The Influence of Religious Beliefs and Practices on Marital Commitment,

Parent-Child Closeness, and Family Involvement

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Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Human Development

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Abstract

Strong families are built on positive relationships among husbands, wives, and children, and can be positively or negatively impacted by a variety of factors. This study focuses on the influence of religiosity on family strengths, particularly as it affects marital commitment, relationships between parents and children, and family involvement. Using Flourishing Families Project (FFP) data (*N*=305 couples) and a theoretical framework derived from Dollahite and Marks, Mahoney and colleagues, and Stinnett and DeFrain, I examined the ways in which a parent's religious beliefs and religious practices support or hinder family relationships. The Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) was used to examine the intrapersonal and interspousal relationships among religious beliefs, religious practices, marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement. Results suggest that religious beliefs and practices are equivocal and are associated with higher and lower marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement for both husbands and wives. Significantly, this research demonstrated that husbands and wives differed through both intrapersonal and interspousal pathways. These results provide important insight into the ways religiosity is associated with family strengths and provides additional handles for researchers and practitioners interested in strengthening families.

Acknowledgments

Throughout this project, and my entire graduate experience over these last 6 years, I have seen the "**tender mercies of the Lord**" (Psalm 145:9, 1 Nephi 1:20) in my life. Through prayers and faith in Him, I have received increased strength and stamina as well as a multitude of blessings. As I look back over my experience here at Virginia Tech, I have seen His hand guiding me and blessing my family. From earning a second master's degree to gaining access to the Flourishing Families Project (FFP), to finishing my degree in May, 2010, to securing a tenure-track faculty position at ECU, I have received many tender mercies from God and am thankful to Him for these blessings.

My wife Melanie deserves this PhD as much as I do. Her patience, support, encouragement, and expectations are what motivated me to press forward and persist in all diligence. She is the love of my life and I thank her for being by my side and supporting me through this decision and goal we made together. She deserves the "girl's trips" she takes each year…and I enjoy the time I get to spend alone with my children. To **my children**, who for a time thought they only had a mother, I want to thank for keeping me sane during the entire process. Without the excited calls of "Daddy is home" when I walked through the door, and then their easing my mind by their hugs and interactions, I would not have mentally been able to cope. I also appreciate them racing me to the end of the street as I left for school on my motorcycle, waving and calling out to me, "honk and wave when you get down the road a little." Each of them is a true blessing in my life. I also want to thank **my parents and family members** who prayed for me when times were tough and who encouraged me to continue pressing forward in faith and diligence.

To my advisor and mentor **Dr. Jay Mancini**, I want to express my deep appreciation for his support and guidance. He has been incredibly helpful in my progress and understanding of my struggles. I appreciate all that he has done for me and my family over the years I have been at Virginia Tech. I am sure he has done more for me than I even realize and I could not have accomplished what I have without his mentorship and guidance. From providing space to work, to travel money, to meals together, and to research projects, I have learned, and continue to learn, a great deal from Jay.

I am also thankful for wonderful committee members. I appreciate **Dr. Rosemary Blieszner** suggesting I defend in May and then working with me to help me meet that goal. Rosemary helped me clarify my thinking, organize my thoughts, narrow my focus, and improve my writing. I appreciate **Dr. Tina Savla** for suggesting I show my preliminary findings to my other committee members, which prompted Rosemary to suggest I defend in May. Tina was always willing to meet with me about my methods and analysis in SEM as well as about my job search and my proposal presentation. I am grateful to Dr. Kaestle for suggesting I add Tina to my committee – Tina was very helpful and supportive throughout the process. I appreciate **Dr. Joyce Arditti** for pushing me to think more deeply about the reasons why I did certain things. Joyce (Jade in Spanish), helped me to think more broadly and deeply about my topic and the purpose of my study. I appreciate **Dr. Fred Piercy** for his support during my time at VT, from our With Love project to his writing for publication course to my dissertation. Fred helped me clarify my writing and pushed me to state on paper what I knew in my head. I appreciate **Dr. Lydia Marek** for her willingness to be a proxy for Joyce, for her wonderful comments and thoughts, and for allowing me to work in her space at the CRC. Having access to the office at

the CRC provide many hours of "alone" time where I could concentrate and get much more accomplished than I otherwise could have. I also appreciate her understanding when I had to end my assistantship with her midway through the semester (after the current project was finished) in order to commit my full energy to finishing my dissertation.

I am grateful to **Dr. Randy Day** and the other PI's of the FFP for granting me access to their wonderful data set. It was a great data set to learn about how to use secondary data and having access to the data was a true blessing in my life. Thanks to **Dr. Jeremy Yorgason** for responding to questions about the data and answering some analysis questions.

I appreciate my friends and colleagues **Nita Newswander**, **Bradford Wiles**, **John Butler**, and **Deepu George** for editing and providing comments on my dissertation. These were helpful as I finalized the final draft for my committee. They were great to work with over the last few years and I appreciate the many discussions we had about most every topic. They helped make my graduate experience enjoyable. I look forward to repaying them in the future by providing feedback on their dissertation or future project. I also look forward to working with them on future publications.

I am grateful to my friends here at VT, those in the Blacksburg ward, as well as those from home, praying and supporting me through posts on Facebook to calls of encouragement. I appreciate my best friend **Russ Brown** for helping me to think about attending college during our junior high years. I had mentioned that I wanted to take time off after high school, that 12 years was enough for me, and that I would think about college after working for a time. Now, after 10 years of college and continuing as a professor, it looks like I'll never escape college. I appreciate **Nathan Sharp**, my elder's quorum president at BYU (currently an assistant professor in accounting at Texas A&M), suggesting to me that I think about being a professor. He stated how family friendly the career was and that it would provide many blessings and opportunities throughout my life. His prompting made me revisit the idea when I was deciding what to do with my life (this was while I was an assistant manager in Wal-Mart in York, PA). Now that it is over, thanks Nate for suggesting that I pursue a career as a faculty member (I will start as an assistant professor in the Department of Child Development and Family Relations at East Carolina University in August, 2010).

I appreciate **Dr. Shannon Jarrott** for her support of graduate students in general and for providing departmental research grants in particular. I was awarded grant money in the 2008-2009 and the 2009-2010 years to attend the "Religious Practice and the Family: What the Research Says" conference in DC and to purchase the SPSS and AMOS software for my analyses. I also appreciate **GSA** for their research grant that I was also able to receive both years as well, which helped me present my project to the PI's of the Flourishing Families Project at BYU in Provo, Utah.

Finally, I am grateful to the hiring committee and Dr. Cynthia Johnson at **East Carolina University** for hiring me in December of 2009 so I could spend my time working on my dissertation during Spring 2010, rather than prepare for and participate in interviews. I am grateful to have a 9-month tenure-track position in the department of Child Development and Family Relations at ECU starting August 16, 2010, especially in the current economy. In sum, I have received many tender mercies of the Lord, for which I am deeply grateful.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Ten days after taking office, President Barack Obama instituted an agenda to strengthen American families. "Our family provides one of the strongest influences on our lives," he said, as he spoke during the first national "Family Day" (Obama, 2009). Positive family relations are important partly because "A strong nation is made up of strong families." Efforts to strengthen and support families have historically received widespread support in politics, academia, and communities, perhaps because the benefits are incontrovertible: Families who appreciate one another, share quality time, communicate well, and are committed to each other as well as to religious ideals (MacKinnon, MacKinnon, & Franken, 1984) are more likely to stay together, contribute positively to society, and consider themselves happy (Alesina & Giuliano, 2007 DeFrain & Asay, 2007b; Otto, 1962, 1963; Schumm, Bollman, & Jurich, 2001; Stinnett, 1979; Woodhouse, 1930).

In recent decades, social scientists have expanded the scope of research on family life from a focus on dysfunction and prescriptive remedies to include studies of high-functioning, positive relationships as well (DeFrain & Asay, 2007b; Fincham & Beach, 2010; MacKinnon, MacKinnon, & Franken, 1984). Along with a wide variety of personal characteristics and practices, religiosity (the extent to which a person is religious) has routinely been named a factor in family strength and happiness (DeFrain & Asay, 2007a; Houseknecht & Pankhurst, 2000; Madsen, Lawrence, & Christiansen, 2000). But how exactly does religiosity influence family life? On this particular question, the literature is largely silent (Lambert & Dollahite, 2008; Mahoney, in press). While numerous studies have investigated various correlations between religion and family life (including marital and parent-child relations), the focus is often narrow (Handel, 1996; Mahoney et al., 2001). Limiting assessments to only one or two characteristics of spousal or parent-child relationships ignores the function of families as entire units. A broad investigation into the encompassing factors that influence family strength could provide important information for individuals, families, and communities.

In an attempt to provide a starting place for more comprehensive analyses, the present study uses the Family Strengths framework of Stinnett and DeFrain (1985). The Family Strengths framework emerged from focusing on how families succeed rather than on why they fail and includes six elements of strong families: spiritual/religious well-being, family commitment, family involvement/spending positive time together, positive communication and

conflict resolution, appreciation and affection, and the ability to cope with stress and crisis. The six elements of the Family Strengths framework surfaced from qualitative analysis of thousands of families throughout the world (DeFrain & Asay, 2007a) and provide a thorough theoretical grounding for this empirical study. Specifically, this project focuses on the relationships among three elements from the Family Strengths framework that theoretically precede the other elements (Schumm, 1985), namely, religious well-being, family commitment, and family involvement. Examining the linkages among these elements will lay the groundwork for future researchers to examine how religious beliefs and practices influence the family strengths variables that come later in the model: namely, positive communication and conflict resolution, appreciation and affection, and the ability to cope with stress and crisis. Fincham and Beach (2010) pointed out that the family strengths literature is mostly descriptive and that advancing the empirical research, informed by the family strengths model, would be a "welcome addition to the literature" (p. 9). Parent-child closeness, the second model in the current study, is theoretically and qualitatively encompassed by both family commitment (DeFrain, 1999) and family involvement (Amato & Gobreth, 1999). The relationships among these three elements provide insight into particular characteristics of strong families. Additionally, the linkages among these elements set the groundwork for future research examining the linkages among additional family strength elements. Furthermore, understanding the linkages among these elements provides handles to prevention and intervention workers desiring to strengthen couples and families.

In this context, "religious well-being" may mean different things for different families. However, Stinnett and DeFrain (1985) found that despite differences of opinion on the content and practice of religion, families throughout the world benefited from high levels of religiosity and the meaning and influence it had in their lives (DeFrain & Asay, 2007a). In other words, strong families believe in something bigger than themselves and have higher levels of religiosity than less strong families, and their daily lives are highly influenced by their religious beliefs and practices (Houseknecht & Pankhurst, 2000; Madsen, Lawrence, & Christiansen, 2000). Significantly, 88% of Americans consider religion to be either very important or fairly important in their lives (Hill et al., 2000). Similarly, approximately 65% of Americans describe themselves as religious and spiritual (Marler & Hadaway, 2002).

Although it may take on a diversity of forms, *religion* has been defined as "a system of beliefs in a divine or superhuman power, and practices of worship or other routines directed

towards such a power" (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 1975, p. 1). *Spirituality* has been defined as "the presence of a relationship with a Higher Power that affects the way in which one operates in the world" (Armstrong, 1995, p. 3). The terms *religiosity* and *religiousness* have been used interchangeably (Hill & Pargament, 2003) and signify the extent to which a person is religious. The current research focuses on and largely uses a sample of the Judeo-Christian tradition of religious beliefs and practices. The traditions of other faiths and religions are not necessarily reflected in the current study. If religiosity influences people's beliefs, behaviors, and decisions, then the level of their religiosity will affect their interactions with their families.

The current study begins with these basic definitions, the framework provided by DeFrain and Asay, and a foundational understanding of the importance of religion in American family life provided by the literature. Using survey data, I tested three complementary models: (1) the relationship between religiosity and marital commitment, (2) the relationship between religiosity and parent-child closeness, and (3) the relationship between religiosity and family involvement. In doing so, additional insights into the interconnected pathways by which religiosity influences family life were gained.

The Relationship between Religiosity and Family Life

Studies conducted over the past quarter century have found positive relationships between religiosity and family life that cut across religions, indicating that religiosity is important for couples, parent-child relationships, and families (Dollahite, Marks, & Goodman, 2004; Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001). Family religiosity has consistently been linked to positive family functioning for parents and youth (Dollahite et al., 2004; Mahoney et al., 2001; Sherkat & Ellison, 1999). For example, parents who viewed their family as being more religious (the sum of a 13-item religiosity scale) also felt their family was closer and had healthier relationships than those families who viewed themselves as being less religious (Agate, Zabriskie, & Eggett, 2007). For youth, family religiosity was significantly related to the cohesion and flexibility of their family (Agate et al., 2007).

Religious practice may be just as influential as religious belief. For example, according to one study, parent and adolescent religious service attendance and importance of religion were significantly related to higher family satisfaction (Regnerus, 2006). Religious fathers reported better quality relationships with their children, greater expectations for positive relationships in the future, and application of more thought and effort to their relationships with their children. Likewise, religious divorced fathers reported feeling a greater degree of obligation to maintain

regular contact with their adult children and were more likely to provide emotional and financial support (King, 2003). Religious involvement appears to be equally important to mothers. One group found that children were more likely to report a higher level of satisfaction in the relationship with their mother if religion was important to the mother (Pearce & Axinn, 1998). Because marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement are significant elements in strengthening family relationships, comprehensively understanding how religiosity influences these elements is important.

Not all of the effects of religiosity on family life are positive, however. The specific content and interpretation of religious beliefs and practices may determine if they help or harm family relationships (Pargament, 1997). Religious beliefs can give value to any purpose or object, positive or negative emotion, goal or action (Pargament et al., 2005; Silberman et al., 2001) from an act of benevolence to an act of violence. For example, *selflessness* within a family could be interpreted as a way to focus on the needs of other family members in order to serve them in love. On the other hand, *selflessness* could also be interpreted as putting God first by sacrificing one's own and others' lives in acts of suicide (e.g., bombings or war) or homicide for the greater good. The use of religion as a weapon against family members and societies has been documented throughout the ages (see Silberman, 2005).

Another example of how religiosity could negatively affect families is that religious couples who believe that divorce is wrong may experience more psychological and emotional distress upon separation (Mahoney et al., 2001) even if they otherwise consider divorce to be the best solution. Additionally, couples who have different religious orientations may experience marital distress as they communicate about religion and make difficult decisions such as which church affiliation to adopt, which religious beliefs to teach their children, and which religious practices and traditions to continue. Furthermore, disagreement about religion between parents and adolescent children may also increase relationship distress and lead to less involvement and connectedness (Stokes & Regnerus, 2009). Although religious factors such as these are potentially destructive of family relationships, Seybold and Hill (2001) suggested that the construct of religiosity is complex and concluded that the influence of religiosity is usually beneficial. The present study rests upon that generalization and follows the Family Strengths framework by focusing on how religious beliefs and practices either increase or decrease the level of marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and meaningful family involvement.

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Unique influence of religion on family life. Among a myriad of other factors which may influence family relations, religion has a unique influence on individuals and families because of its focus on the sacred and unexplained events (Mahoney et al., 2001; Pargament & Mahoney, 2005). Hill and Pargament (2003) define the *sacred* as, "those special objects or events set apart from the ordinary and thus deserving of veneration…[including] concepts of God, the divine, Ultimate Reality, and the transcendent" (p. 65). Researchers and theorists (Dollahite and Marks, 2005; Mahoney et al., 2001) have identified religious beliefs and religious practices as distinct domains of religiosity with unique influences on family life. For example, Mahoney suggests that religious beliefs shape individuals' meaning, purpose, and core assumptions which then guide behaviors and interactions. Snarey and Dollahite (2001) similarly argued that "family and religious life interact to advance the psyche's deepest commitments and highest ideals" (p. 646). For example, couples who see their marriage with sacred significance or through a spiritual lens may have more unified goals and a clearer sense of the future together, which are strong predictors of marital and family commitment (Waite & Joyner, 2001).

There are a number of reasons why religion might have a particularly strong effect on family relations. In fact, Mahoney et al. (1999) found that religious couples viewed marriage and parenting as having spiritual meaning and believed that God was manifest in their marriage. For many religious families, marriage and family are sacred (Lauer, 1985; Mahoney et al., 1999). As Mahoney (2005) stated, "spiritual objectives of [the marriage relationship and the parent-child relationship] involve destinations that fall outside the purview of secular systems of meaning" (p. 692). In many religious marital relationships, God was described as the third partner where the couple grew closer to each other as they drew closer to God (Butler & Harper, 1994; Lambert & Dollahite, 2008). Furthermore, a perspective of parenthood as a sacred role has encouraged fathers and mothers to be more involved in their children's lives (Mahoney, in press). Thus, families with stronger religious beliefs and higher levels of religious practices may view family life in unique ways. Marital and family relationships that are viewed and valued as sacred by religious family members may be more committed and involved in meaningful activities.

Limitations of Previous Research

Although research on religiosity and family life has increased over the last twenty to thirty years (Mahoney, in press), relatively little is known regarding the pathways by which religiosity influences marital commitment (Lambert & Dollahite, 2008), parent-child closeness, and family involvement (Mahoney, in press). One concern is that previous research findings are

based almost exclusively on one- or two-item measures (e.g., frequency of church attendance, religious affiliation, or a global assessment of subjective religiousness) to assess religiosity and are thus limited in their depth and scope (Mahoney et al., 2001). For example, a meta-analysis by Mahoney (in press) reported that 79% of the studies on marriage and 76% of the studies on parent-child relationships relied only on one- or two-item measures of religiosity. Despite the use of these global religious measures, findings were still robust, signifying the importance of the link between religiosity and family life. Still, questions about how religiosity influences family life are left unanswered. Researchers have called for more sophisticated research on the intersections among religiosity, marriage, parenting, and family (Mahoney et al., 2001) as well as how multiple religious dimensions relate to family strengths (Dollahite & Marks, 2005; Pargament, Magyar-Russell, & Murray-Swank, 2005). The current research addresses this gap by analyzing the pathways among religious beliefs and religious practices and the family strengths variables of marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement.

Another concern is that "family research" often does not do well at using whole-family methodology (Handel, 1996) because it generally only includes data from one family member or focuses on one relationship within the family (e.g., marital or parent-child). According to Mahoney (in press), researchers need to measure the influence of religiosity in family relationships in new ways in order to better understand what it is about religiosity that makes a difference for families. As Handel noted, "No member of any family is a sufficient source of information for that family" (p. 346). The influence of one spouse on the other spouse is important to understand because relationships are two-sided. One spouse's beliefs or behaviors are not independent from the other (Kenny, 1996). Conclusions based on only one family member may be incomplete or misleading when applying the results to the family as a whole. To paint a more accurate picture of how religiosity influences family dynamics, it is important to study the linkages from the viewpoint of both wives and husbands (Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 1999). The benefit of measuring dyadic (i.e., couple) data is that the influence of couples' interrelated religious beliefs and practices can be examined on their own and each others' family strength variables. This possibility provides a more complete picture of how religiosity influences marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement. The current study addresses this concern by examining multiple family relationships from the perspective of both husbands and wives.

Purpose of the Present Study

  The purpose of the present study is to investigate how religious beliefs and practices influence marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement. The current research tests possible intrapersonal and interspousal pathways from religious beliefs and religious practices to marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement. Studying the interaction among multiple religious dimensions and family life help illuminate the processes of how religiosity and families interact and what aspects of religiosity relate to higher or lower levels of marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement. Secondary goals of the study are to advance theory development through a conceptual framework that specifies linkages that connect religiosity and family strengths and to apply methodological advances by using family level data analysis.

Theoretical Framework

  A theoretical framework is imperative to understand beyond the *what* of our data to the *why* and *how* about families (Bengtson, Acock, Allen, Dilworth-Anderson, & Klein; 2005, emphasis in original). Still, some family researchers have not used theory to guide their research (Taylor & Bagd, 2005). In fact, many studies have been empirically driven rather than theory driven (Snarey & Dollahite, 2001). The absence of theories that link family relationships and religiosity is also prevalent. In reaction to this trend, theorists and researchers (Chatters & Taylor, 2005; Snarey & Dollahite, 2001) have called for theories that explain the relationship between religiosity and family life. In the current study, I adapt the research-based conceptual models of Dollahite and Marks (2005) and Mahoney and colleagues (2001) to create a conceptual framework that helps explain the linkages among religious beliefs, religious practices, marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement.

Religiosity Frameworks

  Families striving to fulfill sacred purposes. Dollahite and Marks' (2005) religiosity framework (see Figure 1) is a useful perspective that links a larger range of religious dimensions to family outcomes by discussing the methods of interaction among religious beliefs and practices and family life. Entitled *The Contexts, Processes, and Outcomes of Families Striving to Fulfill Sacred Purposes*, it includes *contexts*, *family processes*, and *outcomes* associated with religious families. The religious contexts section of the framework consists of *spiritual beliefs* (e.g., relationship with God, identity, and sacred meanings and goals), *religious practices* (e.g., prayer, study of religious texts, and sacred traditions), and *faith community* (e.g., church

attendance, organizational involvement, and service). According to Dollahite et al. (2004), "past research has too frequently examined only one of these [religious] dimensions at a time, thereby failing to capture the complex interaction of religious beliefs, practices, and communities in family life" (p. 413). Their framework provides the grounding for a multi-dimensional perspective which allows for a more holistic perspective of the impact of religiosity on family life.

