The Relationship Between Distal Religious and Proximal Spiritual Variables and Self-Reported Marital Happiness

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DISTAL RELIGIOUS AND PROXIMAL SPIRITUAL VARIABLES AND SELF-REPORTED MARITAL HAPPINESS

By

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A Dissertation submitted to the Department of Family and Child Sciences in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Degree Awarded:
Summer Semester, 2009
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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to examine a married person’s distal religious (private religious practices, organizational religiousness, and religious intensity) and proximal spiritual variable (daily spiritual experiences, positive religious/spiritual coping, and forgiveness) associations to self-reported marital happiness. A secondary purpose was to examine these variable associations by gender. Three hundred forty-five married persons participated in the study. The findings showed that a married person’s organizational religiousness and race were significantly associated with self-reported marital happiness before considering proximal spiritual variables. After considering proximal spiritual variables, daily spiritual experiences, forgiveness, religious intensity, and race were significantly associated with marital happiness. Socio-cultural, distal and proximal variable associations to marital happiness differed in significance by gender. Symbolic interaction theory offered a conceptual foundation for interpretation. Implications for research and practice were discussed.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Many psychosocial benefits are thought to be associated with being married, at least to the extent that the marriage is perceived by the individual as happy. Marital happiness should not be confused with marital quality or health. It is an attitude, that is, an evaluative belief with an appropriate emotion and action tendency (Krech, Crutchfield, & Ballachey, 1962).

Just as marital happiness may be associated with certain kinds of wellbeing many socio-cultural factors have been explored to assess their contribution to each. Religion has been among the popular interests. Religious behaviors, in particular, have long been considered positive for marital happiness (Mahoney et al., 1999). One theory is that religious involvements impact marital happiness through key aspects of family life: balancing of work and family and relationship interactions – support, communication, conflict resolution, and affective expression. An alternative theory is that marital benefits attributed to religious behaviors have much more to do with an individual’s personal sense of spirituality than what has been acknowledged by previous researchers. If true, then the supposed positive influence of religion on marriage might have been overstated in the literature.

Statement of the Problem

Given the alleged power of marital happiness on personal psychological, social, and physical wellbeing (see Amato, Booth, Johnson, & Rogers, 2007), it is important to ascertain what contributes most to reports of marital happiness. However, the data about religion and marital happiness have created more questions than answers. Much of this scholarship has been atheoretical and methodologically infirm. If the research questions involving religious determinants of marital happiness had been more theory-based and systematically explored, the concept of spirituality might have been considered a major contender. Driven by theory, Mahoney and associates (1999) recently hypothesized that human spirituality is an important moderating variable in self-reports of marital happiness. After all, spirituality is thought to shape how married persons give meaning to their world and their experiences in it, including their experiences with marriage (Jeffries, 2002).
So-called “distal” religious variables have been explored first, namely public and private individual religious practices (church attendance, prayer, Bible reading, denominational membership), religious homogamy, and perceived global religiousness (see Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001). These variables are considered “distal” because they are rudimentary and look at an individual’s personal religious experiences from a distance. Perhaps this is why marital happiness has been associated more with a married woman’s organizational participation and a married man’s perceived meaning of his involvement (Fiese & Tomcho, 2001; Hatch, James, & Schumm, 1986). Distal religious variables likely fail to capture what it means to be spiritual; a concept that should transcend social gender-types. More “proximal” spiritual variables – the operational definitions of religiosity, if you will – are more likely to influence a married person’s perceptions, feelings, decisions, and actions important for his or her self-reported marital happiness (Jeffries, 2002). Knowledge gained from these variable associations to marital happiness may help marital therapists and researchers better prepare individuals for marriage as well as help those in distress.

Rationale for the Study

Proximal spiritual variables are just beginning to be discussed, in general, and studied in regard to marital happiness. This process has been hindered by lack of interest, and by problems of definition (Pargament, 1997). However, recent developments have provided an opportunity to look at both of these:

- Recent work in medicine, wherein each spiritual variable has been formally and operationally defined, and – by the way – positively associated with better medical and mental health outcomes (Fetzer Institute/NIA, 1999),
- The embedding of the resulting subscales (Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale, Positive Religious/Spiritual Coping, and Forgiveness) in a nation-wide data set (General Social Survey – GSS) which also inquires into aspects of marriage.

Purpose of the Study

The first purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which certain distal religious variables (private religious practices, organizational religiousness, and religious intensity) were each associated with a married person’s self-reported marital happiness after considering the unique influence of socio-cultural factors. The second purpose was to investigate the extent to which certain proximal spiritual variables (daily spiritual experiences, positive
religious/spiritual coping, forgiveness) were each associated with a married person’s self-reported marital happiness, after considering the unique influences of socio-cultural and distal religious variables. A third purpose was to investigate the extent to which these variable associations varied for a married man and married woman. To accomplish the purposes of this study, hierarchical binary regressions were performed on relevant data from the 1998 GSS. This included six subscales of the Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness and Spirituality (BMMRS) (Fetzer Institute/NIA, 1999) and a self-report of marital happiness (happy vs. unhappy), as measured by the 1998 GSS. Three BMMRS subscales (Private Religious Practices, Organizational Religiousness, and Religious Intensity) were determined to be distal religious variables based upon each variable’s similarity to Mahoney et al’s (1999) classifications of distal religious correlates to marital happiness. Three additional BMMRS subscales (Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale, Positive Religious/Spiritual Coping, and Forgiveness) were determined to be proximal spiritual variables based upon each variable’s similarity to other spiritual concepts (Anthony, 1993; Hatch, James, & Schumm, 1986; Mahoney et al., 1999; Roth, 1988) and relational factors (forgiveness) that were already positively associated with marital happiness, and not necessarily affiliated with formal religious institutions (Fetzer Institute/NIA, 1999). As such, this approach and understanding was informed by Symbolic Interaction Theory.

**Research Questions**

To accomplish the purposes of this study there were four research questions:

RQ1: To what extent are a married person’s distal religious variables of private religious practices, organizational religiousness, and religious intensity associated with his or her self-reported marital happiness after considering unique influences of socio-cultural factors?

RQ2: To what extent are a married person’s proximal spiritual beliefs of daily spiritual experiences, positive religious/spiritual coping, and forgiveness associated with his or her self-reported marital happiness after considering unique influences of socio-cultural factors and distal religious variables of private religious practices, organizational religiousness, and religious intensity?

RQ3: To what extent are distal religious variable associations to self-reported marital happiness different for a married man and married woman?

RQ4: To what extent are proximal spiritual variable associations to self-reported marital happiness different for a married man and married woman?
**Hypotheses**

H1: A married person’s distal religious variables of private religious practices, organizational religiousness, and religious intensity each will have significant positive associations with his or her self-reported marital happiness beyond what is accounted for by socio-cultural factors.

H2: A married person’s proximal spiritual variables of daily spiritual experiences, positive religious/spiritual coping, and forgiveness each will have significant positive associations with his or her self-reported marital happiness after considering the unique influences of socio-cultural factors and distal religious variables of private religious practices, organizational religiousness, and religious intensity.

H3: The pattern of influence between distal religious variables and self-reported marital happiness will be different for a married man and married woman.

H4: The pattern of influence between proximal spiritual variables and self-reported marital happiness will not be different for a married man and married woman.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms were defined to assist in understanding this research project.

**Marital happiness.** Definitions of marital happiness have changed throughout the years. Recent understanding of marital happiness has been, in its simplest form, a global appraisal of marriage by the individual. This was not to be confused with “marital quality” and “healthy marriage”. These have been theoretical, and often, a-theoretical constellations of variables compiled by outsiders to assess marriages.

**Distal religiousness.** Mahoney et al. (1999) referred to distal religious variables as individual religiousness, which included church attendance, frequency of prayer, religious homogamy, and global perceptions of religiousness. In this sense, distal religiousness was the behaviors and global appraisals of religion that did not capture the inherent meanings and values therein. For this study, distal religious concepts were external religious behaviors and global self-appraisals of religiousness – denominational membership, church attendance, prayer, Bible reading, religious homogamy, and global religiousness. This was not to dichotomize spirituality and religiousness, but to illustrate key variation in how each has been understood (Pargament, 1997).
**Proximal spirituality.** Mahoney et al. (1999, p. 328) referred to proximal spiritual variables as taking on characteristics of “holy”, “blessed”, and “heavenly”. They considered spirituality “apart from explicit, theocentric beliefs about religion”. Pargament (1997, p. 12) referred to spirituality as “however people think, feel, act, or interrelate in their efforts to find, conserve, and if necessary, transform their lives”. He considered spirituality the “heart and soul of religion”. Proximal spiritual beliefs in this study were, then, understood to reflect the inherent spiritual belief systems, not necessarily related to formal religion, that guide individuals’ values, decisions, and actions in day-to-day marital life.

**Assumptions**

This study was based upon the following assumptions: The respondents participated willingly and answered questions honestly; the respondents understood the questionnaires and the interviewer; and the research was conducted ethically and scientifically.

**Delimitations**

The following delimitations existed in this study: The data were collected as part of a previous research project; sample and variable distributions were based on the original study; and data analysis was limited in focus by examining religious, spiritual, and marital variables as measured by the BMMRS and 1998 GSS.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Family scholars have long been interested in marital happiness and its socio-cultural and “distal” religious correlates (see Amato et al., 2007; Mahoney et al., 1999, 2001). Proximal spiritual associations of self-reported marital happiness have not been thoroughly examined. To do so was expected to extend promising work already done in adult medicine (Levin, 2001; Mills, 2002; Siegel, Tenebaum, Jamanka, Barnes, Hubbard, & Zuckerman, 2002) and mental health (Garrouste, Goldberg, Beals, Herrell, & Manson, 2003; Hill & Pargament, 2003; Schnittker, 2001).

In the following first paragraphs the concept of marital happiness has been defined and its measurement discussed. Socio-cultural factors that affect marital happiness are discussed next. These include personal characteristics and aspects of family life. One purpose is to establish relevant control variables for the present study. A secondary purpose is to suggest aspects of family life which may be implicated by the findings of this research. Data about distal religious and proximal spiritual correlates to marital happiness are then reviewed. Symbolic Interaction Theory has been the conceptual framework of this research.

Defining and Measuring Marital Happiness

Essentially, “marital happiness” has asked of married individuals if they were satisfied, happy, and content with what they had. This variable has not dictated the bases for these judgments. In contrast, by exploring “marital quality”, “healthy marriages”, “successful marriages”, and similar constructs, social scientists created models that included variables held important by those social scientists. For example:

- The ratio of positive to negative experiences and kind of response to conflict (Gottman, 1999; Spanier & Lewis, 1980).
- Ability to demonstrate compassion, companionship, respect, responsibility, conflict-management, and overall effective communication (Gottman, 1999).
- Satisfaction with specific aspects of marital life, including finances, child-rearing practices, sexuality, and division of labor (Snyder, 1979, 1997).

Consequently, the concept of marital happiness has been understood to mean many things. It has been defined globally as marital satisfaction, marital success, marital quality, and marital
adjustment (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Knapp & Lott, 2008). The complexity in understanding marital happiness has led to a lack of agreement on its definition among scholars. However, several prominent researchers have suggested that marital happiness is an overall evaluative perception about the nature of the marital relationship (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987; Jacobson, 1985; Norton, 1983; Rosen-Grandone, Myers, & Hattie, 2006).

Global measures of marital happiness have long been popular in social research. The National Opinion Research Center (NORC) has for decades included a single-item measure for marital happiness in one of its largest longitudinal projects – The General Social Survey (GSS). Rosen-Grandone et al. (2006) recently suggested that the global approach to defining marital happiness offered straightforward interpretation of the antecedents, correlates, and consequences thereof. The implication here was that one’s self-reported marital happiness indicated certain marital qualities. Kurdek (1992) found this to be true using the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (Spanier & Lewis, 1980), where the marital satisfaction subscale of the DAS was most consistent in determining variance in other variables of interest. Overall, the concept of marital happiness suggested that a married person was happy with what he/she had, and recent scholars have favored this more global self-report approach over more multidimensional measures (Rosen-Grandone et al., 2006).

