

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY: A TEST OF THE RELATIONAL
SPIRITUALITY FRAMEWORK

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. To my wife Carolyn: all my love and thanks for your encouragement, patience, and the sacrifices you've made to help me complete this journey. You make my dreams come true.

To Wesley and Samuel: you are bright spots of joy in my life. I am proud of you and I want to make you proud of me. I pray that your families will bring you as much fulfillment and satisfaction as you bring to me.

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

-- Paul's Letter to the Romans 14:19

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	5
Research on Religion and Marriage	
Elements of the Relational Spirituality Framework	
Research Questions and Hypotheses	
3. METHODOLOGY.....	16
Sample	
Measures	
Data Analysis Plan	
4. RESULTS.....	22
Data Screening	
Measurement Model	
Structural Model	
5. DISCUSSION.....	30
Direct Effects	
Model Testing	
Tests of Mediation	

Implications	
Strengths and Limitations	
REFERENCES.....	39
APPENDIX	
1. FIGURES.....	50
2. TABLES.....	58
VITA.....	61

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figures	Page
1. Conceptual Model of Mahoney’s Relational Spirituality Framework.....	50
2. Hypothesized Mediation Model of the Relational Spirituality Framework.....	51
3. Mixed Latent Structural Model.....	52
4. Direct Effect of Personal Religiousness on Marital Quality (Standardized Coefficients).....	53
5. Direct effect of Dyadic Religiousness on Marital Quality (Standardized Coefficients).....	54
6. Direct effect of Communal Religiousness on Marital Quality (Standardized Coefficients).....	55
7. Mediation by Communal Religiousness on the Relationship between Personal Religiousness and Marital Quality (Standardized Coefficients).....	56
8. Mediation by Dyadic Religiousness on the Relationship between Personal Religiousness and Marital Quality (Standardized Coefficients).....	57
Tables	
1. Sample Demographics.....	58
2. Correlations Among Personal Religiousness, Dyadic Religiousness, Frequency of Religious Attendance, and Marital Quality.....	59
3. Unstandardized and Standardized Estimates for Factor Loadings in the Measurement Model.....	60

ABSTRACT

Several decades of research have established that religiousness and marital quality are positively correlated. The Relational Spirituality Framework, proposed by Annette Mahoney, is an attempt to organize this research by describing three distinct categories of religiousness (Personal, Dyadic, and Communal Religiousness) and predicting that they each have a direct effect on marital quality. Using data from the Portraits of American Life Study (PALS) ($N = 935$), I test the validity of the Relational Spirituality Framework as well as an alternative model in which Dyadic and Communal Religiousness are hypothesized to mediate the positive association of Personal Religiousness with marital quality. Support of mediation was found for Dyadic Religiousness. Personal Religiousness was found to suppress the association between Dyadic Religiousness and marital quality. These results offer limited support for the use of the Relational Spirituality Framework to guide future research when interactions among the components of the Framework are taken into account.

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

An extensive literature has emerged in the past several decades on the positive consequences of high marital quality (Amato, 2010; Fincham & Beach, 2010; Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007; Ribar, 2004; Wilcox et al., 2011). Adults in stable marriages report fewer physical and mental health problems, less substance abuse, and experience decreased mortality risk compared to divorced individuals (Amato, 2000, 2010; Kimmel et al., 2000; Wood, Goesling, & Avellar, 2007). High marital quality is associated with lower prevalence of mental illness and substance abuse (Overbeek et al., 2006; Whisman, Uebelacker, & Bruce, 2006; Whisman, 1999) as well as a number of positive physical health outcomes including more rapid wound healing (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 2005), more positive prognosis after heart disease (Coyne et al., 2001; Orth-Gober et al., 2000), lower blood pressure (Ewart, Taylor, Kraemer, & Agras, 1991), and greater immune system health (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1993, 1997).

In light of the positive outcomes associated with strong, stable marriages, scholars and policy makers have given a great deal of attention to predictors of marital quality. A growing line of inquiry is the association between religious practices and beliefs (i.e., “religiousness”) and marital quality. Marital and family relationships are addressed by the teachings and doctrines of every major religion (Dollahite, Marks, & Goodman, 2004; Edgell, 2006), and cultural norms and scripts regarding marriage are influenced by religious teachings (Burr, Marks, & Day, 2012; Putnam & Campbell, 2010). Although recent research shows declines in religious participation among Americans (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2012), religion continues to be an influential force in American life. In the mid-1990’s, 96% of adults in the United States expressed a belief in

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

God (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005). By 2012 that figure was 93%, indicating a decline although still a substantial majority (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2012).

Although only 37% of Americans report attending religious worship services on a weekly basis, nearly 70% report attending at least once per year (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2012). More than 80% of Americans claim an affiliation with a particular religious group, and over two-thirds of religiously unaffiliated Americans express a belief in God (Pew Forum on Religion and Family Life, 2008; Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2012).

The body of literature on associations between religiousness and marital quality has been increasing in recent decades (Mahoney, 2010). Most of this research has shown that religiousness is correlated with higher marital quality and stability. Participation in religious activities is associated with a lower risk of divorce (Brown, Orbuch, & Bauermeister, 2008; Mahoney, 2010; Vaaler, Ellison, & Powers, 2009), lower risk of domestic violence (Ellison & Anderson, 2001; Ellison, Trinitapoli, Anderson, & Johnson, 2007), greater odds of marital fidelity (Burdette, Ellison, Sherkat, & Gore, 2007), greater marital commitment (Allgood, Harris, Skogrand, & Lee, 2008; Wilson & Musick, 1996), greater marital satisfaction (Ellison, Burdette, & Wilcox, 2010; Wolfinger & Wilcox, 2008), and less frequent marital conflict (Mahoney et al., 1999).

Unfortunately, research on the links between religion and married life has largely relied on single-item measures of religiousness such as frequency of church attendance or self-identification as a religious person (Dollahite et al., 2004; Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001; Mahoney, 2010). Such variables measure only general religiousness or the presence or absence of religious belief and may fail to capture

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

variations in specific religious beliefs and practices. Experts in this field have called for researchers to address more specific aspects of religious faith and practice such as prayer, studying religious texts, and belief in particular doctrines, with the goal of measuring the effect these beliefs and practices may have on marital relationships. More research is also needed that investigates possible interactions among diverse forms of religious expression in their influence on marital quality.

Additionally, research on marriage and religion suffers from a lack of connection to theory (Mahoney, 2010; Sullivan, 2001). Researchers have commonly focused on replicating previous findings and discovering correlations without offering insights into the processes driving those correlations (Dollahite et al., 2004; Sullivan, 2001). Recent reviews have emphasized this gap and authors have called for research that investigates possible mechanisms of influence between religion and marriage (Dollahite et al., 2004; Mahoney, 2010).

Mahoney (2010) put forth a theoretical model with the goal of organizing current findings in this area and suggesting directions for future research. The Relational Spirituality Framework describes three categories of cognitive and behavioral processes through which married partners might experience the influence of religion on the marital relationship across the life span: Personal, Dyadic, and Communal Religiousness (Figure 1). Personal religiousness includes the relationship or connection each partner experiences with the object of their worship or reverence. This object may be a higher power, although in the case of non-theists the object of veneration may be a set of ideals or qualities such as truth, beauty or justice. Dyadic religiousness describes the degree to which partners engage in religious behaviors and practices together, as well as processes

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

by which partners ascribe sacred characteristics and significance to their relationship. Examples of such sacred characteristics might be eternal commitment, the protection of a higher power, or unconditional love. Communal religiousness focuses attention on the relationships each partner experiences in communities of individuals who share their religious beliefs and practices, such as church congregations or synagogues. Mahoney proposed that these three categories of religious belief and practice act as independent mechanisms by which the religious activities and beliefs of married partners might exert an influence on marital quality (Figure 1).

This study builds on Mahoney's theoretical work by testing the Relational Spirituality Framework in a subsample of 935 married adults drawn from the Portraits of American Life Survey sample (Emerson, Sikkink, & James, 2010), a publicly available data set. Structural equation modeling is used to test the fit of the direct effects model proposed by Mahoney. Furthermore, an alternative model is proposed, hypothesizing that Personal Religiousness serves as a driving force for the influence of religion on marital quality, and that Dyadic and Communal Religiousness mediate the positive association of Personal Religiousness with greater marital quality (Figure 2).

