

Spirituality and Relationship Satisfaction: The Role of Prayer

by

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Abstract

Research has supported the association between spirituality and relationship satisfaction, whereby more spiritual individuals are more satisfied with their romantic relationships. However, it remains unclear why spirituality benefits romantic relationships. Addressing this gap in the literature, the current study uses a guided theoretical framework and tests whether prayer for the partner is an intervening variable underlying this link. Using data from a diverse sample, this study drew upon measures of self-reported spirituality, prayer for the partner, and relationship satisfaction to test the association between spirituality and relationship satisfaction and whether prayer for the partner was an intervening factor in this relationship. The sample consisted of 286 individuals in a romantic relationship. Regression analyses supported the positive association between prayer for the partner and relationship satisfaction in men and women, but provided no support for the association between spirituality and relationship satisfaction. No mediation or moderation effects were found. Possible explanations for these findings, implication for practice, and future directions are provided.

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Introduction

It is estimated that somewhere around 88% of the world's population profess some religious faith (CIA Worldfacts, 2010). In the United States, survey research shows that most Americans have a non-dogmatic approach to faith and that up to 92% of people believe in the existence of God or a universal spirit (U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, 2008). In addition, McCullough and Larson (1999) found that 90% of Americans pray occasionally. As can be inferred from the above, spirituality seems to play a significant role in most people's lives. According to Fincham, Ajayi, & Beach (2011), spirituality may have stronger implications in the quality of romantic relationships and has been explored less than religiosity and its effects on relationship satisfaction. Because spirituality directly influences individuals' beliefs and behaviors and because of the widespread use of prayer, the study of spirituality and prayer, and its effects on individuals in a dyad, such as a couple relationship, warrants empirical study.

While there is overlap in defining religiosity and spirituality, the terms typically convey distinct concepts. Religiosity tends to be associated more with social expressions of faith, such as attending church services or participating in ritualized or institutionalized expressions of faith (Woods & Ironson, 1999). Spirituality refers to a focus on the meaning and purpose of life and an individual's personal relationship with a supreme being (Peteet, 1994).

Previous research has shown the benefits of spirituality in relationship satisfaction. For example, those individuals whose actions are congruent with their faith and are not concerned with living up to other people's expectations (characteristics of a spiritual individual), report a higher perception of marital happiness (Roth, 1988). Similarly, couples who live their lives

consistent with their spiritual beliefs also tend to report higher marital-satisfaction (Anthony, 1993). In contrast, low scores of marital satisfaction are associated with individuals that use their religious beliefs and practices to socialize, gain recognition, or obtain some type of personal benefit, apart from simply fostering their relationship with God.

In a study specific to spirituality, Giblin (1997) found that marital spirituality (high spirituality of both partners) was positively related to marital satisfaction. Couples who most often attended church, prayed, or read scripture (i.e. high religiosity) were not necessarily the ones reporting higher marital satisfaction. It was the couples whose actions were congruent with their spiritual beliefs, and who made these beliefs an integral part of the marital relationship who were more likely to report higher relationship satisfaction.

Although researchers have explored spirituality and how it affects marital satisfaction, learning about the specific variables that may contribute to the positive outcome have been understudied (Fincham, Lambert, & Beach, 2010). Dollahite and Marks (2009) believe that there are specific processes that result from individuals' spiritual convictions and that lead to positive outcomes in personal, marital, family and community relationships. Relying on God or God's word, resolving conflict with prayer, and nurturing spiritual observance and growth through teaching, example, and discussion are some of the processes or mechanisms that Dollahite and Marks found to be common among a sample of 74 families.

Prayer in particular was one of the many factors highlighted by Dollahite and Marks (2009) that is extensively practiced in the United States (McCullough & Larson, 1999). According to a study done by Dudley and Kosinski (1990), spiritual activities such as prayer may help individuals consider the needs of the partner, making them more loving. According to Beach, Fincham, Hurt, McNair and Stanley (2008) prayer can be helpful in creating religious

imagery that is not compatible with recycling grievances or with fantasies of superiority. In a more recent study, Fincham, Lambert, and Beach (2010) found that praying for the partner was associated with lower infidelity, which can directly affect relationship satisfaction. Fincham, Beach, Lambert, Stillman, and Braithwaite (2008) conducted three studies to examine the role of prayer for the partner in relationship satisfaction and found that in young adults (undergraduate college students around the age of 20), prayer for a partner was positively associated with greater relationship satisfaction.

Despite the growing literature linking spirituality and relationship satisfaction, and linking spiritual behaviors and relationship satisfaction, further studies are needed to assess the relationship among all areas. Because prayer is related to both, spirituality (McCullough & Larson, 1999) and relationship satisfaction (Fincham et al., 2008), the present study sought to explore whether prayer for the well-being of a romantic partner mediated or moderated the relationship between spirituality and relationship satisfaction. In other words, it may be that spiritual individuals are more likely to pray more often for their partner, which then is associated with greater relationship satisfaction; or it may be that when spiritual individuals pray for their partner, their relationship satisfaction is higher, but when they have lower levels of prayer for their partner, their relationship satisfaction is not higher. Thus, prayer for the well-being of a romantic partner was examined through self-report as a behavioral contributor of the relationship between spirituality and relationship satisfaction. Considering that 96% of licensed marriage and family therapists believed in a relationship between mental health and spiritual health (Carlson, Kirkpatrick, Hecker, & Killmer, 2002), research exploring the role of spirituality in romantic relationships can help therapists in understanding how couples' spirituality can function to improve the quality of a couple's relationship.

Review of Literature

Understanding the constructs of spirituality, prayer, and relationship satisfaction is important in building on previous research in the area of relationships and spirituality. Additionally, having a theoretical framework provides structure and direction, as well as a logical explanation of hypotheses. In this chapter, a theoretical background which supports the concept of spirituality and relationship satisfaction is provided. This is followed by a discussion of the differences between spirituality and religiosity. Finally, the literature examining spirituality, prayer, and relationship satisfaction is reviewed.

Theoretical Background

It is often assumed that spirituality and specific spiritual processes impact romantic relationships. Unfortunately, little is known about the specific variables which may affect the relationship between spirituality and relationship satisfaction (Fincham, Lambert, & Beach, 2010). For example, after a wide search of the research conducted in the area of spirituality and romantic relationships, only a few studies looked at the relationship between spirituality and romantic relationships and the specific processes that may intervene. Nevertheless, spirituality was found to be incorporated in a conceptual model of family and religious processes in highly religious families developed by Dollahite and Marks (2009; see figure 1). Because spirituality and religiosity often overlap, Dollahite and Marks' model was used as a baseline in this literature review. This model describes the contexts in which family processes operate in order to fulfill sacred purposes and then goes on to describe the possible outcomes. Spiritual beliefs are considered one of the contexts in which families strive to fulfill sacred purposes (see figure 1).

This model also proposes that relationship satisfaction and happiness is an outcome of spiritual convictions and religious involvement, but in association with a number of family processes, such as nurturing spiritual observance and growth through teaching, or resolving conflict with prayer. The family processes are considered the missing bridge that connects the spiritual convictions and religious involvement with the family, couple, or personal outcomes. However, family processes may actually interact with the spiritual convictions (moderate) to augment or reduce the outcomes, rather than be the mechanism through which the outcomes are observed (mediation).