**Gender and Marital Happiness**

Bernard’s (1982) often-quoted theory of “his” and “her” marriage suggested that married men generally report higher levels of marital happiness than do married women, a pattern supported empirically with some literature (Amato et al., 2007; McGraw & Walker, 2004; Thompson, 1993). However, scholars discussed recently that the self-reported marital happiness for men and women was perhaps more similar than different (Amato et al., 2007; Aron & Henkemeyer, 1995; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kurdek, 2005). For instance, Amato et al. (2007) reported that married men and women reported about the same level of happiness, with men being only marginally happier than women. They concluded further that the factors affecting marital happiness for men and women were essentially about the same. As such, Amato et al. and Karney and Bradbury (1995) argued that gender differences with self-reported marital happiness were likely overstated in the literature.
Other Socio-cultural Influences on Marital Happiness

According to Amato et al. (2007), there were personal characteristics other than gender that were of importance to a married person’s self-reported marital happiness. These were race, age, education, income, psychological health, and divorce. Parental divorce and pre-marital cohabitation were also examined; as were certain aspects of family life. These were balancing work and family and relationship interactions – communication, support, conflict resolution, and affective expression. These factors, along with personal characteristics, have been given considerable attention in the literature throughout the study of marital happiness.

Personal Characteristics

Race. In recent years more African Americans and Latinos reported being married than in times past (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003). In turn, authors found consistently that African Americans were less happy in marriage than their Caucasian counterparts (Acitelli, Douvan, & Veroff, 1997; Adelmann, Chadwick, & Baerger, 1996; Amato et al., 2007; Broman, 1993; Trent & South, 2003). This racial variation in marital happiness was explained, in part, by African Americans having lower educational attainment, employment status, and financial returns than Caucasians (Bowman, 1990; Clark-Nicolas & Gray-Little, 1991; Goodwin, 2003; Orbuch, Veroff, & Hunter, 1999). African Americans were also more likely than Caucasians to have experienced a parental divorce and to cohabitate before marriage (Teachman, Tedrow, & Crowder, 2000) – each associated inversely to the marital happiness among predominately Caucasian samples (Amato et al., 2003, 2007). Moreover, inverse associations between antisocial behavior (heavy drinking) and marital happiness were also much stronger among African Americans than Caucasians (Adelmann et al., 1996). In effect, African Americans were more likely than Caucasians to face such an array of challenges associated with marriage and marital happiness, especially economic sustainability (Goodwin, 2003). This raised awareness of the issue of race when studying marriage.

Age at first marriage. By paying attention to age at first marriage, researchers have been able to examine cohort effects in self-reported marital happiness. For instance, a positive association between age at first marriage and marital happiness has been a common pattern in the literature (Amato et al., 2007). However, authors have been cautious in their interpretations of this association. Some speculated that these data had much more to do with education than age (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Quinn & Odell, 1998).
**Education and income.** Education has been the focus of many studies about marital happiness. The consensus has been that married persons with more than less education were more psychologically and relationally mature (Quinn & Odell, 1998). Older and more educated individuals were also considered to have better communication and conflict resolution skills in marriage (Amato & Booth, 1997; Ross & Wu, 1995). Overall, authors suggested that this increased the chances of being happily married. Moreover, education generally helped marriages financially (Amato et al., 2007; Fox & Chancey, 1998; Kreider & Fields, 2002; Lehrer, 2003), which reduced the risk for marital strain associated with pervasive economic hardship (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002). In fact, a married person’s education level has better predicted marital happiness than overall income (Amato et al., 2007; Amato & Rogers, 1997; White & Rogers, 2000). Perhaps the link between education and marital happiness also had to do with a married person’s overall psychological wellness.

**Psychological health.** In recent studies, authors reported that a married person’s psychological condition during (Heyman, O’leary, & Jouriles, 1995; Karney & Bradbury, 1995) and even prior to marriage (Johnson & Booth, 1998; Kurdek, 2002) was associated strongly with marital happiness. Personal tendencies toward anger and neuroticism, in particular, appeared to undermine what was needed for a healthy marriage. Similarly, general psychological wellness has also been implicated in peoples’ choices in living prior to their current marriage, as well as the successfulness of those living arrangements (premarital cohabitation, a pre-mature decision to marry, and divorce) (Amato et al., 2007).

**Divorce.** Divorce was another life-circumstance of questionable influence on subsequent marital happiness. Johnson and Booth (1998) found that angry individuals who remarried after divorce experienced marital problems and unhappiness similar to that in their previous marriage. Amato et al. (2007) reported also that persons in remarriages (after divorce) tended to have more marital problems and less overall marital happiness than those in first marriages. In fact, Amato et al. (p. 24) and others suggested that “marital instability breeds more marital instability” (Booth & Edwards, 1992; White, 1990). Implicated therein was the affect of parental divorce.
Parental Divorce

In research about the determinants of marital happiness and stability, Amato et al. (2003) found that parental divorce was perhaps most important. In fact, they have since argued that parental divorce was perhaps one of the best predictors of offspring success in marriage. Others reported the same (Bumpass, Martin, & Sweet, 1991; Feng, Giarrusso, Bengston, & Frye, 1999; Wolfinger, 1999). One theory was that married persons of divorced parents had severe, or chronic, self-blaming, anxiety, and depression associated with their parents’ dysfunctional marriage (Amato et al., 2003). In turn, their psychological condition facilitated the dissolution of their marriage. Additionally, married persons of divorce parents might have modeled marriage after the parents’ disruptive relationship, further increasing the odds of a similar outcome for themselves.

Premarital Cohabitation

Living together before marriage has not been encouraged by the academic literature. Amato et al. (2007) suggested that premarital cohabitation was generally detrimental to subsequent marital happiness. One reason was that cohabitating relationships were believed to be harder to sever than non-cohabitating relationships. Consequently, cohabiting partners were considered more likely than non-cohabiting partners to marry when not fully committed to the relationship. Sharing living space, furniture, pets, finances, and in-law pressure to marry were factors at play. Consequently, cohabitants that married with hesitation increased the odds of being unhappy and eventually divorcing.

Aspects of Family Life and Marital Happiness

It was clear from the above data that certain personal characteristics have affected self-reported marital happiness. The appraisal of marriage as happy or not, or some variation of this, also involved aspects of family life relevant to the current marriage (balancing work and family and marital interaction). The extent to which married persons communicate in positive ways, are effective with resolving conflict, and express positive emotion were among other factors associated with marital happiness. These relational processes were likely most important during marital transitions into parenthood.
Children and Employment

The research has shown that married persons were generally happier prior to having children (see Amato et al., 2007). In fact, several authors reported that a married person’s marital happiness was lowest during childrearing years (Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Glenn, 1998; Lindahl, Clements, & Markman, 1998; VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001). The extent to which having children affected marital happiness was even more pronounced as the number of children increased, especially when both spouses worked fulltime (Amato et al., 2007; Gottman, 1999). Spain and Bianchi (1996) reported specifically that balancing work and family was a major marital task for most dual-earner families.

Marital Interactions

John Gottman (1999) has been among the most prominent researchers of marital interaction patterns in recent decades. According to his research, having more positive than negative interactions in marriage was among the most important determinants of marital happiness and success. He discussed the value of positive affective expression and conflict-resolution. For instance, married persons proficient in resolving conflict without harboring resentment and negative affect were expected to be happier and stay married longer than were those more accustomed to using criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling behaviors. Others have concurred with Gottman (Bryant & Conger, 1999; White, 1983; Zuo, 1992) in that supportive communication and spending quality time together were important for marital happiness.

Moreover, attention to these interaction patterns was especially important across time in marriage. As some married persons interacted less over the course of marriage, they tended to report lower levels of marital happiness than those interacting more often (VanLaningham, Johnson & Amato, 2001; White, 1983; Zou, 1992). Spending less time together in marriage was also associated with greater risk for divorce (White, 1983). Although these data by marital duration were not unequivocal (Amato et al., 2007), they suggested that attention to interaction patterns was important to consider throughout the course of marriage and especially during transitions such as having children. To complicate matters further, the effects of many spousal characteristics and aspects of family life on marital happiness have been patterned for decades (Amato et al., 2007). The result has led to some interesting interaction effects over time. This further complicated what has been known about antecedents to marital happiness.
Socio-cultural Trends that May Affect Marital Happiness

Although personal characteristics and aspects of family life have had obvious and unique relevance to marital happiness, Amato and his associates (2007) suggested that cross-sectional interpretation was misleading. They reported on certain trends that, when interpreted longitudinally, had offsetting effects on marital happiness. For example, while higher educational attainment and later age at first marriage were positively related to marital happiness over time, increases in premarital cohabitation and non-marital childbirths had the opposite impact. Moreover, higher educational attainment was positively associated with increased risk for premarital cohabitation and non-marital childbirths. Amato et al. reported also that positive associations between family income and marital happiness were offset by the negative effects of wives’ workforce participation. Even though dual-earner families had more income, there were additional stresses associated with balancing work and family (Spain & Bianchi, 1996). These authors reported that challenges were especially evident during childrearing years. For these reasons, Amato et al. (2007) advocated for a longitudinal approach to studying corollaries to marital happiness. Whereas not always feasible, an alternative approach has been to consider certain socio-cultural trends during a particular era (Cherlin, 1992, 2004; Coontz, 2005; Mason, Fine, & Carnochan, 2004). This was expected to help determine demographics of primary importance to marital happiness at any one particular time in which a study was to be conducted.

Determining Socio-cultural and Family Life Covariates for this Study

The selection of demographic covariates for this study was best informed by a combination of two methods. The first approach was to consider recent socio-cultural trends in moderating influences for marital happiness (Amato et al., 2007). The second approach was to consider socio-demographic factors considered by authors of recent studies about religious and spiritual correlates to marital happiness. Combining these approaches allowed for inferences about which demographic variables might be most relevant to this study.

For instance, marriage researchers in recent years suggested that divorce and especially parental divorce had significant impact on a person’s self-reported marital happiness (Amato et al., 2003). Considerable attention has also been afforded to age at first marriage, education, income, premarital cohabitation, and psychological health (Amato et al., 2007). Amato et al. also considered the presence of children, wives’ workforce participation, and duration of marriage as other potential moderators of marital happiness (e.g., aspects of family life).
Authors of recent studies about religion and spirituality in marriage often controlled for many of these factors. Age, education, income, gender, divorce, and the presence of children were common socio-demographic controls (Anthony, 1993; Booth, Johnson, Branaman, & Sica, 1995; Cunradi, Caetano, & Schafer, 2002; Mahoney et al., 1999; Shehan, Bock, & Lee, 1990; Williams & Lawler, 2001). To follow the precedent set by these scholars many of these factors were considered for inclusion in this study of married persons in the 1998 GSS. Inclusion was, however, going to be affected by variable accessibility and applicability based on preliminary statistical procedures.

**The Next Step: Unraveling Distal Religious Associations to Marital Happiness**

Studying religious variable associations to marital happiness was the standard for decades in marital research. Mahoney et al. (1999) recently categorized religious involvements as “distal” to marital happiness. These included formal and informal religious practices such as religious affiliation, church attendance, prayer and Bible reading, and perceived religiousness.

**Formal Religious Practices**

**Religious affiliation.** In the past, researchers generally assumed that the role of religious affiliation in marriage was a positive one. Studies showed that religiously affiliated married persons had greater marital happiness and less conflict than non-affiliated married persons (Herrenkohl, 1978; Rollins & Oheneba-Sakyi, 1990; Sorensen, Upchurch, & Shen, 1996; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). However, other researchers reported that differences between religious affiliates and non-affiliates on marital violence and happiness were nil, especially after considering demographic factors (Brinkerhoff, Grandin, & Lupri, 1992; Ellison, Bartkowski, & Anderson, 1999; Mahoney et al., 1999; Straus et al., 1980).

