

Interfaith friendships among emerging adulthood in Surabaya: The role of tolerance and stigma consciousness

Nicolas Valentino Fonda, Darmawan Muttaqin

Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Surabaya, Indonesia
Corresponding Author: darmawan.muttaqin@staff.ubaya.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Forming quality interfaith friendships is not impossible. Additionally, our society has become accustomed to differences. However, a clear explanation for the difficulty of forming such friendships has yet to be established. This study aimed to investigate the influence of tolerance and stigma consciousness on the quality of interfaith friendships. The research involved 400 respondents aged 18-25, comprising 200 Muslim respondents with at least one non-Muslim friend and 200 non-Muslim respondents with at least one Muslim friend. The quality of friendship was evaluated using the McGill Friendship Questionnaire (MFQ), while tolerance and stigma consciousness were measured using the Tolerance Index Questionnaire (TI) and Stigma Consciousness Questionnaire (SCQ), respectively. Multiple regression analysis was utilized to test the research hypothesis. The study results indicate that tolerance and stigma consciousness are significant factors in determining the quality of interfaith friendships. Individuals with tolerance and low levels of stigma consciousness are more likely to form quality interfaith friendships.

Introduction

Friendship has been considered important throughout history, including in the current urban era, as humans are social creatures and require interaction with others, particularly peers. Friendship relations can help individuals develop socially (Tesch, 1983) and understand the constantly changing urban situation (Kathiravelu & Bunnell, 2017). Previous studies have shown that friendship relations can also encourage individuals to be open to others (Berndt, 2002) and to practice building intimate relationships (Corsano et al., 2017). Additionally, friendship relations can aid individuals in preparing for adulthood (Aryanti, 2014) by fostering independence, regardless of family involvement (Flynn et al., 2017), and can prevent various psychological problems, such as stress (Schwartz-Mette & Smith, 2016) and depression (Tandiono et al., 2020).

Generally, friendship relations are considered beneficial for individuals involved in them. These benefits include stimulating the formation of friendships, mutual assistance, intimacy, loyal relationships, self-validation, and emotional security (Mendelson & Aboud, 1999). These benefits can be experienced when friendship relations have a certain level of quality. Friendship benefits are used in a measurement tool, with the principle that the higher the score, the higher the quality of the individual's friendship (Mendelson & Aboud, 1999). Other indicators of high-quality friendship include supportive attitudes, reciprocal interaction,

minimal conflict (Parker & Asher, 1993), and feelings of security and closeness during time spent together (Bukowski et al., 1994).

Friendship relations are a unique and complex phenomenon. Researchers have not found a definitive explanation for their formation (Bunnell, 2017; Parker & Asher, 1993; Policarpo, 2015; Wicaksono & Adiyanti, 2019). Friendship may arise from a single point of similarity, even if the individuals involved have yet to derive any tangible benefits from the relationship. This phenomenon is possible because individuals interact with others to obtain something, whether it be tangible or intangible, such as a sense of mutual trust (Lambe et al., 2001; Lioukas & Reuer, 2015). From the outset, factors such as geography, hobbies, interests, and even favorite foods significantly formed friendship relations in daily life. However, when individuals enter adolescence, they begin to have abstract and idealistic thoughts, and certain criteria are considered when choosing friends (Baharun et al., 2016; Kazi & Galanaki, 2020). These criteria are the accumulation of experiences and socialization from the environment, which shape new standards of similarity in choosing friends. Religion can be a determining factor in forming friendship relations, and society generally prefers to interact and be friends with individuals with relatively similar backgrounds (Rubin et al., 2008). This phenomenon is often illustrated as a "fishbowl" to describe how individuals are born, grow, spend time, and interact with others who are relatively similar to themselves (Van Der Walt, 2014). This illustration reinforces the importance of similarity as a key factor in forming relationships (Myers & Twenge, 2019).