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on Religion and Marriage

Decades of research have affirmed a positive association between religiousness (i.e., religious beliefs and practices) and greater marital quality (Mahoney et al., 2001; Mahoney, 2010; Pargament, 1997). Yet this growing body of research suffers from inconsistent operationalization and measurement of variables of interest (Dollahite et al., 2004; Mahoney, 2010; Sullivan, 2001). Although marital satisfaction and quality have been consistently defined, indicators of religiousness have been operationalized differently by various researchers. An incomplete list of religious variables in this line of research includes participation in religious holiday rituals (Fiese & Tomcho, 2001), strength of religious beliefs (Schramm, Marshall, Harris, & Lee, 2012), denominational affiliation (Wilson & Musick, 1996), self-identification as a religious person (Sullivan, 2001), prayer for one's partner (Fincham, Lambert, & Beach, 2010; Lambert, Fincham, Stillman, Graham, & Beach, 2010), couples' joint participation in religious activities (Fincham & Beach, 2010; Lichter & Carmalt, 2009; Mahoney et al., 1999), and the frequency of church attendance (Atkins, Baucom, & Jacobson, 2001; Atkins & Kessel, 2008; Lichter & Carmalt, 2009; Mahoney et al., 1999; Sullivan, 2001; Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2008; Wolfinger & Wilcox, 2008), each of which is commonly cited as evidence that "religiousness" is associated with greater marital quality. This lack of consistency is problematic because as a body, these variables might represent a constellation of unique facets of religious behavior or belief rather than a single valid religiousness factor.

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

Partially because of the lack of consistency in identifying religious variables of interest, problems of measurement exist in this body of research (Mahoney, 2010). Most of the previously mentioned religious constructs are indicators of individual religious faith or practice. Such constructs do not evaluate the integration of religion into a couple's activities or the influence of religion on their shared perceptions of their marriage (Mahoney et al., 1999). Additionally, measurement of religion is usually limited to single-item measures of variables such as self-identification as a religious person or affiliation with a particular congregation (Dollahite et al., 2004). One review of the literature found that 80% of studies reviewed used single-item measures of religious indicators, most commonly the rate of attendance at religious services (Mahoney et al., 2001). It is possible that such measures do a poor job of evaluating diverse religious experiences; for example, congregational affiliation would not accurately measure the importance of religion to a person who practices a faith that does not emphasize regular corporate gatherings, such as Wicca (Cantrell, 2001) or Scientology (Church of Scientology International, 1998).

In addition to measurement issues, this body of research suffers from poor connections to theory. Although some researchers have offered various explanations for the positive association between religion and marital quality, these explanations have largely focused on limited indicators of religious belief and practice and on narrow mechanisms of religion's effect on marriage (Mahoney, 2010; Sullivan, 2001). Until recently, little work had been done to describe a comprehensive theory that accounts for multiple intersections between religion and the marital relationship.

Elements of the Relational Spirituality Framework

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

The Relational Spirituality Framework (Mahoney, 2010) is one attempt at a theoretical model to organize the research on religion and families and to provoke new research in understudied areas where those subjects intersect. The Relational Spirituality Framework is grounded in the work of Mahoney and colleagues on the sanctification of family relationships. Sanctification refers to a psychological process by which an individual ascribes divine qualities or significance to any aspect of life (Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Murray-Swank, 2003; Mahoney et al., 2001; Pargament & Mahoney, 2005). In this way sanctified things and relationships are specifically associated with whatever an individual holds to be sacred (i.e., holy, set apart from the ordinary, or worthy of respect) (Pargament & Mahoney, 2005). Whether this relates to any particular faith tradition or religious group varies by individual, and thus sanctification may be founded in a theistic or a nontheistic worldview (Pargament & Mahoney, 2005). Theistic sanctification refers to one's perception that an object is in some way a manifestation of a divine being or of that being's will. For example, a person may attribute a wage increase to the beneficence of God. Theistic sanctification may also imbue the object with particular characteristics of a higher power; for instance, an individual may conceive that both God and their marriage are holy and worthy of reverence. A person may enact nontheistic sanctification, on the other hand, by conceiving of an object as possessing sacred qualities without associating the object with any divine being (or, for that matter, believing in the existence of such a being). Qualities such as timelessness, transcendence, ultimate value and worth, and holiness (i.e., the characteristic of being set apart), among others, may be considered as sacred by an individual even in the absence of any association with a higher power (Mahoney et al.,

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

1999, 2003; Pargament & Mahoney, 2005) . Finally, one may consider any facet of life as being sanctified: for instance, physical objects (a rosary, a bell), places (a forest, a cathedral), events (weddings, funerals), people (spouses, saints), periods of time (Lent, Ramadan, Independence Day), or relationships and roles (marriage, parenthood) (Mahoney, et al., 2003; Pargament & Mahoney, 2005).

The construct of sanctification provides an inclusive view of religion, religious belief and practices, and the ways in which religion might influence marital relationships. Not everyone is religious in the sense of belief in a higher power or association with a body of believers. Mahoney, however, defines religion as “the search for significance in ways related to the sacred (Mahoney, 2010, p. 810; Pargament, 1997). The classical view of religion in the social sciences has been that religion always involves a coherent system of beliefs and practices as well as affiliation with a community of like minded-believers (Durkheim, 1915; Pargament, 1997). Mahoney’s approach is more inclusive. Adherence to a set of doctrines or participation in a religious community are subsumed into this definition but are not considered a necessary component of religion.

With this inclusive definition of religion in mind, Mahoney’s (2010) Relational Spirituality Framework organizes the diverse conceptualizations of religiousness that have prevailed in the social sciences into three categories: Personal Religiousness, Dyadic Religiousness, and Communal Religiousness. Mahoney contends that these categories of religiousness represent mechanisms by which religion influences the quality of marital relationships (as well as other family relationships).

Personal Religiousness. Personal Religiousness is defined as the relationship individuals experience with what they consider to be divine or sacred (Mahoney, 2010).

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

Some examples of behaviors in this category include private prayer, studying scriptures, or meditation. Personal Religiousness also includes cognitive processes such as belief or faith in a higher power, internalized perceptions of the will of God, and the influence of those beliefs and perceptions on decision-making (Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2003). According to the Relational Spirituality Framework, Personal Religiousness influences the quality of marital relationships as each partner relies on the divine for support and guidance and as religious beliefs and practices promote marriage-enhancing virtues in each partner.

The most commonly measured construct in this category is belief in God or a higher power, and this belief is the norm rather than the exception in American society. More than 90% of Americans express belief in God or a higher power (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Pew Forum on Religion and Family Life, 2008; Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2012). Behaviors related to Personal Religiousness are also common; for example, nearly 90% of Americans report that they pray (Lambert, Fincham, Stillman, Graham, & Beach, 2010). Additionally, both the cognitive and behavioral aspects of Personal Religiousness have been shown to predict greater marital quality. For example, the strength of individuals' religious beliefs is positively associated with their marital quality (Schramm et al., 2012). Qualitative research indicates that religious individuals use prayer to experience support and positive motivation during couple conflict (Butler, Stout, & Gardner, 2002; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). Quantitative research has confirmed the efficacy of this practice; prayer for one's partner has been shown to increase one's inclination to forgive one's partner (Lambert et al., 2010) and reduce the likelihood of future marital infidelity (Fincham et al., 2010), and is

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

positively associated with relationship satisfaction (Fincham, Beach, Lambert, Stillman, & Braithwaite, 2008).

A large literature has also formed around the construct of religious coping, another component of Personal Religiousness. Religious coping during stressful situations involves cognitions such as trusting God or appraising circumstances as being within God's will, as well as behaviors such as prayer or attempts to avoid sin (Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000). These and similar strategies for relying on the divine during stressful events have been shown to predict various markers of well-being, such as positive mental health, greater life satisfaction, optimism, and a feeling of purpose, as well as healthy lifestyle behaviors such as avoiding drug and alcohol abuse (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Levin & Chatters, 1998).

Dyadic Religiousness. Dyadic Religiousness, the second component of the Relational Spirituality Framework, refers to religious practices that couples engage in mutually as well as beliefs and cognitions about the sanctity of the marital relationship (Mahoney, 2010). Couples might pray, study sacred texts, or engage in religious rituals and traditions together. Couples might also come together to teach their children religious principles. The belief that the marriage is itself a reflection of God's will and character is also an aspect of Dyadic Religiousness. Mahoney contended that these practices and cognitions contribute to marital quality because partners will be more motivated to maintain and protect the relationship when they perceive it to have divine significance (Mahoney, 2010). Additionally, Dyadic Religiousness involves shared couple interests and activities that are hypothesized to bring couples closer independent of their religious nature.

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

A growing body of research demonstrates that many individuals perceive their marital relationships to have sacred qualities and significance and that this is associated with greater marital quality (DeMaris, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2010; Ellison, Henderson, Glenn, & Harkrider, 2011; Goodman & Dollahite, 2006; Mahoney et al., 1999; Mahoney, Pargament, & DeMaris, 2009; Stafford, David, & McPherson, 2014; Stafford, 2013). Married individuals who ascribe divine characteristics to their marriage have been found to be more satisfied with their relationships (Ellison et al., 2011; Mahoney et al., 1999; Stafford et al., 2014), report less marital conflict (Mahoney et al., 1999), are less negatively impacted by external stressors (Ellison et al., 2011), and engage in more marital maintenance behaviors (e.g., helping with tasks and discussing future goals) (Stafford, 2013).

