ENHANCING MARITAL HAPPINESS: THE EFFECTS OF RELIGIOUS ATTENDANCE ON INFIDELITY, RELIGIOUS CONGRUENCE, AND SPOUSAL SUPPORTIVENESS

by

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STATEMENT OF THESIS APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

Ninety percent of Americans marry at least once in their lifetime; 40 – 50% of first marriages are dissolved. Divorce affects not only the lives of each spouse but the lives of children as well. It is important to study characteristics that improve marital satisfaction, as unhappy marriages may end in divorce.

Attending religious services can increase marital happiness. Cross-sectional data from the 2006 National Study of Religion and Family Life are analyzed via logistic regression to explore why religious attendance, frequency and with whom, increases marital happiness.

My research examines four possibilities which are taught in religious services that increase marital happiness: 1) no adultery, 2) improved spousal supportiveness, 3) sharing religious core values, and 4) participating in religious activities in the home or family prayer. First, religious attendance affects marital happiness by reducing the risk of infidelity. When couples attend church frequently, several times a week or more, infidelity rates decline. Second, marital happiness is increased when spouses demonstrate frequent supportive behaviors, such as showing love, not criticizing, giving complements, helping around the home, and performing small acts of kindness. Church attendance can improve spousal supportiveness. Third, marital happiness is enhanced when spouses concur on basic religious ideals. Agreement on core values results in less conflict and more unity. Fourth, participating in family prayer and/or religious activities in the home provide opportunities for bonding,

improved communication, and religious goal setting. Religious congruence, measured by sharing core values and practicing religious rituals at home, increases marital happiness.

Findings show spousal supportiveness and religious congruence, which are promoted through religious attendance, are significant predictors of marital happiness. Parishioners who take religious doctrines and principles taught at church and apply them in their lives are more likely to be happy in marriage.

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, who taught me that you can never be truly poor if you have an abundance of blessings. She considered her family her greatest blessing; but as a teacher for many years, she also held education in high esteem. Through her example, I have come to appreciate the importance of lifelong learning.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT…….....iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS……....vii

INTRODUCTION……...1

LITERATURE REVIEW……....3

Religious Attendance and Marital Happiness…….3
Religion and Infidelity…….4
Religion and Spousal Relationship Support……5
Religious Congruence……..6
Age, Gender, and Race Effects on Religion and Marital Happiness…….……..8

HYPOTHESIS……11

METHODS……..…12

Data……..…12
Variables…….12
Descriptive Statistics……..15
Analysis...……...18

RESULTS……...19

DISCUSSION…….29

Limitations……..36
Future Research……..36

CONCLUSIONS…….38

REFERENCES……41

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INTRODUCTION

Benjamin Franklin (1730) wrote, "The happy state of matrimony is, undoubtedly, the surest and most lasting foundation of comfort and love…." Most American couples marry hoping they have found their soul mate, someone with whom they can experience great joy and happiness, as well as someone to help them during sorrow, hardships, and trials (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). For centuries marriage has implied a permanent relationship, one that could be dissolved only under extreme situations, such as desertion, adultery, or criminal activity (Phillips, 1991; Strow & Strow, 2006). Traditional marriage vows in the United States often include a promise for each spouse to commit "…from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part" (*Book of Common Prayers,* 1979). Ninety percent of Americans get married at least once in their lifetime (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002; Goldstein & Kenney, 2001).

Nevertheless, an unhappy marriage may lead to divorce. Currently, 40 to 50% of first marriages are dissolved (Bergman, 2002; Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006; Papalia, Sterns, Feldman, & Camp, 2002). Divorce affects not only the lives of each spouse but the lives of children as well. Research has shown there are many ill effects for children when their parents divorce, such as worse health, lower academic scores, early sexual activity, drug and/or alcohol abuse, and behavior problems (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006; Wolfinger, 2005). Therefore, exploring what enhances marital happiness is an important area of study.

Accordingly, my research examines why religious attendance, determined by frequency and with whom, increases marital happiness. I will explore four possibilities which are taught in religious services: 1) no adultery, 2) improved spousal supportiveness, 3) sharing religious core values, and 4) participating in religious activities in the home and/or family prayer.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An overview of previous literature showing the effects of religious attendance on marital happiness will be examined. Marital happiness is greater when there is no infidelity, so a review of how religiosity can lessen the risk of infidelity will be addressed. Spouses who demonstrate supportive behaviors also have happier marriages; accordingly, the benefits of religiosity on spousal supportiveness will be reviewed. Religious congruence is measured by spouses sharing core religious values and practicing religious rituals at home. As such, how religious congruence increases marital happiness will be noted.

Religious Attendance and Marital Happiness

Frequent church attendance offers couples many benefits. Couples who attend church together regularly have happier marriages (Shehan, Bock, & Lee, 1990). Going to church provides couples access to social networks, where friendships can flourish as worshippers bond with people having similar beliefs and values. Social networks formed at church provide friends that help celebrate happy occasions and provide support during times of sorrow, conflict, or stress. Frequent church attendance may give married women the social resources they need to deal with marital problems (Brown, Orbuch & Bauermeister, 2008). In addition, couples can see good role models of happy marriages at church. Gruber (2005) postulates people who live in areas dense with others of like ancestry have notably higher religious participation, which provides numerous opportunities for social networking.

Moreover, by attending church, couples have an opportunity to get acquainted with local church leaders. When problems arise, couples may seek counsel, comfort, or even temporal help from clergy that may ease burdens that strain marital happiness.

Furthermore, frequent worshippers are reminded of the importance of the marital commitment through sermons and lessons extolling the value of marriage (Wilson & Musick, 1996). This may inspire renewed efforts to work on marital problems rather than just giving up on marriage. Interpersonal values that are taught at church, such as unconditional love, humility, unselfishness, forgiveness, and self-improvement, also improve marital relationships and reduce the risk of divorce (Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001; Waite & Lehrer, 2003). Brown, Orbuch, and Bauermeister (2008) similarly report that frequent church attendance, when reported by wives, reduces the likelihood of divorce.

Religion encourages life-long, strong, healthy marriages. Benefits of long-lasting marriages include better mental and physical health, including fewer long-term illnesses or disabilities, and better financial outcomes (Murphy, Glaser, & Grundy, 1997; Soydemir, Bastida, & Gonzalez, 2004; Waite & Gallagher, 2000; Waite & Lehrer, 2003). Thus, past research is replete with the positive effects religious attendance has on marital happiness.

Religion and Infidelity

Religion encourages fidelity. There are many scriptures lauding the value of fidelity in marriage (Alma 16:18 *The Book of Mormon*; 1 Corinthians 6:9; Exodus 20:14 King James Version). Opportunities to discuss and review scriptures addressing fidelity are provided by attending religious services.