What this meant was that the two groups may have been more similar than different in terms of marital happiness, or that religious affiliation, by itself, was a poor indicator. There was even some evidence to suggest that religious affiliates, namely husbands, were at greater risk for marital violence and poorer marital happiness than non-affiliates (Brinkerhoff et al., 1992; O’Brien, 1971). Brinkerhoff et al. explained that the risk for violence increased if a husband was unable to fulfill his religiously-proscribed marital role as head of household. These inconsistencies in the data were perhaps why Mahoney et al. (1999) referred to religious affiliation as a “distal” religious correlate to marital happiness.
However, some speculated that it was couple affiliation status that made the ultimate difference in marital happiness (Shehan et al., 1990). However, Mahoney et al. (1999) and others concluded again that couple affiliation and marital happiness were distal correlates (Heaton, 1984; Ortega, Whitt, & William, 1988; Shehan et al., 1990). The emergent theme in the literature was that religious affiliation, in and of itself, and any variation thereof, had little predictive power in terms of marital happiness (Brinkerhoff et al., 1992; Mahoney et al., 1999, 2001; Straus et al., 1980). In effect, authors began looking more closely at certain other religious practices – church attendance, prayer and Bible reading (see Mahoney et al., 2001).

**Church attendance.** The extent to which a married person’s church attendance affected his or her marital happiness was considered by many over the years. Findings from independent studies in the 1980s showed that church attendance and marital happiness were positively related (Bahr & Chadwick, 1985; Glenn, 1982; Hatch et al., 1986). However, earlier studies were plagued with methodological issues of small and non-random samples, variable measurement error, and failure to account for demographic confounds (education, income, and divorce history) (Mahoney et al., 2001). As such, authors of more recent and sophisticated cross-sectional and longitudinal studies reported that no meaningful associations existed between church attendance and marital happiness (Booth et al., 1995; Mahoney et al., 1999, 2001). Others showed inconsistencies in the data about church attendance and marital conflict (Brinkerhoff et al., 1992; Ellison et al., 1999; Ellison & Anderson, 2001), a variable of relevance to marital happiness. It was then reasonable to conclude from these data that church attendance alone, even couple attendance (Myers, 2006; Robinson & Blanton, 1994), was not going to determine marital happiness. These unique variable associations were perhaps mediated by something else. In terms of religious practices, the trend was to investigate more private involvements in hopes to find such mediating influences (Mahoney et al., 1999).

**Informal Religious Practices**

**Prayer and Bible reading.** The practice of prayer and Bible reading were considered less institutional and more personalized than religious identification and church attendance. For this reason some believed that prayer and Bible reading better predicted marital happiness (Mahoney et al., 1999). In fact, authors of a number of studies found that a married person’s prayer and Bible reading correlated positively to marital happiness, including his or her problem solving skills, sense of responsibility for self-change, as well as to relationship softening and
reconciliation (Butler, Stout, & Gardner, 2002; Dudley & Kosinski, 1990; Gruner, 1985; Mahoney et al., 1999).

From these data it appeared that prayer and Bible reading promoted self-evaluation and relationship bonding that was beneficial for marriage and marital happiness. However, this interpretation was countered with data about the detrimental impacts of prayer and Bible reading on marriage (Curtis & Ellison, 2002; Ellison & Barkowski, 1997). These authors found that the extent to which prayer and Bible reading were helpful for marriage was dependent upon a married person’s internal motivations. For instance, prayer and Bible reading were particularly damaging to marriage when used to create unholy coalitions and to displace and defer personal responsibility to God (Curtis & Ellison, 2002). Moreover, Bible interpretations that inadvertently promulgated marital hierarchies in which the husband had more power than his wife were believed to create marital conflict and unhappiness (Ellison & Barkowski, 1997). According to these data, the patriarchal perspective of religion, in general, might have even persuaded male aggression if a wife disagreed with her husband on Biblically defined marital roles (Curtis & Ellison, 2002; Ellison & Barkowski, 1997).

As such, there was more to how religion and marriage interacted than was observable through religious affiliation, church attendance, prayer, and Bible reading (Mahoney et al., 1999). It appeared that a married person’s internal motivations played a crucial role. Examining religious behavior alone risked overlooking inherent personal values and beliefs that ultimately seemed to guide marital process and happiness. The study of global religiousness in relation to marital happiness was perhaps one attempt to better understand these motivations (Mahoney et al., 1999).

Global Religiousness

Interestingly, research about global religiousness, or the extent to which one is perceived as religious (Fetzer Institute/NIA, 1999; Pargament, 1997), and marital happiness was much more convincing of a clear and positive association than that observed with formal and informal religious practices (Booth et al., 1995; Dudley & Kosinski, 1990; Filsinger & Wilson, 1984; Mahoney et al., 2001; Roth, 1988). These data were consistent across studies and remained after considering demographics (Glenn & Weaver, 1978; Wilson & Filsinger, 1986). Perhaps a married person’s perceived global religiousness was more closely related to his or her own spiritual worldview than what was captured through religious behaviors.
Also interesting with these data was that positive associations between religiousness and marital happiness differed by religious affiliation status (affiliated versus no affiliation) (Mahoney et al., 2001). Mahoney et al. discussed that personal religiousness was most salient for the marital happiness of churchgoers. Associations between religiousness and marital happiness were weaker when considered among community and nationally-based samples of both churchgoers and non-churchgoers. One possibility was that non-churchgoers identified less with religiosity, making this correlation to marital happiness of lesser valence to them than that observed among churchgoers. Perhaps those without religious affiliations identified more with spiritual concepts not necessarily linked to formal religious institutions. Had authors studied more spiritually-based concepts this divergence between affiliates and non-affiliates might have been less pronounced (see Anthony, 1993).

Moreover, Mahoney et al. (1999) suggested that little was really known about how this global concept of religiousness affected marital happiness. They discussed that a married person’s global religiousness was likely to not capture the inherent mechanisms, or spiritual beliefs, that would influence behavior important for marital happiness. They called for a more detailed approach to involve a married person’s spiritual beliefs and values in association to marital happiness. As such, Mahoney et al. considered global religiousness a distal religious correlate to marital happiness, irrespective of some data affirming positive associations (Booth et al., 1995; Dudley & Kosinski, 1990; Filsinger & Wilson, 1984; Roth, 1988).

**Proximal Spiritual Correlates to Marital Happiness**

Few authors have studied what could be considered proximal spiritual variables in relation to marital happiness (Anthony, 1993; Hatch et al., 1986; Hunt & King, 1978; Mahoney et al., 1999; Roth, 1988; Schumm, Bollman, & Jurich, 1982). Researchers in the past half-century focused instead on the abovementioned distal religious concepts (see Mahoney et al., 2001). Recent interest in more spiritually-based variables suggested that there was much more to learn. For comprehensiveness the following discussion addresses two types of proximal spirituality in marriage – personal spiritual variables and shared spiritual variables. It should be noted that, for theoretical purposes, the primary interest in this research was on personal spirituality.
Personal Spiritual Beliefs

The type of spirituality considered in this section was that of a married person’s own personal, or self-reported, beliefs. Authors that studied self-reported spiritual beliefs among married persons found unequivocal positive associations to marital happiness (Anthony, 1993; Hunt & King, 1978; Roth, 1988; Schumm et al., 1982). Essentially these data suggested that there was something more about spiritual belief concepts, in general, in relation to marital happiness than was captured through religious variables. This was true of spiritual belief concepts that may or may not have been similar enough to link together – spiritual wellbeing versus maturity versus sanctification of marriage (Anthony, 1993; Mahoney et al., 1999; Roth, 1988).

In the more recent of these studies Mahoney et al. (1999) argued that personal spiritual beliefs were better predictors of marital happiness than formal and informal religious practices. To test their hypothesis they created a construct – perceived sacred qualities of marriage. They found that perceived sacred qualities of marriage accounted for over half of the overall variance in marital happiness after considering other more distal religious involvements. This confirmed their hypothesis that spiritual belief concepts captured variance in marital happiness that was not discernable through the traditionally-studied religious variables.

Actually, this was not new ground. Anthony (1993) and Roth (1988) had arrived at similar conclusions in two earlier studies. Roth, in particular, reported that a husband’s and wife’s existential wellbeing (meaning, purpose, direction in life, and spiritual connection with God), as measured by the Spiritual Wellbeing Scale (Ellison, 1983), was a stronger positive correlate to marital happiness than religious wellbeing. She discussed that having purpose, direction in life, and spiritual connectedness to self, others, and to God were most important when it came to marriage.

Anthony (1993), in a similar approach, used Allport and Ross’ (1967) Religious Orientation Scale (ROS) to determine if differences in marital happiness existed among husbands and wives by type of religious orientation. The ROS contained four subscales to measure the degree to which a married person’s was intrinsically religiously oriented, extrinsically religiously oriented, indiscriminately pro-religious, or indiscriminately anti-religious. The intrinsically religious married person was considered spiritually mature, interested in personal growth and striving, and described as living out his or her faith on a daily basis. The extrinsically religious
person was described as using religion to gain prestige, status, and social recognition. Supporting anything religious without indication of motive was considered indiscriminately religious whereas opposition to anything religious was indiscriminately anti-religious.

As expected, Anthony (1993) found that the highest levels of marital happiness existed among religiously intrinsic married persons, followed by those indiscriminately anti-religious. It was interesting that the second highest marital happiness scores existed among those indiscriminately anti-religious. Anthony suggested that intrinsically religious and indiscriminately anti-religious married persons were more genuine and less concerned about living up to others’ expectations than were those with extrinsic religious orientations. The latter reported the lowest marital happiness scores of all the religious orientations. These data supported an earlier notion that religious commitment, when more external than internal, may have little effect, or even undermine marital happiness (Heaton & Albrecht, 1991; Larson & Goltz, 1989).

Perhaps the most important discoveries above were that spiritual mindedness, or having certain spiritual beliefs, was more important in terms of marital happiness than was outwardly expressed religious behavior. There was something more about the internal spiritual processes, decisions, beliefs, and values that transcended religious behavior. These data alone implicated the need for further study. The problem has been a lack of interest and commonality in spiritual variables. It was clear, however, that personal spiritual beliefs were an important part of a married person’s perceived marital happiness. Although not inherently part of this study, some authors went in the direction of shared spirituality to expand knowledge on the topic. A brief discussion of these data was offered.

**Shared Spiritual Beliefs**

As anticipated from studies about personal spiritual beliefs and marital happiness, shared spirituality had a positive affect on marital happiness (Craddock, 1991; Hatch et al., 1986; Kaslow & Hammerschmidt, 1992; Kaslow & Robison, 1996; Robinson & Blanton, 1993; Wilson & Filsinger, 1986) and an inverse affect on marital conflict (Butler & Harper, 1994; Curtis & Ellison, 2002; Dudley & Kosinski, 1990; Katerndahl & Obregon, 2007; Mahoney, 2005). Sharing of moral values was considered among mutual respect, trust, and appreciation as a characteristic of long-term happy marriages (Dudley & Kosinski, 1990; Kaslow & Robison, 1996; Kaslow & Hammerschmidt, 1992). Married persons that shared beliefs about God as
compassionate and impartial used healthier communication and conflict resolution strategies than did those that shared more punitive views (Butler et al., 2002; Chi & Houseknecht, 1983; Mahoney, 2005). These authors suggested that it was the type of spiritual belief as well as the degree to which it was shared that ultimately impacted marital happiness.

There were two major implications from these data: Spouses of opposing spiritual beliefs were less likely to report marital happiness than those with similar positive spiritual beliefs; And punitive views of God and spirituality, especially when shared by spouses, decreased the odds of being happily married. Essentially, the extent to which married persons shared positive spiritual themes and direction in life had a residual effect on the way they interacted toward each other and appraised their marriage (Butler et al., 2002; Chi & Houseknecht, 1983; Mahoney, 2005).