Additionally, couples' joint engagement in religious activities has been shown to be associated with greater marital quality (Fincham & Beach, 2010; Lichter & Carmalt, 2009; Mahoney et al., 1999). Mahoney and colleagues (1999) found that couples who engaged in shared religious activities such as praying together and studying scriptures together reported greater marital satisfaction, less frequent marital conflict, and more collaborative communication. In qualitative research, couples have reported that activities such as praying together, studying scriptures together, and explicitly affirming their shared religious beliefs help them to effectively manage conflict (Butler, Gardner, & Bird, 1998; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006).

Communal religiousness. Communal Religiousness refers to the relationship each marital partner experiences with religious communities and with religious people (Mahoney, 2010). Communal Religiousness is commonly measured by the frequency of

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

attendance at religious services, and in fact a positive correlation between attendance at religious services and marital quality is one of the most replicated findings in this area of research (Atkins et al., 2001; Atkins & Kessel, 2008; Lichter & Carmalt, 2009; Mahoney, 2010; Mahoney et al., 1999, 2001; Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2008; Wolfinger & Wilcox, 2008). Other indicators of Communal Religiousness include congregational membership (Breault & Kposowa, 1987) and the proportion of one's friends who are fellow members of one's congregation (Schwadel, 2012; Stroope, 2012). Mahoney proposed that Communal Religiousness will contribute to marital quality because the spiritual community is a source of support for pro-marriage behaviors and beliefs as well as a source of tangible resources for the couple and family.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The Relational Spirituality Framework organizes diverse conceptualizations of religious belief and behavior into three discrete, theoretically coherent categories (Mahoney, 2010). Mahoney contends that Personal, Dyadic and Communal Religiousness act as the mechanisms by which religion influences the quality of marital relationships. Further, Mahoney's model suggests that personal, dyadic, and communal religiousness are independent from each other in their direct action on the marital relationship (Figure 1).

I propose an alternative model of the Relational Spirituality Framework. I contend that Personal Religiousness encompasses the cognitions and behaviors by which an individual might search for the divine, thus satisfying Mahoney's definition of religion (Mahoney, 2010). I therefore propose that Personal Religiousness represents the individual's experience of religion and, further, that the Dyadic and Communal

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

expressions of religion proceed from the Personal; thus, greater Personal Religiousness should predict higher levels of Dyadic and the Communal religiousness. I further propose that Personal Religiousness predicts greater marital quality through the mediation of Dyadic and Communal Religiousness (Figure 2).

Recent research offers preliminary support for this mediation hypothesis. One experimental study evaluated the influence of Personal and Dyadic Religiousness on the likelihood of relationship infidelity (Fincham et al., 2010). During the 4 week study, participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions with different instructions: (1) to pray daily for their partner's well being; (2) to write a daily diary of their activities; (3) to pray daily with no specific instructions as to the topic of the prayer; and (4) to spend some time every day thinking about their partner's good qualities. The dependent variable was a post-test measure of the participants' engagement in extradyadic romantic thoughts or behavior (i.e., emotional or physical attraction to another person, or actual infidelity). Participants were also asked about the degree to which they perceived their relationship to be sanctified or to have sacred characteristics. The authors reported that individuals in the prayer-for-partner condition were significantly less likely than other participants to engage in extradyadic romantic thoughts or behaviors. Perception of the relationship as being sacred mediated this effect. Thus a measure of Dyadic Religiousness (i.e., the sanctity of the relationship) mediated the influence of Personal Religiousness (i.e., prayer for the partner) on a measure of marital quality.

This study by Fincham and his colleagues (2010) had several limitations. The measure of Personal Religiousness used included only one item, the presence or absence

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

of prayer for one's partner. This condition was experimentally manipulated, and therefore some individuals who engaged in prayer might not have been religious outside of the study. Although prayer for one's partner is a religious activity, it might not be an accurate measure of religiousness in a person who was only praying because they were instructed to by a researcher. Furthermore, although extradyadic romantic behavior may theoretically be linked to marital quality, it is a distinct construct and it is possible that some couples who experienced no infidelity nevertheless had unsatisfactory or low quality relationships. Yet despite these limitations the authors' findings do suggest that the influence of Personal Religiousness on marital quality may be mediated by other forms of religious belief and practice.

Expanding on this recent evidence, I used structural equation modeling to investigate an alternative model of the Relational Spirituality Framework (Figure 2). Specifically, I tested the hypothesis that both Dyadic Religiousness and Communal Religiousness mediate the association between Personal Religiousness and marital quality. Previous research has established the direct effects of each component of the Relational Spirituality Framework on marital quality when tested independently. This is the first investigation of the relationships among the various components of the Relational Spirituality Framework as a single model. Confirming the validity of this alternative model of the Relational Spirituality Framework will improve our understanding of the mutual, interrelated influences of various types of religious experience on marital quality.

Hypothesis 1: Personal Religiousness is positively associated with greater marital quality.

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

Hypothesis 2: Communal Religiousness is positively associated with greater marital quality.

Hypothesis 3: Dyadic Religiousness is positively associated with greater marital quality.

Hypothesis 4: The direct effects model of the Relational Spirituality Framework (Figure 1) will demonstrate an adequate fit to the sample data.

Hypothesis 5: The proposed mediation model (Figure 2) will demonstrate a significantly better fit to the sample data compared to the direct effects model.

Hypothesis 6: Communal Religiousness will significantly mediate the relationship between Personal Religiousness and marital quality.

Hypothesis 7: Dyadic Religiousness will significantly mediate the relationship between Personal Religiousness and marital quality.

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Sample

The Portraits of American Life Study (PALS) (Emerson et al., 2010) is a nationally representative survey of 2,610 U.S. adults, publicly available through the Association of Religious Data Archives (www.thearda.com). Conducted in 2006, the survey emphasizes religion and spirituality as well as health, family relationships, and ethnic diversity. To obtain the PALS sample Census data were used to select 60 geographic regions that permitted oversampling of minority populations. From these regions, a subsample of 120 zip codes was selected using the same minority oversampling weights. Addresses were randomly selected from within these zip codes, and at each address one adult was randomly selected to participate. Letters were sent to each address informing residents about the study, and interviewers visited the households within a week of that letter's arrival to complete a screening interview and computer-assisted questionnaire. Participants were paid \$50 to complete the interview. The total response rate, after excluding households with no eligible respondent as well as those who refused to participate, was 58%. Because this study investigates possible influences on marital quality, a subset of 935 respondents who were currently married and who had complete data on all variables of interest were included in this study. Table 1 presents demographic and descriptive statistics for the sample.

Measures

Personal religiousness. Marks and Dollahite (2001) identified two domains of Personal Religiousness: religious practices and salience of religious beliefs. To assess engagement in religious practices, respondents were asked how often they prayed and

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

how often they read religious texts in the last year (Practice 1 and Practice 2, respectively). In both cases responses ranged from 1=*never* to 8=*more than once a day*. Participants' median response for frequency of prayer was 6 ($SD = 2.45$), *a few times a week*. Median response for frequency of reading religious texts was 2 ($SD = 2.17$), *a few times in the last 12 months*. Two items assessed the salience of respondents' religious beliefs: "How important is religion or religious faith to you personally?" (i.e., Salience 1; $M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.085$) and "How important is God or spirituality in your life?" (i.e., Salience 2; $M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.073$). For both items responses ranged from 1=*not at all important* to 5=*by far the most important part of your life*. Exploratory factor analysis with promax rotation revealed that these four items loaded on a single factor and all path loadings were significant; therefore these items were used as indicators for the latent Personal Religiousness variable. Confirmatory factor analysis indicated that this one-factor model resulted in a satisfactory fit to the data ($RMSEA = .079$; $CFI = .996$). Modification indices indicated correlated error variances between Salience 1 and 2 and between Practice 1 and Salience 2. Error variances of these items were allowed to covary in subsequent analyses.

Dyadic religiousness. Two items were used as indicators of a latent Dyadic Religiousness factor: "How often would you say you and your spouse/partner pray together, not including before meals and at religious services?" (i.e., Prayer) and "How often would you say you and your spouse/partner talk or read about religion, God, or spirituality together?" (i.e., Talk) (Mahoney et al., 1999). Responses for both items ranged from 1=*never* to 7=*more than once a day*. The median score for the Prayer item

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

was 2 ($SD = 1.77$), *rarely*. The median score for the Talk item was 3 ($SD = 1.68$), *once or twice a month*.

Communal religiousness. Following the example of many previous researchers, frequency of attendance at worship services was used as a measure of Communal Religiousness (Atkins et al., 2001; Atkins & Kessel, 2008; Lichter & Carmalt, 2009; Mahoney, 2010; Mahoney et al., 1999, 2001; Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2008; Wolfinger & Wilcox, 2008). Responses ranged from 1=*never* to 8=*three or more times a week*. Median response was 4 ($SD = 2.18$), indicating a median frequency of one worship service per month.