Dollahite and Lambert (2007) studied religious mid-life couples living in New England and northern California to see how religion and other factors influence fidelity. Risks for increased infidelity include low religiosity, views of gender inequality, liberal political beliefs, unhappy marriages, premarital sex, and unsatisfying sexual relations in marriage.

Adultery decreases marital happiness and is frequently cited as motivation for divorce (Amato & Previti, 2003; Atkins, Baucom & Jacobson, 2001). The strongest prophylactic against infidelity is a high level of religious participation; when couples attend church frequently (several times a month or more), infidelity rates decline (Wade & DeLamater, 2002).

Likewise, Atkins and Kessel (2008) found that infrequent religious attendance is an important predictor of infidelity. Merely acknowledging that religion is important in one's life wasn't enough to heighten fidelity (Atkins & Kessel, 2008; Wilcox, Chaves, & Franz, 2004). This validates the maxim that actions speak louder than words. Attending religious services is a shared spousal activity for many (Dollahite & Lambert, 2007), which can strengthen the marital relationship and reduce chances of infidelity (Atkins & Kessel, 2008; Mahoney, et al., 2001). Some studies disagree on causality of infidelity: is infidelity an effect of a troubled marriage or a cause of marriage trouble? Previti and Amato (2004) claim that infidelity can cause relationship deterioration as well as be the result of relationship decline.

Religion and Spousal Relationship Support

Church attendance can improve supportiveness of spouses (Wolfinger & Wilcox, 2008), e.g., demonstrating affection. Further, men who attend church, even without their

mates, view their spousal relationship in a more positive light (Wolfinger & Wilcox, 2008). Positive marital traits are enhanced by social integration and support of other church members (Soydemir, et al., 2004; Waite & Lehrer, 2003). Viewing church friends who have supportive relationships can be an incentive to improve one's own spousal supportiveness. Sullivan (2001) did a cross-sectional study of newlyweds between the ages of 18 and 35. He found increased religiosity leads individuals to view divorce more negatively, which in turn increases their relationship commitment. Couples who are more committed to their religion are generally more committed to their marriage (Wilson & Musick, 1996).

How necessary is religious homogamy to marital happiness? Several research studies report religious participation is more important in predicting martial happiness than spouses belonging to the same denomination (Shehan, Bock & Lee, 1990; Wilcox, Chaves, & Franz, 2004; Wolfinger & Wilcox, 2008). However, others suggest that spouses who share the same religious affiliation and who attend church together may enjoy happier, more stable marriages (Heaton & Pratt, 1990; Waite & Lehrer, 2003).

Religious Congruence

Measures of religious congruence include sharing similar religious values and participating in religious rituals in the home. Couples who share the same religious core values enjoy greater unity, report less conflict, and have more stability in marriage (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006). Many couples who share similar religious core beliefs also report religious homogamy (Heaton & Pratt, 1990), though belonging to the same faith is not requisite. However, Iannaccone (1990) posits couples who belong to the same faith have higher levels of religious attendance and participation in religious activities. Supporting

Iannaccone's (1990) findings, Williams and Lawler (2001) report interfaith couples have lower levels of religious participation. Heaton and Pratt (1990) found homogamous couples express higher marital satisfaction and stability.

Couples who participate in religious rituals at home, such as family prayer and/or religious activities, generally have a greater commitment to marriage and greater marital stability (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006). Prayer is considered by some couples to be a pathway for God to communicate and be involved in their marriage (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006). Many religious couples feel personal and relationship well-being is enhanced by having a close relationship with God through prayer. Positive outcomes for couples who participate in family prayer include: stability and unity, growth and motivation, happiness and peace (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006).

In addition, participating in religious activities in the home increases religious and spiritual core values (Mahoney, et al., 2001). Religious activities vary greatly by faith. There are ongoing religious activities, such as daily scripture reading or Muslim prayers. Others activities may center on religious holidays, like Passover or Lent. The advantages for participating in family prayers and/or religious activities in the home, though, regardless of religious affiliation, include improving communication and relationship quality; developing shared values; increasing religious, spiritual, and moral support; and strengthening marital commitment (Mahoney, et al., 2001).

Age, Gender, and Race Effects on Religion and Marital Happiness

Age

Is marital satisfaction influenced by a couple's age? Sullivan (2001) asserts that age is not a predictor of marital happiness in young couples. However, there are factors that affect marital happiness as a person ages. Certainly changing family dynamics may affect marital happiness. Many researchers support the curvilinear pattern of marital happiness, where couples are happiest right after they marry, then experience a decline in marital happiness during the career-building and child-raising years, but return to a higher level of happiness after the children leave home and work-related stress may have declined (Ihinger-Tallman & Cooney, 2005; Vaillant & Vaillant, 1993). The increase in happiness parents experience when children leave home may decrease if children boomerang back as adults (Boyd & Bee, 2009; Edmonson & Waldrop, 1993). Older children who return home are likely to inflict financial or emotional troubles on their parents.

One aspect of age is declining health. Health also affects marital satisfaction. Generally, women outlive their husbands and may have to care for them prior to death (Ihinger-Tallman & Cooney, 2005). Kaufman and Taniguchi (2006) hypothesize that women who are caregivers will feel more stress and declining health themselves, which can decrease marital happiness.

Retirement can also affect marital satisfaction. A couple's together time at retirement is greater than at any previous stage of marriage (Bernard & Phillipson, 1995). When a spouse retires, diminished career stress may result in higher levels of marital happiness (Myers & Booth, 1996). However, Lee and Shehan (1989) found wives' marital happiness

declined when they continued working after their husbands retired. Further, Moen, Kim, and Hofmeister (2001) report that the retirement transition taxes marital happiness regardless of gender, particularly when one's spouse retires first.

Gender

Marital happiness is greatest when there is equity between spouses (Amato, Johnson, Booth & Rogers, 2003; Rogers & Amato, 2000). Men and women may view characteristics of marital happiness differently. Henry, Miller, and Giarrusso (2005) posit that the number of problems is less important than the types of problems each gender reports; for instance, infidelity, financial problems, drug and/or alcohol abuse will create more marital discord than issues such as the role of discipline for grandparents, vacation plans, or household repairs. Overall, wives report less satisfaction in marriage than husbands do (Corra, Carter, Carter, & Knox, 2009).

Race

African Americans report less happiness in marriage than Whites (Faulkner, Davey, & Davey, 2005). Further, Black wives report being less happy than Black husbands in marriage (Corra, et al., 2009). One reason might be the economic challenges that Blacks face. Discrimination, lower levels of education, and the lack of employment opportunities for African Americans in inner cities may lead to lower rates of marriage and higher crime (Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2007).