However, before spiritual beliefs could be communicated and shared they must have had personal meaning (see Jeffries, 2002). From this perspective, married persons shared their spiritual beliefs only so far as they had each personally identified with the meanings of the terms for themselves. For this reason, shared spiritual beliefs in relation to marital happiness were not a focus of this study. Those spiritual beliefs, as known to a married individual, were perhaps clearer path associations to self-reported marital happiness, and they were perhaps somewhat different for married men and married women (Fiese & Tomcho, 2001; Hatch et al., 1986; Roth, 1988; Sherkat & Ellison, 1999).

**Gender Effects in Religious and Spiritual Correlates to Marital Happiness**

Now that more general effects of religion and spirituality in terms of marital happiness have been discussed, we need to point out some gender nuances. For instance, researchers agreed that married women participated more than married men in formal organizational religious practices (Miller & Hoffman, 1995; Wilson & Sherkat, 1994). In fact, Fiese and Tomcho (2001) found that a married woman’s marital happiness was related most to her religious routine whereas the meaning of religious involvement was most important to a married man.

The implication of these data was that formal church participation indicated less about a married man’s sense of religiousness than it did for a married woman. In effect, religious variable associations to marital happiness perhaps varied between a married man and married woman to the extent to which those variables were measured according to meaning (for men) and social involvement (for women). For instance, Hatch et al. (1986) found that church attendance was the strongest direct predictor for a married woman’s marital happiness but was of
no importance to a married man’s marital happiness. In Roth’s (1988) study, a married man’s existential wellbeing was always the strongest correlate to his self-reported marital happiness when compared to his religious wellbeing. Roth’s data suggested also that a married man was likely to place emphasis on spiritual meaning, which in turn, had the most impact on his marital happiness. If this was a pervasive pattern and distinction between a married man and married woman, then previous researchers might have overlooked how gender nuances in spirituality and religiousness affected his and her marital happiness.

**Interest in Daily Spiritual Experiences, Positive Religious/Spiritual Coping, and Forgiveness**

The proximal spiritual variables of interest to this research (daily spiritual experiences, positive religious/spiritual coping, and forgiveness) were distinctly defined concepts in the BMMRS that was integrated in the 1998 General Social Survey (GSS). They were of special importance in adult medicine and mental health for both men and women (Fetzer Institute/NIA, 1999). Given the more recent development of these concepts and the supposed positive affects in areas of medicine and mental health across genders, they seemed logical concepts for research about marital happiness among both married men and married women.

**Daily Spiritual Experiences**

This concept was considered among the most innovative conceptualizations of spiritual experience in recent years (Ellison & Fan, 2008). It was measured by a standardized tool, namely, the Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale (DSES) (Underwood & Teresi, 2002). According to its developers, this scale tapped into a much broader range of spiritual traditions than was offered by more traditional Judeo-Christian measures (Underwood, 2006). Data to support its use in marital research existed in studies that showed positive associations with medical and mental health outcomes (Ciarrocchi & Deneko, 2004; Dunn, Chapelski, Stinson, & Massanari, 2004; Hayton, Boylan, Jackson, & Devinsky, 2002; Keefe et al., 2001; Koenig, George, & Titus, 2004). Moreover, Underwood and Teresi (2002) reported that the DSES correlated positively with a multitude of life experiences, including quality of life, optimism, perceived social support, and inversely to anxiety, depression, anger and hostility; many of which also had corresponding associations to marital happiness (Johnson & Booth, 1998; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kurdek, 2002). In fact, Amato et al. (2007) reported that a married person reported higher levels of marital happiness when religious beliefs were important to his or her daily life.
The next appropriate use of this measure was in marital research, wherein distal religious correlates to marital happiness were inconsistent and weak, and interest in proximal spiritual beliefs – like daily spiritual experiences – was just beginning to develop. A married person’s perceived daily spiritual experiences were expected to go beyond what was captured by formal and informal religious behaviors. It was perhaps daily spiritual experiences that represented the broader socio-contextual day-to-day marital life of modern-day Americans. For this reason, it was worth knowing whether or not, and to what extent, daily spiritual experiences affected a married person’s self-reported marital happiness.

**Positive Religious/Spiritual Coping**

Like daily spiritual experiences, positive religious/spiritual coping received considerable attention in areas of adult medicine and mental health (Fallot, 1998; Koenig et al., 2004; Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000). Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez (1998) referred to positive religious/spiritual coping as expressing spirituality, meaning in life, secure relationship with God, and spiritual connectedness. It was different from other coping methods. In fact, Pargament et al. reported that positive religious/spiritual coping accounted for variance in stressful outcomes that was not explained by secular-based coping methods. In fact, Psychological and physical health outcomes were positively affected by religious/spiritual coping (Pargament, 1997). Variations in health outcomes were especially noticeable when comparing negative and positive religious/spiritual coping (Koenig, Pargament, & Nielsen, 1998). Negative religious/spiritual coping was described as a struggle to find meaning in life and having a punitive perception of God (Pargament et al., 1998). Pargament et al. reported that people experienced greater psychological distress and sense of loss when they used negative religious/spiritual coping. For these reasons, it was worth knowing whether or not and to what extent positive religious/spiritual coping applied to marital happiness as well. If consistent with mental health and medical outcome research (Fetzer Institute/NIA, 1999), then more positive religious/spiritual coping was going to mean greater self-reported marital happiness among spouses.

**Forgiveness**

The final concept of interest to this study was forgiveness, as defined and measured by the Fetzer Institute/NIA (1999). These authors considered forgiveness as a spiritual concept. Here, forgiveness was about the aptitude to forgive self, other, and to have a view of God as
forgiving. This approach to defining and measuring forgiveness was less about behavior and more about one’s personal spiritual belief systems. It closely resembled what Roberts (1995) called a sense of “forgivingness”. This was a disposition towards forgiving that existed across life circumstances. It was an internal personal characteristic, or belief attribute.

Like daily spiritual experiences and positive religious/spiritual coping, the Fetzer Institute/NIA (1999) concept of forgiveness was also associated with positive mental and medical outcomes (Kaplan, Munroe-Blum, & Blazer, 1993; Mauger, Perry, Freeman, Grove, McBridge, & McKinney, 1992). Moreover, this definition was similar to other more secular-based intrapersonal conceptualizations that already had positive associations to marital happiness (Gordon & Baucom, 2003; Fenell, 1993; Fincham, 2000; Fincham, Hall, & Beach, 2006; Paleari, Regalia, & Fincham, 2003; Worthington, 1994). For instance, Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000) referred to forgiveness as a personal process rather than a specific behavior. McCullough, Pargament, and Thoresen (2000) referred to forgiveness as an “intra-individual prosocial change toward a perceived transgressor that was situated within a specific interpersonal context” (p. 9). Within marriage, Fincham et al. (2006) referred to forgiveness as “the idea of a change whereby one becomes less motivated to think, feel, and behave negatively” (p. 416). As such, a corresponding association between the Fetzer/NIA (1999) concept of forgiveness and marital happiness was expected.

**Theoretical Perspective**

Symbolic Interaction Theory guided the direction of this research. George Herbert Mead (1934) was credited with its early development. The theory assumptions applicable to this research were: Society precedes the individual, individuals have minds, and individuals define the meaning of their behavior and social contexts (White & Klein, 2002). These tenets illustrated the processes by which social concepts, like spirituality, became individualized and reflective of behavior and appraisal of marriage.

**Society Precedes the Individual**

Mead (1934) believed that society preceded the individual and not the reverse. His reason was that conceptualization depended on the presence of symbols. Examples of symbols were language and material objects. According to symbolic interaction theorists, the meanings of these symbols were social before they were individual (White & Klein, 2002). As individuals developed they interacted with society and its already established symbols of meaning to
communicate. This interaction between individual and society allowed for development of personal meanings. In fact, interaction theorists believed that it was only through the individual’s interactions with society that allowed him/her to acquire, process, and integrate the meaning of social symbols into aspects of the self. The process was referred to as socialization (White & Klein, 2002). It was then said that personal meaning-making was embedded in larger social systems (Mead, 1934).

Therefore, the extent to which an individual and society interacted was important to symbolic interaction theory. The social-historical context in which people lived played a crucial role. For instance, personal conceptualization occurred only so far as individuals were exposed to societal conceptualizations (Mead, 1934). As society has accepted new symbols of meaning, so then, was the case for its members.

Zinnbauer, Pargament, and Scott (1999) provided an example of this with the concepts of religion and spirituality. They discussed that American society has continuously become more spiritual than religious since the early 1900s. Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1985) suggested the same. This ideological shift has been so dramatic that some referred to it as a “Spiritual Movement” (Fuller, 2001; Naisbitt, 1982).

Consequently, and according to symbolic interaction theory, the societal acceptance of spirituality (Roof & McKinney, 1987) was what promulgated belief changes at the individual level. Zinnbauer et al. (1999, p. 892) referred to this as a cultural shift towards “religious pluralism”, wherein individuals developed their own individualized sense of transcendent expressiveness. Yet, these individual belief changes were possible only to the extent that social progressions allowed them. It was social progressivism that influenced the individuality of individuals across time to present-day. Based on Mead’s (1934) work it was through such reciprocal social interactions between individual and society that has allowed for the development of the “spiritual self” irrespective of religious affiliation and practice. The following tenet of symbolic interaction theory better illustrated this dynamic.

**Individuals Have Minds**

According to symbolic interaction theory, it was the mind that acquired, processed, and integrated social information to give it personal meaning (White & Klein, 2002). The mind also was responsible for ultimately motivating and directing individual’s social behavior (Mead, 1934). In fact, it was said that behavior was a reflection of individuals own internal beliefs and
values (e.g., mind). Therefore, and according to Mead, self developed through social interactions between mind and society. That which was apparent or overtly observable was essentially behavior reflective of the individual’s mind, or self.

If, then, spirituality has become a popular Westernized measure of personal meaning and direction in life (Cohen & Hill, 2007), then the extent to which spouses were spiritual should have better predicted appraisal of their behavior than what has been measured by so-called “distal” religious concepts (Mahoney et al., 1999). The latter may not have captured certain inherent value systems that ultimately guided the behavior that was being appraised in marriage. This might have actually explained why religious correlates to marital happiness were inconsistent and oftentimes weak (Mahoney et al., 2001). The defining factor was perhaps a “spiritually poverty or surplus” that translated into poorer or healthier marital relationships and the corresponding appraisal thereof. With this in mind, certain spiritual belief concepts might have indicated marital behavior, which in turn, implicated marital happiness (Jeffries, 2002; Rosen-Grandone et al., 2006).

Yet, according to symbolic interaction theory, only the individual was able to know his/her beliefs, values, and motivations for behavior (White & Klein, 2002). These theorists argued that behavior was best understood only when interpreted by the individual actor of that behavior. This led to the final tenet of symbolic interaction theory as applied to this research. Individuals Define the Meaning of Their Behavior

If, then, most married Americans identified with some spiritual belief (Pargament, 1997) that guided behavior in social contexts (Jeffries, 2002), and marital happiness was reflective of marital behavior (Rosen-Grandone et al., 2006), then the extent to which spouses had certain spiritual beliefs should have directly indicated marital happiness. This belief was consistent with Zimmerman (1947) who suggested that religious/spiritual ideas directly influenced marital interaction. The implication, of course, was that only spouses themselves determined the extent to which their spiritual beliefs guided behavior and overall marital happiness. This was perhaps the missing link in research about religious behavior and self-reported marital satisfaction.

Until now the majority of studies had been about religious behavior and rather mundane global assessments of religiousness in relation to marital happiness (Mahoney et al., 2001). Yet, Allport and Ross (1967) had suggested that one’s spiritual belief orientation provided clearer evidence of how he/she interpreted and used religion. Mahoney et al. (1999) argued recently that
distal religious behaviors and global appraisals of religiousness offered little in terms of marital happiness when compared to more intrinsic spiritually-based concepts. Therefore, the conceptual fallacy so far has been to assume intrinsic spirituality from distal religious variables in marital research. Although spirituality and religious behavior were interrelated for some, others were said to ascribe more meaning to one than the other (Pargament, 1997). It was possible that some individuals identified with spiritual concepts of no particular religious ideology or practice. It was also possible that some identified more with religious ideology and the practice thereof than to less institutionally-based spirituality.