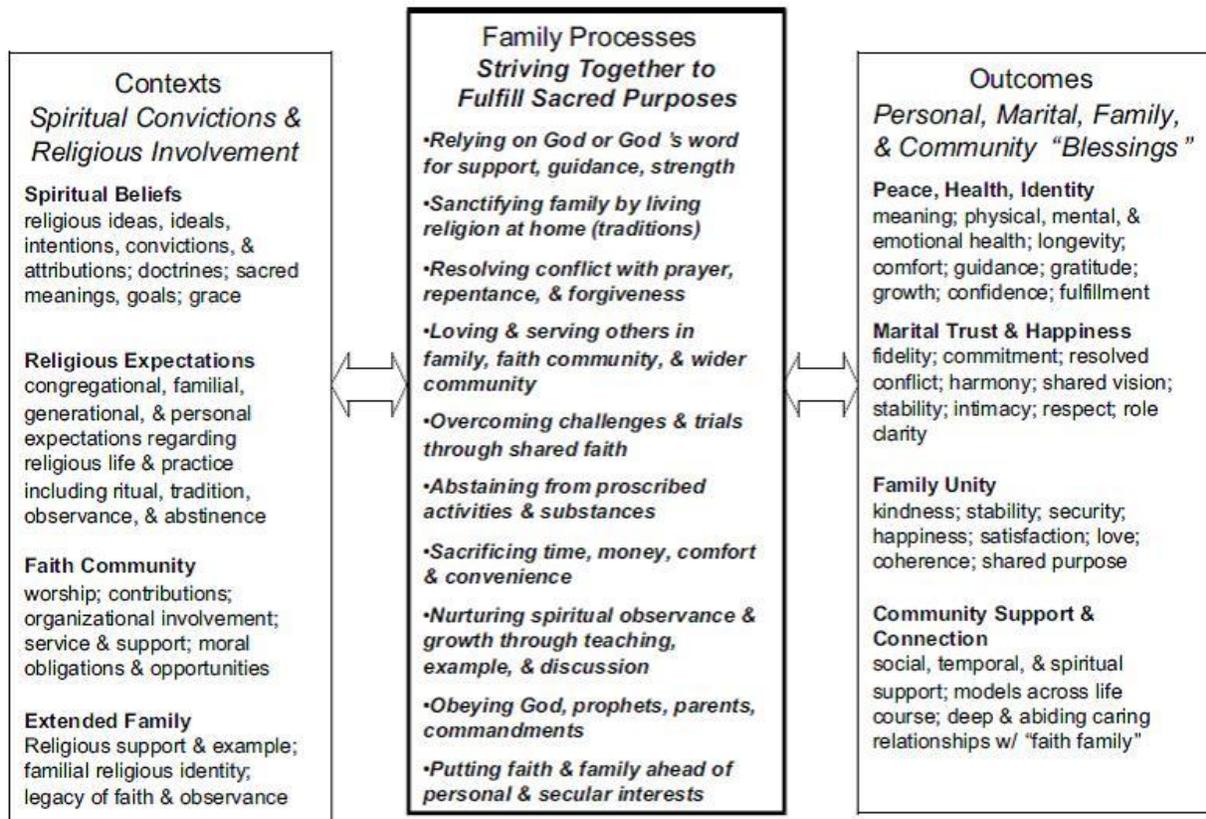


Figure 1. Conceptual model of family and religious processes (Dollahite & Marks, 2009)

The Dollahite and Marks' model was developed from in-depth qualitative interviews that were conducted with a sample of 74 highly religious, racially, and religiously diverse families.

Within the sample there were husbands, wives, and adolescents from across the United States totaling 195 participants. The questions asked about the ways families used their religious beliefs in their marriage, family life, parenting, and their sense of identity. Based on these interviews, Dollahite and Marks concluded that the family processes are the mechanisms that link contexts (spiritual convictions and religious involvement) and outcomes (personal, marital, family, and community “blessings”). For instance, an individual’s spiritual convictions (context), may lead him to nurture spiritual observance and growth through teaching, example, and discussion (family processes), which in turn would lead to family unity. In this sense, Dollahite and Marks (2009) support the assumption that an individual’s spiritual convictions would have a positive effect in the way the individual treats and responds to a romantic partner, which would in turn lead to higher relationship satisfaction.

In line with the Dollahite and Marks (2009) model, it can be expected that the interpersonal process of praying for the partner affects the relationship between spirituality and relationship satisfaction. Although Dollahite and Marks’ model focuses on the family processes as the mechanisms that link *spirituality and religiosity* (as one construct), to relationship outcomes, much of the literature reviewed denotes differences between spirituality and religiosity. Given these differences, the spiritual framework within the Dollahite and Marks model is mostly referenced within this literature review. However, because of the common overlaps in definitions of religiosity and spirituality, and because many studies talk indistinctively about both constructs, religiosity is also discussed, and both constructs are defined thoroughly.

Spirituality and Religiosity

Spirituality has been described in different ways; Peteet (1994) conceptualized the term within the context of psychotherapy as viewing “the human condition in a larger and or transcendent context and therefore concerned with the meaning and purpose of life and with unseen realities, such as one’s relationship to a supreme being” (p. 237). In a review of the last 30 years of nursing literature, Emblen (1992) examined references to religiousness and spirituality and conducted a content analysis. He reported that spirituality was mostly defined as “a personal life principle which animates a transcendent quality of relationship with God” (p. 45).

Spirituality seems to be a broad construct that may include individual’s efforts at reaching sacred or existential goals. Some of these goals may be finding meaning, wholeness, inner potential, and interconnections with others (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005). Goldberg (1990) referred to spirituality as a search for universal truth, while Soeken and Carson (1987) described it as a belief in a connection of an individual to the world which provides meaning and definition.

From the definitions provided, it can be inferred that spiritual people tend to focus more on their personal and intimate relationship with a supreme being and with others, as opposed to an institutionalized and socially motivated approach. Given that the focus is the search of truth as a personal life principle (Goldberg 1990; Emblen, 1992), spiritual individuals, as opposed to religious individuals, tend to be more congruent with their beliefs and actions (Anthony, 1993), which are geared toward finding meaning and purpose in life.

On the other hand, Peteet (1994) defined religion as “Commitments to beliefs and practices characteristic of particular traditions” (p. 237). Pargament (1999) described religiousness as substantively associated with formal belief, group practice, and institutions.

Religious individuals are those that are members of a particular religious denomination, attend worship services, and are actively involved with a religious community. An example of this is a Catholic individual, who may go to church on Sundays, receive Holy Communion, go to bible study or read the bible on his own, and who may have friends who share his same views and be members of the same church. This person may or may not be spiritual. Because of its strong association with institutionalized practices, religiousness is seen by some as peripheral to existential functions. Concrete expressions of religiousness include organizational activities, attendance at services, performance of rituals, church membership, commitment to organizational beliefs, and adherence to institutionally based belief systems (Zinnbauer et al., 1997).

Zinnbauer et al. (1997) believe that spiritual and religious definitions share a common ground: the belief in the sacred. In a sense, the point of disparity lays in the expression of the beliefs. Spiritual individuals tend toward a personal closeness with God or connection with the world and living things, while religious individuals may be characterized in terms of formal and ritualized social expressions of faith. However, being religious does not necessarily imply that the individual is spiritual and vice versa. An individual may be religious and spiritual, religious, but not spiritual, or spiritual, but not religious (Becvar, 1997).

Spirituality and religiosity play an important role in most people's lives. The Central Intelligence Agency estimated in 2010 that 88% of the world's population professes some religious faith (CIA Worldfacts, 2010). In the United States, survey research showed that most Americans have a non-dogmatic approach to faith and that up to 92% of people believe in the existence of God or a universal spirit (U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, 2008). Given the high number of individuals with a non-dogmatic approach to faith or beliefs in the existence of God or

a universal spirit, it would only make sense that researchers paid closer attention to the effects of such spiritual faith and beliefs, apart from religiosity, in people's lives.

Based on a review of literature, Peter Hill et al. (2000) compiled a list of important characteristics of spirituality and religiosity. Some of these characteristics are the fact that spirituality develops across the lifespan, is related to affect and emotion, and is negatively related to drug and alcohol abuse. Unfortunately, most studies focus on measuring the concrete aspects of religious activities and its effects on individuals, couples, or families, as opposed to studying the effects of more subjective variables, such as those related to spirituality. Examples of these more subjective variables are individual prayer and the beliefs about transcendence (Miller & Thoresen, 1999). Because spirituality and relationship satisfaction have been studied less than religiosity and relationship satisfaction, this study focused on spirituality and the role of prayer in relationship satisfaction.

Spirituality and Romantic Relationships

Most research focused on relationship satisfaction and spirituality conceptualizes to a spiritual connection through religiosity. For example, Anthony (1993) used Gordon Allport's Religious Orientation Scale (ROS) when studying the relationship between marital satisfaction and religious maturity. In Allport's scale, four different types of religious orientation are considered: 1) Intrinsic or *spiritually mature*, 2) Extrinsic – subordinating religious practices and beliefs to extrinsic qualities related to needs and motives, 3) Indiscriminately Pro-religious – supporting anything religious without differentiating one's motives, 4) Indiscriminately antireligious – against anything religious. An intrinsic orientation or being spiritually mature refers to what has been described in this literature review as a spiritual individual. Anthony (1993) used Allport's scale and Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale to investigate the

relationship between marital satisfaction and religious maturity. He used a sample of 400 couples from four different Protestant churches in Southern California. The sample was stratified by religious denomination. The results of the analysis of variance showed a significant effect between marital satisfaction and religious orientation $F(3,788) = 13.206, p < .05$. There were significant differences among the type of religious orientation and its association with marital satisfaction. The individuals that were found to be spiritually mature (spiritual individuals) reported higher marital satisfaction (DAS $M = 119.2, SD = 12.5$). In contrast, lower scores of marital satisfaction were associated with individuals who used religious beliefs, as a means to find security, sociability, distraction, or status (DAS $M = 111.4, SD = 16.8$). The results of this investigation speak about the important effects of spirituality on the well-being of the couple relationship.