Marital quality. Seven items were used as indicators of marital quality. Exploratory factor analysis with promax rotation of these seven items revealed two underlying factors. Three items assessed partner supportiveness by asking respondents how often their spouses expressed affection or love, gave compliments, and performed small acts of kindness. These items were measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1=*rarely* to 7=*more than once a day*. Item loadings ranged from .63 to .80. The second factor included four items that assessed global satisfaction with the relationship as well as satisfaction with sex, decision-making, and affection in the relationship. Responses ranged from 1=*completely dissatisfied* to 7=*completely satisfied*. Item loadings of this factor ranged from .65 to .80. This two-factor model was confirmed using confirmatory factor analysis. All path loadings were significant and model fit was good (RMSEA = .046; CFI = .988)

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

Supportiveness and satisfaction subscales were created and Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each (supportiveness $\alpha = .799$; satisfaction $\alpha = .742$). These subscales were used as indicators of the latent marital quality variable.

Control variables. A variety of demographic characteristics have been shown to covary with religiousness and marital quality. Members of Evangelical Protestant congregations report greater social embeddedness within their congregations than members of other religious groups, an indicator of higher Communal Religiousness (Scheitle & Adamczyk, 2009). African Americans report more frequent attendance at religious services than other racial or ethnic groups (Krause, 2002; Wilson & Musick, 1997). Education level, income, and length of marriage have each been shown to covary with marital quality (Marquardt, Blankenhorn, Lerman, Malone-Colon, & Wilcox, 2012; Mirecki, Chou, Elliot, & Schneider, 2013). Because of these relationships with variables of interest, hypotheses were tested controlling for respondents' religious affiliation, race, education, income, and length of marriage.

Religious affiliation. Respondents were asked to name their religious group affiliation, which were then categorized into the following standard classifications (Steensland, Park, Regnerus, & Robinson, 2000): Catholic, Black Protestant, Evangelical Protestant, Mainline Protestant, Other Protestant, Jewish, unaffiliated, and other religious traditions (See Table 1 for sample descriptive statistics). Because previous research indicates that Evangelical Protestants report greater Communal Religiousness than other religious groups, I created a dichotomous dummy variable separating participants into two groups: Evangelical Protestant and Other Religious Group.

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

Race. Race is measured using the following categories: Non-Hispanic white, African American, Hispanic, Asian American, and Other race. Because previous research indicates that African Americans report greater Communal Religiousness than other racial or ethnic groups, I created a dichotomous dummy variable separating participants into two groups: African American and Other Race.

Education. Participants indicated their highest level of education, with responses ranging from 1=*less than high school* to 9=*professional degree*.

Income. Participants indicated their total household income. Responses ranged from 1=*less than \$5,000* to 19=*\$200,000 or more*.

Length of marriage. Participants indicated the year their present marriage began. Counting back from 2006 when these data were collected, responses were recoded into number of years since present marriage began.

Data Analysis Plan

Structural equation modeling was used to estimate the relationships between Personal, Dyadic, and Communal Religiousness and marital quality. The bootstrapping method of testing multiple mediator models suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2004, 2008) was used to test the hypothesis that dyadic and communal religiousness each mediate the relationship between personal religiousness and marital quality.

Bootstrapping involves the creation of bias-corrected resamples drawn from the original sample in order to create a large number of bootstrap samples. Statistical tests are then computed on each of the bootstrap samples. This is a common technique for avoiding some of the problems produced by nonnormality in the original sampling distribution (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002). One benefit of the particular

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

approach recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2004) is that it permits the possibility of significant mediating effects in the case of nonsignificant direct relationships between independent and dependent variables. In addition, this method allows one to directly test the significance of mediating effects, rather than the roundabout method of assessing a drop in significance of direct effects in the presence of a possible mediator.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Data Screening

Data were screened for outliers, skewness, kurtosis, linearity, and multicollinearity. All variables except length of marriage were on ordinal scales, for which extreme value outliers do not exist. Similarly, there was no reason to exclude ordinal variables based on skewness unless they showed unacceptably low variance, which was not the case. Examination of the continuous length of marriage variable showed no outliers or problematic skewness. Kurtosis was a potential problem for all variables and therefore the Kurtosis Index (KI) for each variable was examined. Absolute values of the KI greater than 10 indicate problematic kurtosis (Kline, 2011). No variables showed KI values greater than 3; therefore it was concluded that kurtosis was not a problem. Linearity was tested by conducting one-way ANOVAs between all IV-DV indicator pairs, using the Test for Linearity procedure in SPSS. The results of all tests for nonlinearity were nonsignificant, indicating that the relationships between variables were sufficiently linear to be estimated using structural equation modeling. Tests of multicollinearity using the Variable Inflation Factor for all exogenous variables revealed no VIFs over 3, indicating that multicollinearity is not a problem (Kline, 2011). See Table 2 for correlations among study variables. All correlations among study variables were in the expected directions.

Measurement Model

As a first step in assessing the fit of the hypothesized model, a model was created in AMOS 21.0 in which factors were allowed to covary but no directional paths were specified. All manifest indicators had significant loadings on their latent variables, with

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

all but one standardized coefficient over 0.70 (Table 3). Modification indices were consulted in case it was possible to improve the model. Based on these indices a number of error terms were allowed to covary: between Practice 1 and Salience 2, and between Salience 1 and Salience 2. This measurement model showed a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(15, N = 935) = 33.41, p < .01, CFI = 0.994, RMSEA = 0.037$. CFI over 0.95 and RMSEA less than 0.05 indicate good model fit (Kline, 2011). For further confirmation, these results were compared to an alternative model in which all items loaded on a single factor. This model resulted in a very poor fit to the data and was rejected.

Because self-report survey data was used, common method bias was a possible concern. The PALS survey did not include a social desirability or method bias instrument, so I used Harman's single factor test (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) as well as the common latent factor test in AMOS 21.0 (Billiet & McClendon, 2009; Podsakoff et al., 2003) to diagnosis possible common method bias.

Harman's single factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003) involves entering all variables of interest in an exploratory factor analysis with no rotation. Common method bias is present if a single factor accounts for the majority of the variance in the variables. The results of this procedure indicated that a single factor explained 32.358% of the variance among the study variables. This result suggests that common method bias is not a likely explanation for relationships among the variables.

To perform the common latent factor test (Billiet & McClendon, 2009; Podsakoff et al., 2003), a single latent factor is specified with loadings on all indicators set to 1, based on the hypothesis that common method bias would influence all items equally. The addition of the common latent factor produced $\chi^2(15, N = 935) = 34.074, p < .01$.

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

Calculation of the χ^2 difference between this common latent factor model and the measurement model without the common latent factor indicated that the difference was nonsignificant at $p=.05$ (χ^2 diff = 1.691, $df = 1$). Therefore both models may be said to fit equally well and the model with more degrees of freedom (i.e., the model lacking the common latent factor) is accepted. The results of these tests indicated that common method bias was not an explanation for relationships among the variables in this study.

Structural Model

All the following analyses were performed controlling for education, income, race, religious affiliation and length of marriage. Based on previous research, direct paths were specified from income and education to marital quality and from race and religious affiliation to Communal Religiousness. Income and education were allowed to covary. In order to achieve satisfactory model fit, religious affiliation and race were allowed to covary. This addition is theoretically logical because one category of religious affiliation is Black Protestant. Personal Religiousness was also allowed to covary with religious affiliation, race, and education to improve model fit.

When the full hypothesized model was specified (see Figure 3), the error variance of the Satisfaction indicator was negative, a so-called “Heywood case”. The error variance value in question was -.002, SE = .01, $p = .862$, 95% CI [.0216, -.0176]. Because the 95% confidence interval for this value contains zero, it was concluded that the negative error variance was likely due to sampling error. The error variance of the Satisfaction item was set to 0 and analysis of the structural model proceeded (Dillon, Kumar, & Mulani, 1987).

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

Prior to testing the full theoretical model, the direct effects of Personal Religiousness, Dyadic Religiousness, and Communal Religiousness on marital quality were examined (Hypotheses 1-3). Personal Religiousness demonstrated a positive and significant direct effect on marital quality ($\beta = .106, p < .01$; Figure 4), as did Dyadic Religiousness ($\beta = .429, p < .001$; Figure 5), supporting hypotheses one and three. Communal Religiousness, however, did not have a significant direct effect on marital quality, so hypothesis two was not supported (Figure 6).

