

Religion and Ties Between Adult Children and Their Parents

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Objectives. This study examined whether religious adults (measured by the frequency of attendance at religious services) report more extensive ties with their parents.

Method. Using data from the National Survey of Families and Households ($N = 9,002$), a series of bivariate and multivariate regression models were tested. Several dimensions of adult children's relationships with their parents were considered including relationship quality, frequency of contact, providing care to parents, and providing other assistance.

Results. Adult children who attended religious services more frequently were significantly more likely to provide assistance to parents, and they reported higher quality relationships and more frequent contact with both their fathers and mothers. Results were similar for sons and daughters, and for younger and older adult children.

Discussion. A better understanding of what motivates and fosters strong ties between adult children and their parents is vitally important given the "graying" of America and the consequences of such ties for the health and well-being of both generations. Religion is only one of many factors associated with adult children's ties to parents, and this association is generally modest, but it is an important factor that should be given greater attention in future research.

Key Words: Family sociology—Intergenerational relations—Religion/spirituality.

A growing body of research has examined the influence of religion on parent-child relationships and suggests that religion may foster more frequent and positive ties between family members (see King, 2010; Mahoney, 2010, for recent reviews). Most of these studies, however, are limited to considering the parent-child relationship when children are young. Likewise, there is a large body of research examining the correlates of adult children's assistance and ties to parents, but studies rarely consider the role that religion may play in these relationships (Myers, 2004). Consequently, we know little regarding the association between religion and ties between adult children and their aging parents.

In this study, we examine whether religious adults (as measured by the frequency of attendance at religious services) report more extensive ties with their parents. Using nationally representative data from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), we consider several dimensions of adult children's relationships with their parents including relationship quality, frequency of contact, providing care to parents, and providing other types of assistance. An understanding of what motivates and fosters strong ties between adult children and their parents is crucial given the importance of such ties for parent's well-being in later life, and the important role that adult children play as a potential resource for impaired parents (Umberson, Pudrovska, & Reczek, 2010). Furthermore, the "graying" of America (Uhlenberg, 2005) necessitates a greater awareness of factors related to care provision and

strong family ties. The significant increase in the older population (more than 40 million U.S. adults were 65 or older by 2010; Howden & Meyer, 2011) has been accompanied by a decline in fertility that has resulted in aging parents being less likely to have multiple children to assist them.

There are several reasons to hypothesize that religious adults in general, and more specifically those who frequently attend religious services, might provide more assistance to, and report higher quality relationships with, their parents than less religious adults (King, 2010; Mahoney, 2010). Religious teachings and values emphasize and support the centrality of family life, the importance of positive family relationships, and a focus on the concerns and needs of others over the self (Ellison, 1992; Pearce & Axinn, 1998; Wuthnow, 1991). Religious institutions promote pro-family messages and norms supporting a greater sense of obligation to others through sermons, scriptural stories, religious publications, and other religious teachings. Frequent attendance at religious services increases an individual's exposure to religious doctrine and its pro-family messages, helping promote a belief in the importance of maintaining positive family relationships. Religious institutions also sponsor and support activities that bring family members together, providing family bonding experiences and promoting time together, potentially enhancing the quality and closeness of these relationships (Pearce & Axinn, 1998). In addition, individuals who participate in religious communities are surrounded by like-minded coreligionists who share similar norms regarding the importance of family

relationships and having obligations to others, which can also reinforce family-oriented behaviors, and even serve as a mechanism of social control, motivating individuals to act in socially desirable ways, including assisting parents.

Relatedly, religious individuals may sanctify family roles or relationships, infusing them with religious meaning that leads to placing a high priority on fostering close and involved relationships with parents (Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Murray-Swank, 2003; Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001). Thus, religious individuals, and those who frequently attend religious services, are involved in a culture that shapes their values and behaviors by emphasizing the importance of family relationships and a commitment to others that could encourage them to be actively involved with their parents (Wilcox, 2002).

Despite strong theoretical reasons to expect that religious adults might have more extensive ties with their parents, and growing empirical evidence that religion is associated with closer, higher quality parent-child relationships when children are young or during adolescence (King, 2010; Mahoney, 2010), there is only limited evidence that religion is associated with ties between adult children and their parents from the few studies that have examined this issue. The first study to explicitly test whether adult children's individual religiosity is associated with assistance to parents was conducted by Myers (2004) who used panel data from the Marital Instability over the Life Course study. The study began with a sample of married individuals and later included interviews with one of their adult children (mostly young adults; mean age = 28). Myers reported little influence of adult children's religiosity (affiliation, private religiosity, and public religiosity including religious service attendance) on providing assistance to parents, but found some limited evidence that assistance to married parents was greater when adult children were more similar to their parents in levels of religiosity or if they shared a denominational affiliation.

Using the same panel data, King (2010) examined how the religiousness (indicated by the perception of how much religious beliefs influenced daily life) of fathers and their adult child were associated with the child's report of father-child relationship quality. Although both the father's religiousness and the adult child's religiousness were positively correlated with relationship quality, only the father's level of religiousness remained significant in multivariate models. A measure of father-child similarity in religiousness was unrelated to relationship quality.