In terms of marital happiness, the evidence was clearly in support of a focus on spiritual belief concepts instead of religious behavior (Anthony, 1993; Mahoney et al., 1999, 2001; Roth, 1988). Ultimately, the extent to which spouses had certain spiritual beliefs was likely to best capture the meaningfulness of values that guided marital behavior and its appraisal. The proximal spiritual beliefs of interest to this study were daily spiritual experiences, positive religious/spiritual coping, and forgiveness.

These particular spiritual belief concepts were only recently developed (meaning they were of recent social recognition) and each was important for mental health and medical outcomes (Fetzer Institute/NIA, 1999). Each concept was also developed to have unique implications for individuals (Fetzer Institute/NIA, 1999), which fit with modern-day American social progressions toward spiritual individualism (Farias & Lalljee, 2008). This was consistent also with post-modern perspectives. Post-modernists believed that individuals have had their own unique ways of conceptualizing the world. They believed further in multiple realities, giving less emphasis on pressures to conform to one way of existing.

As such, it was presumed using symbolic interaction theory that spouses marital behavior was reflective of their proximal spiritual beliefs of daily spiritual experiences, positive religious/spiritual coping and forgiveness. These concepts were both intra-psychic and believed to tap into individual spouses own sense of their reality and world. For this reason, it was expected that they symbolically manifested these beliefs in every day activity, including their marriage. In turn, the overall appraisal of the marriage as satisfying or not was expected to be reflective of the behaviors that were guided by these spiritual beliefs.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Introduction

The primary purpose of this study was to examine an appropriate selection of proximal spiritual variables (daily spiritual experiences, positive religious/spiritual coping, and forgiveness), as measured by subscales of the BMMRS, in relation to marital happiness, as measured by self report in the 1998 GSS. This was expected to extend promising work done in adult medicine (Levin, 2001; Mills, 2002; Siegel et al., 2002) and mental health (Garroutte, et al., 2003; Hill & Pargament, 2003; Schnittker, 2001). To accomplish this purpose there were four main research questions:

Research Questions

To accomplish the purposes of this study there were four research questions leading to five hypotheses:

RQ1: To what extent are a married person’s distal religious variables of private religious practices, organizational religiousness, and religious intensity associated with his or her self-reported marital happiness after considering unique influences of socio-cultural factors?

RQ2: To what extent are a married person’s proximal spiritual beliefs of daily spiritual experiences, positive religious/spiritual coping, and forgiveness associated with his or her self-reported marital happiness after considering unique influences of socio-cultural factors and distal religious variables of private religious practices, organizational religiousness, and religious intensity?

RQ3: To what extent are distal religious variable associations to self-reported marital happiness different for a married man and married woman?

RQ4: To what extent are proximal spiritual variable associations to self-reported marital happiness different for a married man and married woman?
Hypotheses

H1: A married person’s distal religious variables of private religious practices, organizational religiousness, and religious intensity each will have significant positive associations with his or her self-reported marital happiness beyond what is accounted for by socio-cultural factors.

H2: A married person’s proximal spiritual variables of daily spiritual experiences, positive religious/spiritual coping, and forgiveness each will have significant positive associations with his or her self-reported marital happiness after considering the unique influences of socio-cultural factors and distal religious variables of private religious practices, organizational religiousness, and religious intensity.

H3: The pattern of influence between distal religious variables and self-reported marital happiness will be different for a married man and married woman.

H4: The pattern of influence between proximal spiritual variables and self-reported marital happiness will not be different for a married man and married woman.

Procedures

Approval from the Florida State University Internal Review Board (IRB) was first obtained to conduct this study. Following IRB approval, data from the 1998 GSS was downloaded from the GSS website into an SPSS Version 16.0 data file. Preliminary procedures were conducted on the data to select only married respondents in the 1998 GSS and de-select all non-married respondents. Preliminary analyses were conducted on the data containing only married respondents to address missing cases, missing values, and violations of Logistic Regression assumptions (non-multicolinearity of independent variables, adequacy of sample size, and that relevant predictors were included and irrelevant predictors were excluded).

Data Selection

Data for the present study were obtained from the GSS public access website. The reasons for selecting the 1998 GSS for this study were compelling:

- It employs a national probability sample of the adult (at least 18 years of age), non-institutionalized, English-speaking, United States population.
- Along with core socio-cultural and attitudinal variables it contains a special topic module on religion, and self-report of marital happiness.
This was the only GSS administration to contain the religious, spiritual, and marital variables of interest to this study. Individual data were obtained by full probability sampling procedures. Participants for the 1998 GSS were randomly selected for personal interviews at their homes. Interviewers entered the begin and end time of each interview. For constancy across the interview process, each interviewer was provided a questionnaire packet which structured their interviews. It told them to ask each question according to the original question wording, and listed the response categories, punch designations, the number of responses, and variable name. The median length of time for each interview was 1.5 hours (see Davis, Smith, & Marsden, 2007).

Selection of Instruments

The GSS and Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness/Spirituality (BMMRS) (Fetzer Institute/NIA, 1999) were used to measure the variables of interest in the study. The BMMRS was included in the 1998 GSS topic module on religion. Six specific subscales of the BMMRS were chosen for use in the study (Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale, Positive Religious/Spiritual Coping, Forgiveness, Private Religious Practices, Organizational Religiousness, and Religious Intensity). Accessibility to these particular variables, and most importantly a self-report of marital happiness (measured by the GSS), was not possible in other GSS administrations, or any other published national data set.

Description of GSS. The GSS has been a widely-used survey among scholars to monitor social change. It includes many demographic and attitudinal variables, including those specific to marriage (marital happiness). The GSS was first administered in 1972. Since then it has been administered annually to monitor social change in American society. It has been one of the National Opinion Research Center’s (NORC) largest longitudinal projects. Except for the United States Census, the GSS has been the most frequently used information source for social research (NORC, 2008). As such, the GSS has had more than 14,000 scholarly uses for teaching, journal and book publications, and Ph.D. dissertations.

Description of BMMRS. The BMMRS was designed to examine all dimensions of religiousness and spirituality in a limited number of items (Fetzer Institute/NIA, 1999). The initial assumption guiding its development was that religiousness and spirituality had multiple influences on health outcomes. The Fetzer Institute/NIA identified the domains of
religiousness/spirituality most likely to impact health, and incorporated each in the development of the BMMRS.

Each subscale of the BMMRS was standardized on a national probability sample of 2,832 respondents from the 1998 GSS. The composition of the sample ($N = 1,400$) for which complete data for the BMMRS was obtained was 75.8% non-Hispanic white ($N = 1,012$), 14.1% African American ($N = 188$), 6.3% Hispanic ($N = 84$), and 3.8% “Other” ($N = 51$). These sample characteristics were similar to the United States population for non-Hispanic whites (75.1%) and African Americans (12.3%), but not for Hispanics (12.5%) reported by the U.S. Census Bureau (2000).

The Fetzer Institute/NIA (1999) considered the subscales of the BMMRS to be adequate for research in areas of religion, spirituality, and health. Each domain of religiousness/spirituality had moderate to high internal consistency (Cronbach’s coefficient alpha ranging from .66 to .91). Content validity of the subscales of the BMMRS was addressed by considering multiple domains of religious and spiritual experience, including behavioral, cognitive, social, and psychological dimensions. Discriminant validity for BMMRS domains, namely whether or not “items developed for one domain overlap in content with another and if indices were highly correlated” (Idler et al., 2003, p. 352), was relatively high. It ranged from .0 to .6, with half below .3, except for daily spiritual experiences, private religious practices, positive religious/spiritual coping, and religious intensity.

However, Idler et al. (2003) contended that each of the latter domains had “different behavioral and cognitive emphasis” (p. 353). Perhaps this was why Neff (2006), using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), reported domain convergence only between daily spiritual experiences and values/beliefs. All together, BMMRS domains had “appropriate characteristics of reliability and validity for future use as multidimensional measures of religiousness/spirituality (Idler et al., 2003, p. 356; Neff, 2006).

**GSS Criterion Variable**

**Marital happiness.** This concept referred to respondents’ overall appraisal of their marriage as very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy. It was operationally defined as the following item on the 1998 GSS: “Taking things all together, how would you describe your marriage? Would you say that your marriage is very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?” The individual indicated “Happy” (coded 1), “Pretty happy” (coded 2), or “Not too happy” (coded 3).
This concept was dichotomized and recoded for analysis in the present study as “Happy” (coded 1) and “Not too happy” (coded 0). The one respondent that reported “Pretty happy” was dropped from the study.

**GSS Socio-cultural Variables**

According to Tabachnick and Fidell, “when assessing for socio-cultural factors to control the idea is to select an optimal (small) set of covariates uncorrelated with each other but correlated with the dependent variable” (2001, p. 211-212). They suggested further that “it may be possible to pick the covariates on theoretical grounds or on the basis of literature knowledge regarding important sources of variability that should be controlled for.” Some socio-cultural variables were not accessible among the sample of married respondents in the 1998 GSS. These were divorce history, psychological health, length of time married, age at first marriage, and premarital cohabitation. Others, such as parental divorce history, were dropped from the study due to severely missing values where preliminary imputation methods were not possible. As such, the following socio-cultural controls were considered for preliminary exploration to determine appropriateness for inclusion.

**Race.** Respondent’s race was measured as follows: “What race do you consider yourself?” Responses were White (1), Black (2), or “other” (3). This item was recoded for analysis as White (1) and Black/other (2).

**Age.** Respondent’s age was measured as follows in 9-year increments, ranging from 10-19 (1) to 80 or over (8).

**Education.** Respondent’s education level was measured in terms of total years of education ranking from “No formal schooling” (0) to eight years of college (20).

**Family income.** Respondent’s family income was measured in increments from “Under $1,000” (1) to “$110,000 – over” (23).

**Number of children.** Respondents were asked “How many children have you ever had? Possible response ranged from 1 to 8 or more.

**BMMRS Distal Religious Variables**

**Private religious practices.** This concept referred to respondents’ participation in non-organizational, informal, and non-institutional religiosity – outside the realm of organized religion, formal places of worship, and alone. The items were as follows: “How often do you pray privately in places other than at church or synagogue?” (Item-whole correlation is .55);
“Within your religious or spiritual tradition, how often do you meditate?” (Item-whole correlation is .51); and “How often do you read the Bible or other religious literature?” (Item-whole correlation is .56). Each item was ranked on a frequency scale ranging from “more than once a day” (1) to “never” (8); thus, high scores reflect more frequent participation in private religious practices. Internal consistency (Cronbach’s coefficient alpha) of this subscale of the BMMRS was .72.

Organizational religiousness. This concept referred to respondents’ involvement with formal public religious institutions such as church, synagogue, temple, or mosque. The items were as follows: “How often do you go to religious services?” (Item-whole correlation is .70); and “Besides religious services, how often do you take part in other activities at a place of worship? (Item-whole correlation is .70)? Each item was ranked on a frequency scale ranging from “never” (1) to “several times a week” (6); thus, high scores reflect more frequent participation in organized religious activities. Internal consistency (Cronbach’s coefficient alpha) of this subscale of the BMMRS was .82.

Religious intensity. This concept referred to the extent to which respondents viewed themselves overall as religious and spiritual individuals. The items were as follows: “To what extent do you consider yourself a religious person?” (Item-whole correlation is .63); and “To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person?” (Item-whole correlation is .63). Each item was ranked on a scale ranging from “very religious/spiritual” (1) to “not religious/spiritual” (4); thus, high scores reflect less religious intensity. Internal consistency (Cronbach’s coefficient alpha) of this subscale of the BMMRS was .77.