In summation, researchers do not all agree on what enhances marital happiness. Past research has shown there is a connection between church attendance and marital happiness. I will further explore what increases marital happiness by examining the influence of

religiosity on fidelity; religious congruence, as measured by similarity of religious values and practices; and spousal supportiveness behaviors. Age, race, and gender, as well as education, income, and whether there are children in the home, will be used as control variables in ascertaining how religiosity affects marital happiness.

HYPOTHESIS

1. Religious attendance will increase marital happiness.

    1a. Frequent religious attendance with spouse and/or children (family) rather than attending alone or with nonfamily members will increase marital happiness.

    1b. Infidelity will account for part of the relationship between religious attendance and marital happiness.

    1c. Spousal supportiveness will account for part of the relationship between religious attendance and marital happiness.

    1d. Spouses who share similar religious core values will account for part of the relationship between religious attendance and marital happiness.

    1e. Spouses who have religious activities in the home and/or family prayer at least weekly will account for part of the relationship between religious attendance and marital happiness.

METHODS

Data

Cross-sectional data are analyzed from the 2006 National Survey of Religion and Family Life. The data provide information on how religious denomination, church attendance, fidelity, religious congruence, and spousal supportive behaviors affect marital happiness. This national study used random digit dial to acquire an equal number of non-Hispanic Whites, non-Hispanic African Americans, and Hispanics (referred to hereafter as Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics). The sample consisted of 2,403 adults age 18 – 65. One adult was randomly selected as the designated respondent in each eligible household. Interviews were conducted in English or Spanish and averaged 30 minutes. Never married respondents were dropped, resulting in a sample of 1,325. Small numbers of missing data were deleted listwise, except for the following: frequency of church attendance and with whom (397 missing), cheating spouse (38 missing), and income (102 missing). For each of these variables, an additional dummy variable was added to handle missing data.

Variables

The dependent variable is marital happiness. Survey respondents were asked to rate their marriage from a six-point scale. Very few respondents claim to be "very unhappy" or unhappy" (2%). Dichotomizing happiness is suggested by Schoen, Astone, Rothert, Standish, and Kim (2002), who advocate using the top two happiness ratings on a Likert scale to

measure happiness and combining the other ratings to measure unhappiness. Research has shown than respondents tend to skew their responses toward more positive ratings (Di Iorio, 2005). Therefore, in line with Schoen, et al. (2002) and due to small numbers of responses in some categories, marital happiness is dichotomized as happy or unhappy.

The primary independent variables ascertain how religious attendance affects marital happiness. Specifically, church attendance: how often and with whom, spousal supportiveness behaviors, and similarity of religious beliefs and religious practices at home are the categorical indicators used to measure marital happiness. Also, infidelity is a key independent variable, as well as religious denomination.

Classifications for religious affiliation have been divided into four categories: Catholic, Protestant, other (including Jewish, Mormon/Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Greek or Russian Orthodox, Islam or Muslim, other Christian, and other non-Christian faiths) and none (consisting of atheists and respondents who identify with no denomination). I am using a modified version of Steensland, Park, Regnerus, Robinson, Wilcox, and Woodberry's (2000) classification of religion. Steensland, et al. improved older methods of religious classification by developing categories for distinctive religious traditions, e.g., mainline Protestants; showing estimates of demographic coefficients, such as race, sex, and region, e.g., Black Protestants; using straightforward terminology, such as religious practitioners use; and making a useful way to distinguish between nondenominational evangelicals and no-denominational Protestants. In addition, they also allow more fine-grained distinctions for the "other" religious category.

There is a diversity of denominations in the “other” category for this study due to small observation numbers for these religions. Small numbers of observations for the “other” religion category is why I am using a modified version of the Steensland, et al. (2000) classification of religion.

Frequency of religious attendance has been dichotomized as frequent (more than once a week, once a week, or almost every week) and infrequent (once or twice a month, a few times a year, or never). This measurement follows that of Wilcox and Wolfinger (2008). Whom the respondent goes to church with is combined with frequency of church attendance and is dummy coded: 1) infrequent attendance, whether alone or with others (the reference group), 2) attends frequently and alone, 3) attends frequently and with nonfamily members, 4) attends frequently with spouse and/or children (which is sometimes referred to as family), and 5) missing.

Infidelity was measured by responses to questions: 1) “Do you believe your spouse has ever been unfaithful to you?” and 2) “Have you ever been unfaithful to your spouse?” Both are measured dichotomously (“yes” responses, the reference group).

Religious congruence was determined by answers to two questions: 1) “Do you feel your spouse shares your core religious or spiritual values?” (“yes” responses, the reference group) and (2) “How often do you pray or do religious activities with your spouse or children together at home—besides grace at meals?” The answer to the second question was dichotomized as frequently (about once a week or more, reference group) and infrequently (once or twice a month or less).

Spousal supportiveness is measured by answers to these four questions: 1) how often does your spouse show love and/or affection? 2) How often does she or he criticize or insult

you? 3) How often does your spouse complement you for the work you do around the home or as a parent? 4) How often does she or he perform small acts of kindness for you? The respondent was then asked how often they did these supportive behaviors for their spouse. Responses are dichotomized as frequently (always or often, reference group) or seldom (sometimes, seldom, or never). Each question is a separate measurement of spousal supportiveness.

Control variables will be used to account for spuriousness. Age, race, gender, children in the home, education, income, and length of marriage provide important information on family dynamics that may affect marital happiness.

Age (18 – 25 years old, the reference group) and length of marriage (0 – 5 years, reference group) were divided into approximate 5-year intervals. Children were dichotomized as no children (reference group) and one or more children. I experimented with children as a continuous variable and obtained almost identical results. Education was divided as follows: 1) not a high school graduate, 2) high school graduate, 3) some college, trade, or technical school, 4) college graduate (reference group), or 5) postgraduate. Income was dummy coded: 0 - $24,999; $25,000 - $64,999 (reference group), $65,000 - $99,999, $100,000 and over, and missing.

Descriptive Statistics

Summary statistics for this study are given in Table 1. Married women comprise 62% of study participants, which is consistent with other samples, such as the General Social Survey and the U.S. Census Bureau. Respondents claim infidelity is committed more often

Table 1

Summary Variables

Variables	*M*	*SD*
Marital Happiness		
Happy	71%	
Unhappy	29	
Religious Affiliation		
Catholic	36%	
Protestant	47	
Other	10	
None	8	
Church Attendance		
Respondent attends frequently	.65	10.03
Spouse attends frequently	.45	.50
Attends infrequently	19%	
Attends frequently/alone	5	
Attends frequently/others	10	
Attends frequently/spouse/kids	35	
Infidelity		
Respondent cheats	6%	
Respondent does not cheat	94	
Spouse cheats	11	
Spouse does not cheat	86	
Missing	3	
Religious Congruence		
Spouse shares same religious core values	1.55	.87
Family prayer/religious activities at home	3.62	2.01
Spousal Supportive Behaviors		
Spouse expresses love/affection	1.81	.96
Spouse criticizes/insults	3.99	1.02
Spouse complements work around home/parenting skills	2.28	1.17
Spouse performs small acts of kindness	2.24	1.22
Respondent expresses love/affection	1.81	.87
Respondent criticizes/insults	3.86	1.00
Resp. complements work around home/parenting skills	2.07	1.01
Respondent performs small acts of kindness	2.02	.99

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding error. Missing data dummies are not shown. $N = 1{,}248$.