In another study, Roth (1988) sought to explore the relationship between spiritual well-being and marital adjustment by surveying 147 married individuals from three Southern California churches. The sample consisted of 90 women and 57 men. To measure marital satisfaction, the Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale was used. To measure spiritual well-being, the Spiritual Well-Being Scale by Paloutzian and Ellison (1982) was used. Roth found that those individuals whose actions were congruent with their faith rather than focusing on others' religious expectations reported a higher perception of marital adjustment. This was true for both, husbands and wives. However, the association was stronger for the women than it was for the men (zero-order correlation coefficient between spiritual well-being scores and marital adjustment scores for husbands = .261 $p < .05$, for wives = .561 $p < .001$).

In addition, Roth found significant differences in the relationship between spiritual well-being and marital adjustment, depending on the number of years that the individuals had been

married. The strongest associations were for wives married 10-19 years (zero-order correlation coefficient .723, $p < .001$) and for husbands married 20-29 years (zero-order correlation coefficient .914, $p < .01$). On the other hand, weaker associations were found for husband that had been married between 0-9 years, wives married 30-39, and for all married 40-49 years. These results highlight the positive relationship between spiritual well-being and the individuals' perception of their marital adjustment. The differences in sex by length of marriage could be due to the different life phases that men and women go through. For instance, men tend to give work a higher priority during early adulthood (Levinson, 1978) and women tend to focus more on family involvement during the same life period (Roth, 1988), leading to the differences observed in relationship satisfaction by length of years married in spiritual individuals.

In a study specific to spirituality and marital satisfaction, Giblin (1997) studied a total of 35 couples (88% Caucasian, 9% Asian, 3% Hispanic), with an average age of 49 for husbands and 46 for wives. These couples had been married for an average of 20 years (range = 1-51). Most of the couples were in their first marriage (88%). The couples were predominantly Catholic (88%), while twelve percent were Protestant. Their education levels were high, with most having attended college or above (74% for husbands and 63% for wives) and with a household income of \$50,000 or above (60%). Giblin (1997) used the ENRICH and the Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory (RI) abbreviated version to measure marital satisfaction and the Spiritual Experience Index (SEI) and the Spiritual Well-Being Scale to measure spirituality. He also used a brief questionnaire designed for the study to obtain information about the couples' religious behavior. The study was undertaken with couples that considered spirituality an important part of their lives. Pearson correlations were calculated for couple positive-agreement scores on ENRICH and couple means scores for the SWBS. Significant correlations were found

for the SWBS with relevant ENRICH scales. High spirituality was associated with couples' marital satisfaction ($r = .37, p < .01$), conflict resolution ($r = .41, p < .05$), sexual relationship ($r = .36, p < .05$) and family and friends ($r = .37, p < .05$). The SEI and ENRICH showed a significant, positive association between spirituality and marital adaptability ($r = .36, p < .05$). Nonetheless, when analyzed separately, differences by sex were found.

When looking at the results for the husbands, spirituality (SWBS) was significantly related to marital satisfaction (ENRICH) ($r = .51, p < .01$), communications ($r = .44, p < .01$), conflict-resolution ($r = .38, p < .05$), sexuality ($r = .43, p < .05$), family and friends ($r = .36, p < .05$), religion ($r = .60, p < .01$), and empathy (RI) ($r = .43, p < .05$). Husbands' spirituality when assessed by the SEI, yielded similar statistically significant results.

Unlike the results for the husbands, wives spirituality (SWBS) was only significantly, positively related to leisure activities ($r = .37, p < .05$) and children and parenting ($r = .35, p < .05$) (both measured by the ENRICH). As can be inferred, husbands' spirituality seemed to be highly related to overall relationship satisfaction, while wives spirituality presented a different, unexpected picture of results. A possible explanation for the differences in results may be that, given that couples were married on average 20 years and most of them had already reared their children, most women may have been in a phase of life where they could begin seeking new meaning in career and other relationships. On the other hand, husbands' careers could have been more stable, allowing them to shift their attention to the couple relationship. Given that these findings rely on a small sample (only 35 couples), mostly Catholic, Caucasian, well educated, and economically middle class or higher, the results cannot be generalized, and further study is necessary to fully understand the impact of spirituality in relationship satisfaction. However, this

is the second study in this literature review, in which the life stage appears to matter in relation to spirituality and relationship satisfaction.

To assess for the effects of spirituality on marital satisfaction in African American couples, Fincham, Ajayi, and Beach (2011), studied 487 African American couples (430 married, 57 engaged) from urban and rural sections in the southeast of the United States. The couples were interviewed at their homes. The average age for males was 39.9 ($SD = 9.7$). The average age for females was 38.2 ($SD = 9.2$). The scale used to evaluate spirituality was the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (Underwood & Teresi, 2002) which measures the frequency of spiritual experiences. The 16-item scale asks questions such as how thankful people feel for their blessings and if they feel guided by God in the midst of daily activities. The scale focuses more on the personal experience of the individual with a supreme being, rather than on religious practices such as church attendance or worship. To measure relationship satisfaction, the researchers used the Quality of Marriage Index (QMI) (Norton, 1983). In addition, the Positive and Negative Quality in Marriage Scale (Fincham & Linfield, 1997) was also used. Religiosity was assessed with two questions about participation in church-related activities during the preceding 30-day period. Given that responses of partners are not independent, the data were analyzed using the Actor Partner Interdependence Model (Kenny, Kashy & Cook, 2006). The results of this study showed a positive association between spirituality and the individuals' own reports of relationship satisfaction ($B = .33$ for husbands; $B = .26$ for wives). Levels of spirituality of the individuals were also associated with the partners' reports of satisfaction (wives to husbands, $B = .18$; husbands to wives, $B = .14$). No significant sex differences were found.

The argument that religiosity and spirituality may refer to the same construct was taken into account in this study. To test for this possibility, Fincham et al. assessed the relationship between religiosity and spirituality and found a significant, but weak correlation between religiosity and spirituality in husbands, $r(485) = .26, p < .001$, and in wives, $r(485) = .27, p < .001$. In addition, husbands and wives spirituality were weakly related (.09), while husbands and wives religiosity were strongly related (.46) ($z = 6.32, p < .001$). Further, the Actor Partner Interdependence Model was also used when substituting the measure of spirituality with the measure of religiosity and then repeating the analysis. Through this procedure, researchers found a different pattern of results. Husbands' religiosity was associated with their own reports of relationship satisfaction ($B = .19$) and wives' reports of relationship satisfaction ($B = .18$), but no significant actor ($B = .04$) or partner effect ($B = .06$) were found for wives, unlike the model for spirituality, where actor partner effects were found for the wives.

To explore this even further, researchers analyzed actor and partner effects for spirituality and religiosity in a multivariate context and found the same results as explained above. These results clearly show that the construct of religiosity and spirituality are two different constructs and that spirituality is positively associated with relationship satisfaction regardless of sex in African American couples. Consistent results were obtained with the Positive and Negative Quality in Marriage Scale (Fincham & Linfield, 1997). However, in this analysis, spirituality seemed to be particularly important in decreasing husbands' negative evaluations of the marriage and somewhat important in increasing wives' positive evaluations of the marriage.

Overall, the results of these studies consistently report that relationship satisfaction is closely related to an individual's spirituality. Nonetheless, in order for spirituality to have an effect on relationship satisfaction, the individual must live his or her life, consistently with his or

her spiritual beliefs. This means that the spiritual beliefs likely lead to specific individual spiritual practices or processes which would in turn contribute to the outcome of relationship satisfaction. The specific spiritual practices may be prayer, meditation, and contemplation, among others (Miller & Thoresen, 1999). To further explore the contribution of spiritual processes (such as the ones outlined in the process model; Dollahite and Marks, 2009) in the relationship between spirituality and relationship satisfaction, the literature related to the role of prayer for the partner and its contribution to relationship satisfaction is also addressed in this literature review.

Prayer for the Partner as a Potential Process

In general terms, prayer in our society seems to be an important practice given that about 90% of Americans pray at least occasionally (McCullough & Larson, 1999) and many people will pray spontaneously as a means to cope with problems (McCaffrey et al., 2004). According to Beach, Fincham, Hurt, McNair and Stanley (2008) prayer can be helpful in creating religious imagery that is not compatible with recycling grievances or with fantasies of superiority. Additionally, prayer may help individuals focus on divine love and forgiveness. Unfortunately, despite the extensive use of prayer, not much research has investigated the role of prayer in relationship satisfaction. Dudley and Kosinski (1990) were among the first researchers to briefly discuss prayer and its effects on relationship satisfaction. These researchers suggested that prayer and other spiritual activities may positively affect couples by helping them think more often of the needs of others and make them more loving and forgiving.