Religious similarity may be a factor to consider in forming friendship relationships. However, interactions between individuals of different religions in urban settings cannot be avoided, whether through education or proximity (Yulianto & Tohari, 2019). Thus, it is possible for individuals to form friendships across religions. Through a community psychology approach, interfaith friendships can bridge religious differences through meaningful interpersonal relationships (McCormack, 2013). These types of friendships are important in creating an inclusive society and can offer insights that deepen individual religious beliefs (Pschaida, 2018). Despite the significant benefits of interfaith friendships, individual involvement in such relationships still tends to be low (Yahya & Boag, 2014). This situation may be due to concerns when befriending individuals of different religions or a lack of opportunities to interact with them (Lioukas & Reuer, 2015). Furthermore, conflicts between religions in society can lead to misunderstandings of religious differences. Consequently, people may feel uncomfortable and keep their distance, challenging establishing interfaith friendships (Burhani, 2011).

Despite the challenges in establishing interfaith friendships, the enthusiasm to create a more inclusive Indonesian society remains strong. Various groups, such as educators, community leaders, and the government, continuously promote tolerance through different approaches (Agung, 2017; Masamah & Zamhari, 2016; Setiawan, 2017). From the time individuals receive a formal education, they are equipped with an understanding of and character education related to tolerance (Setiadi, 2016). These efforts encourage individuals to accept and appreciate differences among individuals and groups in daily life (Maemunah, 2018; Meiza, 2018). The objective is for tolerant individuals to display behaviors oriented towards kindness and to provide warmth regardless of personal and group backgrounds (Budiman et al., 2021). However, tolerance related attitudes and behaviors are difficult to internalize if individuals lack a tolerance character. Furthermore, tolerant individuals can exhibit tolerant personality traits and show respect towards social and ethnic differences (Sztejnberg & Jasiński, 2018).

Individuals' tolerance can guide attitudes and behaviors of mutual respect and appreciation in interfaith friendships. However, it is undeniable that individuals consider

other factors when establishing such friendships, one of which is stigma consciousness. This consciousness enables individuals to evaluate themselves and potential friends subjectively before establishing interfaith friendships (Major & O'Brien, 2005). The concept of stigma consciousness is related to the mechanism of thinking in meta-prejudice, which allows individuals to avoid members of other groups when they think that those members do not like them or when they think that members of their group do not like members of other groups (Gordijn, 2014; Putra, 2016; Putra & Sukabdi, 2020). Furthermore, stigma consciousness can be defined as an individual's judgment that arises from ignorance and a mistaken understanding of other groups (Syafriani & Fitriani, 2020). This consciousness can arise from norms that are believed and categorized within the structure of society (Usraleli et al., 2020). Individuals who internalize certain stigmas tend to reject and discriminate against other groups (Lubis et al., 2016; Usraleli et al., 2020). The stigma consciousness regarding interfaith friendships that develop in society can cause individuals to worry about problems that may arise before and during the establishment of such friendships. For example, individuals may believe their religious group dislikes or have negative views toward other religious groups, and vice versa. As a result, individuals may choose not to establish interfaith friendships.

Based on the explanation above, interfaith friendships have a unique dynamic compared to friendships in general. However, the dynamics of interfaith friendships have yet to be thoroughly explained, particularly regarding the factors determining friendship quality. Nonetheless, high-quality interfaith friendships can be an asset in fostering a peaceful and harmonious society regardless of religious background. Therefore, this study aimed to contribute to the understanding of the quality of interfaith friendships in terms of attitudes of tolerance and stigma consciousness. This study focuses on interfaith friendships between individuals who practice Islam and those who practice non-Islamic religions in Surabaya.

Method

Research Design

This study was conducted using a quantitative survey method with a cross-sectional design. This study has obtained ethical clearance approval from the Universitas Surabaya Research Ethics Committee with the number 84/KE/VI/2022.

Participants

The study participants were 400 emerging adults in Surabaya aged 18-25 ($M = 20.56$, $SD = 1.308$), consisting of 200 Muslims and 200 non-Muslims. The participant criteria used in this study were male and female aged 18-25 years old, currently studying in Surabaya, Muslim with at least one non-Muslim friend, or non-Muslim with at least one Muslim friend. Data were collected from July to September 2022 using the quota sampling technique, which determined an equal number of Muslim and non-Muslim participants, and convenience sampling, which spread the research information through social media. If the participants agreed to participate in the study, they would be asked to fill in informed consent and online questionnaires. The questionnaire-filling process on Google Forms used the "required" feature in each statement to ensure that the participant's response was fully completed. Based on the study, it was found that there were 253 female participants (63.25%) and 147 male participants (36.75%). The duration of the participants' friendship ranged from 1-180 months ($M = 26.42$, $SD = 25.800$), with the majority of friendship relationships (77.25%) established due to meeting in educational institutions.