Further evidence of the link between religiosity and affective relationship quality, but with a focus on the mother-child relationship, is provided by Pearce and Axinn (1998). Drawing on a panel study of white families in the Detroit metropolitan area, they found that the mother's view of the importance of religion predicted both the mother and the child's perception of the quality of the mother-child relationship when the child was 23 years old. The mother's

religious service attendance only predicted the mother's, but not the child's perception of relationship quality, and only the importance of religion remained significant when included in models with religious attendance. The mother's denominational affiliation had no effect on either mother or child reports of relationship quality. Although this study did not assess the influence of the child's individual religiousness separately, measures of mother-child similarity on these religious indicators were examined. Results indicated that, in addition to the significant effect of the mother's view of the importance of religion, mother-child congruence in the importance of religion predicted relationship quality (both mother and child reports), and congruence in religious service attendance predicted (only) mother's report of relationship quality. Mother-child congruence in affiliation had no influence on relationship quality.

Although religion was not the primary focus of the study, a few studies examining parent-adult child relationships have included measures such as religious service attendance as one of the predictor variables. These studies also provide mixed evidence as to the association between religion and parent-adult child ties. For example, using the second wave of the NSFH to examine adult children's relationships with their elderly (65+) mothers, Sechrist, Sutor, Henderson, Cline, and Steinhour (2007) found the child's religious attendance to be significantly associated with closeness to mothers, but not with contact. In another study using the NSFH, Aquilino (1999) focused on a subset of parent-young adult pairs to compare Wave 2 parent and child reports of closeness and conflict in the relationship and examine their correlates. The child's religious service attendance was associated with both child and parent reports of greater closeness and less conflict, providing further evidence for a link between religiosity and relationship quality. It is important to note, however, that because these studies were primarily focused on issues other than the influence of religion, they tend to be based on more limited and less representative subsamples from the NSFH. For example, the parent-child pairs in Aquilino's (1999) study were selected based on parents who were primary respondents in Wave 1, who had a focal child 12-18 years old living with them, and who were also interviewed in Wave 2 along with these focal children (then aged 18-24). Although this sample was appropriate for a study concerned with comparing parent and child reports, it is more limited in providing a strong test of the link between religion and parent-child ties.

The present study expands the scope of this earlier research by using nationally representative data to examine the association between adult children's religiousness and multiple dimensions of parent-child ties. The limited research in this area has tended to focus on a single indicator of the parent-child relationship. By including multiple dimensions of parent-child ties, we can test whether adult children's religiousness is connected to parent-child ties

generally or only in specific situations. Our main hypothesis is that adult children who attend religious services more frequently will have more extensive ties with their parents: they will provide more care, provide more assistance, have more contact, and report higher quality relationships.

Although information is not available on the parent's religiousness, a proxy measure of parent-child congruence (whether the adult child ever changed religions since they were a child) is included because prior research suggests that it may also be important beyond the individual's own level of religiousness (Myers, 2004; Pearce & Axinn, 1998). Religious congruence may be an indicator of successful parental socialization and a basis for value consensus between parents and children that enhances ties between them, whereas religious differences may be a source of intergenerational tension or indicate a divergence in shared values that weakens parent-child ties (Mahoney, 2005; Sechrist, Sutor, Vargas, & Pillemer, 2011; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). We hypothesize that adult children who have changed religions since childhood will have less extensive ties with their parents.

In exploring the link between adult children's religiousness and ties to parents, we also consider other factors that could potentially confound or explain this association. Adult children could have more extensive ties with parents for reasons that have little to do with their religiousness. A number of demographic factors are known to be associated with both religiousness and ties between adult children and their parents and may account for any association between them. For example, women, and adults in better health, are more likely to attend religious services than men (Levin, Taylor, & Chatters, 1994), and those in poorer health (Musick & Worthen, 2010). Women and adult children in better health are also more likely to provide assistance to parents (Chesley & Poppie, 2009). It is important, therefore, to control for these other factors when examining the association between religiousness and parent-child ties. In addition to gender and health status, other relevant factors often associated with individual religious participation and patterns of intergenerational relationships and exchanges include the adult child's age (Myers, 2004; Smith, 2009), race/ethnicity (Ellison, Hummer, Burdette, & Benjamins, 2010; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2008), education level (Kalmijn, 2007; Stolzenberg, Blair-Loy, & Waite, 1995), marital status (Rossi, 2001; Stolzenberg et al., 1995), employment status (Roof, 1994; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2008), number of children and number of siblings (Kalmijn, 2007; Pearce, 2010), proximity to parents (Sarkisian, Gerena, & Gerstel, 2006; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2008), the parent's health (Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2008), and whether both parents are alive and still married to each other (Kalmijn, 2007; Myers, 2004).

The association between religiousness and ties between adult children and their parents may also be mediated through other mechanisms. One mechanism that we explore

is the role of filial norms. Religious adults may hold stronger norms regarding the expectation that adult children should provide support to their parents (De Vries, Kalmijn, & Liefbroer, 2009), and these norms in turn could foster their involvement with parents (Gans, Silverstein, & Lowenstein, 2009; Silverstein, Parrott, & Bengtson, 1995). We therefore hypothesize that filial norms will mediate the relationship between adult children's religious service attendance and their ties with parents.