BMMRS Proximal Spiritual Variables

Daily spiritual experiences – short form (DSES). This subscale of the BMMRS referred to respondents’ perception of the transcendental in daily life. Daily spiritual experiences, as applied here, was believed to better capture spouses’ ongoing relationship to, and felt presence of God and the transcendental life than “generic” religious practices – formal religious participation and private ritualistic practices of Bible reading and prayer. The brief 6-item version of the DSES was embedded in the 1998 GSS. Each item was as follows: “I feel God’s presence” (item-whole correlation is .77); I find strength and comfort in my religion” (item-whole correlation is .81); “I feel deep inner peace or harmony” (item-whole correlation is .70); “I desire to be closer to or in union with God” (item-whole correlation is .79); “I feel God’s love for
me, directly or through others” (item-whole correlation is .82); and “I am spiritually touched by the beauty of creation” (item-whole correlation is .63). Each item was ranked on a 6-point frequency scale ranging from “many times a day” (1) to “never” (6); thus, higher scores represent less frequent involvement in daily spiritual experiences. The internal consistency (Cronbach’s coefficient alpha) of this subscale of the BMMRS was .91.

**Positive religious/spiritual coping.** This concept referred to respondents’ patterns of spiritual coping with stressful life events reflective of benevolent spiritual methods of understanding and dealing with life stressors. The Positive Coping long-version subscale had 5 items. The short version that was embedded in the 1998 GSS contained three items: “I think about how my life is part of a larger spiritual force” (item-whole correlation is .58); “I work together with God as partners” (item-whole correlation is .75); and “I look to God for strength, support, and guidance” (item-whole correlation is .65). Each item was ranked on a frequency scale ranging from “a great deal” (1) to “not at all” (4); thus, higher scores reflect less involvement in positive religious/spiritual coping. Internal consistency (Cronbach’s coefficient alpha) of this subscale of the BMMRS was .81.

**Forgiveness.** This concept referred to respondents’ ability to forgive self and others and perception of God as forgiving. The Forgiveness long-version subscale had 10 items. The short version that was embedded in the 1998 GSS contained three items: “I have forgiven myself for things that I have done wrong” (item-whole correlation is .47); “I have forgiven those who hurt me” (item-whole correlation is .50); and “I know that God forgives me” (item-whole correlation is .43). Each item was ranked on a frequency scale ranging from “always or almost always” (1) to “never” (4); thus higher scores reflect less frequent forgiveness. Internal consistency (Cronbach’s coefficient alpha) of this subscale of the BMMRS was .66.

**Initial Sample Characteristics**

Preliminary descriptive data showed that the sample of married respondents in the 1998 GSS was 1,346 (619 husbands; 727 wives). Among the 1,346 married respondents, 85.5 % (N = 1,151) were non-Hispanic White, 9.1 % (N = 122) African American, and 5.4 % (N = 73) reported race as “Other”. These demographics were similar to the United States population for non-Hispanic Whites (75.1 %) and African Americans (12.3 %), with non-Hispanic Whites somewhat overrepresented and African Americans underrepresented (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The ages for married persons in this study ranged from 18 to 89, with a mean age of 48.6
for husbands and 45.1 for wives. Educationally, 64.1% (N = 860) of married respondents reported highest education of high school degree or less, and 35.9% (N = 482) reported having a college degree. Among those with a high school degree or less, 62.8% (N = 387) were husbands and 65.2% (N = 473) were wives. Among those with a college degree, 37.2% (N = 616) were husbands and 34.8% (N = 253) were wives. Married respondents who reported no children were 12.4% (N = 167). Those that reported at least one child, with a range of 1 to more than 8, were 87.5% (N = 1,175). Spouses previously divorced were 23.3% (N = 312) and never divorced were 76.6% (N = 1,025). Among those previously divorced, 51.6% (N = 161) were wives and 48.4% (N = 151) were husbands.

**Missing data.** One thousand married respondents had severely missing data relevant to the purpose of this study. Visual data examination showed that data were completely missing for many variables of interest. Consequently, list-wise deletion was used to exclude these cases from the analysis. To determine whether or not the 1,000 cases were missing data at random, a series of comparison analyses were performed on socio-demographic variables between those dropped from the analysis (N = 1,000) and those remaining (N = 345). Chi-square, Spearman correlation, and t-tests were conducted on several demographic variables by data set group (N = 347 vs. N = 1,000) to examine whether relationships or differences existed. In the first analysis, a chi-square was conducted between gender and data set group. The chi-square was not statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 345) = 1.529$, $p = .216$, indicating that no differences existed between these variables by group. In the second analysis, a chi-square was conducted between Ever Divorced status (yes vs. no) and data set group. The chi-square was not statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 337) = 1.388$, $p = .239$, indicating that no differences existed between these variables by group. In the third analysis, a Spearman correlation was conducted between Total Family Income and data set group. The correlation was not statistically significant, $r(1,304) = .007$, $p = .812$, indicating that no relationship existed between these variables by group. In the fourth analysis, a t-test was conducted on participants’ Age by data set group. The t-test was not statistically significant, $t(1, N = 343) = 0.182$, $p = .856$, indicating that those participants’ in each group were of similar ages ($N = 345, M = 46.91, SD = 14.54; N = 1,000, M = 46.74, SD = 14.83$). Given no significant differences existed between the data sets, the data were determined to be missing at random.
After excluding the 1,000 cases which had severely missing data, the remaining respondents were examined on item responses for marital happiness. Another adjustment was made to the sample size after one other respondent was deleted due to failure to meet inclusion criteria for marital happiness. This respondent identified his or her marriage as “pretty happy”. This was a mid-range score on the marital happiness variable and this case was removed from data analysis. Marital happiness was dichotomized to represent only those respondents that reported “happy” or “not too happy” on the GSS administration. The final sample of married respondents for hypothesis testing was three hundred and forty-five ($N = 345$). Missing data were then examined among the final sample. Missing data were found to exist among distal religious and proximal spiritual variables at random (see Table 1), and among socio-cultural variables at random (Table 2). Mean imputation was used to correct missing data given that only a small percentage (8 %) of values were missing and were missing completely at random (see Von Eye & Schuster, 1998).

### Table 1

**Missing Values for Dependent and Independent Variables**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Missing Data</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Missing Data</th>
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<td><strong>Proximal Spiritual Variables</strong></td>
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<td>Daily Spiritual Positive Religiosity</td>
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<td>Private Religious Practices</td>
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<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational Religious Intensity</td>
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Table 2

Missing Values for Distal Religious and Proximal Spiritual Variables by Socio-cultural Variables

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Family Income</th>
<th>Parental Divorce</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
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<td>22</td>
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<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Proximal Spiritual Variables</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Religious Spiritual Coping</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Final Sample Characteristics**

Three hundred forty-five ($N = 345$) married respondents were included in the final sample for data analysis. Of the 345, 168 (49.1 %) participants were male and 177 (50.9 %) were female; 297 (85.8 %) were Caucasian, 33 (9.5 %) African American, and 15 (4.6 %) “other.” Frequencies and percents for religious affiliation are presented in Table 3, and the majority 215 (62.3 %) reported Protestant, followed by Catholic 78 (22.6 %), and “none” 34 (9.9 %). The majority of participants (189, 54.8 %) worked full time. The mean response for “hours worked last week” was 41.57 ($SD = 12.25$), and the mean response for “spouse hours worked last week” was 40.96 ($SD = 12.62$). The mean response for participant age was 46.88 ($SD = 14.50$), and the
The mean response for age when child was first born was 24.36 (SD = 5.26). Eighty-seven (25.4 %) participants had been divorced or separated, and 256 (74.6 %) had not. Eight (2.5 %) participants were widowed. The mean response for highest year of school completed was 13.53 (SD = 3.02), where the majority of participants (162 or 47.1 %) had a high school education. The mean response for number of children was 1.82 (SD = 1.69).

Table 3
Frequencies and Percents of Religious Affiliation for Married Persons Included in the Study from the 1998 General Social Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>62.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
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<td>Jewish</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orthodox Christian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non Denominational</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: N = 345.*

Statistical Assumptions

Statistical assumptions for logistic regression were met by the data with exception of the sample size for gender-specific analyses. For instance, Spearman Rank-Order correlations showed that independent variables were not too highly correlated. Tabachnick and Fidell (2007, p. 89) stated that “multicollinearity is a problem when variables are highly correlated, say .90 and above.” Through bivariate correlations a determination was made about whether to include certain variables based on multicollinearity and relevance to the criterion variable – marital happiness. Therefore, irrelevant predictors were excluded from the logistic regression analysis and relevant predictors were included.
Variable Distributions

BMMRS. Even though normality assumptions are not assumed by logistic regression the mean, range, standard deviation, and skewness and kurtosis for distal religious and proximal spiritual variables of interest are reported in Table 4. These data indicated that some domains of religiousness and spirituality had more skewness and kurtosis than did others. The positively skewed domain was Private Religious Practices. This was indicated by the negative SPSS value. Positively skewed data meant that the distribution concentrated toward lower than higher values. All other domains were negatively skewed (positive SPSS values). Negatively skewed domains meant that the distribution was more concentrated toward higher than lower values. Values closer to 0 were considered to have the least skewness. In terms of kurtosis, values closer to 0 meant that the distribution was more normal than non-normal. Negative kurtosis indicated a flat distribution of scores. Positive kurtosis indicated a peaked distribution of scores. Peakedness increased as values deviated positively from 0. Cronbach’s alphas measuring internal consistency and reliability were presented in Table 5 where the alphas were considered excellent to acceptable (George & Mallery, 2003). George and Mallery suggested the following rules of thumb for evaluating alpha coefficients, > .9 = Excellent, > .8 = Good, > .7 = Acceptable, > .6 = Questionable, > .5 = Poor, < .5 = Unacceptable.

Marital happiness. Of the 345 married persons included in the study 308 (89.0 %) reported being happily married, and 37 (10.7 %) were not too happy. Thus, the two groups were coded “happily married” (1) and “not too happy” (0). Only one person that reported “somewhat happy” was excluded from the analysis. The variable offered a straightforward approach to interpreting predictor variable associations on this criterion.
Table 4
Means, Standard Deviations, Range, and Skewness and Kurtosis for BMMRS Subscales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive R/S Coping</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>-.900</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daily Spiritual Experiences</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>.472</td>
<td>-.490</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>.888</td>
<td>.870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Religious Practices</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>1.71</td>
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<td>-.912</td>
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<td>Organizational Religiousness</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>4.17</td>
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<td>.281</td>
<td>-1.187</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious Intensity</td>
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<td>4.00</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>.368</td>
<td>-.337</td>
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</table>

Note: N = 345.

Internal consistency of the subscales is given in Table 5. Two – Forgiveness and Private Religious Practices – are low by generally-accepted standards. Desirable Cronbach Alpha statistics range between 0.7 and 0.9 (Streiner & Norman, 1989).

Table 5
Cronbach’s Alphas for Daily Spiritual Experiences, Positive Coping, Forgiveness, Private Religious Practices, Organizational Religiousness and Religious Intensity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
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<th>Items</th>
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<tr>
<td>Daily Spiritual Experiences</td>
<td>.912</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>.655</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private Religious Practices</td>
<td>.682</td>
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<td>Organizational Religiousness</td>
<td>.822</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious Intensity</td>
<td>.774</td>
<td>2</td>
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</table>
Data Analysis

Bivariate correlations were first conducted on all independent variables for the full sample and then for each sub-sample of married men and married women. This was to establish socio-cultural controls for each logistic regression analysis for the full sample, the sample with married men only, and the sample with married women only. Socio-cultural variables that appeared to be significantly related to the dependent variable (marital happiness) but not highly inter-correlated with the other socio-cultural variables were controlled for in Model 1 of the logistic regression analyses. To get a gross estimate of such relatedness, the ordinal variables were explored using the Spearman Rank-Order Coefficient.