Instruments

The McGill Friendship Questionnaire (Mendelson & Aboud, 1999) is a 30-item questionnaire used to measure the quality of friendships. The MFQ consists of six dimensions: stimulating companionship (5 items, e.g., "My friend has interesting thoughts or ideas to do."), help (5 items, e.g., "My friend helps me with something."), intimacy (5 items, e.g., "My friend knows when I'm upset."), reliable alliance (5 items, e.g., "My friend wants to stay friends even if we argue."), self-validation (5 items, e.g., "My friend praises me when I do something well."), and emotional security (5 items, e.g., "My friend makes me feel better when I'm scared."). Participants responded using a 9-point scale ranging from 0 (never) to 8 (always). The MFQ demonstrated high reliability with a coefficient of .991 (corrected item-total correlation = .814 – .926) in this study. The MFQ used in this study has been adapted into Indonesian by previous researchers (Mahirah & Muttaqin, 2022; Putri & Muttaqin, 2022).

The Tolerance Index Questionnaire (Sztejnberg & Jasiński, 2018) measures general attitudes toward tolerance. It consists of 22 items that cover three dimensions: ethnic tolerance (7 items, e.g., "Minority ethnic groups would be treated better if they changed their behavior"), social tolerance (8 items, e.g., "All forms of religious beliefs have the right to exist"), and personality trait (7 items, e.g., "I want to become more tolerant towards others"). Responses to the TI are rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 6 (strongly disagree). In this study, the TI demonstrated high reliability with a coefficient of .894 (corrected item-total correlation = .204 – .573). The TI was adapted to Indonesian using the back-translation method, which involved two translators from English to Indonesian, two reviewers, and two translators from Indonesian to English.

The Stigma Consciousness Questionnaire (Pinel, 1999) was used in this study to measure participants' stigma consciousness related to religion. The items of the SCQ were adapted to the context of the study. The SCQ is a unidimensional measure that consists of 10 items, for example, "I feel that people judge my behavior based on my religion when I interact with individuals of other religions." The SCQ responses use a 7-point scale, ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). After eliminating three items with relatively very low scores of CITC, the SCQ had a reliability coefficient of .892 (corrected item-total correlation = .477 – .827). The SCQ was adapted to Indonesian using the back-translation method, which involved two translators from English to Indonesian, two reviewers, and two translators from Indonesian to English.

Data Analysis

The hypotheses were tested for the role of stigma consciousness and tolerance on friendship quality using IBM SPSS version 26. Multiple regression analysis was used to test the research hypotheses. The criterion variable in this study is friendship quality, while the predictor variables are tolerance and stigma consciousness. A predictor variable can predict the criterion variable with a significance value of $< .05$.

Results

The descriptive statistics of the variables and the categorization results for tolerance, stigma consciousness, and friendship quality are reported in Table 1. In this study, participants had a friendship quality score ($M = 5.567$, $SD = 1.743$) that predominantly fell within the extremely high category ($N=178$; 44.50%). As for the stigma consciousness score ($M = 3.524$, $SD = 1.018$), it mostly fell within the extremely low category ($N=164$; 41.00%), while the

tolerance ($M = 3.880$, $SD = .669$) score was predominantly categorized as moderate or average ($N=227$; 56.75%).