In a more recent study that addressed prayer for a partner specifically, Fincham, Lambert, and Beach (2010) studied the relationship between praying for the partner and infidelity. They studied 375 undergraduates (320 females) between 17 to 29 years of age from a public university

in the Southeast. Participants completed all measures at the middle of their school semester and then again six weeks later. They used a 4 item measure to assess prayer for the partner. Items such as “I pray that good things will happen for my partner” and “I pray for the well being of my romantic partner” were part of this measure with high internal consistency ($\alpha = .96$). To assess for infidelity, participants were asked whether they had engaged in extra-dyadic activities with someone other than their specified romantic partner (kissing, sexual intimacy without intercourse, and sexual intercourse) in the last month. Possible responses were “yes” or “no.” Lastly, to assess for relationship satisfaction, a four item scale with optimized psychometric properties developed by Funk and Rogge (2007) was used. The results of a cross-lagged stability model revealed that Time 1 prayer for partner was significantly negatively related to Time 2 infidelity ($\beta = -.09, p < .05$). These results were significant after controlling for Time 1 infidelity ($\beta = -.14, p < .01$). Controlling only for Time 1 infidelity ensured that the effect was not dependent on controlling for relationship satisfaction. The effects of sex, relationship length, relationship status, and ethnicity were also tested, yielding no significant results. In addition, no interaction effects between these variables and praying for partner were found. The stated results showed a significant negative relationship between earlier prayer and later infidelity.

To further explore this relationship, the researchers conducted a second study adding a longitudinal component and provided experimental data on the relationship between prayer for the partner and infidelity. Three control conditions were assessed; repeated measurement, priming of nonspecific process through prayer, or increasing frequency of positive thoughts about the partner. Once again, undergraduate students (74 females, 9 males) from a public university in the Southeast were surveyed. Participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 34, with a median age of 19 years. Inclusion criteria were a) currently in a relationship and b) reports of at

least minimal level of prayer. Infidelity was measured through a nine-item scale that assessed emotional and physical infidelity with high internal consistency in Time 1 and Time 2 ($\alpha = .96$ at Time 1 and 2).

To ensure that praying for partner was not leading to fewer reports of immoral thoughts, acts of infidelity were tested separately. The acts of emotional infidelity and physical infidelity correlated at $r = .77$ at Time 1 and $.74$ at Time 2. These items were taken from the Drigotas et al. (1999) measure. The perception of the relationship as something sacred (having spiritual significance and character) (Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Murray Swank, 2003) was also measured. Items were modified from an earlier measure developed by Mahoney et al (1999) and correlated at $r = .72$ at Time 1 and $r = .79$ at Time 2. Participants were separated into four groups. The first group asked participants to pray for the well being of their partner at least once a day for four weeks and to keep track of how much time they spent doing this. Specific instructions and a sample prayer were given, but participants were encouraged to generate their own prayer. The neutral condition group (activity control), simply asked participants to set aside some time to think about their day, every day, for four weeks, and report as often as the previous group. This group was created to ensure that repeated measurement did not account for the results. The other two groups received instructions similar to the two previous groups, but one of the groups was instructed to set aside time to pray in general (those that prayed for partner were excluded from this group) and the other one to set aside time to think positive thoughts about the partner.

Participants in the prayer for the partner condition reported significantly lower infidelity scores ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 1.04$) than those in neutral conditions ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 2.16$), $F(1,78) = 7.61$, $p < .01$, $d = .87$), positive thoughts about partner condition ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 2.37$), $F(1,78) =$

6.7, $p = .01$, $d = .80$, and the undirected prayer condition (after excluding 4 participants that prayed for partner) ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 2.06$), $F(.174) = 4.02$, $p < .05$, $d = .67$. Although the focus was specific to the effect of prayer on infidelity, the results of the two studies are important because they are among the first to provide evidence of the effects of prayer on a construct that directly affects relationship satisfaction. In addition, the study also revealed that prayer for the partner on a daily basis results in lower infidelity even in comparison with the effects of undirected prayer.

A different study conducted by Lambert et al. (2009) assessed the relationship between prayer and forgiveness. These researchers evaluated the level of forgiveness of the partner's transgressions in individuals who prayed for the well-being of the romantic partner, and in those who reported about the partner's physical attributes to an imagined parent (control group). Fifty-two psychology undergraduates (36 female, 16 male) participated in the study. The Gratitude Questionnaire (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002) was used to measure gratitude. Prayer frequency was assessed with a four-item measure, and forgiveness was assessed with three items. All measures exhibited high internal consistency. Religiosity was assessed with a single question asking about how religious the participants considered themselves to be. Half of the participants were assigned to the prayer condition and the other half were assigned to the control condition (thinking about partner's physical attributes and reporting to imagined parent). Participants were sent to a private room and instructed to one of the two conditions. After controlling for gratitude, level of religiosity, sex, and prayer frequency, an analysis of covariance was conducted revealing higher forgiveness scores in the prayer for the partner condition ($M = 5.15$, $SD = .84$), than in those in the control condition ($M = 4.85$, $SD = .88$), $F(1.47) = 4.00$, $p = .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$. The results demonstrate that praying for the well being of a romantic partner is related to an increase in an

individual's willingness to forgive a romantic partner. These researchers developed a second study in which they were able to rule out positive thoughts and undirected prayer as possible explanations of the results of their first study.

Lastly, Fincham et al. (2008) analyzed the role of prayer in relationship satisfaction. To do this, they recruited 302 undergraduate students (253 female, 49 male) with an average age of 20 years ($SD = 2.71$). Sixty seven percent of the sample was Caucasian, 14% African American, 10% Latino, and the rest were mixed race, Asian, or other. Participants completed a survey twice with a six 6 week interval between applications.

Three different assessments were used. To measure prayer, two items asked about prayer for the well-being of the romantic partner. These items exhibited high internal consistency ($\alpha = .88$ at Time 1 and $\alpha = .92$ at Time 2). To measure relationship satisfaction, a 4-item measure with optimized psychometric properties developed by Funk and Rogge (2007) was used. Given that social desirability is particularly relevant to the constructs assessed, a 13-item scale adapted from the Reynolds short form of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability scale (Reynolds, 1982) was used ($\alpha = .64$).

The results of the analysis yielded a significant cross-lagged relation from earlier partner prayer to later satisfaction ($\beta = .13, p < .05$). Nonetheless, relationship satisfaction did not predict prayer for the partner. Social desirability did not have significant effects on prayer for the partner or relationship satisfaction. In other words, the relationship between prayer for the partner and relationship satisfaction was not accounted for by socially desirable responding. In addition, researchers controlled for earlier prayer and conducted an analysis with a simple recursive model. In this analysis, researchers found a strong association between Time 1 prayer for the partner and Time 2 prayer for the partner ($\beta = .56, p < .05$) and an association between Time 2

prayer for the partner and Time 2 relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .14, p < .05$). However, no significant association between Time 1 prayer and Time 2 satisfaction was found. These results suggest that Time 1 prayer and Time 2 relationship satisfaction may be mediated by Time 2 prayer. A possible explanation for this is that the effect of prayer on relationship satisfaction is proximal. Sex differences were not addressed.

As can be inferred from the studies reviewed, prayer for the partner is a spiritual activity that seems to directly or indirectly affect relationship satisfaction. Different studies have looked at prayer in different ways, but all seem to agree that prayer for the partner is a process that has significant influence in relationship satisfaction. This influence cannot be accounted for by feelings of gratitude, socially desirable responses, repeated measurement, undirected prayer, or thinking positive thoughts about the partner. The association between spirituality and relationship satisfaction may be affected by the contributing role of prayer for the partner; that is, prayer for the partner may be the mechanism through which the association between spirituality and relationship satisfaction is achieved. Nonetheless, a moderation effect should also be contemplated; that being, the interaction of spirituality with prayer for the partner would yield greater relationship satisfaction as opposed to either one of the two constructs measured separately. To build on the research reviewed, hypotheses exploring possible mediation and moderation effects of prayer for the partner in the association of spirituality and relationship satisfaction were the focus of the current study.

Current Study

In line with the Dollahite and Marks model (2009) and with the literature that has been reviewed previously, prayer for a partner may function as a family process that enhances

relationship satisfaction through its interaction with an individual's spiritual beliefs or it may function as the missing bridge that links spirituality to relationship satisfaction.