Religious and Spiritual Purposes and Involvement **(Contexts)**	*Striving Together to Fulfill Sacred Purposes* **(Processes)**	*Personal, Marital, Family, and Community "Blessings"* **(Outcomes)**
Spiritual Beliefs: religious ideas, ideals, identity, intentions; relationship with God; doctrines; sacred meanings and goals **Religious Practices:** sacred rituals and traditions; prayer; study; holy days; vows and covenants; religion-based abstinence and sacrifice **Faith Community:** worship; contributions; organizational involvement; service and support; moral obligations and opportunities	• Turning to God for support, guidance, and strength • Sanctifying family by living religion at home • Resolving conflict with prayer and forgiveness • Loving and serving others • Overcoming challenges and trials through shared faith • Abstaining from proscribed activities and substances • Sacrificing time, money, comfort, and convenience • Nurturing spiritual growth through example, teaching, and discussion • Putting faith & family ahead of personal & secular interests	**Personal Peace and Health:** perspective; physical, mental, emotional health; meaning; purpose; growth, confidence, **Marital Trust and Happiness:** fidelity; commitment; resolved conflict; intimacy; respect; role clarity; shared purpose; stability **Family Unity:** kindness; stability; security; happiness; satisfaction; love; coherence; shared purpose **Community Support & Connection:** social, temporal, spiritual support in "faith family;" models across life course; deep, abiding, caring relationships

Figure 1. The Contexts, Processes, and Outcomes of Families Striving to Fulfill Sacred Purposes framework. Taken from "How Highly Religious Families Strive to Fulfill Sacred Purposes," and used with permission of D. Dollahite, and L. Marks, 2005. In V. L. Bengtson, A. C. Acock, K. R. Allen, P. Dilworth-Anderson, & D. M. Klein (Eds.), *Sourcebook of Family Theory and Research* (pp. 533-541). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

The substantive and functional elements of religion. A complementary framework developed by Mahoney and colleagues (2001) helps to validate the religious contexts section of Dollahite and Marks'ss (2005) framework. Mahoney's framework, distilled from her meta-analysis, includes two themes: the *substantive element of religion* and the *functional element of religion*. The *substantive element* refers to the first two elements of Dollahite and Marks' contexts section, namely spiritual beliefs (e.g., faith in God and belief in miracles) and religious practices (e.g., prayer, study of religious texts, and religious traditions). Mahoney suggests that

religious beliefs shape core assumptions and goals about behavior which guide actions and choices about family interactions. The *functional element* refers to the social purposes of religion (i.e., faith community), and relates to the third element of Dollahite and Marks' contexts section. For example, involvement in a faith community provides a social network with opportunities to give and receive social and physical support. This type of support can occur regardless of religious beliefs or practices and can positively affect individuals and families experiencing good times or bad times. Thus, the two frameworks work together to explain how religion may have multiple ways of influencing family life.

   Integration of religiosity and family strengths. The particular theory which guides the current study is derived from the research and theoretical frameworks of Dollahite and Marks (2005), Mahoney and colleagues (2001), and Stinnett and DeFrain (1985). I included the salient variables from the current study (as operationalized in Appendix A) in order to test a theoretical framework (see Figure 2) and measure the direct and indirect effects among religious beliefs and religious practices and the family strengths variables of marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement. As indicated by Dollahite and Marks's, and Mahoney's frameworks, religious beliefs and religious practices are separate domains that can have a different and unique effect on family life. As delineated in the literature review, religious beliefs and practices have varying influences on marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement. The current study includes both religious domains to increase understanding about what influence each has on family strengths.

   The religious beliefs and religious practices domains of the Religiosity and Family Strengths framework come from the *contexts* section of Dollahite and Marks's framework and also fall under the *substantive element of religion* construct (except for church attendance) in Mahoney's framework. Church attendance comes from *faith community* in Dollahite and Marks's framework and falls under the *functional element of religion* construct in Mahoney's framework. The marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement constructs come from the Family Strengths framework (DeFrain & Asay, 2007a) and fall under the *outcomes* section of Dollahite and Marks's framework. In summary, the frameworks of Dollahite and Marks, Mahoney and colleagues, and Stinnett and DeFrain guide the theoretical framework (Figure 2) that is tested in the current study.

   The Religiosity and Family Strengths framework includes religious beliefs, religious practices, and family strengths. *Religious beliefs* include identity (e.g., I am a child of God; my

relationships as a child, sibling, and parent are sacred), purpose (e.g., the purpose of life is to serve God by serving others in order to return to live with God after this life), and guidance in making life decisions (Hill et al., 2000; Hill & Pargament, 2003). Religious beliefs precede religious practices as suggested by Mahoney et al.'s (2001) theoretical framework. Religious beliefs provide a paradigm or lens through which religious individuals see the world and experience life. These religious beliefs give meaning to their experiences and to the world in which they live. This paradigm influences religious individuals' practices, goals, behaviors, and decisions on how they organize and spend their time and what is important and meaningful to them (Mahoney et al., 2001; Silberman, 2005). For example, if family is important to them, within the limits of their restrictions and abilities, they will organize their time in a way that demonstrates that family is a priority. It is important to acknowledge that not all individuals and
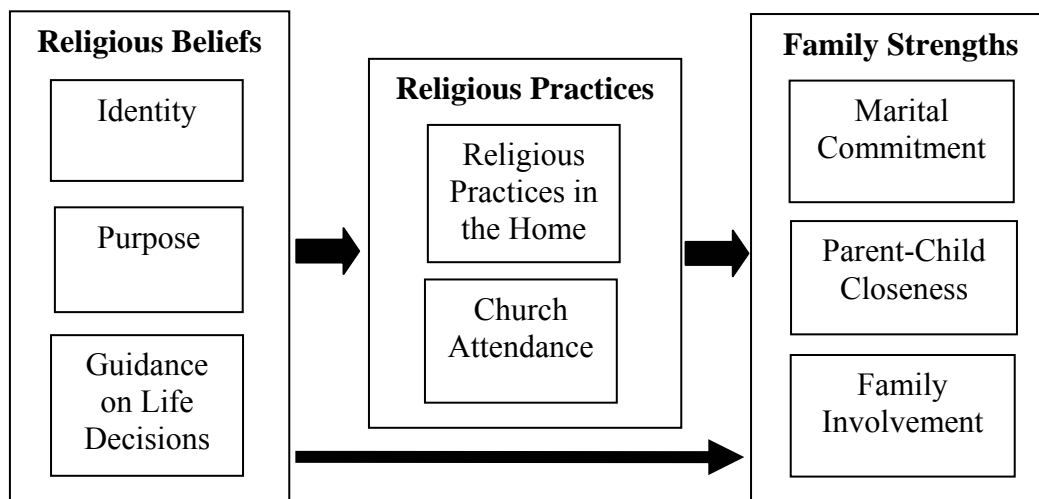
Figure 2. Religiosity and Family Strengths Framework.

families have an equal opportunity to practice their beliefs according to their desires due to the limitations of time and the restrictions life imposes on them. For example, families with fewer resources and income may be very religious or wish to participate in religious practices such as church attendance yet are limited due to their working multiple jobs, lack of transportation, or having other time restrictions that do not provide the occasion they would prefer. Families may be restricted in what they can do because they have family care responsibilities such as an aging parent or a child with special needs. In sum, the degree to which individuals and families participate in practicing their religious beliefs and are involved with their families depends on the context in which they live and the opportunities provided them. An assumption I make in the

Religiosity and Family Strengths framework is that religious families will use their agency, within the restrictions and opportunities in which they find themselves, to choose to participate in religious practices, especially practices done in the home (e.g., prayer, having religious discussions, reading religious texts), and to choose to be more involved as a family.

Religious practices include prayer, the study of religious texts, religious family discussions, religious celebrations, and other sacred routines and traditions. These practices provide opportunities for families to interact and build cohesion. Religious practices also include *church attendance,* which has often been used in research and theory as a proxy for many of the previously stated religious beliefs and practices. Church attendance (i.e., attendance of religious services) continues to be used as a proxy for these items as well as the more functional elements of religion such as public worship, organizational involvement, and feeling part of the larger congregational "family." Church attendance can provide a consistent opportunity for personal and religious reflection and is important because it is the place where religious doctrine is taught, promises or covenants are made, and spiritual strength is renewed. Religious practices in the home and church attendance provide informal and formal opportunities for religious families to be involved and to show their commitment to one another.

Family Strengths is measured in the present study by level of marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and positive family involvement. As will be discussed and defined in the review of the literature section, marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and positive family involvement are elements in the Family Strengths framework and are important for strengthening families (DeFrain & Asay, 2007; Stinnett, 1979). If these elements of family strengths can be increased through specific relationships of religiosity, the findings can provide additional handles for prevention and intervention worker who focus on strengthening families.

The Religiosity and Family Strengths framework (Figure 2) illustrates the relationships by which religious beliefs and practices influence marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement (see Appendix A for the operationalization of constructs). Religious beliefs are theorized to influence family life because beliefs shape the goals families have and therefore their decisions and actions as they work toward their goals. For example, family members demonstrate an increased desire and motivation to interact with and sacrifice for each other when their belief system states that family is a priority over other endeavors (Marks & Dollahite, 2001). Dollahite and Marks (2009) found that although doctrinal beliefs can be important, many families were guided by the personal connection or relationship they had with

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God. When there is agreement in regard to religious practices, they are theorized to influence family life by providing structured and meaningful family activities where family members can discuss important issues, have meaningful experiences together, and better understand each other in a way that enhances unity and family cohesion. The daily decisions and behaviors of family members shape who they are and who they will be (Day, 2003). In summary, religious beliefs and religious practices (e.g., family prayer, family religious discussions, reading religious texts as a family, and attending church together) may strengthen family bonds and provide a basis for family involvement and commitment in unique ways (Dollahite, 2003; Mahoney, 2005; Mahoney et al., 2001).

Summary

Increasing family strengths is an important goal for individuals, communities, and the United States (Obama, 2009), and represents an ever-evolving area of study. In an effort to better understand the unique role that religion plays in family life, previous researchers have called for the development of additional theories and conceptual frameworks. The current study is guided by the Religiosity and Family Strengths framework which is derived from the frameworks of Dollahite and Marks (2005), Mahoney and colleagues (2001), and Stinnett and DeFrain (1985). The Religiosity and Family Strengths framework explores the linkages among religious beliefs, religious practices, and family life and helps illuminate how these religious dimensions may relate to higher or lower levels of marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement. Because marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement are significant elements in strengthening family relationships, understanding more fully how religiosity may influence these elements is important. The following sections contain a discussion of the intricate relationships among religious beliefs, religious practices, and church attendance and the family strengths constructs of marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement and provide a foundation for the study which follows.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Family Strengths framework of Stinnett and DeFrain (1985) provides a theoretical grounding for this empirical study. Specifically, I focus on the relationships among three elements from the Family Strengths framework, namely, religious well-being, family commitment, and family involvement. I include *commitment, closeness,* and *involvement* as key indicators of family strength (DeFrain & Asay, 2007b) and as the outcome variables in the three models of the current study. Commitment, closeness, and involvement can be found in varying degrees in any spousal or parent-child relationship and may be influenced by religiosity. Previously, researchers have focused narrowly on how these markers present themselves in either marital or parental relationships. Here, the relevant literature on commitment, closeness, involvement, and religiosity in marital and parental relationships is brought together in a way that demonstrates both the appropriateness of the connections theorized in the present study and supports the need for further research.

Religiosity and Marital Commitment

Commitment among family members has been associated with various positive outcomes for marriages and children (Adams & Jones, 1997; Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston, 1999). For example, marital commitment is the strongest predictor of marital quality (Clements & Swensen, 2000; Goddard, 2007) and lifetime commitment to marriage is most important to participants in happy, long-term marriages (Fenell, 1993). Stanley and Markman (1992) suggested that commitment encompasses two related constructs: personal dedication and constraint commitment. Personal dedication is described as an individual's desire to maintain or improve his or her relationship quality for the mutual benefit of both participants. Stanley and Markman proposed that dedication to the marriage is shown by an individual's effort to improve it, to sacrifice for it, and to seek the partner's welfare. When marriages have high levels of commitment, family relationships are thought of more in terms of "us" and "we" rather than "me" and "them" and sacrificing time and effort for each other is not seen as a burden. The current study defines commitment similarly to Stanley and Markman; specifically that *marital commitment* is personal dedication to the relationship which takes priority over other life endeavors, and that sacrifice and great effort is exerted to strengthen the marital relationship (Defrain & Asay, 2007b; Goddard, 2007; Stanley & Markman, 1992). If commitment is an important element in strengthening marriages, understanding what influences are most likely to strengthen marital commitment is important. As depicted in Figure 3, part one of the current

study looks at the associations among religious beliefs, religious practices, and marital commitment (see Appendix A for the Operationalization of Constructs).
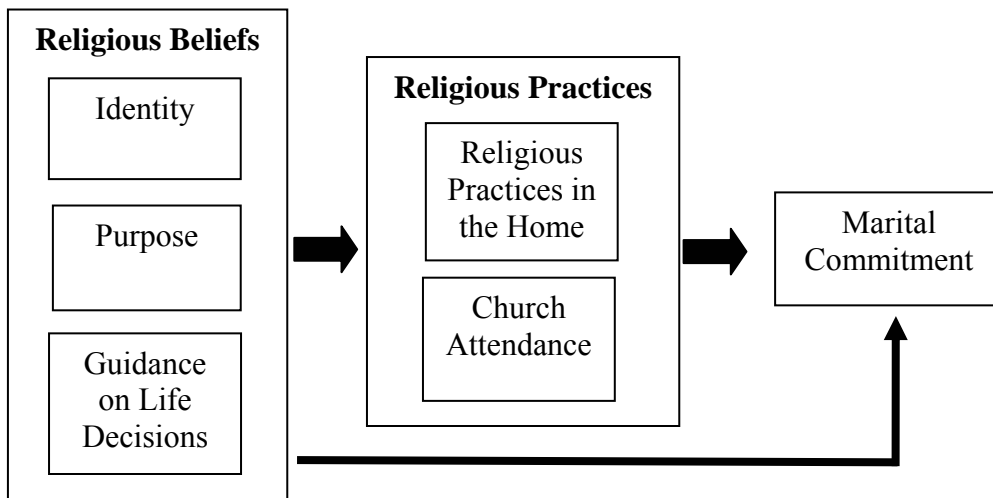
Figure 3. Religiosity and Marital Commitment

Religious beliefs have been linked to couples having higher levels of marital commitment (Mahoney et al., 2001; Sullivan, 2001). For example, when compared to women with lower commitment to orthodox religious beliefs, women with more orthodox religious beliefs had increased marital commitment and felt that nonmarital sexual relationships were wrong (Call & Heaton, 1997). Marital commitment might be strengthened through theological teachings against divorce and those that emphasize the importance of marriage. For example, some religious leaders teach married couples to view marriage as a life-long commitment not to be taken lightly and that divorce should be a last resort (Mahoney et al., 2001). Sharing religious beliefs about the importance of marriage may help couples remain committed over time (Mahoney et al., 2001). Lambert and Dollahite (2008) found that religious beliefs provided couples with an eternal perspective (i.e., that family relationships continue beyond the grave) that helped them through difficult times (e.g., after the death of a child, parents believed they would see their child again after passing beyond death themselves). Consequently, couples who believed their marital relationship would last after death placed a higher value on making the marriage work. Couples with greater religiousness preferred a marriage model that emphasized commitment to marriage and individual sacrifice over other marriage models that emphasized lower commitment, such as no-fault divorce (Sanchez, Nock, Wright, & Gager, 2002). Furthermore, sacrifice for the partner and the relationship is often taught by religious leaders to

be more important than individual desires. Religious texts and traditions about marriage also emphasize expectations to sacrifice for the needs of the partner, marriage, and family; marriage as a lifelong (and sometimes eternal) commitment; the value of sexual fidelity; being unselfish, humble, and patient; and the importance of raising children (Lauer, 1985; Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Murray-Swank, 2003). These teachings provide religious couples a belief system which complements and supports their marital commitment.

Religious practices have been linked to higher levels of marital commitment (Mahoney, in press) and marital quality (Mahoney et al., 1999). Implications for family functioning for families who participate in religious activities (e.g., shared prayer, religious routines at home, and religious conversations in the home) have just recently emerged (Mahoney, in press). Lambert and Dollahite (2006) found that participating in religious practices strengthened a couple's desire to stay married throughout their lives. An older study (Gruner, 1985) found that frequent use of prayer as well as Bible reading (although to a lesser degree) positively influenced couples' marital adjustment. While prayer has previously been linked to marital satisfaction, it has often been measured as a dichotomous variable rather than as an ordinal or continuous variable; that is, asking do you pray, rather than asking how often do you pray and about what and with whom do you pray (Dollahite et al., 2004). In an effort to be more comprehensive and to better understand the specific factors at play in strengthening families, the current study included five types of prayer (e.g., couple prayer, family prayer) as well as the frequency of each type of prayer.

Frequency of *church attendance* has been linked to couples having higher levels of marital commitment (Call & Heaton, 1997; Larson & Goltz, 1989; Mahoney et al., 2001) even after controlling for marital satisfaction and various demographic variables (Wilson & Musick, 1996), suggesting that church attendance has a unique effect on marital commitment. Brody, Stoneman, and Flor (1996) found that religious attendance was related to better marital quality for African American mothers and fathers. Higher church attendance of both husbands and wives reduced the likelihood of a marriage's dissolution with the lowest risk for marital disruption occurring when both spouses attended church regularly (Call & Heaton, 1997; Wilcox, 2005). Additionally, those who attended church more often were less likely to participate in marital infidelity (Burdette, Ellison, Sherkat, & Gore, 2007). On the other hand, in a recent meta-analysis Mahoney (in press) reported that the influence of religious attendance has weakened

over time. The current study included the influence of religious attendance on marital commitment as an element of the religious practices construct.

Negative Effects of Religiosity on Marital Commitment

Although family religiosity does account for substantial levels of marital satisfaction, greater collaboration in problem solving, and less conflict (Mahoney et al., 1999), in some cases it may have the opposite effect. Studies on the negative influence of religiosity on marital commitment are relatively rare, but findings are conclusive (e.g., Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998). Religiosity may lead a family to make decisions that are not in the best interest of its members. For example, a couple may stay in an abusive marriage when it would be better to seek divorce. A spouse might follow his/her religious beliefs to sacrifice time, energy, and personal desires for his/her partner while the other partner takes advantage of this sacrifice and fails to reciprocate. The level of marital commitment could differ among spouses based on level of religiosity and interpretation of religious held beliefs (e.g., believing divorce is a good option; how to discipline children) which could increase conflict in the home as well as intensify a high conflict marriage (Mahoney et al., 2001). For example, couples who have different standards for church attendance are more likely to divorce than are couples who never attend church (Call & Heaton, 1997). Thus, the influence of religiosity on marital commitment can be either positive or negative for families, depending on the particular situation.

Summary

While the above research suggests that religiosity (religious beliefs and practices) may influence marital commitment, the precise relationships between couples are unclear. Mahoney has called for additional theorizing and research to find and understand the religious relationships that matter for both spouses. Dollahite et al. (2004), similarly state that "although religiosity has repeatedly been positively associated with both marital satisfaction and marital stability, researchers have not adequately explained these findings. A better understanding of the [family-religiosity] linkage may be derived from increased emphasis on the relationship between well-measured proximal variables" (p. 418). The current study contributes to the field by measuring the influence of religious beliefs and religious practices on marital commitment as reported by the couple. The current study follows the Religiosity and Family Strengths framework to examine how religious beliefs and practices either facilitate or inhibit marital commitment. Furthermore, it addresses Mahoney's call for better and more reasoned theorizing as well as more nuanced associations between religious dimensions and family life.