Table 1

Descriptive and Category of Tolerance, Friendship Quality, and Stigma Consciousness

Variable	Mean	Range	SD	Frequency (Percentage)				
				Extremely Low	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Extremely High
FQ	5.567	1-8	1.743	25 (6.25%)	72 (18.00%)	52 (13.00%)	73 (18.25%)	178 (44.50%)
SC	3.524	1-7	1.018	164 (41.00%)	85 (21.25%)	77 (19.25%)	56 (14.00%)	18 (4.50%)
T	3.880	1-6	.669	5 (1.25%)	20 (5.00%)	227 (56.75%)	108 (27.00%)	40 (10.00%)

Note: FQ: Friendship Quality; SC: Stigma Consciousness; T: Tolerance

Both tolerance and stigma consciousness factors collectively predict friendship quality with an effective contribution of 46.1% ($F = 169.523$; $p = .001$; $p < .05$). Table 2 presents the regression analysis results of tolerance and stigma consciousness on friendship quality. In more detail, stigma consciousness contributes more to predicting the friendship quality with an effective contribution of 42.6% ($\beta = -.636$; $t = -16.441$; $p = .001$; $p < 0.05$) compared to tolerance, which only provides an effective contribution of 3.5% ($\beta = .113$; $t = 2.925$; $p = .004$; $p < 0.05$). Furthermore, tolerance has a positive role in friendship quality, while stigma consciousness has a negative role.

Table 2

The Regression of Tolerance and Stigma Consciousness on Friendship Quality

Predictor	R^2	B	β	t	p
T	.035	.295	.113	2.925	.004**
SC	.426	-.819	-.636	-16.441	.001**

Note: T: Tolerance; SC: Stigma Consciousness; *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Discussion

This study investigated how tolerance and stigma consciousness contribute to the quality of interfaith friendships among adolescents in Surabaya, Indonesia, particularly between Muslims and non-Muslims. Surabaya was chosen as it is one of the biggest cities in Indonesia, where individuals of different religions interact daily. The study revealed that the research participants predominantly fell into the moderate or average category for tolerance, the extremely low category for stigma consciousness, and the extremely high category for friendship quality. Furthermore, the findings showed that tolerance and stigma consciousness were significant predictors of the quality of interfaith friendships. However, these factors had different directions and strengths in predicting the quality of interfaith friendships. Specifically, individuals with high tolerance levels and low stigma consciousness will have high-quality interfaith friendships. Conversely, individuals with low levels of tolerance and high levels of stigma consciousness will have low-quality interfaith friendships. Additionally, the study indicated that stigma consciousness had a greater contribution than tolerance in predicting the quality of interfaith friendships.

These findings confirm that tolerance cannot be ignored in interfaith friendships, as they serve as the foundation for individuals to initiate interactions with those from different religious groups. Individuals with tolerance are characterized as people who do not pressure

others to change, respect one another, and are free from biased or subjective thinking. These characteristics further direct individuals to easily accept differences in interpersonal relations (Sztejnberg & Jasiński, 2018). Moreover, previous studies have shown that interfaith friendships can be established when individuals respect one another, are open to differences, consider each other's feelings, and are accustomed to doing activities together (Al-Gazali, 2022; Harmi, 2019; Rahmawati & Haryanto, 2020; Utami et al., 2021). These conditions can be considered indicators of an individual's readiness to respond to differences in their environment, including differences in religion (Sztejnberg & Jasiński, 2018). Additionally, one of the key elements of a healthy relationship is respecting the presence of others without imposing one's will (Berggren & Nilsson, 2015; Ghorba & Lestari, 2021).

Although tolerance can serve as the foundation for establishing interfaith friendships, stigma consciousness also plays an equally important role. If individuals have a high level of stigma consciousness, it can decrease their desire to establish interfaith friendships due to the possibility of misunderstandings towards other religions (Lubis et al., 2016; Willemse et al., 2021). Furthermore, if individuals receive various incorrect information about other religions, the possibility of having high stigma consciousness increases (Durupinar et al., 2016; Rauthmann et al., 2015). This condition may occur if individuals receive inaccurate information about other religions and are unwilling to verify the accuracy of that information through direct interaction. The information can then become a stigma that the individual believes (Lewis et al., 2006).