In the present study, prayer for the well-being of a romantic partner as a mediator between spirituality and relationship satisfaction was assessed. Prayer for the partner could mediate relationship satisfaction in spiritual people by increasing positive feelings and behaviors. While spirituality is a transcendent relationship with a higher power, praying for a partner may result from spirituality and help individuals think about the partner in a more loving and compassionate way, allowing them to treat the partner with greater respect (Dudley and Kosinski, 1990).

However, the act of praying for the well-being of a romantic partner could instead be somewhat independent of spirituality. It may be that when spirituality and prayer for the partner are high, relationship satisfaction is also high; but when spirituality is high and prayer for the partner is lower, relationship satisfaction may be lower, indicating a moderation effect. Thus, the purpose of this study was to test the following hypotheses:

1. Spirituality will demonstrate a positive association with relationship satisfaction for males and females separately.
2. Prayer for the partner will demonstrate a positive association with relationship satisfaction for males and females separately.
3. Prayer for the partner will mediate the relationship between spirituality and relationship satisfaction for males and females separately.

or

4. The interaction between prayer for the partner and spirituality will enhance relationship satisfaction more than the relationship of the two variables measured separately for males and females.

Method

Sample

The analytic sample was comprised of 286 participants and was drawn from an overall sample of 792 individuals who attended a statewide relationship education program that is part of the Alabama Community Healthy Marriage Initiative (ACHMI). Individuals that participated in year five of the ACHMI project comprised the sample for this study. Only the pre-program participation data for cohabitating and married couples was used ($N = 305$). The reason for this is that the effects of the relationship intervention in relationship satisfaction were not a focus of the current study. Because romantic relationship satisfaction was examined as a possible outcome, only individuals in a romantic relationship (married and cohabiting individuals) were included in the analytic sample. Four individuals were excluded because they did not specify their sex and the analyses that were conducted were separated by sex. The reason for separating the analytic sample by sex was the interdependence of 88 individuals in the analytic sample (there were 44 heterosexual couples; 31% of the analytic sample). An additional 15 individuals were excluded because they did not answer at least one item for every measure. Given the high internal consistency obtained in every measure (at least $\alpha = .93$), the mean of each scale was computed and used to analyze the data.

At pre-program, participants reported their demographic information. Of the analytic sample, 60% ($n=171$) were married, and the remaining 40% ($n=115$) were cohabiting. The age of participants ranged from 16 to 70, with a median age of 32 years ($M = 33.6$, $SD = 10.39$). The majority of participants were females (71%). The analytic sample was ethnically balanced,

consisting of 61.9% European American, 31.8% African American, 3.8% Hispanic, 0.7% Bi-Racial, and the remaining 1.6% other or did not specify.

Participants also reported their annual household income range. Twenty-eight percent of individuals reported an annual income under \$7,000; 10% of individuals reported an annual income between \$7,000 and \$13,999. That is a combined 38% of participants living below the poverty rate. Almost sixteen percent (15.9%) reported income between \$14,000 - \$24,999, while 12.4% reported an annual household income between \$25,000 - \$39,999; 17.2% reported an annual household income between \$40,000 - \$74,999; 3.1% reported an annual household income between \$75,000 - \$100,000; 1.7% reported an annual household income above \$100,000; the remaining 11.7% did not report their annual household income.

Likewise, participants reported their education level. The sample included 26.2% of individuals with no high school degree; 33.2% of individuals with a GED or high school degree, 19.9% with some college; 12.6% with a 2-year college or technical school degree, 4.2% with a 4-year college degree; and 2.8% of individuals with a postgraduate degree. About 1.1% of the sample did not specify their education level.

Because length of relationship (Roth, 1988), relationship status (married vs. cohabiting) (Nock, 1995), level of education (Jose & Alfons, 2007), household income (Conger et al., 1990), and ethnicity (Bulanda & Brown, 2007) have been linked to romantic relationship outcomes, these variables were considered as possible control variables. After conducting the preliminary analysis, a decision was made as to which of these variables would function as control variables when testing the hypotheses.

Procedure

Data were collected at family resource centers (FRC) located in eight counties in the southern state of Alabama. Five of these counties are considered urban and the other three are considered rural. Participants were recruited to attend Couple and Relationship Education (CRE) classes, free of charge. The data used for the original study were collected using self-reports, both prior to and after implementation of a relationship intervention, and were matched by participant code.

Prior to program participation, participants completed self-report questionnaires assessing domains of individual, couple, and family functioning. Demographic information was included in the pre-program questionnaire. Signed informed consent forms were obtained from participants for the use of their responses in research. The protection of participants was regulated by an Internal Review Board at an accredited institution.

Measures

Spirituality. This independent variable was assessed through five questions (Hodge, 2003) that included items such as, “Growing spiritually is,” and “When I am faced with an important decision, my spirituality...” Participants indicated how important spirituality or the role of spirituality was on a 10- point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not important at all) to 10 (more important than anything else.) Thus, larger scores indicated greater spirituality. Mean scores were computed for use in the analyses. This measure demonstrated good internal reliability ($\alpha = .93$).

Prayer for partner. To assess prayer for the partner, two-items from the Partner Focused Prayer Measure were used (Fincham et al., 2010). The two items included were: “I pray for the well-being of my romantic partner,” and “I pray that good things will happen for my partner.” Participants indicated the frequency in which they engaged in these behaviors in a 5-point Likert

scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very frequently). Thus, larger scores indicated higher frequency of prayer for the partner. Mean scores were computed for use in the analyses. This measure demonstrated good internal reliability ($\alpha = .94$).

Relationship Satisfaction. The Quality Marriage Index (Norton, 1983) was used to assess romantic relationship satisfaction. This measure consists of 6 items that address the goodness of the relationship as a whole, rather than evaluating different covariates. This means that relationship satisfaction was assessed with broadly worded, global items such as: “We have a good marriage/relationship” and “my relationship with my spouse/significant other makes me happy.” Five out of the six items in this measure were used. The answers were measured in a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree). Mean scores were computed for pre-test responses for use in the analyses. This measure demonstrated good internal reliability ($\alpha = .95$). In addition, the measure demonstrated excellent convergent validity when compared to the Dyadic Adjustment Scale and the Relationship Satisfaction Questionnaire (Heyman, Sayers & Bellack, 1994).

Plan of Analysis

First, data were separated by sex to eliminate the interdependence of results of the 44 heterosexual couples within the sample. Then, to better understand the characteristics of the sample, the descriptive statistics for spirituality, prayer for the partner, and relationship satisfaction for males and females separately (i.e., means, standard deviation, range, skewness) were examined.

The distributions of all variables for males and females were analyzed to verify that each resembled normal distributions. When a distribution is normal, the values of skewness and kurtosis should be around ± 1 (Field, 2005; Afifi & Clark, 1996). Additionally, bivariate

correlations were conducted to assess preliminary associations between the variables of interest and possible control variables. The variables considered as controls were length of relationship, relationship status (married vs. cohabiting), level of education, household income, and ethnicity. The reason for considering these variables as possible control variables has been explained earlier in this paper.

Second, to test the proposed hypotheses, a hierarchical linear regression model was utilized to determine both, the unique contributions of an individual's spirituality and prayer for a partner to relationship satisfaction.

To determine the mediating effect of prayer in the relationship between spirituality and relationship satisfaction, specific analyses were conducted. A mediator is an intervening variable which accounts for the relationship between the predictor and the outcome. In order for prayer for the partner to be considered a mediator, prayer for the partner must account for the association between spirituality and relationship satisfaction. Mediation is determined by a series of four analyses (Baron & Kenny, 1986):

1. The predictor variable, spirituality, must be statistically, significantly associated with the outcome variable, relationship satisfaction.
2. The predictor variable, spirituality, must be statistically, significantly associated with the hypothesized mediator, prayer for the partner.
3. The hypothesized mediator, prayer for the partner, must be statistically, significantly associated with the outcome variable, relationship satisfaction.
4. If the criteria of all three analyses were satisfied, further analysis would be conducted to test whether the effect of the predictor variable, spirituality, on the outcome variable relationship satisfaction, was significantly reduced, by controlling for the hypothesized

mediator, prayer for the partner. If the effect of the predictor variable was reduced when controlling for the hypothesized mediator, the Sobel test would be utilized to calculate the significance of mediation effects.