We also explore several factors that may interact with religiousness in patterning adult child-parent ties including the adult children's gender and age, and whether they ever changed religions since they were a child. We test whether the association between religious service attendance and ties with parents differs by gender because some scholars have speculated that this association might be stronger for women (Myers, 2004; Sechrist et al., 2011). Women are more religious, attend religious services more frequently, and are guided more by their religious beliefs (Argue, Johnson, & White, 1999; Levin et al., 1994; Myers, 2004). At the same time, religion promotes the type of characteristic in parent-child relationships, such as warmth and affection, that is thought to motivate giving by women more so than by men (Myers, 2004; Silverstein et al., 1995). In one study that directly examined such gender differences, Myers (2004) found that for daughters, but not sons, higher levels of public religion were associated with providing more assistance to married parents. Although this constitutes rather limited evidence, the gendered nature of religion and intergenerational ties suggest a more extensive test of this hypothesis regarding a stronger association of religion for women is warranted.

We also test whether the link between religious service attendance and parent-child ties differs by the adult child's age. Older adults are more religious than their younger counterparts (Argue et al., 1999), and because parental needs for assistance increase with age, the association between religious service attendance and parent-child ties may be stronger for older adult children than younger adult children. Prior research has not directly examined this possibility, and many studies have focused on a more narrow age range of parents or adult children than the current study. By including all adult children with living parents, the current study is more representative of the full range of parent-child relationships and will allow for an exploration of whether the link between religion and parent-child ties appears to vary by child age.

A final interaction test examines whether the association between religious service attendance and parent-child ties depends on whether adult children report ever having changed religions since childhood. As discussed previously, both individual religiousness and religious congruence may foster stronger parent-child ties. It may also be the case, however, that the positive influence of individual religiousness on parent-child ties may be even stronger

or further enhanced when both generations share a similar religious culture. When parents and children diverge on religious beliefs or traditions, and children are actively involved in their new faith communities, this situation may serve as a source of tension that weakens the salience of a child's religiosity on ties to parents or leads children to distance themselves from parents (Mahoney, 2005). We therefore hypothesize that the association between religious service attendance and parent-child ties will be weaker among adult children who have changed religions since childhood.

METHOD

Data

Data come from the first wave of the NSFH, a nationally representative probability sample of 13,007 adults in U.S. households in 1987–1988 (see Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988, for a detailed description of the data). Whereas much prior research focuses on single indicators of the parent-child relationship, the NSFH contains multiple measures of the relationship between adult children and older parents. Although measures of religiousness are more limited, frequency of attendance at religious services is available, and prior research suggests that this indicator of religiousness is an important one that is associated with various aspects of intergenerational ties (King & Elder, 1999) and individual well-being (Lim & Putnam, 2010).

We first selected respondents who reported having at least one living parent ($n = 9,002$). Some of the questions regarding ties to parents refer to parents in general and for these analyses, we included all respondents who had at least one living parent. Other questions refer specifically to ties with mothers and ties with fathers, and these analyses were based on the subset of respondents who had a living mother ($n = 8,312$) or had a living father ($n = 6,282$) as appropriate (5,592 respondents reported that both parents were still alive). As discussed later, sample sizes for analyses further varied by whether respondents were coresiding with parents because some questions were only asked about parents who lived outside the household, whereas others were asked regardless of coresidence.

Measures

Dependent variables.—Six measures of adult child-parent ties were examined. Help to parents was assessed with two measures. Providing *care* in the past year to an ill or disabled parent who lives outside the household is a dichotomous indicator (1 = *yes*, 0 = *no*). Providing *assistance* to parents is the average of three items regarding whether the respondent gave noncoresiding parents help in the past month with (a) housework, (b) transportation, or (c) home or car repairs (1 = *yes*, 0 = *no*). Relationships with

fathers were assessed with two measures. Relationship *quality* is a single item that asked respondents to describe their relationship with their father (1 = *very poor*, 7 = *excellent*). *Contact* is the average of two items regarding how often in the past year they saw their father and how often they communicated by phone or letter (1 = *not at all*, 6 = *several times a week*). The same two measures were available for relationships with mothers.

The analysis sample for care and assistance included adult children who had at least one noncoresiding living parent ($n = 8,405$). The analysis samples for contact with fathers ($n = 5,874$) and contact with mothers ($n = 7,556$) included adult children who had a living, noncoresiding father, or mother, respectively. The analysis samples for relationship quality with fathers ($n = 6,282$) and mothers ($n = 8,312$) included all adult children with living parents, regardless of coresidence.

Independent variables.—*Religious service attendance* is a measure of how often the adult child attended religious services (1 = *never*, 5 = *more than once a week*). *Changed religions*, a proxy measure of parent-child religious congruence, is a dichotomous indicator of whether the adult child ever changed religions since they were a child (1 = *yes*, 0 = *no*).