Religiosity and Parent-Child Closeness

Closeness among family members has been associated with various positive outcomes for children and families (Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston, 1999). For example, parent-child closeness has been positively associated with better mental health and social skills, higher school achievement, and reduced conduct disorders and risk behaviors for children (Lezin, Rolleri, Bean, & Taylor, 2004). *Closeness* is the idea that family members feel connected with one another in an intimate way (Defrain, 1999; Mahoney, in press). When closeness exists in the parent-child relationship, parents are able to relate to their child, feel a sense of togetherness with their child, and feel connected to their child. Because closeness is an important element in strengthening the parent-child relationship, understanding the influences most connected to parent-child closeness is important. As depicted in Figure 4, part two of the present study looks at the associations among religious beliefs, religious practices, and parent-child closeness (see Appendix A for detailed items).
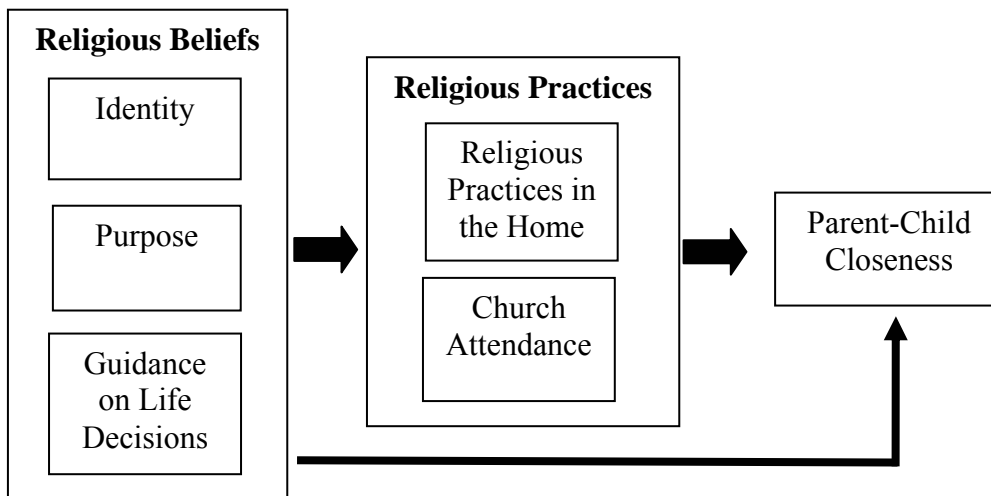
Figure 4. Religiosity and Parent-Child Closeness

Religious beliefs promote greater closeness in the parent-child relationship (Dollahite, 2003; Dollahite, Marks, & Olson, 1998; Marks & Dollahite, 2001; Olson, Dollahite, & White, 2002). Many adults in religious families turn to their faith for guidance on how to be a better parent. Most religious traditions teach that being a parent is a sacred calling, that family is a sacred unit, and that both should be made a priority and put in balance with secular pursuits such as work and individual hobbies (Bartkowski & Ellison, 1995; Marks & Dollahite, 2001). King (2003) found a link between global paternal religiousness and greater father-child relationship

quality and parenting effort for both married and divorced fathers. Obedience, respect, honesty, self-esteem, service to others, doing well scholastically, and abstaining from substance abuse and premarital sexual behaviors are all values that religions endorse and encourage parents to teach their children (Mahoney et al., 2001; Nonnemaker, McNeely, & Blum, 2003; Regnerus & Burdette, 2006; Trusty & Watts, 1999; Wilcox, 1998). As Mahoney (2005) described, the spiritual meaning of parent-child relationships are beyond secular discussions. For example, some religions teach that children are gifts from God and that parents have a sacred responsibility to nurture and care for their children (Mahoney et al., 2001). The religious belief that parents have a stewardship over their children, with whom God has blessed them, may strengthen their connection to their children and help guide their actions and decisions.

Religious practices may be linked to increased parent-child closeness. For example, the more often mothers and adolescents had religious discussions about personal religious beliefs (e.g., views about religion, ideas about who or what God is, and differences in religious practices and beliefs), the higher their relationship satisfaction and intimacy (Brelsford & Mahoney, 2008). Dollahite et al. (1998) suggested that participation in prayer, reading religious texts, engaging in sacred routines, and having religious conversations gave stability to family life and provided opportunities for parents to connect with their children. Furthermore, religious practices provided opportunities in which to plan their time as well as to counsel together and share personal feelings and beliefs. Another study found that fathers had a strong connection with their children when they gave spiritual guidance or participated in religious practices (e.g., prayer, religious discussions) together (Brotherson, Dollahite, & Hawkins, 2005).

The findings are equivocal with regard to how *church attendance* relates to parent-child closeness. Dollahite (1999) suggested that religious communities (i.e., fellow members and religious leaders) encourage men to be connected to their families, responsible to their children, and better husbands and fathers. Religious communities also provide a network of other like-minded fathers who may act as a support (Ellison & George, 1994). On the other hand, Mahoney (in press) found that adolescents felt more satisfied in their relationship with their parents the greater the individual religiousness of either the adolescent or the parent but did not feel more satisfied in their relationship with their parents based on religious attendance or affiliation (Mahoney, in press). Clearly, additional research in this area is needed.

Negative Effects of Religiosity on Parent-Child Closeness

Although family religiosity can account for increased feelings of closeness in the parent-child relationship (Mahoney et al., 1999), in some cases it may have the opposite effect. Studies on the negative influence of religiosity on parent-child closeness are relatively rare, but have been found (Pearce & Axinn, 1998; Stokes & Regnerus, 2009). Religiosity may lead family members to make decisions that increase conflict. For example, if children differ from their parents in their religious beliefs and practices, overall levels of conflict may increase, causing division rather than closeness in the relationship. Thus, the influence of religiosity on parent-child closeness can be either positive or negative for families, depending on the religious agreement between children and parents.

Summary

While the above research suggests that religious beliefs and practices may influence parent-child closeness, the linkages between couples are unclear. Mahoney has called for additional theorizing and research to find and understand the religious linkages that matter for husbands and wives. The current study contributes to the field by measuring the influence of religious beliefs and religious practices on parent-child closeness as reported by the couple. The current study follows the Religiosity and Family Strengths framework to examine how religious beliefs and practices were associated with parent-child closeness. Furthermore, it addresses Mahoney's call for more reasoned theorizing as well as more nuanced linkages among religious dimensions and family life.

Religiosity and Family Involvement

Keeping in line with the above-stated findings, research has also demonstrated that meaningful family involvement leads to positive outcomes for families and children (DeFrain & Asay, 2007b; Holman & Epperson, 1984; Smith, Freeman, & Zabriskie, 2009). In this context, *meaningful involvement* has been described (see DeFrain & Asay, 2007b; Popenoe, 1996) as quality and quantity of time, enjoying each other's company, interacting and sharing good times together, counseling together, and supporting each other in activities (e.g., helping with homework and attending each other's activities). For example, Popenoe (1996) and Blankenhorn (1995) found that when fathers were involved with their children in meaningful ways, children did better socially, emotionally, physically, economically, academically, and spiritually. Hofferth and Sandberg (2001) similarly found that family involvement was positively associated with children's educational achievement and risk behaviors. According to the core and balance

model of family leisure functioning (Smith et al., 2009), core family activities such as playing games and eating dinner together cultivated family closeness and cohesion. Wilcox (2002b) found that parental involvement with their children created a stronger feeling of connection allowing for more emotional warmth and less negative or abusive behavior. Although negative family involvement (e.g., abuse) can lead to negative outcomes, the current research focuses on involvement in meaningful, positive ways as suggested by Popenoe (1996). Because meaningful involvement can be significant in strengthening family relationships, discovering the influences most likely to support meaningful family involvement is beneficial. As depicted in Figure 5, part three of the current study looks at the associations among religious beliefs, religious practices, and family involvement. Family involvement (see Appendix A for detailed items) encompasses parent-child involvement and involvement as a family unit.
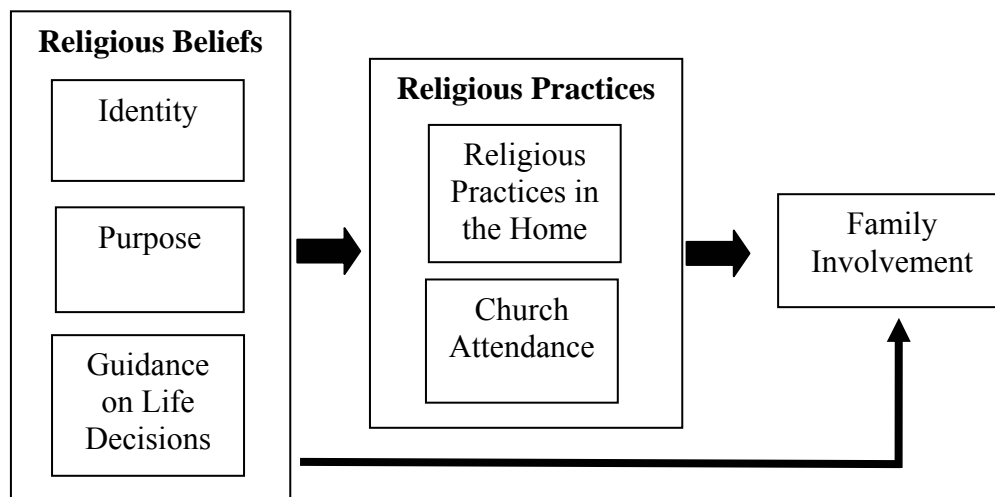
Figure 5. Religiosity and Family Involvement

Religiosity and Parent-Child Involvement

Many studies of parent-child involvement have found religiosity to be a positive influence on this facet of family relations (Mahoney, in press; Mahoney et al., 2001). Specifically, *religious beliefs* have been linked to parental involvement with children (Dollahite et al., 2004). For example, Mahoney et al. (2003) found that mothers with more conservative beliefs about the Bible (i.e., the Bible is the literal word of God) had greater positive mother-child interactions. Dollahite and colleagues (Dollahite, 2003; Marks & Dollahite, 2001) found in their qualitative studies that religious beliefs and practices encouraged fathers to be meaningfully involved with their children, especially fathers who were adjusting to a disability of a child.

Religiously conservative teachings and beliefs (e.g., as held by members of conservative denominations) motivated fathers to be more involved with their children (Marks & Dollahite, 2007; Wilcox, 2004). Specifically, those with a conservative Protestant affiliation were consistently more likely than unaffiliated men to engage in one-on-one conversations with their school-age children, be involved with youth activities, and have dinner with their children (Wilcox, 2002b).

Although *religious practices* have been linked to parental involvement (Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005), only a few studies have directly investigated the link between parental religious practices and parent-child interactions. For example, Dollahite (1998) suggested that participation in religious practices such as reading religious texts, having religious conversations, prayer, and sacred routines provided opportunities to have structured and unstructured time as families. More research needs to be done in order to better understand which types of religious practices influence meaningful parental involvement with their children.

Frequency of *church attendance* has been linked to parental involvement in the lives of children (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 1998; Mahoney, in press; Mahoney et al., 2001; Wilcox, 2002a). For example, parents who attended church services weekly were 80 % more likely than parents who attended church services less frequently to score high on the measure of parental involvement (i.e., spending time in activities like homework help, volunteering with their teenage children, and playing sports) and were significantly more likely to end up among the top third of parents who reported the most one-on-one interaction with their school-age children (Wilcox, 2002a). Regular religious participation reported by young adults demonstrated significantly higher levels of social interaction and shared vision with their parents (King & Furrow, 2004). Additionally, positive perceptions of religion and frequent attendance at religious activities by high school seniors were significantly related to positive parental involvement (Trusty & Watts, 1999). In summary, meaningful parent-child involvement has been found to be positively related to frequency of church attendance.

Religiosity has been specifically linked to greater *father involvement* with their children (Dollahite, 2003; Dollahite et al., 2004; Dollahite, Marks, & Olson, 1998; Marks & Dollahite, 2001; Olson, Dollahite, & White, 2002). Fathers with high levels of religious participation (at least several times per month) reported greater paternal involvement in youth-related activities (Wilcox, 2002b) as well as the highest frequency of engagement with their children (Petts, 2007). This was true whether the father was married or divorced. Based on national surveys, greater

church attendance is linked to greater father-child interaction, paternal supervision, and affection (Bartkowski & Xu, 2000). Religious attendance is also helpful in encouraging significant involvement for fathers who were adapting to the disability or death of a child (Dollahite, 2003; Marks & Dollahite, 2001).

In contrast to research on fathers, few studies have researched *mother-child involvement* in the study of religiosity and family life (Mahoney, in press; Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005). This is surprising given the research that women are more likely to attend church, use religious coping mechanisms, and pray (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001). The minimal research on mothers in the study of religiosity may be because mothers are already heavily involved in family life (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Religion may have a unique influence on the level fathers are involved in family life yet not have the same influence for mother involvement. In a longitudinal study, Pearce and Axinn (1998) found that mothers who frequently attended church had qualitatively better relationships with their children than mothers who rarely attended church. Furthermore, the more religious the mother became over the first 18 years of the child's life, the higher the relationship quality became. The level of importance religion had for the mother also had a strong positive effect on the parent-child relationship even when controlling for church attendance. Additionally, the more important religion was for the mother the better the child reported the relationship quality. Thus, although some research links religiosity to mother-child involvement, more research is needed.

Although previous researchers have found some linkages among religious beliefs, religious practices, and parent-child involvement, more investigation is needed on the influence spouses have on each other and on the comparative influence of these religious dimensions on meaningfully parent-child involvement (Mahoney, in press). The current study moves the field forward by examining these specific linkages for both mothers and fathers.

Religiosity and Involvement as a Family Unit

Religiosity has been associated with the amount of family involvement and type of family involvement (Dollahite et al., 2004; Mahoney et al., 2001; Pearce & Axinn, 1998), yet family involvement is usually measured in dyadic relationships only (e.g., couple or parent-child involvement). Little is known about the link between religiosity and involvement as a family unit. The current study examines both parent-child involvement as well as involvement as a family unit to better understand if there is a difference in how religiosity influences these family processes. Therefore, the current study measured the influence of religious beliefs and religious

practices not only on dyadic involvement (e.g., parent-child) but also on family involvement (e.g., family dinner, family time over the weekend, decisions made together as a family).

Both *religious beliefs* and *religious practices* have been linked to family involvement. The literature on the relationship between *religious beliefs* and family involvement is particularly sparse, however, and more research is needed in this area. What results do exist seem to point to a positive effect. For example, Agate et al. (2007) found that spiritual beliefs promoted family activities such as talking with each other and eating dinner together. Pearce and Axinn (1998) found that for their Judeo-Christian sample, the Judeo-Christian doctrine, as well as belief in the Bible, encouraged loving family relations.

Regarding *religious practices*, Mahoney et al. (2001) suggest that religious activities provide unique opportunities for families to be involved together which may be more or less beneficial for family outcomes than other types of family involvement. For example, time spent by parents with their children in prayer, church attendance, and other religious activities provided meaningful opportunities for building parent-child relations (Pearce & Axinn, 1998). For parents, family religiosity (i.e., informal and formal religious practices such as prayer and church attendance) was positively correlated with core family leisure activities which included everyday, informal activities such as playing in the yard or eating dinner together. For youth, family religiosity was positively correlated with core family leisure activities as well as novel activities (e.g., family vacations) that occurred less frequently (Agate et al., 2007).

Church attendance has also been linked to family involvement (Pearce & Axinn, 1998). For example, not only were families involved together as they attended church meetings and other religious activities but the social ties that linked family members and friends together provided informal leisure opportunities to meet together and build positive family relationships (Agate et al., 2007; Pearce & Axinn, 1998). Thus, compared to less religious families, families that were more religious felt their family had better relationships and healthier interactions (Agate et al., 2007).

Negative Effects of Religiosity on Involvement

Generally, religiosity is positively related to meaningful family involvement through theological teachings that encourage one-on-one involvement, couple involvement, and family involvement as well as religious practices such as participation in holiday and other traditions, family prayer, family religious discussions, and church attendance (see Mahoney, in press). However, in some cases, religiosity could be negatively related to family involvement. For

example, one spouse might spend much of his/her time in church related activities or service causing the other spouse to become resentful and react negatively to religious participation. Similarly, multiple family members may be so involved in church service, possibly at different times throughout the week, that they have less time with each other, leading to a decreased level of family involvement rather than increased family involvement. Additionally, family members who disagree on the importance of religion and argue over participating in religious practices (e.g., a parent-child disagreement of having to attend church or not) could experience increased conflict, leading to decreased family involvement (Fiese & Tomcho, 2001; Marks, 2004). Thus, the influence of religiosity on family involvement can be positive or negative.

Summary

While the above research suggests that religious beliefs and practices may influence parent-child and family involvement, the specific associations and relationships are unclear. More work is needed to identify the religious dimensions that encourage families to be meaningfully involved in a variety of ways. Surprisingly, the link between religiosity and family involvement has been neglected or ignored (Mahoney, in press). Guided by the Religiosity and Family Strengths framework, the current study contributes to the literature by examining the associations between religious beliefs and religious practices and whether they facilitate or inhibit parent-child involvement or involvement as a family unit, as reported by both husbands and wives.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

Although past researchers have measured some aspects of how religiosity affects family relationships, sparse literature using family data (i.e., data from more than one family member) has examined how multiple religious domains influence family strengths (Mahoney et al., 2001). Global measures of religiosity provide minimal insight into the extent to which couples and families integrate religion into their daily lives because it is difficult for researchers to determine what it is about church attendance or religious affiliation that is significant for families. Researchers (Dollahite et al., 2004; Mahoney, in press) have called for future investigation to measure how multiple domains of religiosity are related to family life. For the current study, I contribute to the literature by examining the associations among the multiple religious domains of religious beliefs and religious practices, and the family strengths constructs of marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement. Within the largely Judeo-Christian sample, I measure a broader range of religious elements within each religious domain, as well as the multiple interrelationships among the religious dimensions and the family outcomes four couples. This contributes to the literature by providing increased understanding of how family members' religiosity relates to not only themselves, but also each other.

Research Hypotheses

The purpose of the current study was to investigate how couples' religious beliefs and practices are related to marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement. I investigate the influence husbands' and wives' religiosity has on their own marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement as well as their partner's marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement. The family involvement construct encompasses parent-child involvement and involvement as a family unit. I posit the following hypotheses:

Marital Commitment

1. Participant's religious *beliefs* and *practices* are positively related to their *own* marital commitment.

2. Participant's religious *beliefs* and *practices* are positively related to their *partner's* marital commitment.

Parent-Child Closeness

3. Participant's religious *beliefs* and *practices* are positively related to their *own* parent-child closeness.

4. Participant's religious *beliefs* and *practices* are positively related to their *partner's* parent-child closeness.

Parent-Child Involvement

5. Participant's religious *beliefs* and *practices* are positively related to their *own* parent-child involvement.

6. Participant's religious *beliefs* and *practices* are positively related to their *partner's* parent-child involvement.

Involvement as a Family Unit

7. Participant's religious *beliefs* and *practices* are positively related to their *own* involvement in a family unit.

8. Participant's religious *beliefs* and *practices* are positively related to their *partner's* involvement in a family unit.

Participants and Procedures

For the present study, I used the 305 two-parent families that remained from Wave 1 (2007) to Wave 2 (2008) of the *Flourishing Families Project (FFP)*. Because most of the religious practice items were added at wave 2 and religious beliefs, church attendance, and marital commitment are only asked every other year (i.e., wave 1 and wave 3), I used the data (waves 1 and 2) as a cross-sectional sample rather than a longitudinal sample. In other words, religious beliefs, church attendance, and couple commitment came from wave 1, and religious practices, parent-child closeness, parent-child involvement, and family involvement came from wave 2. To better understand the differences between the variables from wave 1 to wave 2, I analyzed the means of the parent-child closeness measure using a t-test and found no significant difference between the two waves of data collection. Therefore, using data from two waves of data should not have a significant effect on the results.

The FFP is an ongoing, longitudinal study of inner family life involving families with a child between the ages of 10 and 14 at wave 1 (*M* age of child = 12.35, *SD* = 1.01, 51% male). FFP participants were selected from a large northwestern city, and were primarily recruited using a purchased national telephone survey database (Polk Directories/InfoUSA). This database reportedly selected 82 million households across the United States and gathered detailed information about each household. Families identified using the Polk Directory were randomly selected from targeted census tracts that mirrored the socio-economic and racial stratification of reports of local school districts. All families with a child between the ages of 10 and 14 living

within target census tracts were deemed eligible to participate in the study. Of the 692 eligible families contacted, 423 agreed to participate, resulting in a 61% response rate. However, because the Polk Directory national database was generated using telephone, magazine, and internet subscription reports, families of lower socio-economic status were under-represented. Therefore, in an attempt to more closely mirror the demographics of the local area, a limited number of families were recruited into the study through other means (e.g., referrals, fliers; $n = 77$, 15%). By broadening the approach, the FFP researchers were able to increase the social-economic and ethnic diversity of the sample. At wave 1, the FFP study consisted of 500 (164 single parent and 336 two-parent) families, 96% of whom had complete data for Wave 2 ($N = 480$, 155 single parent and 325 two-parent families). Questionnaires were completed by both the mother and father in the families' homes.

Measures

  Religious beliefs. FFP researchers measured spiritual beliefs' influence on parent's life identity using four items from the Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire (Lewis, Shevlin, McGuckin, & Navratil, 2001). This scale originally included 10 items. For this survey they reduced the scale to 4 items by eliminating items 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, and 9. They chose these items based on what they found to best represent the construct in brief format. Their decisions for item inclusion were driven by conceptual clarity and brevity for all the measures. For the current study, I moved one of the four items ("I pray daily") to the family religious practices measure (below) which included multiple types of prayer. Parents responded to three questions (see Appendix 1 for all scales) based on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Questions include, "I look to my faith as providing meaning and purpose in my life," "my faith is an important part of who I am as a person," and "my faith impacts many of my decisions." Higher scores indicate greater perceived religious influence on identity, purpose, and life decisions. Lewis et al. (2001) found reliability to be .93 for the 10-item scale. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the reduced three-item scale and for the subsample used in the present research was .97 for mothers and .97 for fathers.