A diagram of the mediation effect is shown below:

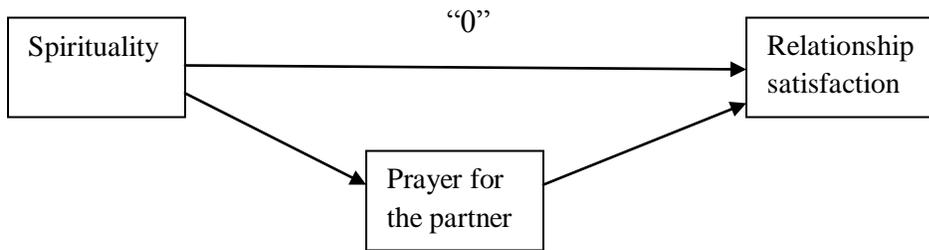


Figure 2. Statistical path model for mediation effect

Because a moderation effect, instead of a mediation effect was also possible, a multiplicative effect of spirituality and prayer for the partner was created to test for moderation. This moderating variable was added to the model to evaluate the interaction between spirituality and prayer for the partner on relationship satisfaction. A diagram of the effects is shown below:

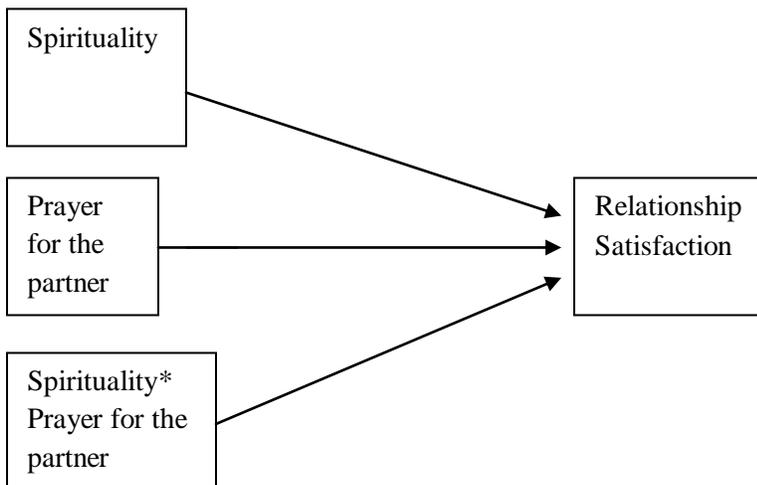


Figure 3. Statistical path model for moderation effect

The model for the moderation effect may be described as follows (Baron & Kenny, 1986):

1. Spirituality, the predictor variable, may or may not be statistically, significantly associated with relationship satisfaction, the outcome variable.
2. Prayer for the partner, the hypothesized moderator, may or may not be statistically, significantly associated with relationship satisfaction, the outcome variable.
3. The interaction of spirituality, the predictor variable and prayer for the partner, the hypothesized moderator, would enhance or reduce the relationship between spirituality, the predictor variable, and relationship satisfaction, the outcome variable.

In summary, this study explored the hypothesized mediation and moderation effects of prayer for the partner in the association between spirituality and relationship satisfaction in a diverse sample. Initially, the descriptive statistics were obtained, followed by the correlations to measure whether a mediation or a moderation effect was possible. Then, a series of regression analyses were conducted to test for the unique contributions of spirituality and prayer for the partner, as well as to test the mediation and moderation effects previously explained.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics for all of the study variables, including the mean, range, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis statistics were examined (see Table 1). On average, the sample reported being highly spiritual, as indicated by the high means in the spirituality measure for both males and females. For example, on a 1 to 10 Likert scale (ranging from “not important at all” to “more important than anything else” respectively), males had a mean of 7.21 ($SD = 2.36$) and females had a mean of 8.39 ($SD = 1.65$). The sample also reported high frequency of prayer for the well being of the partner. This can be observed by the average high scores obtained in the prayer for the partner scale. On a scale of 1 to 5 (ranging from never to very frequently praying for the partner), males had a mean of 3.98 ($SD = 1.22$) and females had a mean of 4.39 ($SD = .97$). Lastly, the Quality of Marriage Index revealed that males and females on average reported being satisfied with their relationship. On a Likert scale ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree), males had a mean of 4.85 ($SD = 1.28$) and females had a mean of 4.96 ($SD = 1.48$).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Spirituality, Prayer for the Partner, and Relationship Satisfaction

Variables (N = 286)

Variables	<i>Males (N =81)</i>			<i>Females (N =205)</i>		
	Spirituality	Prayer	Relationship Satisfaction	Spirituality	Prayer	Relationship Satisfaction
Mean	7.21	3.98	4.85	8.39	4.39	4.96
SD	2.36	1.22	1.28	1.65	.97	1.48
Range	1-10	1-5	1-7	1-10	1-5	1-7
Skewness	-.82	-.94	-.79	-1.26	-1.71	-.52
Kurtosis	-.086	-.297	.986	1.87	2.61	-.10

Skewness and kurtosis were acceptable for almost all variables indicating that all study variables besides females’ prayer for the partner resembled a normal distribution in the sample. The negative skewness (-1.71) and kurtosis statistics (-2.61) for females’ prayer for the partner revealed that the majority of the mean scores were near the upper end of the maximum scores. Prayer is a spiritual activity commonly practiced by religious individuals. Given that the sample was recruited in a highly religious region of the United States (Newport, 2009), the high frequency of prayer for the partner was expected.

Bivariate Analysis

After reviewing the descriptive statistics of the sample, Pearson Correlations between the study variables for males and females were examined (see Table 2). For males, spirituality was positively correlated with prayer for the partner ($r = .60, p < .001$) and prayer for the partner was positively correlated with relationship satisfaction ($r = .26, p < .05$). For females, a similar trend

was found. Spirituality was positively correlated with prayer for the partner ($r = .43, p < .001$) and prayer for the partner was positively correlated with relationship satisfaction ($r = .32, p < .001$). These correlations indicate that individuals whom scored higher on the spirituality measure, tended to score higher on praying for the partner, and that those whom scored higher on praying for the partner, tended to report higher relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, no significant correlations were found between spirituality and relationship satisfaction in males ($r = .14, p = .20$) or females ($r = .07, p = .31$).

Bivariate correlations among the study variables and potential control variables were also examined. (see Table 2). The potential control variables were ethnicity, relationship length, relationship status, household income reported, and level of education. However, only ethnicity for females appeared to be statistically significantly correlated with relationship satisfaction ($r = -.15, p < .05$). The correlation revealed that European-American females on average reported higher relationship satisfaction.

Table 2

Correlations for Study Variables for Males and Females (N = 286)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Spirituality	-	.60***	.14	.03	.18	.015	.12	-.02
2. Prayer Partner	.43***	-	.26*	.02	.17	.08	.01	-.04
3. Relationship Satisfaction	.07	.32***	-	.01	.23	-.03	.11	-.03
4. Ethnicity	.10	.004	-.15*	-	.06	.32**	.14	.38***
5. Relationship Length	.15 [†]	.021	.04	.09	-	-.30*	.25	-.13
6. Relationship Status	-.20**	-.10	.02	.05	-.39***	-	-.07	-.09
7. Income	-.08	.06	.04	-.09	.03	-.17*	-	.48***
8. Education	-.03	.03	-.06	.03	-.17 [†]	-.17*	.43***	-

Correlations below the diagonal represent females' correlations

Correlations above the diagonal represent males' correlations

[†]p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Because ethnicity was the only additional variable that appeared to be correlated with the outcome variable, relationship satisfaction, it became the only control variable in later analyses. Given that ethnicity is a categorical variable and that ethnicity other than European-American and African-American was limited to very small numbers (males: 5 Hispanic, 1 other; females: 6 Hispanic, 1 Native-American, 2 Bi-racial), this variable was converted to a dichotomous variable (1 = European-American, 0 = Not European-American). Once dichotomized, independent sample T-tests for males and females were estimated to assess whether the mean differences in relationship satisfaction by ethnicity (European-American vs. Not European-American) were statistically significantly different from one another. The results of the analyses showed that in males' the mean score for relationship satisfaction did not differ by ethnicity

($t(77) = -.02, p = .99$). On the other hand, the independent sample T-test for females showed that the mean score for relationship satisfaction was statistically significantly different depending on ethnicity ($t(202) = 2.29, p < .05$). European-American females, on average had about half a point higher relationship satisfaction (5.14) on a scale from 1 (lower relationship satisfaction) to 7 (higher relationship satisfaction), when compared to females of other ethnicities (4.65).

Testing Hypotheses

Hierarchical linear regressions were examined separately for males and females to test the proposed hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1. Spirituality will demonstrate a positive association with relationship satisfaction for males and females separately. A regression analysis was conducted to examine the association between spirituality and relationship satisfaction in males controlling for ethnicity. The model did not significantly predict relationship satisfaction ($R^2 = .01, p = .58$; see Table 3). The main effects of spirituality were not statistically significant ($\beta = .12, p = .30$). Hypothesis one for males was not supported.