Control and mediating variables.—*Filial norms* is the average of two items regarding how much respondents agreed that kids should let aging parents live with them, and that kids should give financial help to aging parents (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Other characteristics of the adult child respondent included their age (in years), gender (1 = *female*, 0 = *male*), race/ethnicity (represented by dummy variables for black, Hispanic, and other, with white serving as the omitted comparison group), education (represented by dummy variables for less than high school, some college, and bachelor's degree or more, with high school serving as the omitted comparison group), current employment status (1 = *working*, 0 = *not working*), health (1 = *very poor*, 5 = *excellent*), marital status (represented by dummy variables for divorced or separated, widowed, and never married, with married serving as the omitted comparison group), number of living siblings, and the presence of children in their household (represented by dummy variables for kids younger than 5 in household, and only kids ages 5–18 in household, with no kids in household serving as the omitted comparison group).

Parent characteristics (as reported for each living parent by the child respondent) included their health (1 = *very poor*, 5 = *excellent*), and distance from the child's household (in miles, logged). For respondents who had two living parents, the models examining help to parents used the health of the parent in poorer health. Likewise, distance was averaged for mothers and fathers (if they differed) for these analyses if both were alive. For the remaining parent-specific models

(e.g., contact with fathers), the health and distance of that parent were used. A set of dummy variables capture which parents the respondent had that were still living and, if both were alive, whether they were still married to each other: both parents alive and married to each other (omitted comparison group), both parents alive but not married to each other, only mother is alive, only father is alive. Table 1 displays the sample descriptives for variables in the analyses.

Analytic Strategy

The relationship between adult children's attendance at religious services and ties to their parents was examined in a bivariate and multivariate regression framework (ordinary least squares regression was employed for all outcomes except for providing care to a parent, a dichotomous outcome that was examined with logistic regression). Results presented from the regression models are based on unweighted data (descriptive statistics are weighted). Adjusting the models (standard errors) for design effects (clustering, stratification, and weighting) yielded similar results (Johnson & Elliott, 1998). Multiple imputation procedures were employed to handle missing data using the ICE program in Stata (Stata Corporation, 2007). Five imputations were conducted. Missing data were rare for most of the variables in the analyses, with fewer than 5% missing on each of the independent variables and fewer than 3% missing on the dependent variables except for assistance to parents, where 5%–6% of the cases were missing on each of the three individual indicators. Preliminary analyses confirmed that all control and mediating variables were significantly correlated with adult children's attendance at religious services, with the one exception of parents' health.

Several alternative specifications of religious service attendance (e.g., continuous, curvilinear, dichotomous, categorical) were examined to determine the best way to represent this variable in the regression models. Results indicated a nonlinear relationship existed between religious service attendance and five of the six outcomes that was best represented by including a squared term along with the continuous attendance variable. In contrast, a linear relationship existed between attendance and providing care, so only the continuous attendance variable, and not the squared term, was included in the models for this outcome. In creating the squared term, and for its use in the regression analyses, the religious service attendance variable was standardized at its mean to reduce the correlation between attendance and attendance squared (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003).

RESULTS

The findings presented in Table 2 provide evidence for the hypothesis that religious adults have more extensive ties with their parents. The bivariate models (Model 1) indicated that adult children who attended religious services

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics—Weighted Means (Standard Errors) or Percentages

Dependent variables	
Provides care ^a (%)	5
Provides assistance ^a (0–1)	0.17 (0.00)
Relationship quality with fathers ^b (1–7)	5.35 (0.03)
Contact with fathers ^c (1–6)	3.97 (0.03)
Relationship quality with mothers ^d (1–7)	5.86 (0.02)
Contact with mothers ^e (1–6)	4.31 (0.03)
Child characteristics ^f	
Religious service attendance	2.7 (0.03)
Never attends (%)	23
1–11 times/year (%)	26
1–3 times/month (%)	18
1 time/week (%)	24
More than once/week (%)	9
Changed religions (%)	25
Filial norms (1–5)	3.74 (0.01)
Age (16–76)	35.38 (0.18)
Female (%)	53
Race (%)	
White	79
Black	11
Hispanic	8
Other	2
Education (%)	
Less than high school	15
High school	38
Some college	25
College degree or more	22
Currently working (%)	76
Health (1–5)	4.12 (0.01)
Marital status (%)	
Married	60
Divorced	11
Widowed	2
Never married	27
Number of siblings	2.89 (0.05)
Presence of kids in household (%)	
No kids	42
Kids under 5 years	26
Kids 5–18 years	32
Parent characteristics	
Father's health ^b (1–5)	3.59 (0.02)
Mother's health ^d (1–5)	3.6 (0.02)
Distance to fathers (log) ^b (0–9.21)	2.51 (0.11)
Distance to mothers (log) ^d (0–9.21)	2.01 (0.10)
Marital status ^a (%)	
Both alive, married to each other	45
Both alive, not married	14
Only mother alive	31
Only father alive	7

Notes. ^aSubset of respondents who had at least one noncoresiding living parent, $n = 8,405$ (of these 8,405, 469 provided care and 2,571 provided at least one type of assistance [69% no assistance, 17% one type, 10% two types, 4% all three types of assistance]).

^bSubset of respondents who had a living father, $n = 6,282$.

^cSubset of respondents who had a noncoresiding living father, $n = 5,874$.

^dSubset of respondents who had a living mother, $n = 8,312$.

^eSubset of respondents who had a noncoresiding living mother, $n = 7,556$.