Hypothesis four stated that the direct effects model of the Relational Spirituality Framework originally proposed by Mahoney (2010) would demonstrate a satisfactory fit to the sample data. Model fit of the direct effects model (Figure 1) was poor, $\chi^2 (68, N = 935) = 1155.6402, p < .001, CFI = .772, RMSEA = .131$. Based on these results hypothesis four was rejected. Continuing on to hypothesis five, analysis proceeded using the bootstrapping method suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2004) using 2000 bias corrected bootstrapping resamples in AMOS. Analysis of the goodness of fit of the full hypothesized mediation model (see Figure 3) showed a good fit to the data, $\chi^2 (66, N = 935) = 182.272, p < .001, CFI = .976, RMSEA = .043$. A χ^2 difference test was calculated to compare the goodness of fit of the direct effects model with that of the hypothesized mediation model. The χ^2 difference value of 973.3682 (2, $p < .001$) was significant, indicating the mediation model represents a statistically significantly better fit to the data and confirming hypothesis five.

Hypotheses six and seven state that Communal and Dyadic Religiousness will each mediate the relationship between Personal Religiousness and marital quality. Having established that the mediation model fit the data satisfactorily, I proceeded to test

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

the proposed mediation paths separately. The most common standard for testing mediation includes three criteria (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Preacher & Hayes, 2004). First, the independent variable must significantly predict the dependent variable in the absence of the mediator. Second, the independent variable must significantly predict the mediator. Finally, the mediator must significantly predict the dependent variable after controlling for the influence of the independent variable. When these criteria are met, the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable will be lower when the mediator is included in the equation than when it is not. When this path is reduced to nonsignificance, the mediation is said to be full; when the coefficient of the path is reduced but the path remains significant, the mediation is partial.

Baron and Kenny (1986) also recommended testing the statistical significance of the indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable using the Sobel test. Preacher and Hayes (2004) pointed out that the Sobel test assumes a normal sampling distribution, an assumption that is very often violated. Instead of the Sobel test, Preacher and Hayes recommend using bootstrapping to generate an estimate of indirect effects based on *n* bias-corrected bootstrap samples. This method allows the researcher to test the significance of the indirect effect without assumptions about normality in the original data. Hypotheses six and seven were tested based on the criteria established by Baron and Kenny along with Preacher and Hayes' bootstrapping method of testing the significance of indirect effects.

Hypothesis six predicted a mediating effect of Communal Religiousness on the relationship between Personal Religiousness and marital quality (Figure 7). As noted above, Personal Religiousness did significantly predict marital quality in the absence of

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

the mediator ($\beta = .106, p < .01$), meeting the first criterion of Baron and Kenny's (1986) method. After adding Communal Religiousness as a mediator, Personal Religiousness also significantly predicted Communal Religiousness ($\beta = .766, p < .01$), satisfying the second criterion of Baron and Kenny's method. The third criterion was not met, however, as Communal Religiousness did not significantly predict marital quality in the presence of Personal Religiousness ($\beta = -.060, p = .270$). Additionally, the indirect effect of Personal Religiousness on marital quality was nonsignificant ($\beta = -.046, p = .325$). It was concluded that Communal Religiousness did not mediate the relationship between Personal Religiousness and marital quality, and therefore hypothesis six was rejected.

Hypothesis seven predicted a mediating effect of Dyadic Religiousness on the relationship between Personal Religiousness and marital quality (Figure 8). The first criterion of Baron and Kenny's (1986) method having already been established as met, the analysis proceeded to the second criterion, the significant prediction of the mediator by the independent variable. Personal Religiousness did significantly predict Dyadic Religiousness ($\beta = .798, p < .001$), meeting this second criterion. The third criterion requires that the mediator significantly predict the dependent variable in the presence of the independent variable. That criterion was also met because Dyadic Religiousness predicted Marital Quality, ($\beta = .960, p < .001$). Following the advice of Preacher and Hayes (2004), the significance of the indirect effect of Personal Religiousness on Marital Quality was assessed. It was significant ($\beta = .766, p < .01$). These results support hypothesis seven, which predicted that Dyadic Religiousness mediates the relationship between Personal Religiousness and Marital Quality. Examination of the direct effect of Personal Religiousness on Marital Quality revealed a complication, however. When

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

Dyadic Religiousness was included as a mediator, the path between Personal Religiousness and Marital Quality changed sign from positive to negative ($\beta = -.659, p < .001$). This suggested that a negative suppression effect or “reversal paradox” was present (Maassen & Bakker, 2001).

Suppression takes place when the omission of variable S from a regression equation weakens the effect of X on Y (Conger, 1974; MacKinnon, Krull, & Lockwood, 2000; Rucker, Preacher, Tormala, & Petty, 2011). Put differently, when S is included in the regression equation, the power of X to predict Y is strengthened as compared to the regression of Y on X without the presence of S. Negative suppression is a specific case in which variable S receives a negative regression weight when included in a multiple regression equation (e.g., a path model) although that variable demonstrates a positive zero order correlation with the dependent variable (Maassen & Bakker, 2001; MacKinnon et al., 2000; Tu, Gunnell, & Gilthorpe, 2008).

In this case, S, X and Y are represented by Personal Religiousness, Dyadic Religiousness and marital quality, respectively. Personal Religiousness and Dyadic Religiousness each demonstrate a positive zero-order correlation with Marital Quality (Table 2). When these variables are included in the multiple regression, however, the coefficient for Personal Religiousness becomes negative. Furthermore, the regression coefficient of Dyadic Religiousness increases from .429 to .960 when Personal Religiousness is included in the path model (Figure 8). Therefore Personal Religiousness may be said to suppress a portion of the predictive validity of Dyadic Religiousness. The test of significance of the indirect effect in this model confirms the statistical significance

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

of this negative suppression effect (Lau et al., 2013). Possible explanations for this unusual statistical result will be presented in the section that follows.

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Religious teachings and doctrines are macro-level influences on the ways Americans approach their marital relationships (Burr et al., 2012; Putnam & Campbell, 2010), and previous research has demonstrated that the religious beliefs and practices (i.e., religiousness) of individuals are positively related to the quality of their marital relationships (Mahoney et al., 2001; Mahoney, 2010). The Relational Spirituality Framework (Mahoney, 2010) is one attempt to organize the research on the ways religiousness influences marital relationships on a micro level. According to the Relationship Spirituality Framework, three separate categories of religiousness (i.e., Personal, Dyadic, and Communal Religiousness) each directly influence marital quality in a positive direction. This study tested the validity of the Relational Spirituality Framework as well as whether the components of the Framework interact with each other in their associations with marital quality.

Direct Effects

The hypotheses that the components of the Relational Spirituality Framework would each be significantly positively associated with greater marital quality were partially supported. Personal Religiousness significantly predicted greater marital quality, supporting hypothesis one. This replicates previous research that has shown that the strength of religious beliefs and the frequency of individuals' religious activities predict greater relationship quality (Fincham et al., 2008; Lambert et al., 2010; Mahoney, 2010; Schramm et al., 2012). A number of explanations for this effect are possible. Marital and family relationships are included in the doctrines and teachings of every major world religion (Dollahite et al., 2004). The pro-marriage messages imbedded in

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

those teachings might contribute to religious individuals' commitment to their marriages, while pressure to conform to those messages might suppress individuals' desire to abandon marriage. Furthermore, virtues that are associated with stronger marriages such as forgiveness, generosity, and honesty are encouraged by the teachings of most religious groups. Individuals who seek to adhere to those teachings might display more of those virtues in their marital relationships (Fincham, Stanley, & Beach, 2007; Mahoney, 2010; McClure, 2013).

Dyadic Religiousness was also significantly positively associated with greater marital quality, supporting hypothesis two. This also replicates previous research (Ellison et al., 2011; Mahoney et al., 1999; Stafford et al., 2014). Couples who pray together, study sacred texts together, and engage in religious rituals together have previously been shown to have more satisfying marriages. Additionally, couples who are more similar in their religious beliefs, religious participation, and denominational affiliation have been shown to have higher quality marriages than their religiously heterogamous peers (Call & Heaton, 1997; Curtis & Ellison, 2002; Mahoney et al., 2001; Schramm et al., 2012; Vaaler et al., 2009).

Hypothesis three, however, was not supported because Communal Religiousness was not significantly associated with marital quality. Communal Religiousness also did not mediate the association between Personal Religiousness and marital quality, resulting in hypothesis six being rejected as well. A possible explanation for these results is that Communal Religiousness was measured using a single item, the frequency of attendance at religious services. Although most research using this measure has demonstrated a significant positive relationship with marital quality, some null findings have been

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

reported (Booth, Johnson, Branaman, & Sica, 1995; Mahoney et al., 2001). It is possible that other measures of Communal Religiousness (i.e., proportion of one's friends who are religious, or participants' reports of support from fellow congregants) might reveal a significant relationship between this construct and marital quality (Stroope, 2012). Future research should include greater diversity of measures of the Communal Religiousness construct. Additionally, it is possible that declining rates of religious affiliation and attendance might account for this null finding. In recent decades, Americans have reported less frequent attendance at religious services (Pew Forum on Religion and Family Life, 2008; Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2012). One result of this trend might be a declining influence of Communal Religiousness on marital quality.