A separate regression analysis was conducted to examine the association between spirituality and relationship satisfaction in females controlling for ethnicity. The model statistically significantly predicted relationship satisfaction ($R^2 = .04, p < .05$; see Table 4). However, the main effects of spirituality did not significantly predict relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .06, p = .16$). Hypothesis one for females was not supported.

Hypothesis 2. Prayer for the partner will demonstrate a positive association with relationship satisfaction for males and females separately. A regression analysis was conducted to examine the association between prayer for the partner and relationship satisfaction in males controlling for ethnicity. The model was statistically significant ($R^2 = .07, p < .05$; see Table 3).

The main effects of prayer for the partner were statistically significantly associated with relationship satisfaction when controlling for ethnicity ($\beta = .27, p < .05$). Hypothesis two for males was supported. This means that on average, higher frequency of prayer for the romantic partner was associated with higher relationship satisfaction in males.

A separate regression analysis was conducted to examine the association between prayer for the partner and relationship satisfaction in females controlling for ethnicity. The model was statistically significant ($R^2 = .12, p < .001$; see Table 4). The main effects of prayer for the partner were statistically significantly associated with relationship satisfaction when controlling for ethnicity ($\beta = .32, p < .001$). Hypothesis two for females was supported. This means that on average, higher frequency of prayer for the romantic partner was associated with higher relationship satisfaction in females.

Furthermore, an additional regression model for males and females was fit to the data to test the unique contributions of prayer for the partner, accounting for level of spirituality and ethnicity. This model was not statistically significant for males ($R^2 = .08, p = .12$; see Table 3); but the main effects of prayer for the partner were statistically significant ($\beta = .31, p < .05$), while the effects of level of spirituality remained non-significant. In the case of females, the model was statistically significant ($R^2 = .13, p < .001$; see Table 4). The model, on average predicted 13% of the variance. The main effects of prayer for the partner were statistically significantly associated with relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .34, p < .001$), while the effects of level of spirituality remained non-significant when controlling for ethnicity.

Taken together, these analyses confirm that prayer for the partner statistically significantly predicts relationship satisfaction and that prayer for the partner is comparatively a better predictor of relationship satisfaction (i.e., spirituality vs. prayer for the partner).

Hypothesis 3. Prayer for the partner will mediate the relationship between spirituality and relationship satisfaction for males and females separately. This hypothesis could not be tested because the first step to test for a mediation effect outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986) did not hold for males or females. In other words, there was no statistically significant association between the antecedent, spirituality, and the outcome, relationship satisfaction in males or females controlling for ethnicity. This initial association necessary for a mediation effect was explored in hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 4. The interaction between prayer for the partner and spirituality will enhance relationship satisfaction more than the relationship of the two variables measured separately for males and females separately. For a moderation effect to occur, the predictor variable (spirituality) does not necessarily need to be statistically significantly associated with the outcome variable (relationship satisfaction). Likewise, the moderator variable (prayer for the partner), does not necessarily need to be statistically significantly associated with the outcome variable. However, the interaction of the predictor variable and moderator (spirituality*prayer for the partner) does have to statistically significantly affect the outcome variable (relationship satisfaction).

To test this hypothesis, a hierarchical linear regression analysis for males was conducted to examine the interaction between spirituality and prayer for the partner and the main effects of these variables on relationship satisfaction when controlling for ethnicity. This model did not significantly predict relationship satisfaction ($R^2 = .08$, $p = .18$; see Table 3). Likewise, the main effects of spirituality ($\beta = .15$, $p = .67$) and prayer for the partner ($\beta = .51$, $p = .12$), as well as the interaction of these two variables ($\beta = -.37$, $p = .50$) did not statistically significantly account for

relationship satisfaction. These results provide no evidence to support hypothesis number 4 for males.

A separate hierarchical linear regression analysis for females was conducted to examine the interaction between spirituality and prayer for the partner and the main effects of these variables when controlling for ethnicity. This model statistically significantly predicted relationship satisfaction ($R^2 = .13, p < .001$; see Table 4). However, the main effects of spirituality ($\beta = .11, p = .72$) and prayer for the partner ($\beta = .29, p = .33$), as well as the interaction of these two variables ($\beta = .09, p = .86$) did not statistically significantly account for relationship satisfaction. These results provide no evidence to support hypothesis number 4 for females.

Taken together, higher spirituality did not appear to predict higher relationship satisfaction and the interaction of spirituality and prayer for the partner did not statistically significantly account for the variance in relationship satisfaction in males or females.

Table 3

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Males' Relationship**Satisfaction (N = 81)*

Model		Constant	Variable				F	R ²
			Ethnicity	Spirituality	Prayer for Partner	Spirit* Prayer		
M1	<i>B</i>	4.42	.03	.06				
	<i>SE</i>	.51	.29	.06		.56	.01	
	β		.01	.12				
M2	<i>B</i>	3.75	.10		.28			
	<i>SE</i>	.52	.28		.11	2.96	.07*	
	β		.04		.27*			
M3	<i>B</i>	3.84	.09	-.03	.32			
	<i>SE</i>	.56	.28	.07	.14	2.02	.08	
	β		.04	-.06	.31*			
M4	<i>B</i>	3.20	.10	.08	.52	-.03		
	<i>SE</i>	1.10	.28	.18	.33	.05	1.62	.08
	β		.04	.15	.51	-.37		

**p* < .05

Table 4

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Females' Relationship**Satisfaction (N = 205)*

Model		Constant	Variable				F	R ²
			Ethnicity	Spirituality	Prayer for Partner	Spirit* Prayer		
M1	<i>B</i>	3.85	.54	.09				
	<i>SE</i>	.58	.22	.06			3.66	.04*
	β		.18*	.10				
M2	<i>B</i>	2.57	.44		.48			
	<i>SE</i>	.47	.21		.10		14.27	.12***
	β		.14*		.32***			
M3	<i>B</i>	2.84	.41	-.05	.52			
	<i>SE</i>	.60	.21	.07	.11		9.68	.13***
	β		.13 [†]	-.06	.34***			
M4	<i>B</i>	3.17	.40	-.10	.44	.01		
	<i>SE</i>	1.95	.21	.26	.45	.06	7.23	.13***
	β		.13 [†]	-.11	.29	.09		

[†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$

Additional Analyses. Although the mediation hypotheses for males and females were not supported, the relationship between spirituality and prayer for the partner was tested. In this case, prayer for the partner was regressed on spirituality controlling for ethnicity. For males, this model statistically significantly predicted on average 37% of the variance in prayer for the partner ($R^2 = .37, p < .001$). More specifically, males' spirituality predicted prayer for the partner ($\beta = .59, p < .001$) when controlling for ethnicity (see Table 5).

In the case of females, the model also statistically significantly predicted on average 21% of the variance in prayer for the partner ($R^2 = .21, p < .001$). More specifically, spirituality predicted prayer for the partner ($\beta = .46, p < .001$) when controlling for ethnicity (see Table 5).

Table 5

Summary of Regression Analyses for Spirituality Predicting Prayer for the Partner Controlling for Ethnicity in Males and Females (N = 286)

Model		Constant	Variable		F Value	R ²
			Ethnicity	Spirituality		
Males (N = 81)	B	1.86	-.20	.30	22.28	.37***
	SE	.40	.23	.05		
	β		-.08	.59***		
Females (N = 205)	B	1.93	.26	.27	26.43	.21***
	SE	.035	.13	.04		
	β		.13*	.46***		

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

Discussion

For a better understanding of the results, a comprehensive explanation of the findings and its implications, as well as a possible explanation of the non-findings is discussed. In addition, the strengths and limitations of the study and directions for future research are provided.

In summary, the analyses of the self reported data of the participants yielded the following information: Prayer for the partner contributes to higher relationship satisfaction. It is important to note that it was naturalistic prayer; in other words, prayer for the partner that was not assigned by researchers that was found to be associated with relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, those individuals who consider themselves highly spiritual tend to pray more frequently for their romantic partner. However, this investigation did not find evidence to support the association between the interaction of spirituality and prayer for the partner and relationship satisfaction.

The results obtained in the present work indicate that individuals, males or females, who pray for their partner more frequently, tend to experience higher relationship satisfaction. These results are consistent with previous research conducted with college aged students which revealed that prayer for the partner was positively correlated with greater relationship satisfaction (Fincham et al., 2008). Although this study replicates Fincham et al. (2008) findings, this investigation builds on previous research in that it was conducted with individuals of a greater age range (16-70) who were, on average a decade beyond college age, of varying levels of education and household income, and of different ethnicities; thus, expanding the generalizability of the findings.