^fFull analytic sample of respondents who had at least one living parent, $n = 9,002$.

Table 2. Ties Between Adult Children and Their Parents Predicted by Child's Attendance (Unstandardized Regression Coefficients)

	Help to parents				Relationship with fathers				Relationship with mothers			
	Provides care ^a		Provides assistance		Quality		Contact		Quality		Contact	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Child characteristics												
Religious service attendance	0.10** (0.04)	0.03 (0.04)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.15*** (0.02)	0.06*** (0.02)	0.12*** (0.02)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.10*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.10*** (0.01)	0.07*** (0.01)
Religious attendance squared	—	—	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.04** (0.02)	-0.03* (0.01)	-0.07*** (0.01)	-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.02* (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)	-0.03*** (0.01)
Changed religions		-0.02 (0.11)		-0.00 (0.01)		-0.18*** (0.05)		-0.05 (0.03)		-0.18*** (0.04)		-0.08** (0.03)
Norms help parents		0.21** (0.07)		0.01** (0.00)		0.14*** (0.03)		0.05** (0.02)		0.25*** (0.02)		0.11*** (0.01)
Age		0.03*** (0.01)		-0.00*** (0.00)		0.02*** (0.00)		-0.01*** (0.00)		0.01*** (0.00)		-0.01*** (0.00)
Female		0.57*** (0.12)		-0.01 (0.00)		-0.17*** (0.04)		0.15*** (0.03)		0.00 (0.03)		0.31*** (0.02)
Black ^b		-0.12 (0.15)		-0.06*** (0.01)		-0.03 (0.06)		-0.12** (0.04)		0.32*** (0.04)		0.07* (0.03)
Hispanic ^b		-0.41 (0.24)		-0.02 (0.01)		0.04 (0.08)		-0.12* (0.05)		0.11 (0.06)		-0.05 (0.04)
Other ^b		-0.00 (0.46)		0.02 (0.02)		0.16 (0.15)		-0.14 (0.10)		0.18 (0.12)		0.01 (0.08)
Less than high school ^c		-0.39* (0.16)		-0.05*** (0.01)		0.11 (0.07)		-0.16*** (0.05)		0.05 (0.05)		-0.19*** (0.03)
Some college ^c		0.01 (0.14)		0.02 (0.01)		-0.12* (0.05)		0.06 (0.03)		-0.13*** (0.04)		0.03 (0.03)
College degree or more ^c		0.32* (0.15)		0.03*** (0.01)		-0.08 (0.06)		0.03 (0.04)		-0.13** (0.04)		0.05 (0.03)
Currently working		-0.03 (0.12)		0.01 (0.01)		0.01 (0.05)		-0.03 (0.03)		-0.04 (0.04)		0.00 (0.03)
Health		0.11 (0.06)		0.01 (0.00)		0.06* (0.03)		-0.00 (0.02)		0.09*** (0.02)		0.03 (0.01)
Divorced ^d		-0.08 (0.13)		-0.03*** (0.01)		-0.18** (0.06)		-0.04 (0.04)		-0.22*** (0.04)		-0.07* (0.03)
Widowed ^d		0.11 (0.13)		-0.02 (0.02)		-0.14 (0.17)		0.13 (0.11)		-0.10 (0.10)		0.14* (0.07)
Never married ^d		0.26 (0.17)		-0.02* (0.01)		-0.25*** (0.06)		-0.10** (0.04)		-0.22*** (0.04)		-0.13*** (0.03)
No. of siblings		-0.00 (0.02)		-0.00* (0.00)		0.03*** (0.01)		-0.01* (0.01)		0.03*** (0.01)		-0.03*** (0.00)
No. of kids under 5 years ^c		-0.69*** (0.17)		-0.01 (0.01)		-0.08 (0.05)		-0.09** (0.04)		-0.21*** (0.04)		-0.09** (0.03)
No. of kids over 5 years ^c		-0.05 (0.12)		-0.02* (0.01)		-0.09 (0.05)		-0.15*** (0.04)		-0.21*** (0.04)		-0.12*** (0.03)

(Table 2 continues)

Table 2 (continued)

	Help to parents				Relationship with fathers				Relationship with mothers			
	Provides care ^a		Provides assistance		Quality		Contact		Quality		Contact	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Parent characteristics												
Health		-0.86*** (0.05)		-0.01* (0.00)		0.45*** (0.02)		0.15*** (0.02)		0.30*** (0.02)		0.09*** (0.01)
Distance (log)		-0.21*** (0.02)		-0.03*** (0.00)		-0.03*** (0.01)		-0.31*** (0.01)		-0.02*** (0.00)		-0.32*** (0.00)
Both alive, not married ^f		-0.05 (0.18)		-0.01 (0.01)		-1.41*** (0.05)		-1.27*** (0.04)		-0.37*** (0.04)		-0.28*** (0.03)
Only mother alive ^f		0.55*** (0.13)		-0.00 (0.01)		—		—		-0.11** (0.04)		-0.06* (0.03)
Only father alive ^f		0.56** (0.19)		-0.03** (0.01)		-0.48*** (0.07)		-0.61*** (0.05)		—		—
Constant	-2.84*** (0.05)	-2.60*** (0.51)	0.18*** (0.00)	0.35*** (0.03)	5.36*** (0.03)	3.03*** (0.21)	4.10*** (0.03)	5.28*** (0.14)	5.93*** (0.02)	3.52*** (0.16)	4.50*** (0.02)	5.26*** (0.12)
R ²			0.01	0.12	0.01	0.24	0.01	0.55	0.01	0.11	0.01	0.51
N	8,405	8,405	8,405	8,405	6,282	6,282	5,874	5,874	8,312	8,312	7,556	7,556

Notes. ^aLogistic regression (all other regressions are ordinary least squares); 469 respondents provided care.