Table 1 *continued*

Variables	*M*	*SD*
Children	65%	
No children	35	
Age	42.27	10.03
18 – 25	5%	
26 – 30	11	
31 – 35	13	
36 – 40	14	
41 – 45	16	
46 – 50	17	
51 – 55	14	
56 +	11	
Education		
Not high school graduate	12%	
High school graduate	23	
Some college/trade/technical school	30	
College graduate	22	
Post graduate	13	
Income	4.98	2.25
$0 - $24,999	16%	
$25,000 - $64,999	34	
$65,000 - $99,999	23	
$100,000 +	19	
Race		
Non-Hispanic White	41%	
Non-Hispanic Black	25	
Hispanic	34	
Gender		
Female	62%	
Male	38	
Years Married	15.05	10.33
0 – 5	21%	
6 – 10	20	
11 – 15	16	
16 – 20	11	
21 – 25	11	
26 – 30	9	
31- 35	6	
36 +	6	

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding error. Missing data dummies are not shown. *N* = 1,248.

by spouses than themselves. Since over half of the respondents are women, this underscores that men commit adultery more often than women.

Analysis

The association of religious attendance with the dependent variable, marital happiness, is examined on groups of independent variables for spousal supportiveness, religious congruence, and infidelity. Means are presented separately for independent variables by the categories listed above. This allows for testing the hypothesis that religious attendance will increase marital happiness and that infidelity, spousal supportiveness and religious congruence will account for part of the relationship between religious attendance and marital happiness. Testing significance between groups is performed using chi-square tests (missing data were deleted).

Five logistic regression models are used to estimate how religious attendance affects marital happiness. The first model measures only religious affiliation, attendance, and control variables: children, age, education, income, race, gender, and years married. The next three models separately add the three units of independent variables to test the relationship between religious attendance and marital happiness. The final model includes all three blocks of independent variables.

The final model equation is as follows:

$$\log (p / 1\text{-}p) = \beta_0 + \beta_1\text{Denomination} + \beta_2\text{Attend} + \beta_3\text{Cheat} + \beta_4\text{SpouseCheat} + \beta_5\text{SpouseSharesSameCoreValues} + \beta_6\text{FamilyPrayerActivitiesAtHome} + \beta_{(k)}\text{SupportiveSpousalBehaviors} + \beta_{(k)}\text{CONTROL}$$

RESULTS

Significant results for cross tabulation of infidelity, spousal supportiveness behaviors, and religious congruence by religious attendance confirm: 1) respondents who attend church frequently with their family report a lower percentage (7%) of unfaithful spouses (Table 2). 2) People who attend church frequently with spouses and/or children have a higher percentage of spouses who share their religious core values (97%). 3) People who engage in family prayer and/or religious activities weekly are much more likely to be people who attend church with their families frequently (68%).

In addition, cross tabulations of spousal supportive behaviors (Table 2) show respondents who attend church frequently with their families receive these benefits: they report higher levels of expressing love and/or affection (84%) and have spouses who do the same (83%). Their spouses criticize and/or insult less (4%), and their spouses complement work around the home and/or parenting skills more (66%).

Yet, cross tabulation shows spouses who perform small acts of kindness are equally likely to be those who attend frequently and alone or frequently with their families (both 69%). Few respondents claim to criticize/insult their spouse regardless of attendance patterns, and results are not significant. However, respondents who claim their spouses criticize/insult them are also few in numbers, and results are significant. It appears the vast majority of respondents and spouses are not guilty of frequent criticisms or insults.

Table 2

Cross Tabulation of Infidelity, Religious Congruence,
and Spousal Supportiveness Behaviors by Religious Attendance

	RELIGIOUS ATTENDANCE				
BEHAVIORS	Attends Infrequently	Attends Frequently/ Alone	Attends Frequently /Others	Attends Frequently/ Spouse/Kids	Total
Infidelity					
Respondent cheats	16	4	11	19	50
	7%	7%	9%	5%	6%
Respondent does not cheat	210	52	110	399	771
	93%	93%	91%	95%	94%
Total	226	56	121	418	821
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
$\chi^2(3) = 4.14$ $p = 0.246$					
Spouse cheats	26	7	23	31	87
	12%	13%	19%	7%	11%
Spouse does not cheat	200	49	98	387	734
	89%	88%	81%	93%	89%
Total	226	56	121	418	821
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
$\chi^2(3) = 13.91$ $p = 0.003$					
Religious Congruence					
Spouse shares same religious core values	207	45	103	419	774
	90%	76%	80%	97%	91%
Spouse doesn't share same rel. core values	25	14	25	13	77
	11%	24%	20%	3%	9%
Total	232	59	128	432	851
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
$\chi^2(3) = 52.53$ $p = 0.000$					
Family prayer/religious activities at home (weekly or more)	92	23	70	294	479
	40%	39%	55%	68%	56%
Family prayer/religious activities at home (less frequently)	140	36	58	138	372
	60%	61%	45%	32%	44%
Total	232	59	128	432	851
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
$\chi^2(3) = 54.54$ $p = 0.000$					
Spousal Supportiveness Behaviors					
Spouse frequently expresses love/affection	186	37	99	358	680
	80%	63%	77%	83%	80%
Spouse seldom expresses love/affection	46	22	29	74	171
	20%	37%	23%	17%	20%
Total	232	59	128	432	851
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
$\chi^2(3) = 13.76$ $p = 0.003$					