Although not all of the research questions yielded significant results and no mediation or moderation effects were found, it is important to note that the association found between prayer for the partner and relationship satisfaction is of important value. Prayer for the partner may have demonstrated an association to higher relationship satisfaction because praying for the romantic partner is an intentional mental and physical action with the purpose of positively affecting the romantic partner. The individual praying for the partner would most likely be invested in the well-being of the romantic partner. A partner who takes mental and physical action for another will more likely exhibit more positive feelings within the relationship. In this sense, prayer for the partner seems to serve as an empathic, positive behavior that may increase positive behaviors and feelings toward the partner, creating a reciprocation of positive behaviors (Fincham et al. 2008). At the same time, prayer for the partner may decrease the frequency or intensity of behaviors that are detrimental to the couple relationship. Behaviors such as retaliation or entertaining fantasies of one-upmanship could be some of the negative behaviors that could be undercut by praying for the partner (Beach et al., 2008).

The association between prayer for the partner and relationship satisfaction is supported by Dudley and Kosinski's (1990) view on prayer for the partner. Dudley and Kosinski believe that prayer for the partner might help partners think of one another in a more loving or compassionate way, which may lead them to treat each other with greater respect and sensitivity.

In addition, prayer for the partner seems to be linked to other interacting variables such as commitment to the relationship, conflict resolution (Fincham, Stanley, & Beach 2007), willingness to forgive the partner (Lambert et al., 2010), and lowering levels of infidelity over time (Fincham, Lambert, & Beach, 2010), all of which directly or indirectly may affect the perception of relationship satisfaction. However, given the cross-sectional design of the present

study, it may also be that those individuals experiencing higher relationship satisfaction are more likely to pray for their romantic partner.

Though not the results of a primary research question in this study, additional analyses conducted, revealed a positive association between spirituality and prayer for the partner. This means that increased spirituality is related to praying more frequently for the romantic partner. Despite the moderate association, spirituality was not found to be directly related to relationship satisfaction. Given that some research has supported the positive association between spirituality and relationship satisfaction (Roth 1988; Giblin 1997; Fincham, Ajayi, & Beach 2011), further testing of the possible mediating or moderating role of prayer for the partner in the association between spirituality and relationship satisfaction should continue to be considered in later research.

Clinical Implications

There are two important practical implications of the findings. One of them relates to individuals who already believe in a supreme being or universal spirit. The findings in this study may help clinicians consider prayer for the partner as a potential tool to recommend to couples in distress when they indicate that spirituality is part of their lives. Given that the results of this study are consistent with previous findings, clinicians should begin to feel more confident of the benefits of prayer for the partner. However, it is important to understand that there are differences between healthy and beneficial prayer and harmful prayer that may negatively affect couple relationships (Beach et al. 2008),

The second practical implication relates to prayer for the partner as a mental and physical action that may create empathy and positive thoughts about the partner. Creating or recapturing empathy for the partner is a central component to the ultimate effectiveness of therapy

approaches such as Acceptance and Change Therapy (Jacobson & Christensen, 1996) and Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (Johnson, 2004). If it is the increase in empathy and positive thoughts about prayer for the partner that is related to higher relationship satisfaction, perhaps clinicians could target these behaviors and recommend them in a non-spiritual form for secular clients. Thus, clinicians could consider recommending couples that are not spiritual to dedicate some time to, for example, think positive thoughts about the partner and think about the partner overcoming difficulties. These actions may lead to an increase in empathy and positive feelings and behaviors toward the partner, which in turn may help couples work more closely together and eventually experience higher relationship satisfaction.

Explanation of the Non-Findings

According to Giblin (1997), when spirituality becomes an integral part of a couple relationship to the degree that it affects communication, conflict-resolution, decision-making, and other aspects of the relationship, it will likely result in higher relationship satisfaction. The link between spirituality and romantic relationship satisfaction that Giblin (1997) found in his research was not observed in the present study.

A possible explanation of the non-finding could be linked to the measure used to assess spirituality. The spirituality measure has not been well defined within the literature and it is a global measure which does not cover the relational aspect of spirituality. For instance, in the literature reviewed earlier, those individuals whom considered themselves spiritual were those who highly valued their connection with a supreme being, as well as their connection with others. Not measuring the relational factor could have limited the measure to only assessing the relationship of the individual with a supreme being or universal spirit, and not directly assessing how spirituality may affect everyday interactions with loved ones. For example, the items in the

measure used in this study asked participants to rate the importance of spirituality in their lives. Items included “Growing spiritually is...” and “When I am faced with an important decision, my spirituality...” (Hodge, 2003). This type of items did not assess whether those individuals that considered themselves spiritual were actually responding differently to their romantic partner when they had been wronged or when they thought they had been treated unfairly. In this sense, measuring spirituality in terms of how it affects an individual’s relationship, just like the measure of prayer assessed prayer specifically for the partner, may have yielded a statistically significant association between spirituality and relationship satisfaction.

A measure that has been used in previous research and that accounts for the relational aspect of spirituality is The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (Underwood & Teresi, 2002). In this measure, items such as “I feel a selfless caring for others” and “I accept others even when they do things I think are wrong” are used to assess the relational aspect of spirituality. A measure such as this one could aid researchers in better assessing all areas of spirituality.

Strengths and Limitations

One of the strengths of the present study was the diversity of the sample in relation to: age group, ethnicity, and levels of education and household income. Participants in the present study were not limited to a college aged group or affiliation to a particular church or club. In fact, the majority of participants in this study were around thirty and from diverse backgrounds. This allows for more generalizability of the results.

Furthermore, the fact that the sample was from a relatively spiritual region of the country was a strength in the design because it allowed a high baseline level of prayer and spirituality. Without this advantage in the design, it would have been difficult to find sufficient individuals that would naturally pray for their partner; thus it would have been difficult to find an effect on

the dependent variable. However, this is also a limitation that could have restricted the variability in the spirituality measure and could have contributed to the non-significant results in the link between spirituality and the outcome.

This investigation was limited in that it was a cross-sectional study that could not provide causal explanations for the findings. Including data from only one time point is a limitation because relationship satisfaction is not a static entity. Ideally, tracking changes in relationship satisfaction with its association to spirituality and prayer for the partner would provide a better understanding on how these variables affect one another. Additionally, depending only on self-reports could have led to socially desirable responding, providing inaccurate, higher scores in all of the measures. Lastly, sex differences could not be assessed given the interdependence factor among 88 participants in the study (44 heterosexual couples).

Future Directions

Much of the research done on prayer and relationship satisfaction has been conducted in the Southeast region of the United States. Participants in this part of the country tend to be more spiritual than in other regions in the country, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research in other regions of the country and even cross-culturally may contribute to the research in the area of spirituality, spiritual behaviors, and relationship satisfaction. Longitudinal data are also needed to determine how romantic relationship satisfaction, spirituality, and prayer for the partner are connected over time.

Furthermore, studies examining how males and females may experience spirituality and prayer for the partner differently and how that may affect relationship satisfaction differently in males and females would also provide valuable information that would contribute to the understanding of relationship satisfaction.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between spirituality and relationship satisfaction and the role of prayer in this association in males and females living in the Southeast state of Alabama. The findings showed a statistically significant association between prayer for the partner and relationship satisfaction in males and females. The variable of ethnicity seemed to play a role in relationship satisfaction, with European-American females reporting higher relationship satisfaction than non European-American females.

This study contributes to the current literature on spirituality and relationship satisfaction by incorporating a theoretical framework, examining a potential intervening variable through which these constructs may be linked, and using a diverse sample. Although no support for a mediation or moderation effect for prayer for the partner in the association of spirituality and relationship satisfaction was found, this study did find an association between spirituality and prayer for the partner, and prayer for the partner and relationship satisfaction for both males and females. Perhaps, with a measure that better captures data on how spirituality affects relationships, future research may be able to clearly identify intervening variables affecting the link between spirituality and romantic relationship satisfaction.

Despite the non-findings, the association observed between prayer for the partner and relationship satisfaction suggests to clinicians, educators, and researchers that couples that feel comfortable with praying can benefit from praying for their romantic partner; thus praying for the romantic partner should be considered as a tool to help couples in distress who have a spiritual orientation.

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Appendix – Questionnaire Measures

Quality Marriage Index (Norton, 1983)

4. Please FILL IN ONE circle per question about your current marriage/relationship.

	Very Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Mixed	Agree	Strongly Agree	Very Strongly Agree
A. We have a good marriage/relationship.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
B. My relationship with my spouse/significant other is very stable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
C. Our marriage/relationship is strong.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
D. My relationship with my spouse/significant other makes me happy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
E. I really feel like part of a team with my spouse/significant other.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