^bWhite is reference category.

^cHigh school is reference category.

^dMarried is reference category.

^eNo. of kids is reference category.

^fBoth parents alive and married to each other is reference category.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$; standard errors in parentheses.

more frequently were significantly more likely to provide care to a parent outside the household, provide other types of assistance to parents, report higher quality relationships with fathers and mothers, and have more frequent contact with both parents. The addition of controls and mediating factors often reduced the magnitude of these associations although all but one (provide care) remained significant in the full multivariate models (Model 2).

The significance of the religious attendance quadratic term for five of the outcomes indicated that more frequent attendance was associated with increasing levels of assistance, contact, and relationship quality only up to a point, after which even higher levels of attendance were not associated with any additional increase in levels of assistance, contact, or quality.

Intermediate models in which different sets of controls and the mediating variable, filial norms, were introduced were also estimated. We present only the final full model in Table 2 because the substantive conclusions from these intermediate models remained the same. These intermediate models revealed that controlling for age had the strongest influence in reducing the magnitude of the religious service attendance coefficient on providing care to a parent. Older children (who generally had older parents) were significantly more likely to be providing care to a parent, and they were also significantly more likely to attend religious services. Controlling for whether the parents were still married to each other was particularly influential in reducing the magnitude of the religious service attendance coefficient on relationships with fathers. Frequent attenders were more likely to have parents who were still married to each other and this characteristic was significantly associated with having better quality relationships and more contact with fathers (consistent with prior research on the negative impact of divorce for relationships between adult children and their fathers; see Kalmijn, 2007). It was the combination of a number of control variables that reduced the magnitude of the religious service attendance coefficient on relationships with mothers, although gender played a role in the model for contact with mothers. Daughters had more contact with their mothers than sons and were also more frequent religious service attenders.

An additional series of robustness checks were conducted for providing care to a parent and providing other types of assistance (tables not shown; all tables referred to but not shown are available from the first author upon request) because these two kinds of parental ties are most relevant for families where parents are in poorer health, and one might only expect a relationship between religious service attendance and providing care or assistance among individuals with parents who are in need of care or assistance. Models that limited the sample to respondents who had parents in poorer health were tested. We first dropped respondents whose "sickest" parent was rated good or excellent on health and retained those rated very poor, poor,

or fair. Another set of models further restricted the sample to respondents who indicated that their parent was in very poor or poor health. These results were similar (in terms of magnitude and significance) to those reported when using the entire sample (as shown in Table 2) with attendance significantly associated with providing care in the bivariate model but no longer significant in the multivariate model, and attendance significant in both the bivariate and multivariate models for providing assistance. As a final robustness test, an interaction term between attendance and parent health was added to these models to test whether the association between attendance and providing care or assistance was stronger for individuals who had sicker parents. The interaction terms were not significant.

Little evidence was found for the hypothesis that filial norms would explain or mediate the relationship between religious service attendance and ties to parents. The addition of this variable to the models had little influence on the attendance coefficient, although it was a significant predictor in its own right. Although positively correlated ($r = .11$), both frequent religious service attendance and holding stronger filial norms of obligation to parents were independently associated with having more extensive ties to parents.

In our study, we view relationship quality as an important outcome variable in its own right (see also Pearce & Axinn, 1998) and as one of several dimensions of adult children's relationships with their parents. Some prior studies that have examined the predictors of adult children's provision of assistance to parents model relationship quality as a predictor of providing assistance and as a potential mediator of the link between religion and providing assistance (Myers, 2004). Therefore, we added the measure of relationship quality to the full models (Model 2) predicting assistance to parents (using the mean of relationship quality with mothers and relationship quality with fathers if both were alive), contact with fathers, and contact with mothers to test whether it mediated the remaining relationship between religious service attendance and these three outcomes (tables not shown). The addition of relationship quality had little influence on the attendance coefficient, suggesting that it does not explain the relationship between religious service attendance and these outcomes. Relationship quality was, however, a significant predictor of each of these behaviors (and of providing care to a parent outside the household; all at $p < .001$), indicating that adult children who had higher quality relationships with their parents provided more care and assistance and had more frequent contact with parents than those who reported weaker relationships (a finding consistent with Myers, 2004).

Partial support was found for the hypothesis that adult children who changed religions since childhood would have less extensive ties with their parents. Adult children who changed religions reported having lower quality relationships with both mothers and fathers, as well as less contact

with mothers. No differences were found, however, for contact with fathers, providing care, or providing assistance to parents.