Model Testing

Hypothesis four and five involved testing the goodness of fit of Mahoney's original direct effects model of the Relational Spirituality Framework components (Figure 1) as well as the hypothesized mediation model (Figure 2). The hypothesis that the direct effects model would represent a satisfactory fit to the data was not supported, indicating that the Relational Spirituality Framework as Mahoney originally proposed it did not accurately describe the relationships among measures of marital quality and Personal, Dyadic and Communal Religiousness in this sample. The mediation model, however, demonstrated a good fit to the sample data and a significantly better fit than the direct effects model. This supports the hypothesis that the elements of the Relational Spirituality Framework interact with each other in their influence on marital quality. Previous research had suggested this possibility (Fincham et al., 2010); however, this is the first research to test all the components of the Relational Spirituality Framework in a

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

single model. This finding, along with preliminary analyses that confirmed the presence of the factors of interest in these data, supports the use of the Relational Spirituality Framework as an organizing model when interactions between the various categories of religiousness are taken into account.

Tests of Mediation

Hypotheses six and seven stated that Communal and Dyadic Religiousness would each mediate the positive relationship between Personal Religiousness and marital quality. Communal Religiousness did not prove to be a significant mediator, and therefore hypothesis six was rejected. As noted above, Communal Religiousness did not demonstrate a significant direct effect on marital quality in these data; therefore it is not surprising that the construct did not contribute significantly to the indirect effect of Personal Religiousness.

Dyadic Religiousness did significantly mediate the relationship between Personal Religiousness and marital quality, supporting hypothesis seven. Personal Religiousness significantly predicted greater Dyadic Religiousness, which in turn significantly predicted greater marital quality (Figure 8). This relationship took the form of a statistically significant negative suppression effect by Personal Religiousness on Dyadic Religiousness' association with marital quality.

Two results indicated that negative suppression was present. First, the regression coefficient for Dyadic Religiousness was higher in the multiple regression equation (i.e., the path model; Figure 8) than in a bivariate regression of marital quality on Dyadic Religiousness alone (Figure 5). This suggests that the power of Dyadic Religiousness to predict marital quality was being suppressed when that relationship was tested in

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

isolation. Second, the regression coefficient for Personal Religiousness was negative in the path model (Figure 8), despite a positive zero-order correlation between Personal Religiousness and marital quality.

These two results should be interpreted as manifestations of a single negative suppression phenomenon (Maassen & Bakker, 2001). The Personal and Dyadic Religiousness variables appear to share variance that is not predictive of marital quality. In the path model (Figure 8), this shared variance is controlled for and the true relationship between Dyadic Religiousness and marital quality is better displayed. One interpretation of this result is that the religious nature of the dyadic activities being measured is irrelevant to the influence of those activities on marital quality.

Previous research regarding Dyadic Religiousness has largely tested the influence of the construct on marital quality in isolation, finding a significant positive relationship. Some researchers have hypothesized that these prior findings merely reflect the tendency for individuals to be attracted partners who share their worldview, including their religious beliefs (Hitsch, Hortaçsu, & Ariely, 2010; Jones, Pelham, Carvalho, & Mirenberg, 2004). Researchers have also suggested that the dyadic nature of shared religious activity is influential on marital quality and that the religious aspect of the activity may be superfluous (Lichter & Carmalt, 2009; Mahoney, 2010). This explanation is supported by the finding that couples who engage in more secular activities together display greater marital quality (Aron, Norman, Aron, McKenna, & Heyman, 2000).

The negative suppression present in these data may support the conclusion that shared activities are predictive of greater marital quality regardless of their religious or secular nature. Participants' reported Personal Religiousness positively predicted Dyadic

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

Religiousness; however, this relationship appears to be unrelated to participants' marital quality. Put differently, more religious individuals were more likely to report more frequent religious activities with their spouse regardless of the quality of their relationship with their spouse. Therefore to better understand the various influences on marital quality, future researchers investigating the association between Dyadic Religiousness and marital quality should be sure to control for the tendency of respondents to report greater Dyadic Religiousness only because of greater Personal Religiousness.

Alternative explanations are possible, however. Both the Personal and Dyadic Religiousness factors contained a measure of frequency of prayer. It is possible that measures of individual and dyadic religious activities that are distinct from one another may produce different results. Additionally, this analysis would be strengthened if there were measures of secular dyadic activities such as mutual participation in political events or recreation. For example, it might be informative to measure dyadic participation in political activities along with the strength of participants' personal political convictions. Unfortunately such measures were not available in the PALS data set. Future research is needed to confirm that the religious nature of shared religious activities is superfluous to the influence of those activities on marital quality.

Strengths and Limitations

One limitation of this study was the use of self-report data. Although common method bias did not appear to be a problem, the conclusions of this study would be strengthened by reports from participants' spouses or observational data. Additionally, these data come from a secondary data set and therefore measurement of the variables of

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

interest was limited to the items included in the PALS survey. For example, Communal Religiousness was only measured via a single item and Dyadic Religiousness was limited to two items. More items might have been useful to assess more diverse expressions of religiousness in all three categories of the Relational Spirituality Framework. The study was also limited by its use of cross-sectional data. Longitudinal data would permit analysis of changes in religiousness and marital quality over time and would strengthen the validity of claims that changes in one produce changes in the other. A final limitation of this study was an exclusive focus on theistic religiousness. No items or measures used in this study assessed the nontheistic sanctification of marital relationships hypothesized by Mahoney and her colleagues (Mahoney et al., 2003; Mahoney et al., 2001; Pargament & Mahoney, 2005). Future research should use measures that are more inclusive of the experiences of people who do not endorse the existence of a higher power.

A strength of this study is the large sample size. This permitted the use of structural equation modeling to simultaneously test multiple relationships between variables as well as to compare competing theoretical models. Additionally, the Portraits of American Life study sample was randomly selected and nationally representative. Although for the purposes of this study a nonrepresentative subsample of participants was used, the original sampling procedure lowered the risk of selection bias. Another strength was the use of multiple latent indicators of the variables of interest, despite some measurement limitations described above. Furthermore, this study was strongly grounded in theory, a lack of which has been a weakness of previous research on the association between religiousness and marital outcomes.

Implications

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

These findings have implications for future research and theoretical work.

Previous research on links between religiousness and marital relationships has largely focused on direct effects and bivariate correlations, with little attention paid to possible interactions among various forms of religious belief and practice (Dollahite et al., 2004; Sullivan, 2001). Additionally, most of this research has subsumed diverse expressions of religious belief and action into a global construct of religiousness, rather than acknowledging distinctions among those expressions. Mahoney's Relational Spirituality Framework, one of the first attempts to propose that diverse forms of religiousness may have independent and varied effects on relationship quality, does not itself go so far as to propose mechanisms by which those categories of religiousness might interact. This study is one step towards validating a theoretical model of interaction among different categories of religious expression in their influence on marital quality. These results offer partial support of the Relational Spirituality Framework as a valid model of the ways in which various categories of religiousness influence marital quality, when interactions between those categories are taken into account. The findings of this study suggest that Communal Religiousness may not be a significant predictor of marital quality when measured by frequency of church attendance. More research using a variety of measures of this construct is needed. This research also indicates that the relationship between individual and dyadic religious behaviors and beliefs is complex and merits further attention from researchers. Specifically, Personal Religiousness appears to suppress a portion of the power of Dyadic Religiousness to predict marital quality, which suggests that neither construct should be measured in isolation in future research on this topic.

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

Future research should continue to use diverse measures of the religious constructs in question. In particular, items that measure the religious expressions of a variety of faiths are needed, as well as measures of nontheistic forms of spirituality and sanctification of relationships. The relationship between Personal and Dyadic Religiousness merits special attention, because it appears that the strength of one's religious beliefs may contribute to the frequency of dyadic religious activities in ways that are irrelevant to the influence of those activities on marital quality.

This study is the first to test the Relational Spirituality Framework as a complete model, and the first to test for possible interactions between the components of the Framework. These findings suggest future directions for the field, and they highlight the need for a truly objective approach to the scientific study of religion and its possible influence on relationships.