Table 2 *continued*

Behaviors	Attends Infrequently	Attends Freq/Alone	Attends Freq/Others	Attends Freq/ Spouse/Kids	Total
Spouse frequently criticizes/insults	13	9	7	17	46
	6%	15%	5%	4%	5%
Spouse seldom criticizes/insults	219	50	121	415	805
	94%	85%	95%	96%	95%
Total	232	59	128	432	851
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
$\chi^2(3) = 13.04$ $p = 0.005$					
Spouse frequently complements work around home and/or parenting skills	128	30	66	284	508
	55%	51%	52%	66%	60%
Spouse seldom complements work around home and/or parenting skills	104	29	62	148	343
	45%	49%	48%	34%	40%
Total	232	59	128	432	851
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
$\chi^2(3) = 13.97$ $p = 0.003$					
Spouse frequently does acts of kindness	137	41	64	297	539
	59%	69%	50%	69%	63%
Spouse seldom does acts of kindness	95	18	64	135	312
	41%	31%	50%	31%	37%
Total	232	59	128	432	851
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
$\chi^2(3) = 18.05$ $p = 0.000$					
Respondent freq. expresses love/affection	185	40	96	362	683
	80%	68%	75%	84%	80%
Resp. seldom expresses love/affection	47	19	32	70	168
	20%	32%	25%	16%	20%
Total	232	59	128	432	851
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
$\chi^2(3) = 11.47$ $p = 0.000$					
Respondent freq. criticizes/insults	14	5	7	27	53
	6%	8%	5%	6%	6%
Resp. seldom criticizes/insults	218	54	121	405	798
	94%	92%	95%	94%	94%
Total	232	59	128	432	851
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
$\chi^2(3) = 0.65$ $p = 0.885$					

Table 2 *continued*

Behaviors	Attends Infrequently	Attends Freq/Alone	Attends Freq/Others	Attends Freq/ Spouse/Kids	Total
Respondent freq. complements work around home/parenting skills	164	35	77	300	576
	71%	59%	60%	69%	68%
Resp. seldom complements work around home and/or parenting skills	68	24	51	132	275
	29%	41%	40%	31%	32%
Total	232	59	128	432	851
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
$\chi^2(3) = 6.77$ $p = 0.080$					
Respondent freq. does acts of kindness	165	35	89	307	597
	72%	59%	70%	71%	70%
Resp. seldom does acts of kindness	66	24	39	125	254
	28%	41%	30%	29%	30%
Total	232	59	128	432	851
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
$\chi^2(3) = 3.72$ $p = 0.294$					

Religious affiliation is not the best predictor of marital happiness. Cross tabulation for religious affiliation and marital happiness (not shown) reveals that 78% of respondents in the "other" religious classification are happy in marriage; 71% of Protestants report being happily married, and 69% of Catholics report happy marriages; however, the results are not remarkable.

Results for multivariate logistic regression will now be reviewed to determine the effect of independent variables on marital happiness. Religiosity, a combination of denomination and attendance, shows respondents belonging to "other" religious affiliations who attend church weekly with their families are 71% more likely than Catholics to be happy in marriage (see Table 3, "Religiosity Only"). Those attending religious services with their spouse and/or children are 70% more likely to be happily married than those who attend services infrequently. This lends support for Hypothesis 1a: frequent religious attendance with spouse and/or children increases marital happiness. When Model 2 is compared to Model 1(Table 3), it shows "other" denominations are 78% more likely than Catholics to be happy in marriage. Respondents who attend church frequently with their family are 62% happier in marriage than infrequent attendees. Respondents who have unfaithful spouses are significantly ($p < .001$) less happy in marriage (61%) than those with noncheating spouses. The dummy missing variable for cheating spouses is also significant. This finding partially supports Hypothesis 1b: infidelity accounts for part of the relationship between religious attendance and marital happiness. Infidelity by one's spouse significantly decreases marital happiness.

Table 3

Logit Estimates of Marital Happiness by Religiosity, Infidelity, Religious Congruence, and Spousal Supportiveness

Variables	Religiosity Only			Religiosity + Infidelity			Religiosity + Religious Congruence			Religiosity + Spousal Supportiveness			Religiosity + Infidelity, Religious Congruence, & Spousal Supportiveness		
	Coef.	Std. Err.	Odds[1]	Coef.	Std. Err.	Odds[1]	Coef.	Std. Err.	Odds[1]	Coef.	Std. Err.	Odds[1]	Coef.	Std. Err.	Odds[1]
Denomination															
Catholic	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Protestant	.12	.20	1.13	.12	.20	1.13	.07	.19	1.07	.20	.25	1.22	.14	.24	1.15
Other	.54	.45	1.71*	.58	.47	1.78*	.47	.42	1.59†	.55	.52	1.74†	.50	.50	1.65†
None	.31	.39	1.36	.26	.37	1.30	.37	.42	1.44	.31	.44	1.36	.29	.44	1.33
Attendance															
Infrequent	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Frequent/alone	-.37	.22	.69	-.41	.22	.66	-.24	.26	.78	-.10	.34	.90	-.07	.36	.93
Frequent/others	.02	.25	1.02	.08	.27	1.08	.00	.26	1.00	.05	.30	1.06	.10	.32	1.11
Frequent/family	.53	.33	1.70**	.48	.32	1.62*	.26	.26	1.30	.38	.32	1.46†	.19	.27	1.21
Missing	-.22	.15	.80	-.21	.16	.81	-.02	.20	.99	-.06	.21	.94	.08	.25	1.09
Infidelity															
Respondent cheats				-.36	.19	.70							-.17	.27	.85
Spouse cheats				-.94	.08	.39***							-.53	.15	.59*
Spouse missing				-1.12	.12	.32**							-.69	.21	.50†
Religious Congruence:															
Spouse same values							.99	.51	2.69***				.60	.39	1.82**
Fam. prayer and/or religious activity							.71	.31	2.03***				.47	.28	1.60**
Spousal Supportiveness															
Sp. expresses love										1.15	.62	3.17***	1.10	.60	3.02***
Sp. does not criticize										1.14	.95	3.12***	1.05	.91	2.86***
Spouse complements work/parenting skills										.78	.39	2.19***	.71	.36	2.03***
Sp. does kind acts										.53	.29	1.69**	.47	.28	1.59**
Respondent expresses love										.48	.32	1.61*	.47	.32	1.60**
Resp. does not Criticize										.72	.57	2.05**	.67	.56	1.96**
Resp. complements work/par. Skills										.05	.19	1.05	-.01	.18	.99
Resp. does kind acts										.10	.19	1.10	.13	.20	1.13

†$p < .10$ *$p < .05$ **$p < .01$ ***$p < .001$ (2-tail tests) $N = 1{,}248$ [1]Odds Ratio