Next, we tested whether the association between religious service attendance and ties with parents differed by the adult child's gender, age, or whether they reported ever having changed religions since childhood. Interaction terms between each of these three variables and religious service attendance (and the attendance quadratic term) were individually added to the full models (tables not shown). Interactions with age were tested in two different ways—with age (in years) as a continuous variable, and with age dichotomized into younger (under 35) and older (35+) adults. There were no significant interactions between attendance and the adult child's gender or age, indicating that the positive association between religious service attendance and ties to parents was similar for sons and daughters, and for younger and older adult children. (Two significant interactions involving the quadratic attendance term suggest that although religious service attendance is positively associated with ties to parents similarly for sons and daughters, and younger and older adult children, the functional form of this association varies by gender and age for certain ties. Specifically, although the association between attendance and father relationship quality is similarly positive and significant across gender, only among daughters does this association flatten out at higher levels of service attendance. Additionally, the association between religious service attendance and providing parental assistance is similarly positive and significant for younger and older adults, but this association exhibits a curvilinear form only among younger adult children.)

The interaction term for having changed religions reached significance for one outcome, assistance to parents ($p < .05$; results from this model are reported in Table 3). (Interactions with the quadratic attendance term were never significant.) Additional analyses that included estimating the model separately by whether the adult child changed religions revealed that religious service attendance was significantly associated with providing assistance to parents for children who had not changed religions. In contrast, for children who changed religions, religious service attendance had little association with assistance to parents with the notable exception of the very highest attenders (more than once a week) who provided the least assistance of all. These findings provide some evidence that the link between individual religiosity and parent-child ties is stronger when both generations share a religious culture and weaker when they do not. At the same time, however, the positive association between religious service attendance and both contact and relationship quality with parents did not significantly vary by whether adult children changed religions since childhood.

Overall, our results suggest that religious adults do have more extensive ties with their parents. At the same time, however, it should be noted that the differences in ties to

Table 3. Ties Between Adult Children and Their Parents Predicted by Child's Attendance, Interactions With Changed Religion (Unstandardized Regression Coefficients)

	Provides assistance
Child characteristics	
Religious service attendance	0.01*** (0.00)
Religious attendance squared	-0.01* (0.00)
Changed religions	0.01 (0.01)
Changed religions $\times$ attendance	-0.01* (0.01)
Changed religions $\times$ attendance squared	-0.00 (0.00)
Norms help parents	0.01** (0.00)
Age	-0.00*** (0.00)
Female	-0.01 (0.01)
Black ^a	-0.06*** (0.01)
Hispanic ^a	-0.02 (0.01)
Other ^a	0.02 (0.02)
Less than high school ^b	-0.05*** (0.01)
Some college ^b	0.01 (0.01)
College degree or more ^b	0.03*** (0.01)
Currently working	0.01 (0.01)
Health	0.01 (0.00)
Divorced ^c	-0.03*** (0.01)
Widowed ^c	-0.02 (0.02)
Never married ^c	-0.02* (0.01)
No. of siblings	-0.00* (0.00)
No. of kids under 5 years ^d	-0.01 (0.01)
No. of kids over 5 years ^d	-0.02* (0.01)
Parent characteristics	
Health	-0.01* (0.00)
Distance (log)	-0.03*** (0.00)
Both alive, not married ^e	-0.01 (0.01)
Only mother alive ^e	-0.00 (0.01)
Only father alive ^e	-0.03* (0.01)
Constant	0.35*** (0.03)
N	8,405

Notes. ^aWhite is reference category.

^bHigh school is reference category.

^cMarried is reference category.

^dNo. of kids is reference category.

^eBoth parents alive and married to each other is reference category.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$; standard errors in parentheses.

parents between adult children who attend religious services frequently and those who attend infrequently are modest. Table 4 provides a simple illustration of the magnitude of the differences in ties to parents by levels of religious service attendance. We selected a group of frequent attenders (those who attended at least once a week) to compare with nonattenders in order to illustrate the modest differences in ties to parents among those at both ends of the distribution on religious attendance, where differences might be expected to be largest. Whereas 6% of frequent attenders provided care for a parent outside the household, 4% of nonattenders had done so. Examining whether any assistance was given to parents on any of the three items assessed (housework, transportation, home/car repairs) revealed that 32% of frequent attenders gave assistance in at least one area compared with 27% of nonattenders. Turning to relationships with fathers, 37% of frequent attenders rated the relationship as excellent compared with 30%

Table 4. Differences in Ties Between Adult Children and Their Parents by Adult Children's Attendance at Religious Services

	Never attends religious services (23%)	Attends religious services at least once a week (33%)
Provided care to an ill or disabled parent outside the household	4%	6%
Provided at least some assistance to a parent ^a	27%	32%
Reports excellent relationship quality with fathers	30%	37%
At least weekly contact with fathers	28%	46%
Reports excellent relationship quality with mothers	42%	48%
At least weekly contact with mothers	44%	54%

Notes. Results are based on weighted data.

^aProvided at least one of three types of help to a parent in the past month (housework, transportation, or home/care repairs).

of nonattenders, and 46% of frequent attenders reported weekly contact compared with 28% of nonattenders. For relationships with mothers, 48% of frequent attenders rated the quality as excellent and 54% had weekly contact compared with 42% of nonattenders who rated the relationship as excellent and 44% had weekly contact.

