and what it means to love people well. Our work is to create intentional space for the Holy Spirit's work of transformation. God has done amazing things on our campus as we have leaned into this reality of relationship with God and others being interconnected. Our anecdotal and research evidence is overwhelming at the interconnectivity of relationships with God and others.

There is still much to research and much to understand. An exciting area for further research would be to study how exposure to healthy relationship education may contribute to relationship quality with others and with God. Longitudinal research that follows young adults into adulthood, measuring correlations between relational and spiritual health, is an additional area for further exploration. Drawing from our results, research needs to examine how the rapid changes in relationships with others and God during college have lasting impact on adult adjustment and development. Future research would also need to examine how the demographic characteristics of students correlate with relational outcomes. Examining how students' backgrounds interplay with key interpersonal adjustment and developmental outcomes will help higher education practitioners and researchers understand and practically target key factors that may facilitate optimum development. 

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