Notably, the study revealed participants to have an extremely low stigma consciousness. This finding suggests that people in Surabaya favor interfaith friendships and do not perceive any obstacles to establishing such relationships. This belief is reinforced by the assumption that individuals from their group or other groups do not have negative attitudes toward intergroup interactions (Gordijn, 2014; Putra, 2016; Putra & Sukabdi, 2020). Several factors may account for this situation. Firstly, Surabaya is recognized as a large and peaceful city in Indonesia despite its diverse ethnic, religious, and racial makeup (Nissa et al., 2022; Rosidah, 2019). This condition may have contributed to a society where people are accustomed to coexisting with others with different religious beliefs (Sofinadya & Warsono, 2022; Yulianto & Tohari, 2019). Consequently, individuals tend to identify themselves more broadly as a member of a group with general characteristics, such as being a resident of the city (Al-Gazali, 2022; Dvir-Gvirsman, 2019; Rahmah & Amaludin, 2021; Trepte & Loy, 2017). In addition, people tend to prioritize factors such as comfort and power in friendship relationships, which can give them a higher position in the social status hierarchy within their community or among their peers (Anggarani et al., 2022; Privado et al., 2019).

The second presumption about the relatively low stigma consciousness may be due to Indonesia, especially in Surabaya, individuals can interact with other religions in education and work contexts. Moreover, some researchers have explained that joint activities between groups can gradually reduce individuals' tendency to worry about stigma consciousness (Bazemore et al., 2010; Lewis et al., 2006). This phenomenon is because individuals can evaluate the truth of the stigma they hold when interacting with other groups (Clark et al., 2017). Additionally, interfaith friendships do not generate rejection and negative societal labels (Clark et al., 2017; Shigihara, 2018). This condition is also supported by the passive effect of the motto "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*" in Indonesia, which implies unity in diversity, and therefore, there is no discriminatory treatment when individuals establish interfaith friendships (Jacobs et al., 2017; Künkler & Lerner, 2016; Mulya & Aditomo, 2019).

The findings of this research have implications for interfaith friendships in Indonesia, particularly in Surabaya. Interfaith friendships can be formed when individuals have at least an average level of tolerance or relatively low stigma consciousness. Therefore, initiative

needs to be made to enhance tolerance as a foundation for building interfaith friendships that originate from within oneself. It is not only about focusing on improving tolerance alone; the efforts also need to consider changing existing stigma towards a more positive direction. Moreover, this research found that stigma consciousness contributes more significantly than tolerance in predicting the quality of interfaith friendships. One approach that can be considered is the relational approach. This approach fosters tolerance through positive activities that enable direct interactions between two or more groups. This approach focuses on developing tolerance and aims to change the existing stigma towards a more positive direction for each individual (Al-Gazali, 2022; Rahmawati & Haryanto, 2020). The hope is that individuals will form high-quality interfaith friendships based on their tolerance and the absence of stigma that disrupts interfaith friendships.

In the subsequent discussion, although this study provides new insights into interfaith friendships, it still has limitations. First, the study was conducted using a cross-sectional approach, which means it cannot explain changes in each variable over time. Second, this study employed a person-centered approach, which has yet to explain the relationships among variables among individuals who engage in interfaith friendships. Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to utilize more complex approaches such as the cross-lagged panel model and actor-partner interdependence model. Through the cross-lagged panel model approach, it is expected that the study can examine the longitudinal dynamics of interfaith friendships (Yang et al., 2023).

Conclusion

This study concludes that tolerance and stigma consciousness play a role in predicting the quality of interfaith friendships. Interfaith friendships can be of good quality when individuals have at least a moderate level of tolerance or relatively low to extremely low levels of stigma consciousness. Although tolerance can serve as the foundation for interfaith friendships, stigma consciousness plays a more significant role in guiding individuals in establishing such friendships. In this study, most participants had extremely low levels of stigma consciousness, indicating a positive indication that there are no concerns about forming interfaith friendships due to misconceptions about interreligious interactions.

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Declarations

Author contribution. NVF contributed to proposing the initial research idea, conducting literature reviews, preparing the measurement tools, data collection, data analysis, and writing the initial draft of the research article. DM contributed to adapting the initial idea into a more practical research topic, examining the measurement tools, conducting data analysis and performing verification checks, language review, writing, and providing necessary manuscript corrections.

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