A hierarchical Binary Regression was used to test each hypothesis. Hierarchical Binary Regression was used to predict the effects of a subset of independent variables on a dichotomous dependent variable (marital happiness). The order in which variables were entered into the models was based on theory and previous research (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Socio-cultural factors were entered into Model 1, distal religious variables were entered into Model 2, and proximal spiritual variables were entered into Model 3 for each logistic regression analysis. This statistical procedure allowed the researcher to make determinations about the unique affects of each independent variable on the dependent variable while controlling for the influences of other independent variables in each Model. This was accomplished by examining the significance of the Wald statistic and direction of beta-coefficients for each independent variable of interest. The Logistic Regression also allowed the researcher to make determinations about the overall change in R-square (Nagelkerke R²) as each set of independent variables was entered into the models. Model fit was determined by examining the Hosmer-Lemeshow Chi-square.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

To review, there were four research questions, leading to four hypotheses:

RQ1: To what extent are a married person’s distal religious variables of private religious practices, organizational religiousness, and religious intensity associated with his or her self-reported marital happiness after considering unique influences of socio-cultural factors?

RQ2: To what extent are a married person’s proximal spiritual beliefs of daily spiritual experiences, positive religious/spiritual coping, and forgiveness associated with his or her self-reported marital happiness after considering unique influences of socio-cultural factors and distal religious variables of private religious practices, organizational religiousness, and religious intensity?

RQ3: To what extent are distal religious variable associations to self-reported marital happiness different for a married man and married woman?

RQ4: To what extent are proximal spiritual variable associations to self-reported marital happiness different for a married man and married woman?

H1: A married person’s distal religious variables of private religious practices, organizational religiousness, and religious intensity each will have significant positive associations with his or her self-reported marital happiness beyond what is accounted for by socio-cultural factors.

H2: A married person’s proximal spiritual variables of daily spiritual experiences, positive religious/spiritual coping, and forgiveness each will have significant positive associations with his or her self-reported marital happiness after considering the unique influences of socio-cultural factors and distal religious variables of private religious practices, organizational religiousness, and religious intensity.

H3: The pattern of influence between distal religious variables and self-reported marital happiness will be different for a married man and married woman.

H4: The pattern of influence between proximal spiritual variables and self-reported marital happiness will not be different for a married man and married woman.
Spearman Rank-Order Coefficient Results

Spearman Rank-Order Coefficients (rho) obtained from the full sample (N = 345) showed that only race was significantly associated with a married person’s self-reported marital happiness ($R_s = -.158; p = .003$). The direction of the association suggested that White married persons were more likely than non-White married persons to report being happily married. Thus, race was included in the logistic regression for the full sample of married men and married women (see Table 6).

Spearman Rank-Order Coefficients from the sub-sample of married women showed that education ($R_s = .153; p = .042$), race ($R_s = -.172; p = .022$), and age ($R_s = -.190; p = .011$) were significantly associated with their marital happiness, and education and race were significantly associated with each other. Whereas this coefficient was relatively small ($R_s = -.154; p = .041$), each variable included in the logistic regression. The direction of the associations suggested that younger White married women with more education were more likely to report marital happiness than were older non-White married women with less education. (see Table 7).

Spearman Rank-Order Coefficients from the sub-sample of married men showed also that race was significantly associated with their self-reported marital happiness ($R_s = -.135; p = .042$). The direction of the association suggested that White married men were more likely than non-White married men to report being happily married. Thus, race was included in the logistic regression for married men only (see Table 8).
Table 6
Spearman Rank-Order Coefficient Matrix for All Married Persons in the Study

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Note. *p < .05, **p < .01
**Logistic Regression Analysis Results**

A summary of the logistic regression is given in Table 9.

Hypothesis 1, that a married person’s distal religious variables of private religious practices, organizational religiousness, and religious intensity will each have significant positive associations with his or her self-reported marital happiness after considering the unique affects of socio-cultural factors, was partially supported by the results in Model 2 for the full sample. Specifically, only a married person’s organizational religiousness was positively associated with his or her self-reported marital happiness \( (p = .007; \text{Wald} = 7.298) \). Together with race \( (p = .004; \text{Wald} = 8.424) \), the two variables explained 12.5 % of the variance in marital happiness.

Hypothesis 2, that a married person’s proximal spiritual beliefs of daily spiritual experiences, positive religious/spiritual coping, and forgiveness will each have significant positive associations with his or her self-reported marital happiness after considering the unique affects of socio-cultural factors and distal religious variables of private religious practices, organizational religiousness, and religious intensity, was partially supported by the results in Model 3 for the full sample. Specifically, only a married person’s proximal spiritual beliefs of daily spiritual experiences \( (p = .001; \text{Wald} = 12.112) \) and forgiveness \( (p = .000; \text{Wald} = 13.961) \) were significantly and positively associated with his or her self-reported marital happiness. Together with lower levels of religious intensity \( (p = .006; \text{Wald} = 7.637) \), the two variables explained 32 % of the variance in marital happiness.
Table 9

Logistic Regression Analysis for a Married Person’s Self-reported Marital Happiness using Proximal Spiritual Variables as Predictors Controlling for Race and Distal Religious Variables

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*Note.* $X^2 (7, N = 345) = 69.70, p < .01; R^2 = .323. *p < .05, **p < .01

Hypothesis 3, that the pattern of influence between distal religious variables and self-reported marital happiness will be different for a married man and married woman after considering the unique influences of socio-cultural factors, was supported by comparison of Model 2 data in Table 10 and Table 11. A significant positive association existed between a married man’s organizational religiousness ($p = .040; Wald = 4.218$) and his self-reported marital happiness, whereas no significant influences existed between a married woman’s distal religious variables and her self-reported marital happiness. Together with race ($p = .019; Wald = 5.467$), organizational religiousness explained 14.5% of the variance in a man’s marital happiness.
Hypothesis 4, that the pattern of influence between proximal spiritual variables and self-reported marital happiness will not be different for a married man and married woman after considering the unique influences of socio-cultural factors and distal religious variables was not supported by comparison of Model 3 data in Table 10 and Table 11. The proximal spiritual belief of forgiveness ($p = .002; \text{Wald} = 9.641$) was strongest in terms of a married woman’s self-reported marital happiness, followed by her daily spiritual experiences ($p = .011; \text{Wald} = 6.465$), whereas a married man’s daily spiritual experiences ($p = .018; \text{Wald} = 5.566$) was strongest in terms of his self-reported marital happiness, followed by his organizational religiousness ($p = .020; \text{Wald} = 5.401$), belief of forgiveness ($p = .029; \text{Wald} = 4.794$), and lower religious intensity ($p = .029; \text{Wald} = 4.746$). Together with age ($p = .003; \text{Wald} = 9.086$), daily spiritual experiences and forgiveness explained 51% of the variance in a woman’s marital happiness. Together with race ($p = .021; \text{Wald} = 5.314$), daily spiritual experiences, organizational religiousness, forgiveness, and religious intensity explained 31% of the variance in a man’s marital happiness.
**Table 10**

Logistic Regression for A Married Woman’s Self-reported Marital Happiness using Proximal Spiritual Variables as Predictors Controlling for Age, Education, Race and Distal Religious Variables

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</table>

|                  | B       |          | B       |          | B       |          |
| Age              | -.058   | .019     | 9.103**| .944     |         |          |
| Educ             | .139    | .080     | 3.015   | 1.148    |         |          |
| Race             | -.625   | .383     | 2.659   | .535     |         |          |
| Priv Rel Pract   | -.266   | .205     | 1.688   | .766     |         |          |
| Org Relig        | .249    | .152     | 2.705   | 1.283    |         |          |
| Rel Intensity    | -.026   | .446     | .003    | 1.027    |         |          |
| Nagelkerke R²    | .244    |          |         |          |         |          |
| X²               | 9.031   |          |         |          |         |          |

|                  | B       |          | B       |          | B       |          |
| Age              | -.077   | .025     | 9.086**| .926     |         |          |
| Educ             | .092    | .091     | 1.058   | 1.096    |         |          |
| Race             | -.108   | .543     | .404    | .842     |         |          |
| Priv Rel Pract   | .177    | .288     | .378    | 1.151    |         |          |
| Org Relig        | -.068   | .203     | .085    | .943     |         |          |
| Rel Intensity    | -.1335  | .822     | 2.573   | 3.729    |         |          |
| Pos R/S Cope     | -.973   | .672     | 2.096   | 2.645    |         |          |
| Daily Sp Exp     | 1.798   | .915     | 6.465†  | .166     |         |          |
| Forgiveness      | 2.842   | .915     | 9.641** | .060     |         |          |
| Nagelkerke R²    | .514    |          |         |          |         |          |
| X²               | 15.867  |          |         |          |         |          |

*Note. X² (9, N = 177) = 15.87, p > .05; R² = .514. N = 177. *p < .05, **p < .01*
Table 11
Logistic Regression Analysis for a Married Man’s Self-reported Marital Happiness using Proximal Spiritual Variables as Predictors Controlling for Race and Distal Religious Variables

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Note. \( X^2 (7, N = 168) = 10.43, p \geq .05; R^2 = .313. *p < .05, **p < .01 \)
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to first investigate the extent to which a married person’s distal religious variables of private religious practices, organizational religiousness, and religious intensity each were associated with his or her self-reported marital happiness after considering the unique influences of socio-cultural characteristics. The second purpose was to investigate the extent to which a married person’s proximal spiritual beliefs of daily spiritual experiences, positive religious/spiritual coping, and forgiveness each were associated with his or her self-reported marital happiness after considering the unique influences of socio-cultural characteristics and distal religious variables. A final purpose was to examine differences in the effects of the variables of interest among married men and married women to determine gender patterns.

A hierarchical binary logistic regression was performed on the full sample of married persons and again for married men and married women separately. Socio-cultural variables of relative importance were entered in Model 1, followed by the distal religious variables (i.e., private religious practices, organizational religiousness, and religious intensity) in Model 2, and lastly by the proximal spiritual variables (i.e., daily spiritual experiences, positive religious/spiritual coping, and forgiveness) in Model 3 for each analysis. The order in which variables were entered was based on prior research and theory.

Overview of Findings

Overall, a married person’s organizational religiousness was significantly and positively associated with self-reported marital happiness when controlling only for socio-cultural factors. This association did not remain when considering a married person’s proximal spiritual variables, namely daily spiritual experiences and forgiveness. Instead, it was religious intensity that then became a significant contributor to marital happiness. However, religious intensity was inversely associated with marital happiness, suggesting that as intensity decreased the odds of marital happiness increased. Therefore, it was a married person’s greater levels of daily spiritual experiences and forgiveness and lower level of religious intensity that explained marital happiness.
The pattern of distal religious and proximal spiritual associations to marital happiness was also different for men and women. Whereas distal religious variables were of no significance to the self-reported marital happiness for women when considering socio-cultural factors and proximal spiritual variables, a different set of patterns existed for men. When looking only at socio-cultural and distal religious variables for men, it was organizational religiousness and race that contributed significantly to their marital happiness; a pattern that changed when later considering proximal spiritual variables. For instance, in the final model for men organizational religiousness and religious intensity were associated significantly to marital happiness. Although organizational religiousness was positively associated with the marital happiness of men, the inverse was observed for their religious intensity. Moreover, daily spiritual experiences and forgiveness were significantly positively associated with their marital happiness. All together, the greater a married man’s daily spiritual experiences (proximal), organizational religiousness (distal), and forgiveness (proximal), and the lower his religious intensity (distal), the greater his marital happiness. For women it was her age (being younger) and her daily spiritual experiences and forgiveness that were most meaningful for her marital happiness.

Relevance to Past Research

The findings from this study illustrated that certain “so-called” distal religious and proximal spiritual variables were important for marital happiness, and that these variable association differed by gender. As such, the current findings were consistent with previous research suggesting that certain religious involvements, namely private religious practices, were, in fact, distal correlates of marital happiness for men and women (Anthony, 1993; Mahoney et al., 1999, 2001; Roth, 1988). The data were also consistent with previous research that certain spiritually-based concepts (i.e., daily spiritual experiences and forgiveness) were proximal in terms of marital happiness for men and women (Anthony, 1993). The latter findings each offered unique contributions to the existing literature, as they had not yet been studied in terms of marital happiness.