  Family religious practices. Family religious practices were assessed using the Family Activities In The Home Scale (FAITHS). FAITHS was tested on three samples and the coefficient alphas were high, ranging from .88 to .94, which demonstrated good internal consistency. In these same samples, FAITHS was moderately correlated with other measures of religiosity, such as intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity, prayer behavior, and was not correlated

with social desirability. Thus, FAITHS demonstrates adequate convergent and discriminant validity. The results of a test-retest reliability indicated high reliability at .86 (*p*<.001). These indices indicate that FAITHS is a reliable and valid measure (Lambert & Dollahite, 2008). FAITHS consists of nine family religious practices such as prayer, scripture study, and religious conversations. Frequency of religious activities are assessed with responses ranging on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 0 (*never*) to 6 (m*ore than once a day*). Sample religious practices items include "Family Prayer" and "Family religious conversations at home." Higher scores indicate higher frequency of family religious practices. Cronbach's alphas were .93 (mothers) and .94 (fathers) for the FFP sample. As stated previously, I added the "I pray daily" item to the religious practices construct to be able to measure the factor loadings of each type of prayer. Parents responded to this item based on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the new 10-item measure and for the subsample used in the present research was .94 for mothers and .95 for fathers.

Church attendance. Church attendance is included in the model because of mixed findings (Mahoney, in press) in previous research on the influence attendance has had on family dynamics and to measure its comparative factor loading to the other religious practices (Atkins & Kessel, 2008; Burdette et al., 2007). Church attendance was measured by asking "How often have you attended religious/spiritual services in the past 12 months?" Frequency of church attendance was assessed with a response ranging on a 7-point Likert-type scale (0=*never*, 1=*a few times*, 2=*several times*, 3=*once a month*, 4=*two or three times a month*, 5=*once a week*, 6=*more than once a week*).

Marital commitment. For this construct, I used the Couple Commitment Inventory (Stanley & Markman, 1992) which consists of 60 items with 10 subscales. For the FFP study, 10 questions of the 60 were included. This scale was reduced based on what the FFP researchers thought best represented the construct of couple commitment in brief format. The 10-item Couple Commitment Inventory was used to measure the degree to which a marital partner is personally dedicated to the relationship and their willingness to sacrifice for their partner. The first 6 questions measured level of marital commitment; questions 7-10 measured satisfaction with sacrifice. Satisfaction with sacrifice refers to the satisfaction couples have when doing things that are mainly for their partners' benefit. Respondents answered 10 questions based on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Sample questions include, "My relationship with my partner is more important to me than almost anything else in

my life," "I like to think of my partner and myself more in terms of 'us' and 'we,' than 'me' and 'him/her,'" and "I get satisfaction out of doing things for my partner, even if it means I miss out on something I want for myself." After reverse scoring questions 4, 5, 6, and 7, higher scores indicate higher levels of commitment to and increased willingness to sacrifice for the partner. Stanley, Rhoades, and Markman (2006) found the reliability to be .88. The Cronbach's alphas for the FFP sample were .80 for mothers and .80 for fathers. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the subsample used in the present research was .84 for mothers and .86 for fathers.

Parent-child closeness. Parent-child closeness was assessed using nine items from the Social Closeness Scale (Lee, Draper, & Lee, 2001). The measure assesses statements regarding how connected parents feel with the target child. The scale originally contained 20 items and was applicable to all social interactions. This scale was reduced to reflect parent-child interactions and was based on what the researchers thought best represented the construct of parent-child closeness in brief format. Parents responded on a Likert scale from 1 (*disagree*) to 6 (*agree*). Items were reworded to focus on the parent-child relationship and parents were asked to respond in terms of their agreement or disagreement with statements such as "I feel close to my child" and "I am able to relate to my child." Items 1, 2, 3, 5, and 9 were reverse coded so that higher scores represent greater perceived levels of closeness between the parent and their son/daughter. Cronbach's alphas for the FFP sample were .90 for mothers and .90 for fathers. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the subsample used in the present research was .90 for mothers and .88 for fathers.

Parent-child involvement. Parents' involvement in their child's life was measured using items from the Inventory of Father Involvement (Hawkins, Bradford, Christiansen, Palkovitz, Day, & Call, 2002). The original instrument consists of 43 items, 8 of which were conceptually selected for the FFP to form a brief measure of mother and/or father involvement. For the current study, participants responded to five questions based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often)*. Sample questions include, "help your child with homework" and "read books or magazines with your child." Only 5 of the 8 items were used for the current study due to the emphasis on parent-child involvement. Three items (e.g., "work hard to pay for things your child needs" and "give encouragement to your child") did not stress involvement. A higher score indicates a greater degree of mother or father involvement in the child's life. Hawkins et al. (2002) found the reliability to range from .69 to .83 for the various subscales. The

Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the 5-item measure and for the subsample used in the present research was .61 for mothers and .60 for fathers.

Involvement as a family unit. Involvement as a family unit was measured using three items from the Family Implicit Rules Profile (Harper, Stoll, & Larsen, 2007). The selected items focused on meaningful family involvement and included the following items, "play; have fun together," "share happenings of your day with family members," and "make decisions together as a family." Responses were based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*most of the time*). Higher scores represent higher levels of family involvement. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the 3-item measure and for the subsample used in the present research was .74 for mothers and .76 for fathers.

Data Analysis

The hypothesized models were tested using structural equation modeling (SEM) in AMOS (Arbuckle, 2006; Byrne, 2001) version 18. I used SEM to assess pathways among religious beliefs, religious practices, and the family strengths variables of marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement. Based on the theoretical framework of Mahoney et al. (2001) and following the Religiosity and Family Strengths framework, I positioned religious beliefs as the exogenous variable and religious practices as an endogenous variable. Additionally, the religious beliefs measure was only available in the first wave of data whereas the religious practices measure was added in the second wave of data. Because of the timing of when the data were gathered, it makes theoretical sense to position religious beliefs before religious practices and to test the theory. SEM permitted testing each hypothesized model in a simultaneous analysis of all included variables to determine the goodness of fit with the data. SEM also supported incorporation of both latent and observed variables in the model and analysis of direct and indirect effects. Additionally, SEM accounts for random measurement errors and provides explicit estimates of these error variance parameters (Byrne, 2001).

The overall retention rate in the FFP was very high, with less than 1% missing data on the variables in the model. As a result, instead of deleting cases with missing data, I used Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) to test predicted relationships. Parameter estimates from FIML provide improved information over ad hoc procedures such as Listwise deletion or imputation of means (Little & Rubin, 1987). The first step in testing the model was examination of the data for normality and homoscedasticity. The second step was performance of a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) for each construct. After verifying that each observed

variable loaded well on the assigned construct, I correlated the factors for each of the three models separately for husbands and wives. After obtaining an acceptable model fit for husbands and wives, I examined couple dynamics within the full structural models (see Figures 6-8; also see Appendix D).

Due to nonindependent, distinguishable family data, I used the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM, see Figures 6-8) as suggested by Kenny, Kashy, and Cook (2006). Examining family interactions requires methodologies that match the theory being tested and will not violate statistical assumptions (Kenny et al., 2006). Testing couple dynamics within the framework of the APIM allowed the interdependence between spouses to be modeled without violating statistical assumptions, thus providing increased confidence in the results for each model. The interdependence resulted from both husbands and wives completing the same measures for religious beliefs, religious practices, marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement. Because the family members are distinguishable, I examined within-family differences. The APIM assesses actor and partner effects and evaluates the data of both partners at the same time. For example, the influence of a wife's religious beliefs or practices on her own marital commitment is an "actor effect" (the effect she has on herself), and the influence of her husband's religious beliefs or practices on her marital commitment is a "partner effect" (the effect her husband has on her). In other words, the level of marital commitment for the wife is influenced by both her own report of religious beliefs and practices as well as her husband's report of religious beliefs and practices. This is important because her husband's religious beliefs or practices may influence her marital commitment level differently than her own religious beliefs or practices and vice versa. Studying family relationships from the interrelated perspectives of both husbands and wives creates a more powerful and complete picture of how religiosity influences family relationships. A separate model was tested for each outcome variable (see Figures 6-8) using wives' and husbands' religious dimensions as the independent variables and marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement as the dependent variables.

Marital commitment. I tested the first two research hypotheses to investigate how religious beliefs and practices influence marital commitment (see Figure 6).

1. Participant's religious *beliefs* and *practices* are positively related to their *own* marital commitment.

2. Participant's religious *beliefs* and *practices* are positively related to their *partner's* marital commitment.
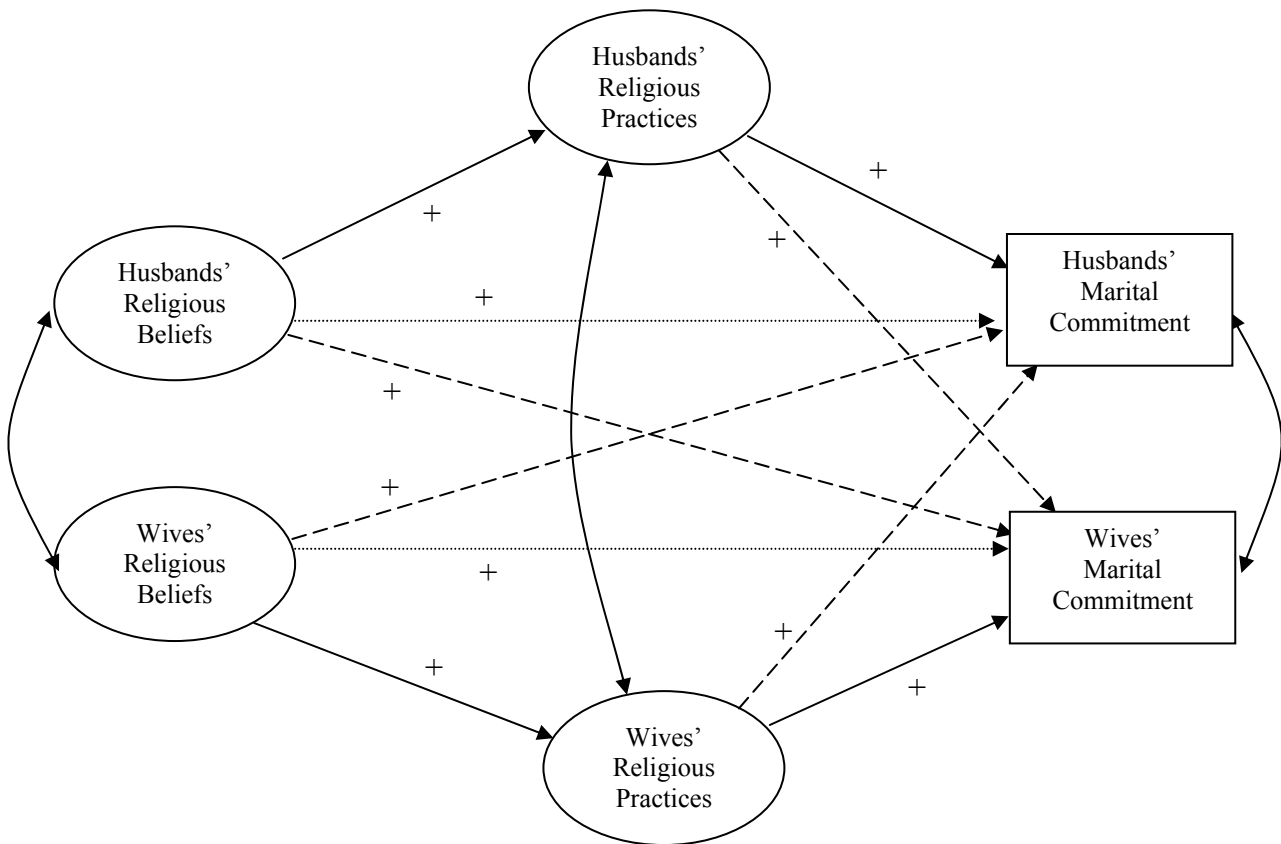
Figure 6. Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) for Marital Commitment. Marital commitment falls under the family strengths construct. Indirect paths are marked with a short dash arrow. The actor-partner effects are marked with a long dash arrow.

Parent-child closeness. I tested the third and fourth research hypotheses to investigate how religious beliefs and practices influence parent-child closeness (see Figure 7).

3. Participant's religious *beliefs* and *practices* are positively related to their *own* parent-child closeness.

4. Participant's religious *beliefs* and *practices* are positively related to their *partner's* parent-child closeness.
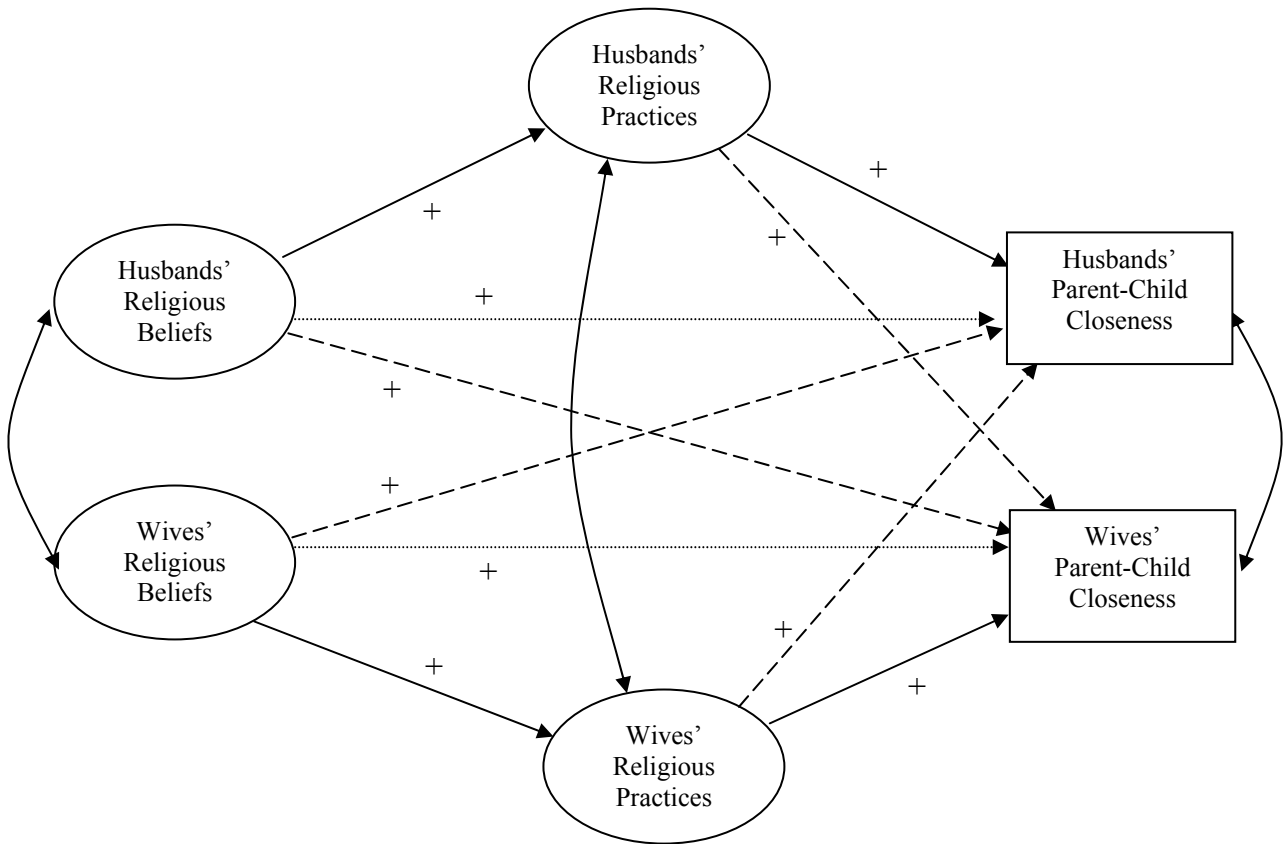
Figure 7. Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) for Parent-Child Closeness. Parent-child closeness falls under the family strengths construct. Indirect paths are marked with a short dash arrow. The actor-partner effects are marked with a long dash arrow.

The endogenous construct of family involvement encompasses parent-child involvement and involvement as a family unit (see Figure 8).

Parent-child involvement. I tested research hypotheses five and six to investigate how religious beliefs and practices influence parent-child involvement.

5. Participant's religious *beliefs* and *practices* are positively related to their *own* parent-child involvement.

6. Participant's religious *beliefs* and *practices* are positively related to their *partner's* parent-child involvement.

Involvement as a family unit. I tested research hypotheses seven and eight to investigate how religious beliefs and practices influence involvement as a family unit.

7. Participant's religious *beliefs* and *practices* are positively related to their *own* involvement as a family unit.

8. Participant's religious *beliefs* and *practices* are positively related to their *partner's* involvement as a family unit.
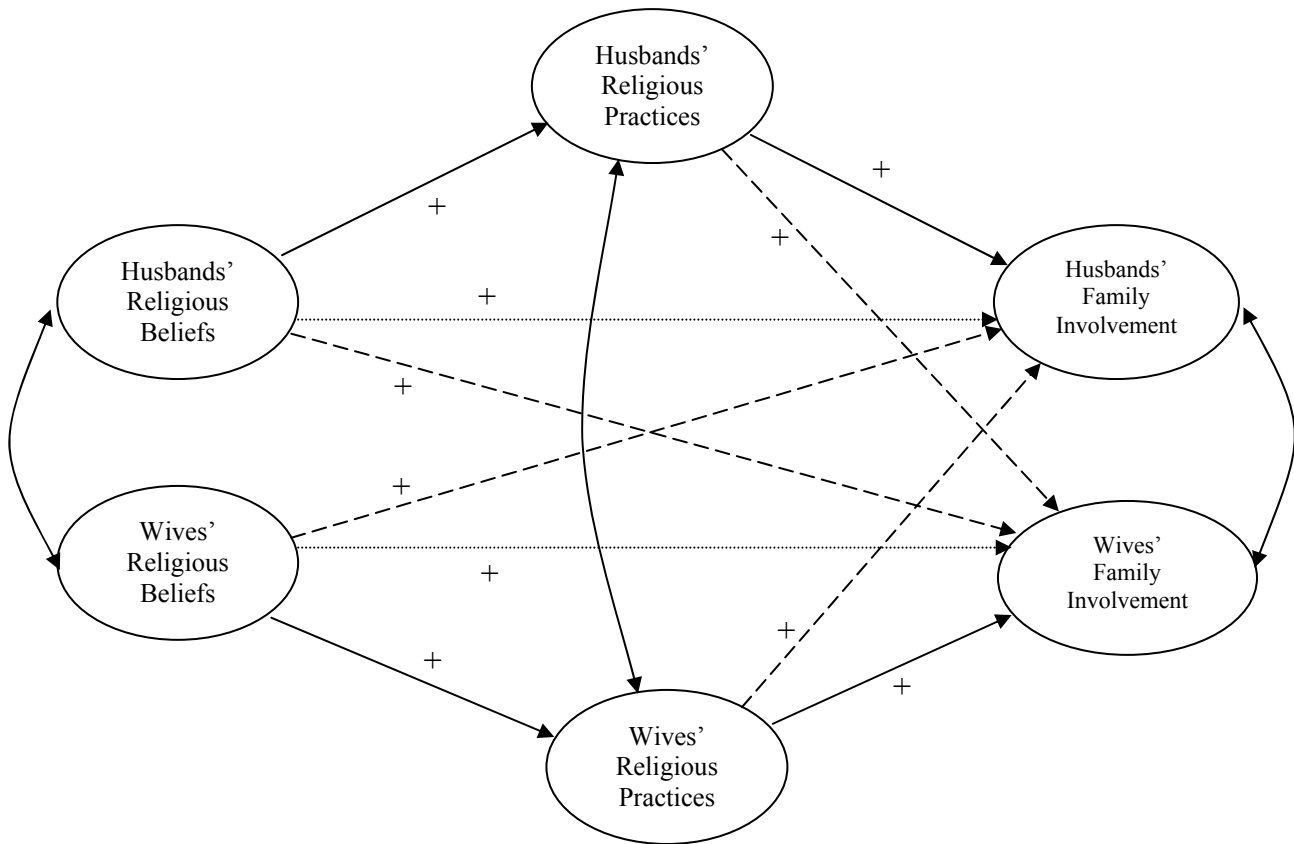
Figure 8. Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) for Family Involvement. Family involvement encompasses parent-child involvement and family unit involvement. Indirect paths are marked with a short dash arrow. The actor-partner effects are marked with a long dash arrow.