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

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Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Mahoney's Relational Spirituality Framework

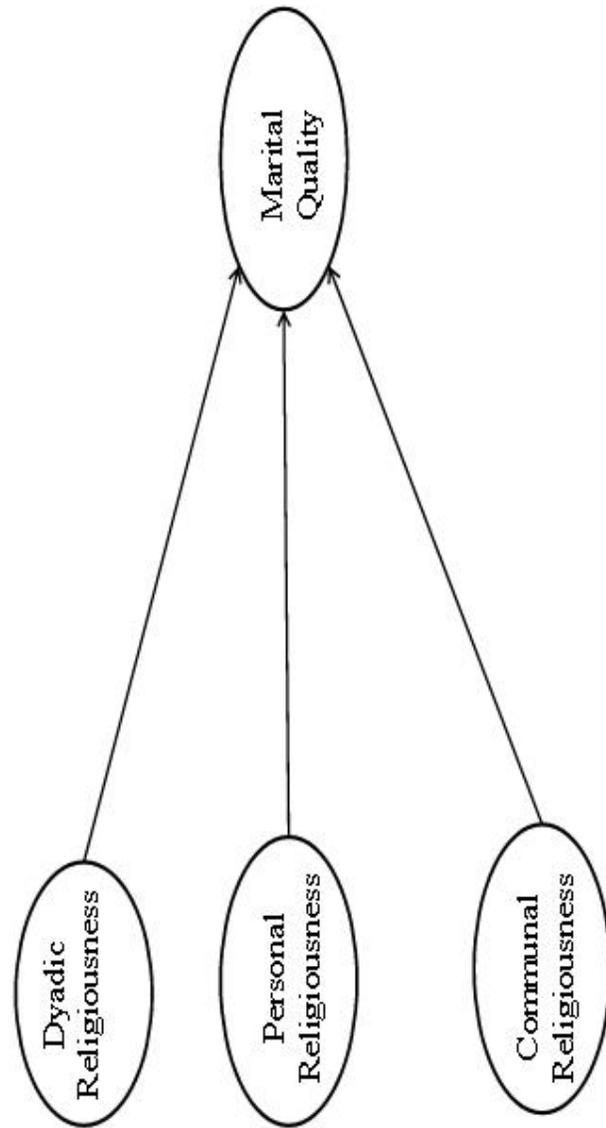


Figure 2. Hypothesized Mediation Model of the Relational Spirituality Framework.

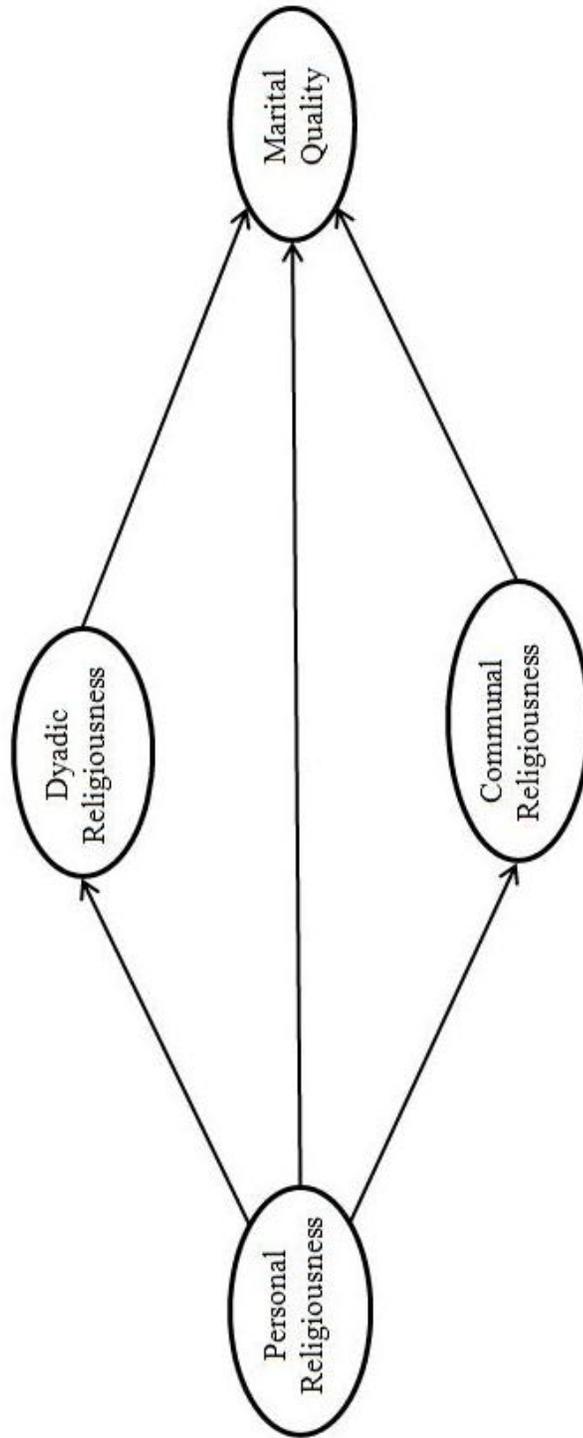
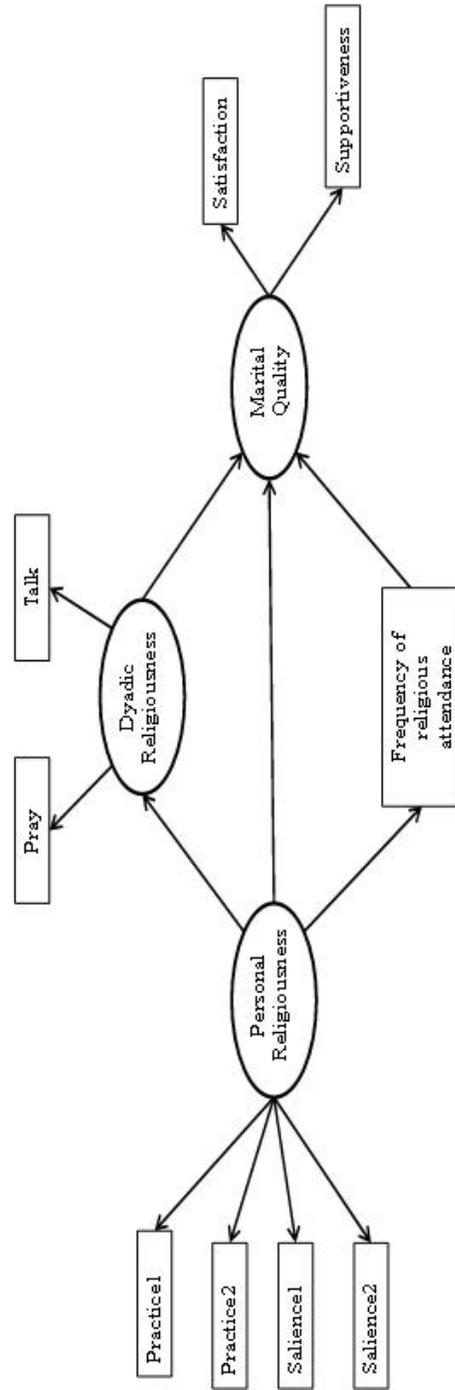
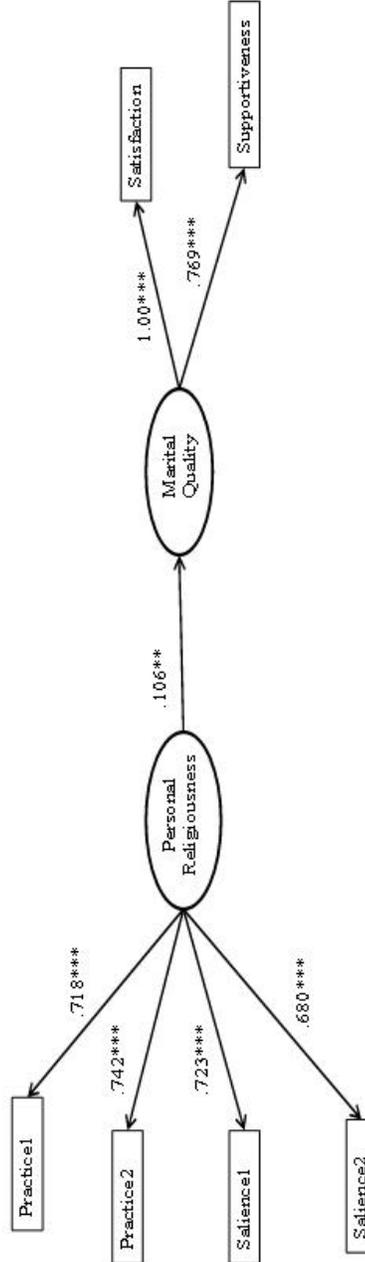


Figure 3. Mixed Latent Structural Model



RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

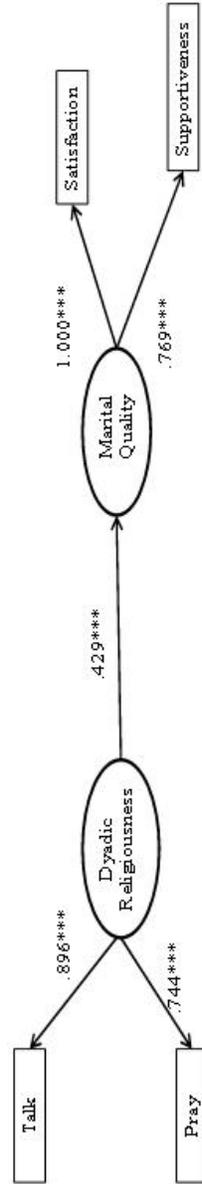
Figure 4. Direct Effect of Personal Religiousness on Marital Quality (Standardized Coefficients).