The concept of daily spiritual experiences was about having inner strength and comfort, inner peace and harmony, knowing God’s presence, being in union with God, and having a sense of awe for the creation (Fetzer Institute/NIA, 1999). According to Anthony (1993), it was exactly this type of spiritually-connection that made a difference in one’s marital happiness, and not whether he or she participated regularly in formal church activities – a roster which no doubt
includes individuals of varying inner states, perceptual lenses, and value systems. Roth (1988) alluded to this as well by showing that spiritual well-being was always the stronger correlate to marital happiness when compared to religious well-being for both men and women.

Perhaps daily spiritual experiences captured a certain sense of “spiritual-ness” that is not only important for a married person’s approach to life, in general, but also impacts those aspects of family life important for marital happiness (Amato et al., 2007; Jeffries, 2002). Together, this positive association with an individual’s marital happiness might indicate that he or she is connected to something larger than self, and that this greater sense of authentic, altruistic power is what guides and directs him or her on how to experience each other and the marriage.

Likewise, the belief in forgiveness of self, other, and to view God as forgiving was important for marital happiness of both men and women. Maybe the ability to identify with a sense of forgiveness and to view God as forgiving is symbolic of how an individual approaches his or her marriage. Forgiving one’s spouse has been associated with softening conflict and creating a more positive marital environment (Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2004; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). Perhaps a forgiving individual is more accepting of others and therefore better able to adjust to marriage than someone that is less forgiving. The persistent positive associations between daily spiritual experiences and forgiveness and marital happiness suggested that these variables may transcend individual experience and be particularly important for a married man and woman’s marital happiness.

Less clear, however, was the interaction of certain distal religious and proximal spiritual variable associations to marital happiness by gender. These findings contradicted some earlier data to suggest that religious intensity for men and organizational religiousness for women was most important for his and her marital happiness, respectfully (Fiese & Tomcho, 2001; Hatch et al., 1986). In fact, the data here showed that religious intensity was always inversely associated with the marital happiness for men and women, although stronger for men. Furthermore, it was a man’s organizational religiousness that was significantly positively associated with his marital happiness, even when considered with proximal spiritual variables.

Another interesting finding was that a greater number of distal religious and proximal spiritual variables impacted the marital happiness for men than for women. Yet, although including the significance of socio-cultural factors (age for women; race for men), the overall variance in marital happiness explained by distal religious and proximal spiritual variables was
greater for the women (51%) than for the men (31%). This was consistent with some research suggesting that these variable associations were strongest for women (Roth, 1988). Perhaps it takes men utilizing or minimizing certain religious involvements (i.e., religious intensity), in addition to having spiritual experiences and forgiveness, to meaningfully impact their marital happiness. Perhaps women can get the same effect from their non-religious spiritual investments only. Had previous authors studied more closely religious and spiritual involvements together with marital happiness they might have known more about the interplay between these associations, in general, and by gender.

**Relevance to Theory**

Symbolic interaction theory was used to conceptualize this interplay between religion, spirituality, and a person’s marital happiness. It was believed that a person’s symbolic association with the transcendental, through daily spiritual experiences, positive religious/spiritual coping, and forgiveness, better captures his or her self-reported marital happiness than does more external behaviors associated with institutional religion. The idea is not to discount the importance of religion, but to illustrate what Allport and Ross (1967) argued decades ago – that a person’s intrinsic beliefs about his or her spirituality may be most important for life experiences. That is one reason why it seemed justified to predict that a person’s spiritual beliefs would specifically influence marital behavior and its overall appraisal.

Moreover, another facet of this theoretical perspective was that spiritual beliefs, motivations, and transcendental connectedness did not necessarily coincide with institutional religious involvements. This was considered to be especially true for modern-day America, where spirituality has become so popular (Poloma & Gallup, 1991; Thornton, 1985). Spirituality is what resides in the self, as opposed to a geographic location which some spiritual folks might regularly visit.

In effect, these findings may indicate that American society – by dint of its increasing spirituality – could be having a significant influence on marriage. This influence may have much more to do with personal spirituality than to formal or informal religious involvement. This may be especially the case for women, as their religious involvements were of no significance to self-reported marital happiness. Perhaps the data from this study showed that a man’s marital happiness has a lot to do with his religious and spiritual investments together, and that the latter, alone, are enough for women. Perhaps these patterns indicate that modern-day women are less
vested in patriarchal religious institutions (Brinkerhoff et al., 1992; O’Brien, 1971) for marital support and happiness. Some religiously oriented women, especially when feeling pressured by their religion to remain unhappily married (Heaton & Albrecht, 1991; Wilson & Musick, 1996), might instead seek spiritual comfort and guidance through more direct associations with the transcendental – daily spiritual experiences and forgiveness. The same might also be true for happily married women. Overall, it seems logical to conclude from these findings that an individual’s intrinsic belief systems, whether or not part of formal religious associations, are what ultimately influence key aspects of family life important for marital happiness.

**Research Implications**

The current findings about the role of religion and spirituality in marital happiness are important for several reasons. First, these findings emphasize the need for continued research on spirituality and marriage; a topic given attention primarily in recent years (Mahoney et al., 2001). Perhaps there are only certain proximal spiritual beliefs that make a difference in marital happiness. It may be that proximal spiritual beliefs other than daily spiritual experiences and forgiveness are more important to marital happiness. The challenge has been to delineate theoretically-based aspects of religion and spirituality for consistent examination. Perhaps religious variables interact with spirituality in more complex ways than this particular study was able to show.

More innovative research in the future might employ a mixed-methods approach to studying religion, spirituality, and marriage. This might include quantitative and qualitative methods to continue exploring why religious and spiritual beliefs correlate with marital happiness differently by gender, and why race, age, or other socio-cultural factors might be involved. Authors might find that spiritual variables most similar to daily spiritual experiences and forgiveness remain robust correlates to marital happiness for men and women across samples and population cohorts. For instance, future research might examine religious and spiritual variables, such as these, with samples of religious and racial groups other than predominantly Protestant-Whites. Future studies might examine cohort affects with associations of distal religious and proximal spiritual beliefs to self-reported marital happiness. For instance, the trend towards personal spirituality (Thornton, 1985) might have primarily impacted the marital happiness of those from recent cohorts, with a much lesser effect on older cohorts.
Essentially, this research shows that spirituality is important for differentiating degrees of marital happiness, even more so than public and private religious involvements. These findings also show that gender variations existed when examining concepts of religion and spirituality with marital happiness. Further research might show convincingly that the associations between certain intrinsic spiritual beliefs and marital happiness interact with distal religious variables to influence marital happiness differently for men and women. Researchers might consider these findings when studying religion and/or spirituality in marriage in the future.

**Clinical Implications**

There has been considerable interest in the role of religion and spirituality in marital therapy over the years (Anderson & Worthen, 1997; Garland & Conrad, 1990; Griffith, 1986; Schell, 1992). This orientation is given more support from the current findings. For marital therapists to avoid these discussions in therapy might be a serious oversight. Therapists would be overlooking inherent transcendental mechanisms that each person brings into marriage and which currently directs marital behavior (Stewart & Gale, 1994). In fact, Prest and Keller (1993) stated:

> The spiritual system is intra-and interpersonally constructed to proved faith explanations of past and present experiences and, for some, to predict the future and explain the ultimate meanings of life and existence. It may also serve to construct meaning out of the seeming chaos and randomness of life, thereby alleviating anxiety and providing a heightened sense of security. (p. 138)

As such, Griffith (1986) suggested that clinicians have a special responsibility to pay attention to a client’s spiritual orientation, as an integral part of his or her life. By respectfully exploring the meaning of one’s religious and spiritual experience and orientation (Griffith, 1986), therapists and other clinical support persons might be better able to assist people in finding the direction and purpose they desire.

Moreover, exploring spirituality in the context of marital and family relationships might not only help individual family members, but the family unit altogether. Hodge (2000) recently discussed the benefits of using spiritual ecomaps to assess marriages and families. Furman and Chandy (1994) argued convincingly that spiritual belief systems were salient aspects of family dynamics. Knowledge from studies like this one might also help clinicians in understanding the extent to which religious and spiritual variables impact marital happiness differently for men and
women. There appears to be much more to learn about how men and women organize themselves religiously and spiritually, and how these associations impact marital functioning.

**Limitations of the Study**

There were a number of methodological issues that warranted attention. This was especially the case for the analyses that separated married men and married women. The sample size was significantly reduced in these separate analyses, increasing the risk of overestimating parameter estimates (see Pedhazur, 1997). Moreover, the overall models for men and women were non-significant. Interpretation of the unique significant findings is made with caution as the individual contributors to marital happiness could be considered as artifacts of the data attributed to Type I errors.

Furthermore, the final dataset was overrepresented by happily married persons who were predominantly White and religiously identified as Protestant. Most of the sample was also in a first marriage, had at least some secondary education, and worked full-time. Therefore, any characterizations and predictions about religious and spiritual correlates to marital happiness may be limited. Perhaps the relationship of distal religious and proximal spiritual variable associations to marital happiness might be different for remarried individuals, and various subcultures within the Black or Hispanic populations. Education appeared to play a unique role in the marital happiness for White women. Race was important for men, with Whites being more likely to be happy than non-Whites. However, the sample size is too small to speak of these findings with authority. A much larger and more diverse sample will be needed for gender specific analyses.

Another limitation related to the above was the inability to control for certain socio-cultural factors. One in particular was a person’s psychological health. Because no data were available on this construct, it could not be included in analyses A married person’s divorce history, parental divorce history, current length of time married, age at first marriage, and premarital cohabitation were other factors excluded from examination due to missing data.

Yet, even if all of these variables were present, the cross-sectional design of the study was a limitation. Amato and his associates (2007) suggested that longitudinal designs were more comprehensive and offered clearer associations between variables. They observed that socio-cultural variables tended to cancel each other out in cross-sectional studies of this type, whereas longitudinal designs allow researchers to determine patterning affects.
Moreover, the inclusion of qualitative data might have shown why variable associations were different for married men and married women over time. Perhaps certain life events occurred that strengthened or weakened religious and/or spiritual experiences, which in turn, influenced any number of aspects of family life important for marital happiness (marital and family interactions). Therefore, the findings from this study must be regarded as exploratory, and its gender-specific findings speculative. Hopefully, these results will inspire additional investigation about the possible nuances of religion and spirituality in marriage for men and women.
APPENDIX

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Office of the Vice President For Research
Human Subjects Committee
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2742
(850) 644-8673 · FAX (850) 644-4392

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 2/27/2009

To: David Bell

Address: 7062 Cherry Run Road, Washington, NC 27889
Dept.: FAMILY & CHILD SCIENCE

From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research
The Relationship of Proximal Spiritual Beliefs With Marital Satisfaction: A Closer Look

The application that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Secretary, the Chair, and two members of the Human Subjects Committee. Your project is determined to be Exempt per 45 CFR § 46.101(b)4 and has been approved by an expedited review process.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals, which may be required.

If you submitted a proposed consent form with your application, the approved stamped consent form is attached to this approval notice. Only the stamped version of the consent form may be used in recruiting research subjects.

If the project has not been completed by 2/26/2010 you must request a renewal of approval for continuation of the project. As a courtesy, a renewal notice will be sent to you prior to your expiration date; however, it is your responsibility as the Principal Investigator to timely request renewal of your approval from the Committee.
You are advised that any change in protocol for this project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee prior to implementation of the proposed change in the protocol. A protocol change/amendment form is required to be submitted for approval by the Committee. In addition, federal regulations require that the Principal Investigator promptly report, in writing any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the Chair of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protection. The Assurance Number is IRB00000446.

Cc: Robert Lee, Advisor
HSC No. 2009.1745
REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

David Bell graduated from East Carolina University in 2000 with a BA in Psychology and minor in Alcohol and Drug Studies. David went on to receive his MS in Marriage and Family Therapy from East Carolina University in 2002. He entered the Ph.D. program in Marriage and Family Therapy at Florida State University in the Fall of 2002 and became a doctoral candidate in the Fall of 2004. David is in private practice with interest in clinical outcome research.