I estimated the full structural models to examine the regression paths among wives' and husbands' religious dimensions and the outcome variables (see Figures 6-8). I report factor loadings, correlations among latent variables, model fit, and structural coefficients. To assess the fit of the model, the chi-square statistic is most often used. The goal of SEM is to find a solution that results in a reproduced matrix that is as close as possible to the original sample matrix. The chi-square statistic is sensitive to sample size and is usually significant, meaning that the models are not similar. Consequently, I used a multiple-index strategy as suggested by Hu and Bentler (1998). I used the stand-alone index of Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), a standardized measure of the lack of fit of the population data to the model. I used the incremental index of the Incremental Fit Index (IFI). The IFI compares the hypothesized model with the independence model, similar to NFI and CFI, but addresses the issues of parsimony and sample

size. Finally, I examine the expected cross-validation index (ECVI) which assesses "the likelihood that the model cross-validates across similar-sized samples from the same population" (Byrne, 2001, p. 86).

Chapter 4: Results

The goal of the research was to examine how religious beliefs and practices influenced marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement. I used the Actor-Partner Interdependence Models in the structural equation modeling (SEM) framework to test intrapersonal and interspousal associations among religious beliefs, religious practices, marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement. To analyze the validity of placing religious beliefs as the independent variable, as theoretically presented in the Religiosity and Family Strengths framework and as discussed by Mahoney and colleagues (2001), I correlated religious beliefs and religious practices in each study model as well as switched the directionality of the pathways between religious beliefs and practices (i.e., I positioned religious practices as the independent variable) in the marital commitment model. Results indicated each model to be less predictive than the study models presented below, providing justification for the placement of religious beliefs as an antecedent of religious practices. I present sample characteristics and psychometric properties, followed by correlation matrices, model fit, and direct and indirect effects for couples under each of these three areas: religiosity and marital commitment, religiosity and parent-child closeness, and religiosity and family involvement (family involvement encompasses parent-child involvement and involvement as a family unit).

Sample Characteristics and Psychometric Properties of Measures

Table 1 includes the demographic characteristics of the sample. The majority of the sample was European American. Age was distributed evenly with the majority between the ages of 40 and 44 years. Most families had higher household incomes than the 2008 mean national average of $52,029 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Close to 10% of families reported an income less than $36,000, around 40% made below $65,000, and about 60% of the families made $65,000 or more. Husbands and wives were both employed in the majority of the families with very few households in which only the wife was employed or neither was employed. Additionally, about 70% of husbands and wives had a bachelors degree or higher with almost all couples having received at least some college education. Most of the families were from mainstream Christian affiliations with a few from eastern religions (e.g., Buddhism), Jewish, or who were agnostic/atheist, unaffiliated, or other. A little over half of the couples in the sample shared religious affiliation leaving the other half from different affiliations or religious ideologies or being nonreligious.

Table 1.

Demographic Characteristics of Sample (N = 305 couples)

Variables	Wives %	Husbands %
Gender	.50	.50
Ethnicity		
European American	.82	.87
African American	.04	.05
Asian American	.05	.02
Hispanic	.03	.01
Multi-Ethnic or Other	.06	.05
Age		
27-39	.25	.16
40-44	.33	.34
45-49	.27	.24
Over 50	.15	.25
Household Income		
<$36,000	.10	.08
$36,000-$49,999	.14	.15
$50,000-$64,999	.15	.17
$65,000-$84,999	.27	.25
>$85,000	.34	.35
Employment Status		
Both Employed	.70	.70
Only Husband Employed	.24	.24
Only Wife Employed	.05	.05
Neither Employed	.01	.01
Education Level		
High School or Less	.06	.06
Some College	.24	.23
Bachelor's Degree	.41	.40
Master's or Advanced Degree	.29	.31
Religious Affiliation		
Catholic	.20	.18
Protestant	.46	.41
LDS	.08	.08
Jewish	.04	.04
Eastern Religion	.02	.02
Other	.04	.05
Agnostic or Atheistic	.04	.05
None	.12	.17

Religious Pairing		
Shared Affiliation	.54	.54
Different Affiliations	.21	.21
One Affiliation, One Non-Religious	.15	.15
Both Non-Religious	.10	.10

Table 2 includes the psychometric properties of the study measures used in the structural models. The measures had good internal reliability and consistency with the lowest alpha levels for the parent-child involvement measures (wives = 0.61, husbands = 0.60) and the highest alpha levels for the religious beliefs measures (wives and husbands both = 0.97). The low parent-child involvement reliability is on the lower end of the full measure which consisted of 43 items and had a reliability that ranged from .69 to .83 (Hawkins et al., 2002). Psychometric properties of all study variables can be found in Appendix B.

Table 2.

Psychometric Properties of Study Measures (Structural Models)

Measure	μ	SD	Range		α
			Potential	Actual	
Religious Beliefs					
Wives' Beliefs	2.94	1.06	1-4	1-4	0.97
Husbands' Beliefs	2.65	1.10	1-4	1-4	0.97
Religious Practices					
Wives' Practices	1.77	1.39	0-6	0.09-5.45	0.94
Husbands' Practices	1.61	1.38	0-6	0.09-5	0.95
Commitment					
Wives' Marital Commitment	5.86	0.75	1-7	1.7-7	0.84
Husbands' Marital Commitment	6.02	0.75	1-7	3.10-7	0.86
Wives' Parent-child closeness	5.22	0.76	1-6	2.22-6	0.90
Husbands' Parent-child closeness	5.06	0.80	1-6	2.33-6	0.88
Involvement					
Wives' Parent-Child Involvement	4.05	0.47	1-5	2.4-5	0.61
Husbands' Parent-Child Involvement	3.69	0.52	1-5	2.2-5	0.60
Wives' Family Unit Involvement	3.87	0.58	1-5	2-5	0.74
Husbands' Family Unit Involvement	3.82	0.65	1-5	1.17-5	0.76

I conducted ANOVAs in order to answer the following question: Are there differences in religious beliefs, religious practices, marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement based on employment and education level? I used ANOVAs to examine the differences between the categorical personal characteristics of employment and husband's education level and the continuous dependent variable mean scores of religious beliefs, religious practices, marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement (see Table 3). Because differences were found in religious practices (employment) and religious beliefs (education), I conducted post hoc tests. Tukey's HSD test identified that religious practices were higher in families where only the husbands were employed compared to those in which both husbands and wives were employed. Perhaps wives who choose to take care of the home and the children have more time for religious practices because other home tasks are completed during the day when other wives are employed. Tukey's test also indicated that families where the husband had a masters or advanced degree were less religious. In sum, findings indicate that religious practices differed by level of employment and religious beliefs differed by education level.

Table 3.

Differences in Religious Beliefs, Religious Practices, Marital Commitment, Parent-Child Closeness, and Family Involvement by Employment and Education Level (N=305)

Characteristics	Employment			Education Level		
	df	MS	F	df	MS	F
Religious Beliefs	3	.844	.748	3	3.31	*2.99[2]
Religious Practices	3	9.329	**5.03[1]	3	2.05	1.08
Marital Commitment	3	.409	.717	3	1.03	1.41
Parent-Child Closeness	3	.366	.640	3	1.07	1.83
Family Involvement	3	.055	.270	3	0.29	1.89

MS = Mean Squared $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, [1]H > Both, [2]Bachelor > AD

Correlations run for each model (see Appendix C) established relationships among the constructs, which provides support for including them in the model. Additionally, a relationship among the constructs between husbands and wives (e.g., wives' religious beliefs and husbands' religious beliefs) indicates a dyadic relationship (that husbands and wives can be included in a model such as the APIM that examines couple interactions). In other words, significant positive correlations signify agreement between the spouses on the various measures.

Religiosity and Marital Commitment

Religious beliefs and practices tend to correspond to couples having higher levels of marital commitment and sacrifice (Mahoney et al., 2001; Sullivan, 2001) yet the mechanisms supporting this association are unclear. Following the Religiosity and Family Strengths framework, I examine the intrapersonal and interspousal associations among religious beliefs, religious practices, and marital commitment.

Model fit. Due to nonindependent, distinguishable family data, I use the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) as developed by Kenny et al. (2006). The APIM examines actor (intrapersonal) and partner (interspousal) effects and evaluates the data of both partners simultaneously. The first two research hypotheses stated that each participant's religious *beliefs* and *practices* are positively related to their *own* marital commitment as well as their *partner's* marital commitment.

Table 4 shows the measurement model results from the analysis on the religiosity and marital commitment model. It includes factor loadings, measurement error and the squared multiple correlations of the measurement model. There were 4 variables under religious beliefs and 11 under religious practices for both husbands and wives. Personal prayer explained a small (i.e., under 0.4) amount of the variation in the husbands' (29%) and wives' (31%) religious practices constructs but did explain a moderate (i.e., between 0.4-.07) amount of the variation in the husbands' (64%) and wives' (64%) religious beliefs constructs.

Table 4.

Standardized Factor Loadings and Squared Multiple Correlations for Marital Commitment Measurement Model for Husbands and Wives

Measure	Factor Loadings	Measurement Error	SMC
Husbands' Religious Beliefs			
Purpose	0.95	0.014	0.90
Identity	0.97	0.011	0.95
Life Decisions	0.94	0.015	0.88
Personal Prayer	0.64	0.032	0.64
Husbands' Religious Practices			
Personal Prayer	0.29	0.032	0.64
Family Prayer	0.76	0.114	0.58
Couple Prayer	0.76	0.064	0.58
Parent-Child Prayer	0.74	0.124	0.55
Meal-Time Prayer	0.72	0.178	0.52

Reading Religious Texts	0.81	0.054	0.65
Family Religious Conversations	0.77	0.068	0.59
Religious Gatherings	0.76	0.064	0.58
Religious Music	0.66	0.084	0.43
Religious Media	0.72	0.070	0.51
Church Attendance	0.79	0.131	0.62
Wives' Religious Beliefs			
Purpose	0.95	0.012	0.90
Identity	0.96	0.011	0.93
Life Decisions	0.97	0.011	0.93
Personal Prayer	0.64	0.029	0.66
Wives' Religious Practices			
Personal Prayer	0.31	0.029	0.66
Family Prayer	0.73	0.137	0.53
Couple Prayer	0.69	0.081	0.47
Parent-Child Prayer	0.71	0.150	0.51
Meal-Time Prayer	0.77	0.151	0.60
Reading Religious Texts	0.75	0.070	0.56
Family Religious Conversations	0.84	0.063	0.71
Religious Gatherings	0.77	0.062	0.59
Religious Music	0.65	0.096	0.42
Religious Media	0.65	0.101	0.43
Church Attendance	0.78	0.136	0.62

Note: Measurement Model $\chi^2(384) = 1114$; RMSEA = 0.079; IFI = 0.928. Factor loadings significant at .001 level of significance; SMC = Squared Multiple Correlations of the measurement model.

Figure 9 shows the structural model results from the analysis on the religiosity and marital commitment framework. Error terms were correlated for husbands' and wives' religious practices, husbands' and wives' marital commitment, and for corresponding indicator variables for husbands and wives (i.e., family prayer, couple prayer, parent-child prayer, meal-time prayers, use of religious media, and church attendance). MacCallum, Browne, and Sugawara (1996) suggested that RMSEA values under .06 indicate good fit, values ranging from .06 to .10 indicate moderate fit, and values greater than .10 indicate poor fit. A rule of thumb to determine a good fitting model for the IFI and other incremental indexes is that values greater than .95 indicate good fit, values greater than .90 indicate reasonably good fit, and values under .90 indicate poor fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). At 4.197, the expected cross-validation index (ECVI)

falls within the interval ranges (3.881 to 4.539), suggesting that the hypothesized model represents a reasonable approximation to the population and is a well-fitting model (Byrne, 2001). Goodness of model fit indices indicated a moderately good fit between the model and the data (Kline, 2005): $\chi^2(384) = 1114$, Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = .928; and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .079.

Direct and indirect effects. Keith's (1993) recommended criteria guided evaluation of the standardized path values. Standardized path values ranging from 0.05 to 0.10 are small but meaningful influences; path values ranging from 0.11 to 0.25 are moderate in size and influence; and path values over 0.25 are large in size and influence.

Figure 9 provides the standardized direct effects in the model. First, for wives, the path from their own religious beliefs to their own religious practices (this is the same for all three models) was significant (b=.39; p<.001). Second, the path from wives' religious practices to their own marital commitment was significant (b=.16, p<.01). In other words, wives who reported that their family participated more often in religious practices had higher marital commitment than wives who reported less frequent family religious practices.

Husbands had similar results. First, the path from their own religious beliefs to their own religious practices (this is the same for all three models) was significant (b=.41; p<.001). Second, the path from husbands' religious practices to their own marital commitment was significant (b=.20; p<.001). Similar to wives, husbands who reported that their family participated more often in religious practices had higher levels of marital commitment than husbands who reported less frequent family religious practices.

Examining the influence husbands and wives had on each other, the path from husbands' religious beliefs to wives' marital commitment was significant (b=.11, p<.05), yet the path from wives' religious beliefs to husbands' marital commitment was not significant (b=.05). Thus, the stronger the religious beliefs of husbands, the higher the marital commitment level of their wives. Conversely, the strength of wives' religious beliefs had no influence on the level of the husbands' marital commitment.

Table 5 shows the indirect paths and associated t values for paths with a standardized coefficient greater than 0.10. Using a cutoff value of $t = |1.96|$ to determine whether indirect paths were statistically significant, 22 of the 24 indirect effects were significant. Wives' religious beliefs had a significant and moderate influence on their own personal prayer and a
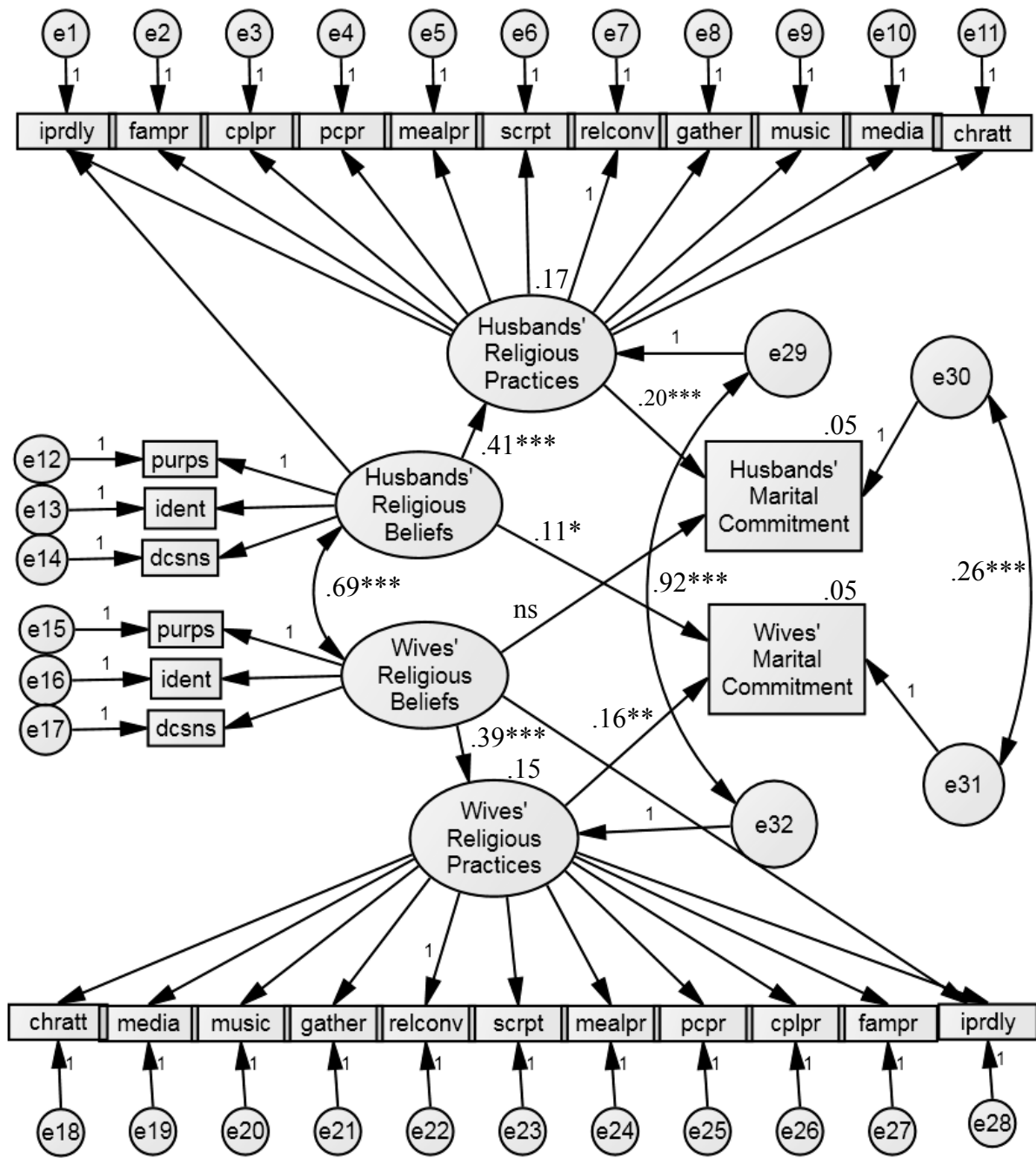
Figure 9. Standardized estimates for the religiosity and marital commitment framework. $\chi^2(384)$ = 1114; IFI = .928; and RMSEA = .079. Note: *ns* represents non-significant paths. *p< .05, **p< .01, ***p< .001.

significant and large influence on each of their other ten religious practices. Wives' religious beliefs did not have an effect on their own marital commitment. Husbands had similar path values. Husbands' religious beliefs had a significant and moderate influence on their own

personal prayer and a significant and large influence on each of their other ten religious practices. Husbands' religious beliefs did not have an effect on their own marital commitment. This model predicted little amount of variance in marital commitment ($R^2 = .05$) for both husbands and wives. The squared multiple correlations are shown in Figure 9.

Table 5.

Indirect Effects for the Religiosity and Marital Commitment Model (N=305 couples)

	Indirect Effects	
Predictor and Criterion	Path Coefficient	t
Wives' Religious Beliefs		
Wives' Marital Commitment	0.06	0.11
Wives' Church Attendance	0.31	4.38
Wives' Religious Media	0.26	3.59
Wives' Religious Music	0.26	3.65
Wives' Religious Gatherings	0.30	6.18
Wives' Religious Conversations	0.33	7.75
Wives' Reading Religious texts	0.30	5.53
Wives' Meal-Time Prayer	0.30	4.03
Wives' Parent-Child Prayer	0.28	3.40
Wives' Couple Prayer	0.27	4.36
Wives' Family prayer	0.29	3.71
Wives' Personal prayer	0.12	4.07
Husbands' Religious Beliefs		
Husbands' Marital Commitment	0.08	0.13
Husbands' Church Attendance	0.33	4.47
Husbands' Religious Media	0.30	5.04
Husbands' Religious Music	0.27	3.92
Husbands' Religious Gatherings	0.32	5.97
Husbands' Religious Conversations	0.32	5.88
Husbands' Reading Religious texts	0.33	7.43
Husbands' Meal-Time Prayer	0.30	3.16
Husbands' Parent-Child Prayer	0.31	4.02
Husbands' Couple Prayer	0.31	5.98
Husbands' Family prayer	0.31	4.45
Husbands' Personal prayer	0.12	3.47

Religiosity and Parent-Child Closeness

Religious beliefs and practices reflect the tendency of couples having higher levels of parent-child closeness (Brotherson et al., 2005; Dollahite et al., 1998) yet mutual influence of partners on one another is uncertain. Following the Religiosity and Family Strengths framework, I examined the intrapersonal and interspousal associations among religious beliefs, religious practices, and parent-child closeness.

Model fit. The third and forth research hypotheses state that each participant's religious *beliefs* and *practices* are positively related to their *own* parent-child closeness as well as their *partner's* parent-child closeness. Table 6 shows the measurement model results from the analysis on the religiosity and parent-child closeness model. It includes actor loadings, measurement error and the squared multiple correlations of the measurement model. There were 4 variables under religious beliefs and 11 under religious practices for both husbands and wives. Personal prayer explained a small (i.e., under 0.4) amount of the variation in the husbands' (28%) and wives' (31%) religious practices constructs but did explain a moderate (i.e., between 0.4-.07) amount of the variation in the husbands' (64%) and wives' (64%) religious beliefs constructs.

Table 6.

Standardized Factor Loadings and Squared Multiple Correlations for Hypothesized Parent-Child Closeness Model for Husbands and Wives

Measure	Factor Loadings	Measurement Error	SMC
Husbands' Religious Beliefs			
Purpose	0.95	0.014	0.90
Identity	0.97	0.011	0.95
Life Decisions	0.94	0.015	0.88
Personal Prayer	0.64	0.032	0.64
Husbands' Religious Practices			
Personal Prayer	0.28	0.032	0.64
Family Prayer	0.76	0.115	0.58
Couple Prayer	0.76	0.064	0.58
Parent-Child Prayer	0.74	0.123	0.55
Meal-Time Prayer	0.72	0.177	0.52
Reading Religious Texts	0.81	0.054	0.65
Family Religious Conversations	0.77	0.068	0.59
Religious Gatherings	0.77	0.064	0.58
Religious Music	0.66	0.084	0.43

Religious Media	0.72	0.070	0.51
Church Attendance	0.79	0.131	0.62
Wives' Religious Beliefs			
Purpose	0.95	0.012	0.90
Identity	0.96	0.011	0.93
Life Decisions	0.97	0.011	0.93
Personal Prayer	0.64	0.029	0.66
Wives' Religious Practices			
Personal Prayer	0.31	0.029	0.66
Family Prayer	0.73	0.137	0.53
Couple Prayer	0.69	0.081	0.47
Parent-Child Prayer	0.71	0.150	0.51
Meal-Time Prayer	0.77	0.151	0.60
Reading Religious Texts	0.75	0.070	0.56
Family Religious Conversations	0.84	0.064	0.71
Religious Gatherings	0.77	0.062	0.59
Religious Music	0.65	0.096	0.42
Religious Media	0.65	0.101	0.43
Church Attendance	0.78	0.136	0.62

Note: Measurement Model $\chi^2(383) = 1090$; RMSEA = 0.078; IFI = 0.930. Factor loadings significant at .001 level of significance; SMC = Squared Multiple Correlations of the measurement model.