Table 3 *continued*

Control Variables	Religiosity Only			Religiosity + Infidelity			Religiosity + Religious Congruence			Religiosity + Spousal Supportiveness			Full Model		
	Coef.	Std. Err.	Odds[1]	Coef.	Std. Err.	Odds[1]	Coef.	Std. Err.	Odds[1]	Coef.	Std. Err.	Odds[1]	Coef.	Std. Err.	Odds[1]
No Children	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
1+ Children	-.59	.09	.55***	-.57	.10	.57***	-.60	.10	.55***	-.42	.13	.66*	-.42	.13	.66*
Age															
18 – 25	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
26 – 30	-.22	.32	.80	-.17	.34	.84	-.30	.30	.74	-.62	.24	.54	.61	.25	.54
31 – 35	-.33	.28	.72	-.27	.30	.76	-.32	.29	.73	-.43	.29	.65	.41	.30	.67
36 – 40	-.47	.24	.62	-.42	.26	.66	-.51	.24	.60	-.66	.23	.51	.62	.25	.54
41 – 45	-.45	.25	.64	-.42	.26	.66	-.44	.26	.64	-.68	.23	.51	.64	.24	.53
46 – 50	-.73	.19	.48†	-.71	.20	.49†	-.70	.20	.50†	-.93	.18	.40*	-.88	.19	.41†
51 – 55	-.81	.18	.44*	-.85	.18	.43*	-.86	.18	.42*	-1.14	.15	.32*	-1.13	.15	.32*
56 +	-1.08	.15	.34*	-.98	.17	.38*	-1.08	.15	.34*	-1.11	.17	.33*	-1.06	.18	.35*
Education															
Not high school grad	.40	.42	1.50	.51	.48	1.66†	.40	.42	1.49	.34	.45	1.40	.39	.48	1.47
High school graduate	-.03	.21	.97	.01	.22	1.01	-.02	.22	.98	-.17	.21	.84	-.14	.22	.87
Some college/technical	-.14	.17	.87	-.08	.18	.92	-.13	.17	.87	-.30	.16	.74	-.25	.17	.78
College graduate	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Post graduate	-.05	.23	.95	-.03	.24	.97	-.05	.23	.95	-.18	.23	.83	-.16	.24	.85
Income															
$0 - $24,999	-.55	.12	.58**	-.48	.13	.62*	-.53	.12	.59*	-.42	.16	.66†	-.39	.17	.68
$25,000 - $64,999	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
$65K - $99,999	.16	.22	1.17	.13	.21	1.13	.22	.24	1.25	.08	.23	1.08	.10	.24	1.11
$100,000 +	.42	.34	1.53†	.39	.33	1.47†	.47	.37	1.60*	.27	.33	1.32	.29	.34	1.34
Missing	-.37	.17	.69	-.33	.18	.72	-.34	.18	.71	-.54	.16	.58†	-.47	.18	.63
Race															
White	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Black	-.38	.12	.68*	-.21	.15	.81	-.50	.12	.61**	.25	.16	.78	-.24	.17	.79
Hispanic	-.01	.19	.99	.08	.21	1.08	-.05	.18	.95	-.08	.20	.92	-.06	.20	.94
Gender															
Female	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Male	.26	.18	1.29†	.18	.18	1.20	.21	.18	1.23	.30	.22	1.35†	.25	.22	1.28
Years Married															
0 – 5	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
6 – 10	-.21	.17	.81	-.14	.19	.87	-.27	.17	.77	-.19	.20	.83	-.20	.20	.82
11 – 15	-.45	.15	.64*	-.38	.16	.68	-.52	.14	.59*	-.43	.17	.65	-.47	.17	.63†
16 – 20	-.15	.23	.86	-.08	.25	.92	-.23	.21	.80	.02	.31	1.02	.01	.31	1.01
21 - 25	.02	.28	1.02	.11	.32	1.12	.00	.29	1.00	.18	.38	1.19	.21	.39	1.24
26 – 30	-.45	.19	.64	-.27	.23	.76	-.41	.20	.66	-.16	.29	.86	-.07	.33	.93
31 – 35	-.51	.20	.60	-.31	.25	.74	-.43	.22	.65	-.35	.27	.70	-.20	.33	.82
36 +	.33	.50	1.39	.38	.54	1.46	.27	.49	1.32	.34	.60	1.40	.34	.61	1.41
Log Likelihood	-705.75			-689.56			-678.03			-573.36			-561.55		

† $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$ (2-tail tests) $N = 1,248$ [1]Odds Ratio

Moreover, when comparing Model 3 measuring religious congruence to Model 1 measuring religiosity only (Table 3), the "other" religious denomination category becomes only marginally significant ($p < .10$), and attendance is no longer significant. The predictors of marital happiness are now the variables measuring religious congruence: having spouses who share the same religious core values and respondents who have family prayer and/or religious activities in their home weekly. Both are significant at $p < .001$. This finding supports Hypothesis 1d and 1e.

Spousal supportiveness (Model 4, Table 3) corroborates cross tabulation findings. Supportive spousal behaviors continue to have robust effects on marital happiness when adding independent and control variables. The "other" denomination category and attending church frequently with one's spouse and/or children are only marginally significant ($p < .10$). Spousal supportive behaviors are significant predictors of marital happiness. This result supports Hypothesis 1c.

Finally, when including all variables, logistic regression shows that infidelity, religious congruence, and spousal supportiveness are all predictive of marital happiness. Infidelity definitely decreases marital happiness ($p < .05$), and both variables measuring religious congruence significantly increase marital happiness ($p < .01$). Just two of the variables which measure spousal supportiveness are not significant: respondent complements work and respondent does kind acts. Respondents who show love/affection and do not criticize significantly affect marital happiness ($p < .01$). Furthermore, spouses who express love/affection, do not criticize, complement work/parenting skills, and perform small acts of kindness are extremely predictive of marital happiness ($p < .001$).

Controls for age and whether children are present in the home continue to have observable negative effects on marital happiness in all models. Respondents aged 51 and older are at least 56% less likely to be happy in marriage compared to respondents 18 – 25 ($p < .05$). People who have children in the home are significantly less likely to claim marital happiness ($p < .001$) compared to those without children, particularly when considering religious attendance (45% less likely), infidelity (43% less likely), and religious congruence (45% less likely). In addition, people with children report being 34% less happy in marriage in the spousal supportiveness model ($p < .05$).

Considering race results, there are only two models which are noteworthy. Model 1, measuring religiosity, shows Blacks are 32% less likely to be happy in marriage compared to Whites ($p < .05$). In Model 3, measuring religious congruence, Blacks are 39% less likely to be happy in marriage ($p < .01$).

In Models 1, 2, and 3, which measure attendance, infidelity, and religious congruence, having an income less than $25,000 significantly reduces the likelihood of marital happiness when compared to those who earn $25,000 to almost $65,000. But low income is not significant in Model 4, measuring spousal supportiveness, nor in Model 5, showing all variables. An income of $100,000 or more significantly increases marital happiness ($p < .05$) only in Model 3, measuring religious congruence (compared to moderate incomes between $25,000 and $65,000).

To recapitulate, a happy marriage is more likely when your spouse is faithful, shares your same religious core values, participates in family prayer and religious activities at home, and demonstrates spousal relationship support. Attending religious services frequently

provides opportunities to hear lessons and sermons espousing the importance of fidelity, spousal supportiveness, and ways to increase religious congruence. Thus, frequent church attendance with one's family, which increases marital happiness, helps to account for the relationship between infidelity, spousal supportive behaviors, and religious congruence.