*** $p < .01$, **** $p < .001$

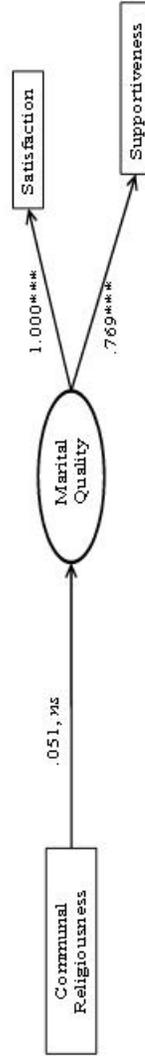
RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

Figure 5. Direct Effect of Dyadic Religiousness on Marital Quality (Standardized Coefficients).



*** $p < .001$

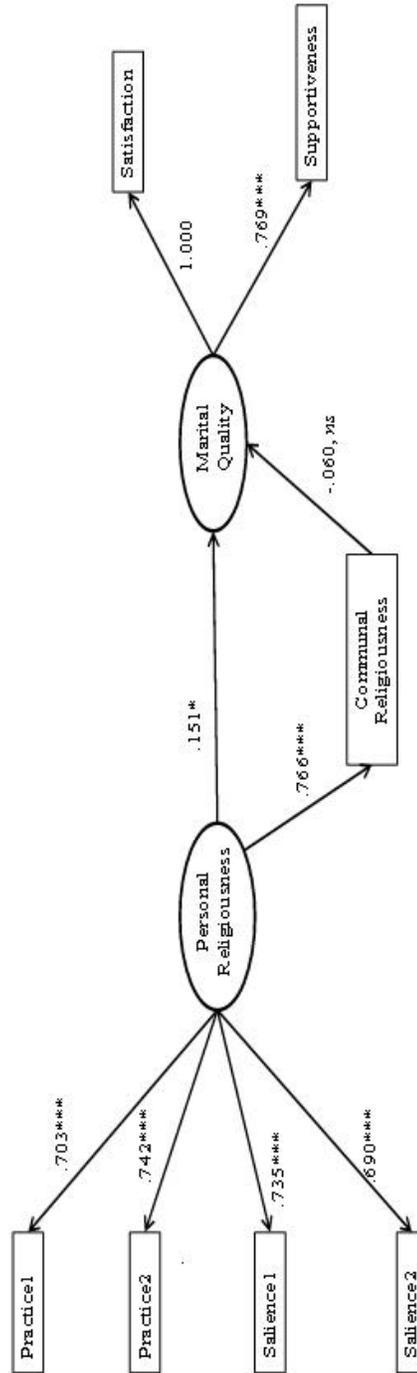
Figure 6. Direct Effect of Communal Religiousness on Marital Quality (Standardized Coefficients).



*** $p < .001$

RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARITAL QUALITY

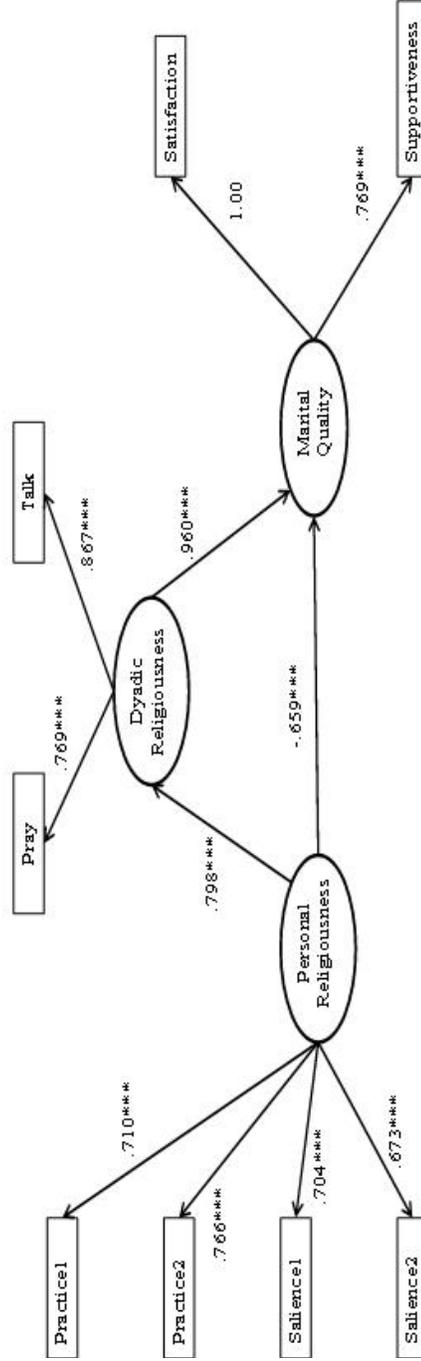
Figure 7. Mediation by Communal Religiousness on the Relationship between Personal Religiousness and Marital Quality (Standardized Coefficients)



Indirect effect: $.766 \times -.060 = -.04596$, ns

* $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$

Figure 8. Mediation by Dyadic Religiousness on the Relationship between Personal Religiousness and Marital Quality (Standardized Coefficients).



Indirect effect: $.798 \times .960 = .766^{***}$

$**p < .01$, $***p < .001$

Table 1. Sample Demographics

Age		
	Mean	44.94
	SD	13.963
Sex		
	Female	56.5%
	Male	43.5%
Race		
	Non-Hispanic White	54%
	African American	12.70%
	Hispanic	20.30%
	Asian American	8.80%
	Other Race	4.10%
Education		
	Less than high school	9.40%
	High school or equivalent	36%
	Some college	22.70%
	Bachelor's degree	20.30%
	Master's degree	8.70%
	Doctorate	1%
	Professional degree	2%
Annual Household Income (in thousands)		
	<\$19	9.60%
	\$20-39	21.50%
	\$40-59	18.50%
	\$60-79	17.10%
	\$80-99	13.40%
	>\$100	19.90%
Religious Affiliation		
	Catholic	32.30%
	Black Protestant	7.60%
	Evangelical Protestant	26.20%
	Mainline Protestant	13.20%
	Other Protestant	3.50%
	Jewish	1.30%
	Other religious tradition	7.2%
	Unaffiliated	8.7%
Length of Marriage		
	Mean	18.6 years
	Mode	3 years
	SD	14.68

Table 2. Correlations Among Personal Religiousness, Dyadic Religiousness, Frequency of Religious Attendance, and Marital Quality

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Practice1	–												
2. Practice2	.524**	–											
3. Saliencel	.543**	.523**	–										
4. Saliencel2	.572**	.495**	.760**	–									
5. Prayer	.450**	.458**	.432**	.418**	–								
6. Talking	.482**	.533**	.773**	.467**	.667**	–							
7. Attendance	.504**	.541**	.552**	.517**	.474**	.467**	–						
8. Marital1	.042	.044	.073*	.088*	.192**	.171**	.074*	–					
9. Marital2	.073*	.043	.083*	.104**	.247**	.237**	.067*	.555**	–				
10. Marital3	.075*	.062	.050	.086**	.197**	.185**	.052	.406**	.589**	–			
11. Marital4	.019	.027	.089**	.047	.185**	.201**	.022	.484**	.526**	.502**	–		
12. Marital5	.042	.036	.051	.044	.142**	.231**	-.011	.322**	.440**	.352**	.317**	–	
13. Marital6	.068*	.051	.060	.061	.231**	.271**	.038	.321**	.395**	.305**	.335**	.545**	–
14. Marital7	.022	.007	.029	.017	.163**	.207**	-.003	.255**	.331**	.270**	.289**	.442**	.486**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 3. Unstandardized and Standardized Estimates for Factor Loadings in the Measurement Model

Path	Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized
Personal Religiousness → Practice 1	.1.083	.055	.717***
Personal Religiousness → Practice 2	.923	.047	.752***
Personal Religiousness → Saliience 1	.436	.023	.709***
Personal Religiousness → Saliience 2	.412	.021	.679***
Dyadic Religiousness → Prayer	.945	.039	.773***
Dyadic Religiousness → Talking	1.058	.044	.863***
Marital Quality → Satisfaction	.630	.037	.976***
Marital Quality → Supportiveness	1.588	.093	.788***

*** $p < .001$

VITA

Greg Brooks is originally from Lebanon, TN. In 1997 he received a Bachelor of Science degree in Youth and Family Ministry from Harding University, and in 2000 he received a Master of Science degree in Marriage and Family Therapy from the same institution. Greg earned his PhD in Human Environmental Sciences, with a specialization in Human Development and Family Studies, from the University of Missouri in 2014. He is currently an Assistant Professor of Marriage and Family Therapy at Abilene Christian University. Greg's research focuses on the intersections of religion and family life.