Figure 10 shows the results from the analysis on the religiosity and parent-child closeness framework. Error terms were correlated for husbands' and wives' religious practices, husbands' and wives' parent-child closeness, and for corresponding indicator variables for husbands and wives (i.e., family prayer, couple prayer, parent-child prayer, meal-time prayers, use of religious media, and church attendance). Goodness of model fit indices indicate a moderately good fit between the model and the data (Kline, 2005): $\chi^2(383) = 1090$, Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = .930; and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .078. At 4.128, the expected cross-validation index (ECVI) falls within the interval ranges (3.816 to 4.465), suggesting that the hypothesized model represents a reasonable approximation to the population and is a well-fitting model (Byrne, 2001).
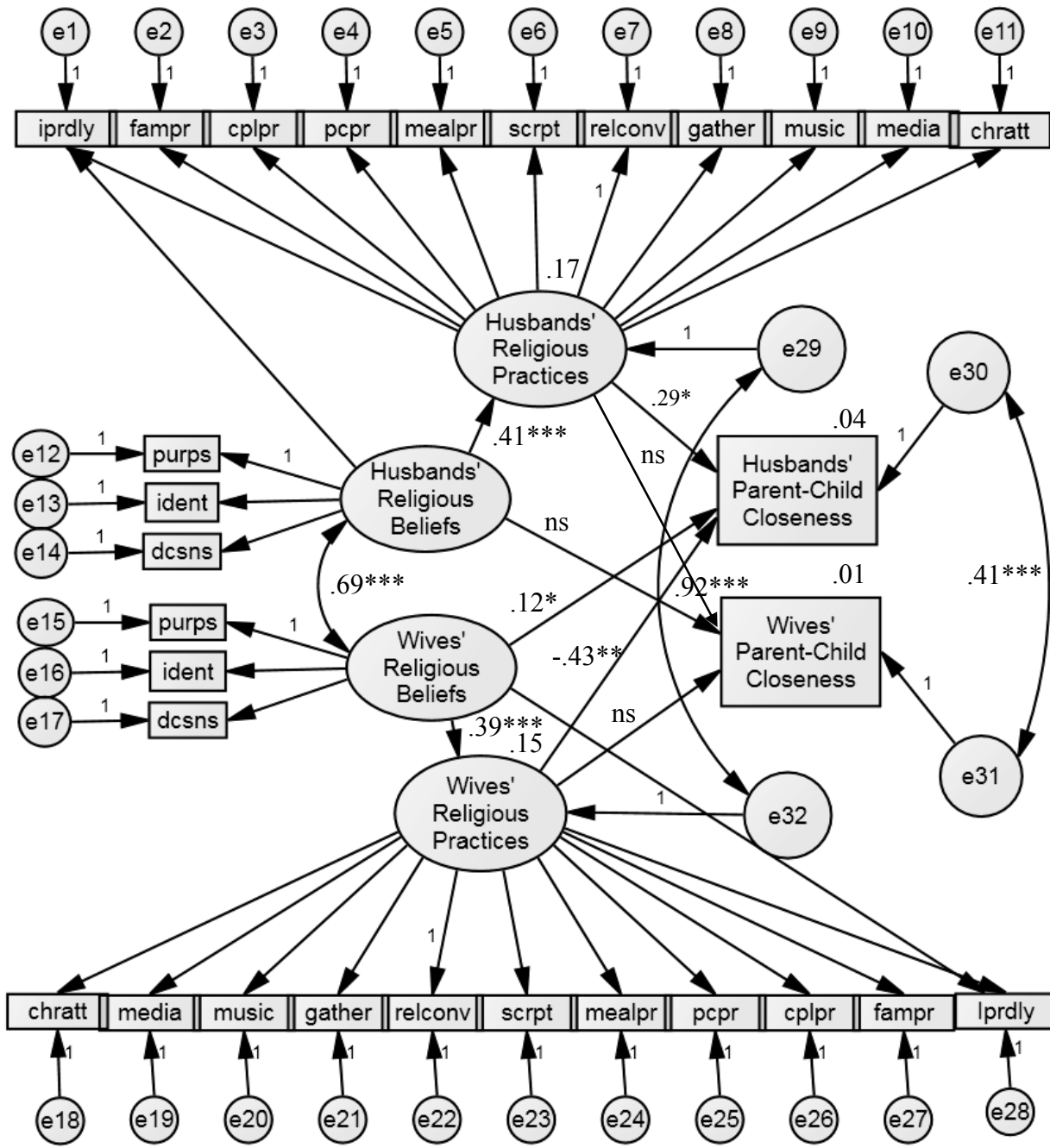
Figure 10. Standardized estimates for the religiosity and parent-child closeness framework. $\chi^2(383) = 1090$; IFI = .930; and RMSEA = .078. Note: ns represents non-significant paths. *p< .05, **p< .01, ***p< .001.

Direct and indirect effects. Figure 10 provides the standardized direct effects in the model. For wives, the path from their own religious practices to their own parent-child closeness was not significant (*b*= -.08). Thus, according to wives' reports, wives' closeness with their

children did not significantly change whether their family participated in religious practices or not. For husbands, the path from their own religious practices to their own parent-child closeness was significant (b=.29; p<.05). Unlike wives, husbands who reported that their family participated more often in religious practices experienced more closeness with their children than husbands who reported less frequent family religious practices.

Examining the influence husbands and wives had on each other, the path from wives' religious beliefs to husbands' parent-child closeness was significant (b=.12; p<.05), as was the path from wives' religious practices to husbands' parent-child closeness (b=-.43; p<.01). On the other hand, the path from husbands' religious beliefs to wives' parent-child closeness was not significant (b=.05). Thus, stronger wives' religious beliefs were positively associated with how close husbands felt with their children. Conversely, higher frequency of family religious practices, as reported by wives, were negatively related with how close husbands felt with their children.

Table 7 shows the indirect paths and associated t values for paths with a standardized coefficient greater than 0.10. Of the 25 indirect effects, 20 were significant. Wives' religious beliefs had a significant and moderate influence on husbands' parent-child closeness, did not have an effect on their own parent-child closeness or personal prayer, and had a significant and large influence on each of their other ten religious practices. Husbands had similar path values. Husbands' religious beliefs had a significant and moderate influence on their own personal prayer and a significant and large influence on each of their other ten religious practices. Husbands' religious beliefs did not have an effect on their own parent-child closeness. This model predicted little amount of variance in parent-child closeness for husbands (R^2 = .04) and wives (R^2 = .01). The squared multiple correlations are shown in Figure 10.

Table 7.

Indirect Effects for the Religiosity and Parent-Child Closeness Model (N=305 couples)

	Indirect Effects	
Predictor and Criterion	Path Coefficient	t
Wives' Religious Beliefs		
Wives' Parent-Child Closeness	-0.03	-0.01
Husbands' Parent-Child Closeness	-0.17	2.26
Wives' Church Attendance	0.31	2.53
Wives' Religious Media	0.26	2.67
Wives' Religious Music	0.26	4.85
Wives' Religious Gatherings	0.30	5.16

Wives' Religious Conversations	0.33	4.20
Wives' Reading Religious Texts	0.29	2.01
Wives' Meal-Time Prayer	0.30	1.85
Wives' Parent-Child Prayer	0.28	3.31
Wives' Couple Prayer	0.27	2.07
Wives' Family prayer	0.28	4.14
Wives' Personal Prayer	0.12	-0.04
Husbands' Religious Beliefs		
Husbands' Parent-Child Closeness	0.12	0.03
Husbands' Church Attendance	0.32	2.47
Husbands' Religious Media	0.30	4.21
Husbands' Religious Music	0.27	3.21
Husbands' Religious Gatherings	0.31	4.91
Husbands' Religious Conversations	0.32	4.65
Husbands' Reading Religious Texts	0.33	6.13
Husbands' Meal-Time Prayer	0.30	1.67
Husbands' Parent-Child Prayer	0.31	2.48
Husbands' Couple Prayer	0.31	4.88
Husbands' Family Prayer	0.31	2.71
Husbands' Personal Prayer	0.12	3.66

Religiosity and Family Involvement

Religious beliefs and practices reflect the tendency of couples having higher levels of family involvement (Agate et al., 2007; Mahoney et al., 2001; Wilcox, 2004) yet the associations between couples are uncertain. Following the Religiosity and Family Strengths framework, I examine the intrapersonal and interspousal associations among religious beliefs, religious practices, and family involvement.

Model fit. Research hypotheses five through eight state that each participant's religious *beliefs* and *practices* are positively related to their *own* family involvement as well as their *partner's* family involvement (family involvement encompasses parent-child involvement and involvement as a family unit). Table 8 shows the measurement model results from the analysis on the religiosity and family involvement model. It includes factor loadings, measurement error and the squared multiple correlations of the measurement model. There were 4 variables under religious beliefs, 11 variables under religious practices, 5 variables under parent-child involvement, and 3 variables under involvement as a family unit for both husbands and wives. Personal prayer explains a small amount of the variation in the husbands' (27%) and wives'

(31%) religious practices constructs but does explain a moderate amount of the variation in the husbands' (66%) and wives' (64%) religious beliefs constructs. The five items in the parent-child involvement constructs for both husbands and wives also have low to moderate loadings which are understandable given that the internal reliability for the construct is .61.

Table 8.

Standardized Factor Loadings and Squared Multiple Correlations for Hypothesized Family Involvement Model for Husbands and Wives

Measure	Factor Loadings	Measurement Error	SMC
Husbands' Religious Beliefs			
Purpose	0.95	0.014	0.90
Identity	0.97	0.011	0.95
Life Decisions	0.94	0.015	0.88
Personal Prayer	0.66	0.032	0.64
Husbands' Religious Practices			
Personal Prayer	0.27	0.032	0.64
Family Prayer	0.77	0.113	0.59
Couple Prayer	0.78	0.065	0.60
Parent-Child Prayer	0.76	0.121	0.57
Meal-Time Prayer	0.71	0.183	0.51
Reading Religious Texts	0.83	0.052	0.68
Family Religious Conversations	0.77	0.068	0.60
Religious Gatherings	0.77	0.064	0.59
Religious Music	0.69	0.079	0.47
Religious Media	0.75	0.066	0.56
Church Attendance	0.63	0.116	0.62
Husbands' Parent-Child Involvement			
Attend Child's Activities	0.44	0.038	0.20
Read to Child	0.36	0.070	0.13
Take Care of Child	0.48	0.050	0.23
Help Child with Homework	0.58	0.054	0.34
Talk to Child	0.58	0.040	0.33
Husbands' Family Unit Involvement			
Play Together	0.73	0.033	0.53
Family Discussions	0.75	0.043	0.56
Family Decisions	0.68	0.041	0.47

Wives' Religious Beliefs

Purpose	0.95	0.012	0.90
Identity	0.96	0.011	0.93
Life Decisions	0.97	0.011	0.93
Personal Prayer	0.64	0.029	0.67
Wives' Religious Practices			
Personal Prayer	0.31	0.029	0.67
Family Prayer	0.73	0.136	0.53
Couple Prayer	0.69	0.083	0.47
Parent-Child Prayer	0.71	0.149	0.51
Meal-Time Prayer	0.77	0.151	0.59
Reading Religious Texts	0.75	0.070	0.57
Family Religious Conversations	0.84	0.063	0.71
Religious Gatherings	0.77	0.062	0.59
Religious Music	0.65	0.096	0.43
Religious Media	0.66	0.100	0.43
Church Attendance	0.78	0.135	0.61
Wives' Parent-Child Involvement			
Attend Child's Activities	0.41	0.033	0.17
Read to Child	0.39	0.076	0.15
Take Care of Child	0.49	0.023	0.24
Help Child with Homework	0.51	0.058	0.26
Talk to Child	0.61	0.030	0.37
Wives' Family Unit Involvement			
Play Together	0.79	0.042	0.62
Family Discussions	0.66	0.038	0.44
Family Decisions	0.66	0.047	0.43

Note: Measurement Model $\chi^2(873) = 1090$; RMSEA = 0.057; IFI = 0.921. Factor loadings significant at .001 level of significance; SMC = Squared Multiple Correlations of the measurement model.

Figure 11 shows the structural model results from the analysis on the religiosity and family involvement framework. Error terms were correlated for husbands' and wives' religious practices, husbands' and wives' family involvement, husbands' and wives' involvement as a family unit, and for corresponding indicator variables for husbands and wives (i.e., family prayer, couple prayer, parent-child prayer, meal-time prayers, reading religious texts, use of religious media, and church attendance). Goodness of model fit indices indicate a moderately good fit between the model and the data (Kline, 2005): $\chi^2(873) = 1748$, Incremental Fit Index (IFI)

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= .921; and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .057. At 6.521, the expected cross-validation index (ECVI) falls within the interval ranges (6.142 to 6.926), suggesting that the hypothesized model represents a reasonable approximation to the population and is a well-fitting model (Byrne, 2001).
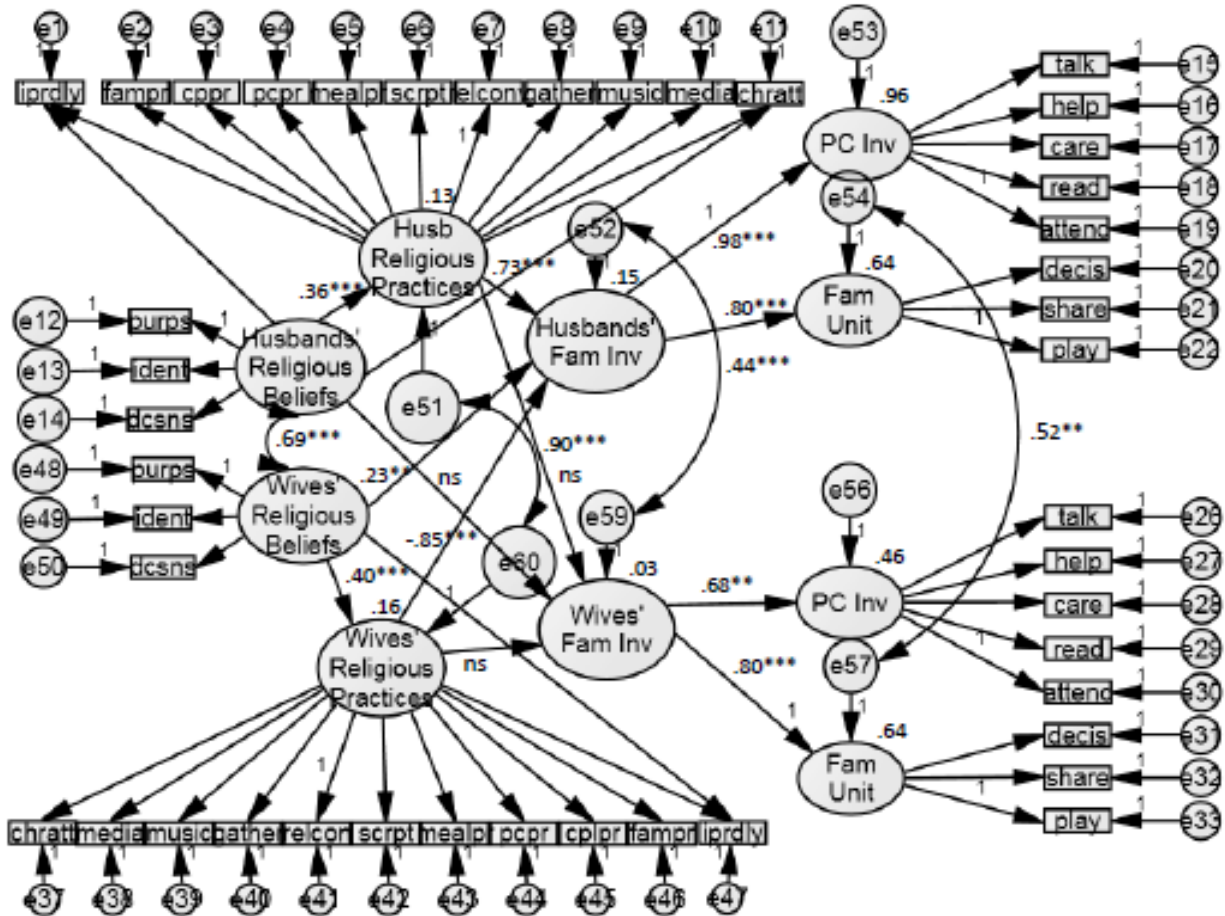

Figure 11. Standardized estimates for the religiosity and family involvement framework. $\chi^2(873)$ = 1748; IFI = .921; and RMSEA = .057. Note: ns represents non-significant paths. *$p<$ .05, **$p<$ .01, ***$p<$ .001.

Direct and indirect effects. Figure 11 provides the standardized direct effects in the model. For wives, the path from their own religious practices to their own family involvement was not significant ($b=.30$). Additionally, the path from wives' family involvement to wives' parent-child involvement was significant ($b=.68$; $p<.01$) as was the path from wives' family involvement to wives' involvement as a family unit ($b=.80$; $p<.001$). Thus, according to wives' reports, wives' family involvement (the level of involvement wives have with their children as

well as their family as a unit) did not significantly change whether their family participated in religious practices or not.

For husbands, the path from their own religious practices to their own family involvement was significant (b=.73; p<.001). Additionally, the path from husbands' family involvement to husbands' parent-child involvement was significant (b=.98; p<.001) as was the path from husbands' family involvement to husbands' involvement as a family unit (b=.80; p<.001). Unlike wives, husbands who reported that their family participated more often in religious practices experienced more family involvement than husbands who reported participating less frequently in family religious practices.

Examining the influence husbands and wives have on each other, the path from wives' religious beliefs to husbands' family involvement was significant (b=.23; p<.01), as was the path from wives' religious practices to husbands' family involvement (b=-.85; p<.001). Conversely, the path from husbands' religious beliefs to wives' family involvement was not significant (b=-.05), nor was the path from husbands' religious practices to wives' family involvement (b=-.16). Thus, the stronger wives' religious beliefs were the more involved husbands were with their family. Conversely, the higher the frequency of family religious practices as reported by wives, the less involved husbands were with their family.

Table 9 shows the indirect paths and associated t values for paths with a standardized coefficient greater than 0.10. Of the 64 reported indirect effects, 56 were significant. For religious beliefs, wives' had a significant and moderate influence on their own personal prayer and a significant and large influence on each of their other ten religious practices and husbands' family involvement. Wives' religious beliefs did not have an effect on their own family involvement or on their husbands' parent-child involvement. Husbands' religious beliefs had a significant and moderate influence on their own report of family unit involvement, church attendance, use of religious music, family decisions, family discussions, family play, parent-child talk, help child with homework, and attend child's activities. Husbands' religious beliefs had a significant and large influence on their own report of family involvement, parent-child involvement, use of religious media, religious gatherings, religious conversations, reading religious texts, meal-time prayer, parent-child prayer, couple prayer, and family prayer. Husbands' religious beliefs did not have an effect on their own report of taking care of your child.

For religious practices, wives had a significant and moderate influence on their own parent-child involvement, family decisions, family discussions, family play, and parent-child talk.

Wives' religious practices had a significant and large influence on their husbands' involvement as a family unit, parent-child involvement, family decisions, family discussions, family play, parent-child talk, help child with homework, care for child, read to child, and attend child's activities. Wives' religious practices did not have an effect on their own involvement as a family unit, help child with homework, or care for child. Husbands' religious practices had a significant and large influence on their own involvement as a family unit, parent-child involvement, family decisions, family discussions, family play, parent-child talk, help child with homework, care for child, read to child, and attend child's activities. Husbands' religious practices did not have an effect on their wives' involvement as a family unit or parent-child involvement. This model predicted little amount of variance in family involvement for husbands (R^2 = .15) and wives (R^2 = .03). The squared multiple correlations are shown in Figure 11.

Table 9.