DISCUSSION

There has been considerable research on how church attendance positively affects marital satisfaction. This study points out the importance of looking at religious attendance as more than just frequency of attendance. It is essential to consider two aspects of church attendance: 1) with whom a person attends religious services and 2) frequency of attendance. This study shows that marital happiness is more likely for people who attend church frequently with their family. Attending church frequently as a family provides a foundation for other factors that increase marital happiness including: 1) lower risk of adultery, 2) improved spousal supportiveness, 3) similar religious core values, and 4) family prayer and/or religious activities in the home.

First, attending church frequently as a family reduces the risk of infidelity. Previous researchers have found that infrequent church attendance is a predictor of infidelity (Amato & Previti, 2003; Atkins, et al., 2001). Results in this study show those least likely to commit adultery are those who attend church frequently with their spouse and/or children. This is more specific than just frequent attendance. In fact, this study reveals that those who attend infrequently are in less peril of adultery than those who attend frequently with nonfamily members. Perhaps individuals who attend church with other people may become attracted to someone they meet at church; spouses attending church together would certainly provide a deterrent for inappropriate advances.

Religious congruence may also affect the risk of infidelity. If people attend church frequently with others instead of their spouse and/or children, they may become attracted to someone they feel shares their core religious values more than their spouse does.

Moreover, the negative results of infidelity on marital happiness are more critical when the respondent is the victim of unfaithfulness rather than the transgressor. Clinical psychologists Snyder, Baucom and Gordon (2007) found that following infidelity, the injured spouse is usually more traumatized by an affair than the spouse who cheated. Yet, another plausible explanation might be that when the respondent is the one cheating, perhaps their spouse is unaware of the infidelity. Thus, other behaviors that strengthen martial satisfaction may not as yet be altered.

Second, frequent religious attendance with family improves spousal supportiveness. Expressing love and affection is important for both spouses to do in order to keep a marriage happy. Likewise, not being critical or insulting is vital. It demonstrates respect for one's mate. At church services, people may notice other couples with supportive relationships and wish to emulate them. Thus, it is not only sermons teaching spousal supportive behaviors, it is also the good role models one sees at church that inspire spouses to improve their supportiveness.

Additional supportive behaviors include complementing a spouse's work around the home and/or parenting skills and performing small acts of kindness. Logically, one would think reciprocity would result in the greatest marital happiness. However, complementing work around the home and performing kind acts were found to predict marital happiness more for the receiver than the giver. This may be due to the lack of effort required when one

receives a complement or has small acts of kindness done for them. The majority of study respondents are women (62%). Wives generally do more work around the home and caretaking of children than their husbands. Thus, being the recipient of complements and kind acts may help women feel more appreciated, which can increase marital happiness. In general, spousal supportiveness significantly increases the likelihood of marital happiness.

The two variables measuring religious congruence are highly effective as marital happiness predictors. Possibly, spouses who share the same religious core values agree more on deep issues that affect them and their marriage. Concerns such as abortion, disciplining children, division of household chores, and family economics are a few of the issues where core religious values may prove vital. Positive communication habits are more likely for spouses who share core religious values; yet, individuals followed over 20 years seldom changed their core values (Acitelli, Kenny, & Weiner, 2001). This would indicate the importance of marrying someone who shares one's core religious or spiritual values.

The other measurement of religious congruence is based on religious rituals performed in the home, such as praying and participating in religious activities. This reinforces doctrines taught at church. People who engage in religious rituals at home show commitment to their religious beliefs: they are not just Sunday or one-day-a-week worshippers. Religious leaders, through congregational activities, can encourage and demonstrate ways parishioners can participate in religious rituals in their homes. Families that pray together and participate in religious activities at home on a frequent basis increase the likelihood for marital happiness. This demonstrates the benefits of being a participant and not just an observer of religion.

If people attend religious services weekly, are they more likely to practice religious behaviors at home? And, if parishioners practice religious behaviors at home, are they more likely to attend religious services frequently? The answer to both questions is yes. Most religions encourage worshippers to take religious doctrines taught at church and apply them in their lives. Praying and participating in religious practices at home can strengthen religious convictions, which in turn may increase the desire to attend church services.

There are diverse traditions that people can practice at home that reinforce the basic tenets of their beliefs, such as Jews observing the Shabbat or Mormons having Monday night family home evening. The conscious act of gathering one's family together for prayer or to do a religious activity reinforces religious beliefs and provides opportunities for more communication, family bonding, and unity.

To increase attendance of infrequent church-goers, religious leaders should encourage parishioners to get to know their neighbors and invite them to church activities and services. Friendships developed at activities are part of social networking and may provide incentive for some people to attend religious services more often.

Religious denomination has a significant effect on marital happiness only when considering religiosity and infidelity, but was not found to be a significant predictor of marital happiness when religious congruence and spousal supportiveness behaviors are considered ($p < .10$). The "other" religions are different from Catholic and Protestant faiths. Greater knowledge could be gained with larger samples from "other" religions to determine which of the "other" worshippers are most likely to be happy in marriage and why. For

instance, Jewish, “other” non-Christian believers, and Mormons are found to be happiest in marriage; but their numbers in this study are too few to show validation.

Also, there is diversity within the Protestant affiliation. Steensland, et al. (2000) provides categories for Black Protestants, mainline and evangelical Protestant divisions. However, due to small numbers in this study, all Protestant divisions are combined. Research with more respondents within the Protestant faith would allow greater understanding of how Black Protestants differ from mainline Protestants, for instance.

When religious congruence and spousal supportiveness are considered, religiosity is less important than living the principles taught at church. However, when a person believes a particular denomination is true and feels part of that religious community, she or he will probably try harder to follow the teachings taught. It is certainly beneficial for local church leaders to emphasize the importance of frequent family prayer, practicing religious rituals at home, and improving spousal relationship behaviors.

A discussion of the control variables follows. Most parents think of children as a blessing, so why would children in the home have a negative effect on marital happiness? Possibly, this is the result of time spent on children’s needs, which reduces time given to one’s spouse. Many women leave their jobs to start a second shift of work at home as wife, mother, and housekeeper. Women who feel overburdened may feel resentful. Conflicts between parents can arise over academic/athletic goals or disciplining children. Spouses may find behaviors that increase marital happiness come second to being a parent.

Local church congregations can help to reduce stress on parents by providing social networking support. Many churches offer daycare services and summer camps. However, for

churches who do not offer childcare, getting to know fellow worshippers can help. Developing social networks with other church members who have similar situations, such as children near the same age, can lead to childcare exchanges, carpooling, and help when crises arise.