DISCUSSION

The current study contributes to the growing body of research that has examined the influence of religion on early parent-child relationships and, only more recently, on parent-child relationships later in life (King, 2010). Results suggest that religious adults have more extensive ties with their aging parents. Using nationally representative data and examining several dimensions of parent-child ties, we found that adult children who attend religious services more frequently were significantly more likely to provide assistance to parents, and they reported higher quality relationships and more frequent contact with both their fathers and mothers, even after taking into account a host of factors related to both religiousness and parent-child ties. Results were similar for sons and daughters, and for younger and older adult children. It appears that the influence of religion in fostering early parent-child ties noted in prior research extends throughout the life course, influencing ties between adult children and their parents.

At the same time, the association between religious service attendance and adult children's ties with their parents was generally modest and should not be overstated, a conclusion consistent with prior studies of religion and intergenerational relationships (King, 2003; King & Elder, 1999; Pearce & Axinn, 1998). Religion is only one of many factors that are associated with adult children's ties with their parents, but one that should be given greater attention in future research on intergenerational relationships in later life. Much of the prior research on adult children's assistance and ties to parents focuses on the resources and

needs of each generation, but a fuller explanation of intergenerational ties also requires consideration of adult children's motivations to provide support to parents (Kohli & Kunemund, 2003).

Further research is needed to elucidate what it is about religious attendance that fosters ties between adult children and their parents, such as the relative importance of religious teachings, religious activities, and participation in religious networks. One factor that does not appear to explain the link between religious attendance and ties to parents is filial norms, in contrast to our hypothesis. Adult children who attend religious services more frequently did hold stronger norms regarding the expectation that adult children should provide support to their parents, but this did not explain why they had more extensive ties with their parents. Both religious attendance and filial norms were independently predictive of having more extensive ties with parents, suggesting that both serve as important motivations for adult children in decisions to assist parents and maintain positive relationships. Thus, both should be considered in future research.

Religiousness encompasses many dimensions, including values, beliefs, identities, practices, and other behaviors. A limitation of the current study was its reliance on a single indicator of individual religiousness, religious service attendance. Although attendance is an important indicator of religiosity, and one that is strongly correlated ($r > .60$) with many other religious indicators (e.g., perceived influence of religious beliefs on daily life, participation in church social activities, frequent prayer, and reading the Bible; see King, 2010), it does not fully capture or substitute for these other dimensions. Research on the influence of religion sometimes, but not always, finds differences depending on the measure of religion examined (King, 2003, 2010). For example, Pearce and Axinn (1998) found that the perceived importance of religion was more predictive of mother-child relationship quality than religious service attendance, suggesting that our study may be underestimating the association between religiousness and adult children's ties with their parents. Certainly, future research would benefit from considering multiple dimensions of religiousness to identify which are most salient for ties between adult children and their parents.

Our study was also limited by the lack of information regarding the parent's religiousness and its potential role in fostering parent-child ties. Our single proxy measure of parent-child congruence, whether the adult child ever changed religions since childhood, provided partial support for our hypothesis that adult children who changed religions would have less extensive ties with their parents. Compared with adult children who did not change religions, those who changed religions reported having lower quality relationships with both mothers and fathers, as well as less contact with mothers, but no differences were found for contact with fathers, providing care, or providing assistance to parents. A more comprehensive measure of parent-child congruence

and other information about parental religiousness might have provided additional insight into the role of religion in fostering parent-child ties that should be explored in future research. The finding that the association between the adult child's religious service attendance and providing assistance to parents was stronger and more positive when adult children had not changed religions since childhood further suggests the importance of considering the larger religious culture of both parents and children, the extent to which it is shared or not, and how strongly parents and children are attached to their shared or divergent religious faiths.

Although this study included a broader array of measures of adult children's ties to parents than previous studies of religious influences on adult child-parent relationships, future research should consider additional measures to gain a better understanding of the extent to which religion influences such ties. With the exception of relationship quality, the measures in this study were limited to assessing ties between noncoresiding adult children and their parents. Future research should consider parent-child ties in both coresiding and noncoresiding families to represent the full range of family living arrangements in the population.

Longitudinal data would also be beneficial for examining how religion influences intergenerational relationships over time and the entire life course, particularly as parents continue to age and may need more assistance. Only 5.5% ($n = 469$) of the adult children in our study had provided care to a parent outside the household in the prior year, which may be one reason that religion was less salient for this dimension of parent-child ties. Future research in this area would benefit from the collection of new data that would allow the examination of parent-adult child relationships as they are unfolding today, and during the graying of America in coming decades. Evidence suggests that religious service attendance has declined across recent cohorts (Schwadel, 2011). Adults from today's youngest cohorts are not represented in our sample. Although this does not mean that the association between religious service attendance and parent-child ties would necessarily change for today's younger adults, this possibility should be examined in future research.

A better understanding of what motivates and fosters strong ties between adult children and their parents is vitally important given the consequences of such ties for the health and well-being of both generations. This study makes an important contribution in furthering our understanding in this area and suggests that religion is one important motivating factor associated with stronger ties between adult children and their aging parents.

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