Indirect Effects for the Religiosity and Family Involvement Model (N=305 couples; b > 0.10)

	Indirect Effects	
Predictor and Criterion	Path Coefficient	*t*
Wives' Religious Beliefs		
Wives' Family Involvement	0.12	0.71
Husbands' Family Involvement	-0.35	-3.72
Husbands' Parent-Child Involvement	-0.11	-1.89
Wives' Personal Prayer	0.13	4.24
Wives' Church Attendance	0.32	4.48
Wives' Religious Media	0.27	3.77
Wives' Religious Music	0.27	3.77
Wives' Religious Gatherings	0.31	6.37
Wives' Religious Conversations	0.34	8.00
Wives' Reading Religious Texts	0.31	5.77
Wives' Meal-Time Prayer	0.31	4.09
Wives' Parent-Child Prayer	0.29	3.54
Wives' Couple Prayer	0.28	4.43
Wives' Family Prayer	0.29	3.83
Husbands' Religious Beliefs		
Husbands' Family Involvement	0.26	2.66
Husbands' Family Unit Involvement	0.21	2.62
Husbands' Parent-Child Involvement	0.26	4.05
Husbands' Church Attendance	0.22	3.34
Husbands' Religious Media	0.27	4.83
Husbands' Religious Music	0.25	3.80

Husbands' Religious Gatherings	0.28	5.27
Husbands' Religious Conversations	0.28	5.18
Husbands' Reading Religious Texts	0.30	6.94
Husbands' Meal-Time Prayer	0.26	2.67
Husbands' Parent-Child Prayer	0.27	3.67
Husbands' Couple Prayer	0.28	5.29
Husbands' Family Prayer	0.28	3.97
Husbands' Decisions	0.14	2.76
Husbands' Share Happenings	0.16	3.05
Husbands' Play	0.15	3.33
Husbands' Talk	0.15	2.63
Husbands' Help	0.15	2.30
Husbands' Care	0.12	1.90
Husbands' Attend	0.11	2.03
Wives' Religious Practices		
Wives' Family Unit Involvement	0.24	1.47
Wives' Parent-Child Involvement	0.21	2.59
Husbands' Family Unit Involvement	-0.68	-7.24
Husbands' Parent-Child Involvement	-0.84	-11.26
Wives' Decisions	0.16	2.36
Wives' Share	0.16	2.63
Wives' Play	0.19	2.98
Wives' Talk	0.13	2.10
Wives' Help	0.11	1.26
Wives' Care	0.10	1.91
Husbands' Decisions	-0.47	-7.68
Husbands' Share	-0.51	-8.47
Husbands' Play	-0.50	-9.21
Husbands' Talk	-0.48	-7.28
Husbands' Help	-0.49	-6.39
Husbands' Care	-0.40	-5.26
Husbands' Read	-0.30	-3.24
Husbands' Attend	-0.37	-5.63
Husbands' Religious Practices		
Wives' Family Unit Involvement	-0.13	-0.91
Wives' Parent-Child Involvement	-0.11	-1.59
Husbands' Family Unit Involvement	0.59	7.40
Husbands' Parent-Child Involvement	0.72	11.53
Husbands' Decisions	0.40	7.85
Husbands' Share	0.44	8.65
Husbands' Play	0.43	9.42

Husbands' Talk	0.41	7.45
Husbands' Help	0.42	6.54
Husbands' Care	0.34	5.38
Husbands' Read	0.26	3.33
Husbands' Attend	0.32	5.76

Summary

The purpose of the current study is to investigate how couples' religious beliefs and practices influence marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement. I examined the influence husbands' and wives' religiosity has on their own marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement as well as their partner's marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement. Results only partially support the hypotheses, that *all* pathways between religiosity and family strengths would be positive for both husbands and wives. As summarized below, religiosity influences marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement for both husbands and wives in different ways.

For *marital commitment*, the first hypothesis, that participant's religious beliefs and practices are positively related to their own marital commitment, was only partially supported. Religious practices were positively related to participants' own marital commitment, but religious beliefs had no influence on participants' own marital commitment. Results only partially supported the second hypothesis, that participants' religious beliefs and practices are positively related to their partners' marital commitment. Results indicate that the stronger the religious beliefs of husbands, the higher the marital commitment level of the wives. The other interspousal pathways were not significant.

For *parent-child closeness*, the third hypothesis, that participants' religious beliefs and practices are positively related to their own parent-child closeness, only had one significant pathway, suggesting that husbands who reported more frequent religious practices perceived increased closeness with their children. The fourth hypothesis, that participant's religious beliefs and practices are positively related to their partner's parent-child closeness, was also only partially supported. Only wives' report of religiosity influenced husbands' parent-child closeness. The stronger wives religious beliefs were the more close husbands felt with their children. Conversely, the higher wives' reported frequency of religious practices, the less close husbands felt with their children.

The relationship between religious beliefs and *family involvement* (which encompasses parent-child involvement and involvement as a family unit) also differed for husbands and wives and was only partially supported. For the fifth and sixth hypotheses, that participant's religious beliefs and practices are positively related to their own parent-child involvement and their involvement as a family unit, husbands religious beliefs had a significant and large indirect and positive influence on their own family involvement, including a positive influence on their parent-child involvement (e.g., help child with homework, attend child's activities, and talk with child) as well as their involvement as a family unit (e.g., play together, share happenings of your day with family, and make decisions together). Husbands' religious practices are positively related to their own family involvement, including a positive indirect influence on their involvement as a family unit and their parent-child involvement. Neither wives' religious beliefs nor practices had an influence on their own family involvement, but religious practices did have a moderate indirect effect on their parent-child involvement (e.g., talk with child) as well as their involvement as a family unit.

For the seventh and eighth hypotheses, that participant's religious beliefs and practices are positively related to their *partner's* parent-child involvement and involvement as a family unit, wives' religious beliefs had a positive influence on husbands' family involvement, yet husbands' religious beliefs had no significant influence on wives' family involvement. For religious practices, wives' had a significant and negative influence on husbands' family involvement, including a negative indirect influence on husbands' involvement as a family unit and their parent-child involvement, yet husbands' religious practices had no significant influence on wives' family involvement.

In summary, my hypotheses were consistently only partially supported. Results suggest that religious beliefs and practices are equivocal and are associated with both higher and lower marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement for both husbands and wives.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications
Discussion

Family relationships are complex and fragile. Religion has a reputation for complicating family relationships. Using survey data from couples I investigated how religious beliefs and practices influenced marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement. I explored how the linkages for these dimensions were either similar or varied for wives and husbands. The results only partially supported the specific hypotheses, that *all* pathways between religiosity and family strengths would be positive for both husbands and wives. In other words, religious beliefs and religious practices can be both beneficial and harmful to family relationships and differ between husbands and wives. Although religiosity can have a destructive influence on some father-child relationships, this study has demonstrated that religiosity and families can and often do work together to create strong bonds of marital commitment, closeness between parents and children, and greater levels of family involvement for mothers and fathers. However, results suggest that religious beliefs and practices are equivocal and are associated with both higher and lower marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement.

Although, generally speaking, the benefits are widespread, the specific pathways among these constructs differed for husbands and wives. A close examination of couple dynamics, including intrapersonal and interspousal pathways, through the APIM analyses, illuminates the importance of observing the influence couples have on each other. An investigation of couple dynamics revealed that religious beliefs and religious practices can either be positively or negatively related to the family strength variables (e.g., family involvement and parent-child closeness) depending on whether it is the husbands' or wives' religiosity that is linked to the husbands' family strength variables. For example, husbands' religious practices are positively related to their own family involvement; conversely, wives' religious practices have a negative effect on husbands' family involvement. Thus, religiosity is related to marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement for both husbands and wives in different ways. The following sections offer a summary and analysis of key findings, including significant contributions, notable limitations, and possible directions for further research and practice.

Religiosity and Marital Commitment

The associations between religious beliefs and marital commitment differ for husbands and wives. The current results provide an important insight into how religiosity is associated

with marital commitment: namely, that husbands and wives differ through both intrapersonal and interspousal pathways.

  Intrapersonal pathways. Husbands and wives with stronger religious beliefs also participate more often in religious practices. This relationship holds true for each of the three models. Additionally, husbands and wives who participate more frequently in religious practices have higher marital commitment than those who participate in religious practices less frequently. These results support earlier findings (Mahoney et al., 2001; Sullivan, 2001) that link religiosity to higher levels of marital commitment and a greater willingness to sacrifice for their partner (Sanchez et al., 2002).

  Interspousal pathways. Wives whose husbands had strong religious beliefs, were related to higher levels of marital commitment compared to wives whose husbands had less strong religious beliefs. Wives' level of marital commitment may increase with their husbands' strength of religious beliefs because they perceive that their husbands' religious view of their marriage includes fidelity, sacrifice, and loyalty to their spouse. Sacrifice for the marital relationship, commitment, sexual fidelity, and that divorce is a last resort are often taught and emphasized in religious settings (Mahoney et al., 2003). Therefore, it is possible that wives' marital commitment is strengthened when husbands learn and apply these teachings and beliefs in their marital relationship. The Religiosity and Family Strengths framework posits that religious beliefs influence behaviors and decisions. The behaviors of the husbands, based on their religious beliefs, demonstrate to their wives that they are more committed to the relationship and therefore increase the wives' marital commitment. Wives' feel closer to their husbands' with increased emotional and verbal communication, which may increase and be connected to husbands' religious beliefs (see Fiese & Tomcho, 2001). Thus, religious beliefs may have a unique influence on how husbands interact with their wives, which then influences wives marital commitment level.

  Significantly, no interspousal pathways were significant between husbands' and wives' religious practices and their spouses' marital commitment. This result is contrary to the hypothesis and suggests that commitment to one's spouse is not influenced by participating in the religious practices that were included in the present study. Previous research has shown that church attendance was related to marital commitment (Call & Heaton, 1997; Wilson & Musick, 1996) and lowered the risk for marital dissolution (Call & Heaton, 1997; Wilcox, 2005) and infidelity (Burdette et al., 2007). The difference in findings could be due in part to measurement;

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the construct of religious practices is measured much differently and includes more practices than has been previously examined. The religious practices construct included 11 elements, some of which may have more or less influence on marital commitment. For example, Gruner (1985) found that prayer influenced marital satisfaction for only some religious affiliations but was measured as a dichotomous variable. Additional research could separately examine the link between each of the religious practices and marital commitment. It may be that some of the religious practices are either positively or negatively related to marital commitment while others have no effect. For example, church attendance was found to strengthen marital commitment (Call & Heaton, 1997; Wilson & Musick, 1996), even after a wide range of variables were controlled for (Mahoney et al., 2001). Implications for families who participate in religious activities (e.g., shared prayer, religious routines at home, and religious conversations in the home) have just recently emerged (Mahoney, in press). Reading religious texts was related to marital satisfaction but only among Pentecostal and evangelical groups. In other words, affiliation, or other factors, could be moderating some of the practices. Understanding these differences could be important for practitioners interested in using religious practices to strengthen marital commitment. Additionally, while husbands' religious beliefs and practice are related to wife's marital commitment, it will be helpful to find out which aspects of wives' religiosity is associated with husband's sense of commitment.

In summary, higher frequency of husbands' and wives' religious practices is related to higher level of their own marital commitment. Additionally, the stronger husbands' religious beliefs were, the higher the wives' marital commitment. These results extend previous research on how religiosity influences marital commitment by including multiple religious domains in the same model and by examining the influence couples have on each other.

Religiosity and Parent-Child Closeness

The relationship between religious beliefs and parent-child closeness also differed for husbands and wives through both intrapersonal and interspousal pathways. As noted in previous family studies literature (Acitelli, 1992; Bernard, 1972; Block, 1983; Clements, Cordova, Markman, & Laurenceau, 1997; Fowers, 1991; Gottman, 1994; Gray-Little & Burks, 1983) husbands and wives differ in a number of ways. For example, Fowers found that husbands differed from their wives in terms of finances, parenting, family and friends, religion, and gendered roles. According to Bernard, husbands and wives have different marital experiences, "his" and "hers," resulting from gender inequalities in the marital relationship and in society.

Throughout each of these studies, is the idea that wives are more focused on relationships and that the more husbands become focused on relationships, the more satisfied wives are with their marriage and other family relationships. The results of the current study also suggest that husbands and wives do not experience family relationships in the same way and that religiosity influences wives' relationships in different ways than husbands' relationships.

Intrapersonal pathways. Contrary to my hypothesis and much of the extant literature, fathers' and mothers' religious beliefs have no influence on how close they feel to their child. The religious beliefs of fathers have previously been linked to a closer father-child relationship (King, 2003) whereas the link between mother's religious beliefs and mother-child closeness has not been found or remains neglected (Mahoney, in press). This discrepancy between fathers and mothers may be because fathers are more uniquely influenced by their faith in seeking for guidance on how to be a better parent (Dollahite, 1998; Dollahite, 2003; Mahoney, in press) whereas the closeness between mothers and their children is found elsewhere. For example, father involvement, more than mother involvement, is influenced by cultural expectations, employment opportunities, and social support (Amato, 1994; Dienhart & Daly, 1997; Dollahite, 1998). Fatherhood initiatives and research on fatherhood have recently surfaced and have led to a change in the expectations of fathers (Amato, 1994; Popenoe, 1996). Whereas mothers have consistently been found to be connected to their children (Allen & Hawkins, 1999), fathers are now participating more collaboratively (Amato, 1994; Dienhart & Daly, 1997). Mothers can be a resource for fathers as they refocus their energy on being involved with their families (Allen & Hawkins, 1999).

The relationship between religious practices and parent-child closeness differed for fathers and mothers. Fathers feel closer to their children the more frequently religious practices take place in the home, whereas mothers' religious practices are not linked to how close they feel to their child. This finding supports previous research stating that fathers who participated in religious practices with their children felt closer to them and had a stronger connection with them due to increased interaction and shared interests (Brotherson et al., 2005; Dollahite, 1998). It also highlights the possibility that fathers and mothers spend time differently in the home. Mothers continue to have responsibility over family matters and are more involved in caring for their home and children, whereas fathers have less family responsibilities in the home (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Pleck, 1997). The finding that mothers' religious practices have no influence on how close they feel to their child does not support previous researchers who found that mothers

and adolescents had higher relationship satisfaction and intimacy the more often they participated in religious discussions together (Brelsford & Mahoney, 2008). Thus, my findings suggest that the influence of religiosity on parent-child closeness has a unique effect for fathers only. It may be that participating in religious practices provides an opportunity for fathers to interact in new and meaningful ways with their children. Fathers may be the sole breadwinner in traditionally religious households (Mahoney et al., 2001) and therefore have fewer father-child interactions with their children than the mothers, or mothers may be reluctant to relinquish responsibility over family matters (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Mothers may already be so much more involved in other areas of their children's lives that religiosity does not add to the closeness mothers feel for their children. Mothers may also be worn out because of the many expectations of them to keep order in the home that religious practices are just one more thing to worry about and complete. Additionally, the children in my sample were between the ages of 11 and 12. They may be too young to connect with their mothers in significant ways through religious discussions as suggested by Brelsford and Mahoney (2008).

Interspousal pathways. In support of my hypothesis and much of the extant literature, fathers feel closer to their children the stronger the mothers' religious beliefs, yet contrary to my hypothesis, the strength of fathers' religious beliefs have no influence on the closeness mothers feel to their children. The current study's findings show that fathers' religious beliefs are highly connected with mothers' religious beliefs. Mothers' religious beliefs may provide a sense of connection between them and the husbands that connect with fathers' view of what it means to be an involved father (Dollahite, 1998; Mirowsky & Ross, 1987). Mothers' religious beliefs may also encourage the mother to support the father in being involved with their children in meaningful ways (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Amato, 1994; Mahoney, in press).

Contrary to my hypothesis, the more frequently families participate in religious practices (as reported by wives) the less likely husbands feel connected to their children. There could be conceptual as well as methodological reasons for this negative relationship. I discuss the possible reasons for this surprising finding, along with a similar finding for the religiosity and family involvement model, later in the discussion section. In summary, neither husbands' religious beliefs nor religious practices are associated with wives' parent-child closeness. On the other hand, wives' religious beliefs and religious practices have opposite (both positive and negative) influences on husbands' parent-child closeness. These results provide additional

support for the idea that fathers' relationships with their families are more greatly influenced by religiosity than are their wives (Fowers, 1991).

Religiosity and Family Involvement

Similarly to previous findings, the relationship between religious beliefs and family involvement differed for husbands and wives through both intrapersonal and interspousal pathways.

Intrapersonal pathways. For fathers, the stronger their religious beliefs, the more involved they are with their families. For example, fathers with stronger religious beliefs are more likely to help their child with homework, attend their child's activities, and talk with their child. Furthermore, fathers with stronger religious beliefs are more likely to play and have fun with their family, to share the happenings of their day with their family, and to make decisions together as a family. Conversely, mothers are not more involved with their families the stronger their religious beliefs. Previous researchers have found that religiosity motivated fathers to be involved with their children (Marks & Dollahite, 2007; Wilcox, 2004). This may be because fathers are influenced more by their faith in seeking for guidance on how to be a more involved father and husband (Dollahite, 1998; Dollahite, 2003; Mahoney, in press) whereas the involvement between mothers and their children is already established (Fowers, 1991). Results from the current study show the same linkages among religious beliefs, religious practices, and family involvement as are found among religious beliefs, religious practices, and parent-child closeness. Conceptually, feelings of closeness are created and strengthened through interaction and involvement. The Family Strengths framework (Stinnett & DeFrain, 1985) also includes closeness as part of involvement. Therefore, the same interactions between husbands and wives in relation to parent-child closeness that were discussed previously (e.g., gender and role differences) are also at work in regards to family involvement.

Husbands and wives differed in the relationship between religious practices and parent-child closeness. For fathers, the more frequently they participate in religious practices, the more involved they are with their families. For example, the more frequently fathers participate in religious practices, the more likely they are to help their child with homework, attend their child's activities, read to their child, take care of their child (e.g., make him/her food or pick him/her up from school), and talk with their child. Furthermore, the more frequently fathers participate in religious practices, the more likely they are to play and have fun with their family, to share the happenings of their day with their family, and to make decisions together as a family.

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Similarly for mothers, the more frequently they participate in religious practices, the more involved they are with their families. For example, the more frequently mothers participate in religious practices, the more likely they are to play and have fun with their family, to share the happenings of their day with their family, and to make decisions together as a family. Furthermore, the more frequently mothers participate in religious practices, the more likely they are to talk with their child. These results support research that indicates that participation in religious practices such as prayer, reading religious texts, having religious conversations, and attending church provides opportunities for fathers and mothers to be involved with their families (Dollahite et al., 1998). The current results indicate that religiosity has more of an effect on fathers' family involvement than on mothers' family involvement, which also supports previous findings (Fowers, 1991; Mahoney, in press).

Investigation of whether religiosity is associated with mother-child involvement has either not been found or has been neglected in previous research (Mahoney, in press; Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005) even through researchers (e.g., Koenig et al., 2001) found that women are more likely than men to pray, attend church, use religious coping practices, and feel that religion is important.. The current results are important for understanding how wives' religious beliefs and practices influence their own parent-child and family involvement. Specifically, that mothers' religious beliefs do not influence their parent-child or family involvement, yet increased frequency of their religious practices is linked to mother-child communication as well as their involvement with their family. This is contrary to previous descriptive studies on Mexican-American (e.g., Garcia, Perez, & Ortiz, 2000) and African American mothers (e.g., Brodsky, 2000) that suggest religious beliefs can help mothers to adapt to parenting and other difficult circumstances (e.g., poverty, being a single parent). More systematic research on the linkage between motherhood and religiosity is needed. However, it appears that religiosity is less associated with the mother-child relationship than the father-child relationship, especially in regard to religious beliefs. The unique influence religiosity has on fathers is mediated by other processes within the mother-child relationship.

Interspousal pathways. In support of my hypothesis and much of the extant literature, fathers are more involved with their families the stronger the mothers' religious beliefs, yet contrary to my hypothesis, the strength of fathers' religious beliefs were not associated with how involved mothers are with their families. Although previous researchers have investigated how affiliational (e.g., conservative Protestant, Catholic, LDS) religious beliefs were related to family

involvement (Marks & Dollahite, 2007; Wilcox, 2004), little research has measured how other forms of religious beliefs (e.g., meaning, purpose, identity, guides life decisions) are connected with family involvement. The current research found that husbands' family involvement is related to wives' religious beliefs and practices, suggesting again that husbands are more greatly influenced by religiosity than are wives. Perhaps religion has a unique relationship with level of meaningful father involvement, whether it is their own religiosity or their wives' religiosity (Fowers, 1991). The emphasis a father places on his role as a parent is heavily influenced by his wife (Rane & McBride, 2000). Mothers' perceptions of the paternal role were better predictors of father involvement than were fathers' own perceptions of their paternal role (McBride & Rane, 1997). Mothers influence not only paternal identities but also fathering behavior (e.g., McBride, Brown, Bost, Shin, Vaughn, & Korth, 2005). Mothers have been found to be gatekeepers of the home (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; McBride et al., 2005) where they may be reluctant to share their mothering identity and to allow fathers the opportunity to care collaboratively for the home and children (Robinson & Milkie, 1998; Thompson & Walker, 1989; Thompson & Walker, 1995) which provides the opportunity to protect and nurture the growth of their children (Hawkins, Christiansen, Sargent, & Hill, 1993). Doctrinal teachings that mothers and fathers should work together to raise their children in righteousness may influence mothers' perceptions of the paternal role and encourage mothers to more actively involve their husbands in nurturing their children and taking care of the home.