Marital happiness decreases somewhat after 45, and considerably after 50. This finding contradicts the curvilinear pattern of happiness endorsed by some researchers (Ihinger-Tallman & Cooney, 2005; Vaillant & Vaillant, 1993). Possible reasons for reduced marital happiness may include being a primary care provider for grandchildren, having adult children boomerang back home, and having to continue to work after one's spouse retires. Continued research on age-related issues can provide greater insight as to why people over 50 might be less happy in marriage compared to young couples.

Length of marriage is only noteworthy when considering attendance and religious congruence. Those married 11 – 15 years are less happy than those married 0 – 5 years. This is not surprising, as the first few years of marriage are considered the honeymoon phase. After a decade of marriage, children's school activities and sports may make one-on-one spouse time scarce.

When income is low, it reduces the likelihood of marital happiness (41%, Model 3). However, when spousal supportiveness is considered, income is not noteworthy. North, Holahan, Moos, and Cronkite (2008) report that after couples have enough to meet their basic needs, income becomes less important than relationship support. One reason may be that supportive behaviors touch a spouse's heart in a way that money cannot.

However, high income was predictive of marital happiness when looking at religious congruence. Possibly, people earning $100,000 or more are as committed to living their religion as they are to making a living, and find happiness in both pursuits. High incomes allow spouses opportunities to take fun vacations, indulge in hobbies, and worry less about bills than people making moderate or low incomes.

Regarding race, African Americans are less happy in marriage when considering attendance and religious congruence. More Blacks attend church alone or with nonfamily members compared to Whites and Hispanics. Also, Black men attend church less frequently than Black women. Since religious attendance contributes to religious congruence and both attendance and congruence have been found to enhance marital happiness, this may be one reason Blacks are less likely to be happy in marriage.

However, when infidelity or spousal supportiveness is taken into account, race is no longer a significant predictor of marital happiness. It appears the propensity for African Americans to be less happy in marriage can be overcome with frequent spousal supportive behaviors. Yet, cross tabulations (not shown) reveal that African Americans perform supportive spousal behaviors less frequently than Whites and Hispanics. Religious attendance as a family, which improves spousal supportiveness and increases religious congruence, would increase marital happiness for Blacks, as it does Whites and Hispanics. As would be expected, infidelity reduces marital happiness for all races.

Religiosity is multifaceted. Peeling back the layers of religiosity shows the importance of church attendance: how often and with whom; what is learned and modeled at church; and the need for worshippers to apply religious doctrines and principles in their lives.

For the full benefit of religion, one must go to church often as a family, not sleep through services, develop social networks at church, and participate in religious rituals at home.

Limitations

Shortcomings of this study include the absence of Asian Americans and American Indians in the sample. Also, since telephone interviews were conducted, it creates some bias for those individuals who are too poor for telephone service, or for the growing population of young people who only have cell phones and no land lines. Further, there are no respondents who are over 65 in this study. It would be interesting to discover if and how religiosity and spousal supportiveness vary in later years.

Future Research

My findings show that the "other" denomination group is more likely to be happy in marriage. This group comprises varied religions. Future research using data gathered from more areas of the country could ensure greater observations in different denominations with fewer being placed in the "other" classification. Specifically, it might prove helpful to compare religiosity information on Mormons, Catholics, Protestants, Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist denominations. Exploring the diverse beliefs and practices among these religions might aid the understanding of how religious practices at home affect marital happiness.

In addition, further research on how age influences marital happiness would be helpful. My findings seem to contradict the studies by Ihinger-Tallman and Cooney (2005) and Vaillant and Vaillant (1993) on marital happiness following a curvilinear pattern. In particular, it would be beneficial to know why individuals over 45 are somewhat less likely

to be happily married and why people over 50 are considerably less likely to be happy in marriage compared to young married individuals. Are grandparents who act as surrogate parents increasing? This sample consists largely of people younger than 60, and usually health is not a viable concern yet. So, it would be useful to have a sample with ages ranging from 18 to 85 to explore how health issues and other aspects of aging may influence how religiosity affects marital happiness.

CONCLUSIONS

This study contributes to previous research on the effects of religiosity on marital happiness. A summary of the major findings of this investigation follows. The greatest predictors of marital happiness are: having a spouse who shares the same religious core values, participating in family prayer and/or religious activities in the home, and demonstrating spousal supportiveness.

People who participate in religious rituals at home are applying church doctrines and practices in their lives. A modification of the adage "practice what you preach" that exemplifies living one's religion might be "practice what was preached". Also, spouses with the same religious or spiritual core values have a much greater chance for a happy marriage than couples who have differing fundamental religious or spiritual values. Unity in core values can aid couples in achieving their religious/spiritual goals. The components of religious congruence are shown to be good predictors of marital happiness.

Religious attendance can improve spousal supportiveness behaviors and increase the likelihood of marital happiness. Supportive relationship behaviors are promoted through religious doctrines and sermons. In addition, role models of good marriages can be viewed at church and may motivate couples to improve their own supportive behaviors. However, supportiveness behaviors involving complementing work around the home and parenting skills, as well as doing frequent small acts of kindness for one's mate were found to be unidirectional. Being the recipient of these behaviors versus the giver is more predictive of

marital happiness. While it may be "…more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35), it is very rewarding to be the receiver of nice complements and deeds. Being appreciated for the work one does around the home and/or parenting skills may give the receiver of complements incentive to continue their efforts. Small acts of kindness may be done by one's spouse to demonstrate appreciation, as well. Thus, being the recipient of complements and kind acts may help one feel more appreciated, which can increase marital happiness.

People who attend church frequently with their families are less likely to have cheating spouses compared to those who attend church infrequently. Marital happiness significantly declines when one's spouse commits adultery. Attending services with one's family increases marital happiness by reducing the risk of infidelity. Overall, religious attendance and infidelity are not as predictive of marital happiness as religious congruence and spousal supportiveness.

Looking at religious denomination, individuals in "other" religions are significantly happier in marriage compared to Catholics when religious attendance and infidelity are considered. Yet, when religious congruence and spousal supportiveness are included, denomination is only marginally significant ($p < .10$).

Control variables having consistent negative effects on marital happiness include children at home and being middle aged. Spousal supportive behaviors are more predictive of marital happiness than the effects of income, race, gender, and length of marriage.

In conclusion, my research has shown that religious attendance as a family increases marital happiness in several ways. Spouses reduce the risk of adultery by attending church frequently and together. Religious core values are strengthened through church attendance.

Spousal supportiveness is modeled and taught at religious services and may motivate spouses to improve their relationship behaviors. Attending church regularly helps increase the knowledge and desire to practice religious rituals, such as family prayer and religious activities in the home. In short, there are many blessings from church attendance. Couples can strengthen their marriage, increase their commitment to each other, and decrease conflict. Family bonding, better communication, and greater unity benefit parishioners who take religious doctrines and principles home and apply them in their lives.

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