Contrary to my hypothesis, the more frequently families participate in religious practices (as reported by mothers) the less likely fathers were involved with their children as well as with their family as a unit. There may be conceptual as well as methodological reasons for this negative relationship. I discuss possible reasons for this unexpected finding below, in conjunction with the similar finding for the religiosity and parent-child closeness model. In summary, neither husbands' religious beliefs nor religious practices have an influence on wives' family involvement. On the other hand, wives' religious beliefs and religious practices have opposite relationships (positive and negative) with husbands' family involvement. These results indicate that fathers' relationships with their families may be more greatly influenced by religious practices and beliefs than are their wives (Fowers, 1991).

Negative Influence of Wives' Religiosity on Husbands' Family Outcomes

Both the religiosity and parent-child closeness model and the religiosity and family involvement model found that wives' religious practices were negatively related to husbands'

family outcomes. In other words, the more frequently families participate in religious practices (as reported by wives) the less likely husbands feel connected to their children and involved with their families. On the one hand, these results contradict research that suggested that participation in prayer, reading religious texts, having religious conversations, participating in religious celebrations, and attending church services provided opportunities for parents to connect with their children in meaningful ways (Bartkowski & Xu, 2000; King, 2003) in the form of structured and unstructured time for families (Dollahite et al., 1998).

Conversely, the results that wives' report of religious practices negatively influence husbands' parent-child closeness and family involvement support other research that found that religious differences between family members (e.g., parents and adolescents) was linked to relational distance and discord (Pearce & Axinn, 1998; Stokes & Regnerus, 2009). Furthermore, qualitative work on highly religious families has found negative communication patterns when parents and adolescents argue and disagree over spiritual matters (Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008). When family members disagree about religious traditions (e.g., which church to attend or other religious practices), the religious disparities may exacerbate the overall level of conflict in the home, which then lessens the desire for family involvement. This may be especially true for fathers when their adolescents differ from their own religious practices (Stokes & Regnerus, 2009). In other words, although religious practices provide *opportunities* for parents to connect with their children, these opportunities may turn out to be negative. Additionally, if family members attend different churches or are involved in differing levels of church service, participating in these religious activities provides less time for family involvement (Mahoney, in press). In sum, religious congruence (where family members report the same level of religiosity, belong to the same denomination, etc.) may be an important factor in whether religiosity strengthens or weakens family relationships, especially the fathers-child relationship (Stokes & Regnerus, 2009).

Sharing religious beliefs, practices, and values can provide important resources and strength to families, especially during the time of adolescence. In fact, religious congruence between family members has been found to be more important to relationship quality than individual religious characteristics and is especially associated with better intergenerational relations (Myers, 2004). The idea that religious agreement is associated with better intergenerational relations (Myers, 2004) and that religious discord is associated with lower quality intergenerational relationships (Stokes & Regnerus, 2009), is based in the solidarity

paradigm (e.g., Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997). The solidarity paradigm predicts that agreement co-occurs with higher affection and that discrepancy co-occurs with lower affection (Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997). Therefore, future research should address religious congruence between family members (i.e., fathers, mothers, and children) in order to better understand how religious congruence either increases or hinders closeness and involvement.

Another conceptual concern is that mothers' religious practices are negatively related to fathers' parent-child closeness and family involvement whereas fathers' religious practices are positively related to the same family strengths. In other words, why would mothers' report of religious practices have an opposite influence as the fathers' report of the same construct? These findings may be related to possible role differences between the couple (see Scanzoni & Fox, 1980). Research has found that relationship maintenance is part of a woman's role (Ragsdale, 1996). It could be that the mother-child relationship is more important to the mother than to have religious agreement. These findings may also express a gendered approach to how religiosity should transmit intergenerationally. Acitelli (1992) proposes that women are generally more relationship oriented than men. Many studies found that fathers are taught to be the spiritual leader in their home (Mahoney et al., 2001) which is one reason why fathers may put more emphasis on religious salience than on their father-child relationship. Although results of the current study do not address role distinctions, the findings do indicate that mothers' religious practices relate to fathers' family involvement.

Another reason why wives' religious practices may be negatively related to husbands' closeness and involvement is due to measurement inconsistencies. For example, some of the items in the religious practices measure are personal practices rather than family practices (e.g., personal prayer, parent-child prayer, personal church attendance) and could differ between husbands and wives. Results indicate that wives had higher mean scores for each of these personal religious practice measures. This score difference could influence the strength and directionality of the relationship. In other words, the difference between husbands' and wives' answers could produce differing relationships. If wives are leading the effort in religious practices, as Koenig et al. (2001) found, and as the current results indicate, especially if there is not religious congruence within the family, husbands may acquiesce to their wives' religious views and practices and then resent participating and become resistant and less involved. Due to the possible discrepancy between wives' and husbands' reports of religious practices, future

research should use the observational data to determine the religious practices that are really happening with the family.

Limitations

While the results mentioned above are based on sound models and supported by theory, several limitations to the current study remain and ought to be noted. First, the FFP married sample is predominantly European American. Therefore, it would be necessary to replicate and extend these results using more diverse samples in order to better generalize these results. Additionally, there is the concern that the relationships within the present study are potentially spurious. For example, although my results indicate that stronger religious beliefs are associated with husbands' involvement with their family, the relationship may be spurious because gender role preferences (e.g., traditionalism to progressiveness) may be what are accurately driving the relationship. Furthermore, once gender role preferences are controlled for, the relationship between religious beliefs and family involvement is no longer significant. Having possible unidentified, spurious variables is a potential limitation that many researchers must confront, and only further research can resolve. Results should be duplicated with other samples to provide improved validity to the relationships found in the study's three models.

Another study limitation is that although the FFP is a longitudinal study that currently gathers annual data, only two waves of data were available at the time of the present study. Thus, the current study used the two waves of data as a cross-sectional data set. One limitation with the variables that were chosen for the present study is that religious beliefs were only included in wave 2 and marital commitment was only addressed in wave 1. This means the data for the outcome variable (marital commitment) for the first model were gathered before data for the predictor variable (religious practices). Although the data were only collected one year apart, the timing of the data collection could cause potential analysis issues. To understand the differences between the variables from time 1 to time 2, I analyzed the means of the parent-child closeness measure using a t-test and found no significant difference between the two waves of data collection. Therefore, using data from two waves of data should not have a significant effect on the results. Although the sample is of moderately large size and were randomly selected from targeted census tracts that mirrored the socio-economic and racial stratification of reports of local school districts from a large northwestern city, all generalizations drawn should be cautiously applied to groups and settings that closely resemble those included in this study. Using multiple waves of data collection would be useful in capturing changes over time.

Additionally, the models used in the current study do not account for the diversity of families (e.g., socioeconomic status, culture, major life events) when measuring the linkages among religious beliefs, religious practices, marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement. For example, it is possible that families with fewer resources may desire to participate more in religious practices or be more involved with their family yet are limited in their opportunity to do so because they are working multiple jobs or have other time restrictions. Brody, Stoneman, Flor, and McCrary (1994) found that religiosity was linked to higher levels of marital quality and support for African American families who were at risk for unemployment, low educational levels, and low wages. Furthermore, Taylor and Chatters (1991) found that religious beliefs and practices are important in coping with the stresses of life. In other words, families with fewer resources may actually be more likely to participate in religious practices, especially those enacted in the home (e.g., family prayer, reading religious texts, and religious gatherings/celebrations). A thorough examination of the linkages among the constructs in the current study and SES and other contextual variables is important to gain an increased understanding of the diversity of families living within multiple contexts. Although I make an assumption in the present study that religious families will, within their time limitations and life restrictions, participate in religious practices and family involvement activities according to the strength of their religious beliefs, it is important to acknowledge that not all individuals and families have an equal opportunity to practice their beliefs according to their desires. The degree to which individuals and families participate in practicing their religious beliefs and are involved with their families depends on the context in which they live and the opportunities provided them.

To understand if there were differences in religious beliefs, religious practices, marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement based on contextual factors, I examined these constructs by comparing their means with employment and education level. I found that frequency of religious practices was higher in families where only the husbands worked compared to when both husbands and wives worked. This result supports the idea that families may have less time to participate in religious practices when both spouses are working. It is also possible that the families without working mothers may belong to more religiously conservative affiliations and that members from the more conservative affiliations participate in religious practices with greater frequency. Additional research is needed to determine the relationship between employment and family participation in religious practices.   Additionally, I found that religious beliefs were stronger for families where the husband had a bachelor's degree

compared to families where the husband had a master's or advanced degree. This result was interesting and implies that people who are more educated have fewer religious beliefs. Thus contextual variables are important to understanding the nuances of why and how religiosity is or is not important to families. Therefore, future research should examine not only the frequency but the subjective meaning of shared religious practices and their importance and influence on family strength outcomes (Fiese & Tomcho, 2001; Marks, 2004). The subjective meaning of religiosity to family members as well as their opportunity to participate in religious practices and be involved with their family will provide context to the results of the current study.

An important measurement question is whether the religious practices measure, which measured frequency of religious activities, would have had more of an influence, or a different influence, on the family strength outcome variables if religious salience (the importance of the religious activity) was used rather than frequency. In other words, instead of asking the how often the family prayed, read religious texts, or had religious conversations in the home, I would ask how important it was (i.e., not important to extremely important) to them that the family prayed, read religious texts, or had religious conversations in the home. Understanding the level of importance for family members will allow analyses that answer congruence or agreement between family members. If father, mother, and child report the same frequency of religious practices yet have different levels of meaning or importance attached to them, it will be easier to determine whether religious practices are helpful to them or whether they participate out of obligation or due to choice. Previous research found that the religious salience of religious practices was more important for marital satisfaction than was the frequency of religious practices (Fiese & Tomcho, 2001; Marks, 2004). It is probable that the influence of religious practices on the family strength variables of marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement might change if religious salience was used rather than frequency. In other words, contextual factors (e.g., SES) may effect how frequent families can attend church whereas the importance of attending church is not limited by SES. Future research should use both in order to compare (frequency compared to salience) or combine them (frequency x salience) in some way. Additionally, the sample is largely Christian and therefore should not be generalized to other religions. Furthermore, the study questions are constructed in a way as to illicit appropriate answers from Judeo-Christian samples (e.g., church attendance) but are limited and may discourage certain people to answer if their beliefs are less conventional.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the current study has also made some unique contributions to the literature. First is the use of the Religiosity and Family Strengths framework, which was derived from the theoretical frameworks of Dollahite and Marks (2005), Mahoney and colleagues (2001), and Stinnett and DeFrain (1985), and was tested using advanced statistical analysis (i.e., APIM). The incorporation of theoretical and empirical modes of analyses answers the call made by Mahoney (in press) for more of such work. Furthermore, this study is notable for its use of a representative sample of 305 couples and inclusion of self-reported data from both husbands and wives. Through the use of APIM, I address previous limitations by considering multiple relationships within the family (e.g., marital, parent-child, and family unit) and using reports from both husbands and wives to conduct "family research". Furthermore, I address the mother-child relationship gap (Mahoney, in press) by including the mother-child relationship in two models (i.e., parent-child closeness and parent-child involvement) in order to examine intrapersonal as well as interspousal pathways. Additionally, I address the limitation (Dollahite et al., 2004; Mahoney, in press) of using one- or two-item measures of religiosity by including multiple religious dimensions (i.e., religious beliefs and religious practices) as well as a variety of religious elements within the religious dimensions. The dimension of religious beliefs included three elements (i.e., purpose, identity, and life decisions) and the dimension of religious practices included eleven elements (e.g., couple prayer, parent-child prayer, family prayer, family reading of religious texts, family religious discussions). These unique contributions provide important considerations for future research, theory, and professional practice on how multiple dimensions and elements of religiosity influence family strengths.

Implications

Future Research and Theory

These initial results demonstrate that there is much to be gained from further research. Future studies could build from the framework established here and examine not only direct and indirect effects, but interaction effects of families and religiosity as well. For example, one might consider: what impact is there on families when family members differ in their religious congruence (e.g., affiliation, beliefs, religiosity salience)? Future research could also examine the interaction effects of religious agreement (i.e., when husbands' and wives' level of religious beliefs and practices are high-high, high-low, low-high, or low-low). Understanding the religious "fit" of a couple could provide a more nuanced explanation of how religiosity influences family strengths for couples.

Future researchers might replicate the models from the current study with couples who are not married (e.g., cohabiting, dating) or include more families of diverse ethnicities, families of lower SES, and families with non-Christian affiliations to further identify how religiosity influences a variety of families. Examining attitudes, expectations, and opportunities would help move the field beyond the "facts" or the "what" to examining how families feel about religion and what their expectations are. For example, researchers could ask families about the importance of religion in their life rather than only measuring frequency of religious practices. Are their expectations being met? Do their experiences match their expectations? These types of questions will increase researchers' understanding of the nuances of how family life is influenced by religiosity.

Other avenues exist for further investigation. Although some theoretical frameworks posit that religious beliefs precede religious practices (Mahoney et al., 2001; Silberman, 2005), other frameworks (Dollahite and Marks, 2005) provide no such directionality. Other researchers (Mahoney, in press) posit that the relationship is recursive, or in other words, religious beliefs and religious practices influence each other over time. For example, individuals with little to no religious beliefs could gain or strengthen their belief as they participated in religious practices. Then, as their beliefs were strengthened, their beliefs would influence their decisions on participating in religious practices. Mahoney (in press) discusses this idea, namely, that religion and family relationships interface in three stages over time: (1) discovery, which refers to family member's relationship with God (i.e., religious beliefs), (2) maintenance, which refers to family relationships having spiritual properties (e.g., religious practices), and (3) transformation, which refers to relationships with spiritual communities. If family members are in the discovery stage, they might be seeking out how the divine operates by participating in religious practices (e.g., reading religious texts, attending religious services, and prayer) which then may strengthen their relationships with the divine and their religious beliefs. Research on the influence of religiosity on family members in the discovery stage would be do well to position religious practices before religious beliefs. Because families in the current study have at least one adolescent child and because I am looking at a snapshot in time, I interpret the current study to be in the maintenance stage where families are living and making decisions as influenced by the meaning they receive from their religious beliefs. Thus religious beliefs and religious practices influence each other at different times and at different levels over time. As discussed earlier, I examined the directionality of religious beliefs and practices through correlating the domains as well as

positioning religious practices before religious beliefs, and found the models in the current study to be the best fitting models. Although, the current findings provide some evidence of the directionality of the constructs, future theory and research could further examine the relationship between religious beliefs and religious practices and the extent to which the relationship is recursive within the framework of Mahoney's (in press) three stages.

Additionally, researchers who may be particularly interested in the Family Strengths framework of Sinnett and DeFrain (1985) could examine how religious beliefs and practices influence the other family strengths variables: positive communication and conflict resolution, appreciation and affection, and the ability to cope with stress and crisis. As the linkages among the Family Strengths framework become clearer, researchers could examine the order of the variables in the full model as deduced by Schumm (1985). Even though Schumm concluded that religiosity was the predictor variable compared to the other family strength variables, it would be interesting to also examine religiosity as an outcome variable to discover if and how the other family strength variables influence religiosity. Palkovitz (2002) found that children prompted religious involvement and religious reflection, demonstrating that religiosity and family variables can be bidirectional (see also Palkovitz, Marks, Appleby, & Holmes, 2003). Additionally, a longitudinal study (Booth, Johnson, Branaman, & Sica, 1995) using a national data set showed that as marital satisfaction increased, religiosity increased. The merits of using religiosity as an outcome variable include understanding the reciprocal relationship between families and religiosity, specifically within Mahoney's (in press) framework of discovery, maintenance, and transformation.

The FFP is an excellent resource for studying pathways of family strengths, and, as a longitudinal study, will continue to be so. To take advantage of this information, future research using the FFP or other longitudinal data sets should also seek to analyze interactions among religious beliefs, religious practices, marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement over time. Additionally, future researchers using the FFP could add the self-report measures of the child. Child data was gathered on many constructs similar to the parents' constructs. Including the report of a third member of a household could increase our understanding of family dynamics. In addition to gathering data from three members of each household, the FFP also gathers observational data. Including observational data could increase the level of understanding about how families interact and live their lives.

Professional Practice

The results that the family strength variables of commitment, closeness, and involvement are influenced by religious beliefs and practices can be instrumental to professional practice. For instance, prevention and intervention specialists interested in strengthening families might increase their ability to understand how and when to incorporate and utilize a family's religiosity to help strengthen a couple's commitment to each other, a parent's closeness to his/her child, and positive family involvement (see Maton & Wells, 1995). For example, over the last 15 years, researchers in the field of family therapy have increased their discussion on how to address religion within the lives of their clients (see Carlson, Kirkpatrick, Hecker, & Killmer, 2002; the *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, April 2000). Walsh (1999a) posited that addressing religiosity is an essential component of clinical practice. Recognizing how religiosity can increase the involvement of the family as a unit or specifically between a child and his or her mother or father, provides different avenues to build feelings of trust, safety, and connection, and strengthen family relationships. Practitioners should also understand how and whether the mother's or the father's religious beliefs or practices increase or decrease individual family strengths, especially if there is religious discord. For example, practitioners interested in strengthening marital commitment might encourage couples to increase their involvement in religious practices. According to the present study, both husbands' and wives' marital commitment increases as they each participate in religious practices. Furthermore, as husbands' religious beliefs are strengthened, wives' marital commitment increases. Including a discussion about a couple's religiosity and how the couple can utilize the strength they receive from their beliefs and practices may lead to increased marital commitment (Walsh, 1999b).

Practitioners can also benefit from an increased understanding of how religiosity influences parent-child relationships. For example, if religious discord exists between a father and his teenage son or daughter, bringing religion into the discussion on how to improve their connection could be counterproductive. On the other hand, it may be beneficial to work with fathers on how to effectively communicate and resolve disagreements with their children if there is religious discord. In other words, if parents and children have differing religious beliefs or participate in different religious practices, working on resolving or accepting their differences would allow fathers to become closer with their children as they increase their positive father-child involvement. Positive family involvement may also increase as practitioners work with parents, and especially fathers, to resolve any ill feelings regarding religious disagreement.

Families will be more likely to be involved together when there are positive, respectful feelings concerning decisions made in regards to personal religious beliefs and practices.

Conclusion

While the president and others continue to promote the importance of family strengths, this study has taken into consideration some of the specific mechanisms by which families may be strengthened. By so doing, it provides a framework for ways in which religiosity may promote or hinder strong families and, in turn, strong communities. Furthermore, the current study has advanced theoretical development by providing empirical support for the idea that one's religious beliefs and practices can have either a positive or negative relationship with the quality of family relationships. Results suggest that religious beliefs and practices are equivocal and are associated with higher and lower marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement. However, the results only partially support my hypotheses, that *all* pathways between religiosity and family strengths would be positive for both husbands and wives. In other words, religious beliefs and religious practices can be both beneficial and harmful to family relationships with pathways that differ between husbands and wives.

Methodologically, using family data was a useful way to enhance our understanding of intrapersonal and interspousal processes among religious beliefs and religious practices and the family strength outcome variables of marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and family involvement. The current results provide important insights into how religiosity is associated with family strengths, namely, that husbands and wives differed through both intrapersonal and interspousal pathways. The present study is among the first to model religious beliefs, practices, and family strengths using data from both husbands and wives, and suggests that preventions and interventions targeted at improving marital commitment, parent-child closeness, and positive family involvement can be enhanced by understanding these underlying intrapersonal and interspousal processes. Educators, clinicians, and clergy interested in the process of how religiosity either strengthens or hinders marital, parent-child, and family relationships now have additional theory to guide and inform them as to how including a couple or family's religiosity in prevention and intervention work might be a powerful way to strengthen family relationships.

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Appendix A. Operationalization of Constructs

Religious Beliefs

I look to my faith as providing meaning and purpose in my life.
My faith is an important part of who I am as a person.
My faith impacts many of my decisions.

Religious Practices

I pray daily.
Couple prayer (husband and wife praying together).
Parents praying with child or listening to her/his prayers.
Family prayer (family together other than at meals).
Saying/singing a blessing/grace/prayer at family meals.
Family reading of scripture or other religious texts.
Family religious conversations at home.
Family religious gatherings/activities/celebrations.
Family singing or playing religious music/instruments.
Family use of religious media (e.g., videos, radio, TV).

Church Attendance

How often have you attended religious/spiritual services in the past 12 months?
Never
A few times
Several times
Once a month
Two or three times a month
Once a week
More than once a week

Couple Commitment

My relationship with my partner is more important to me than almost anything else in my life.
I want this relationship to stay strong.
I like to think of my partner and myself more in terms of "us" and "we," than "me" and "him/her."
I think a lot about what it would be like to be married to (or dating) someone other than my partner.
I am seriously attracted to someone other than my partner.
I may not want to be with my partner a few years from now.
Giving something up for my partner is frequently not worth the trouble.
It can be personally fulfilling to give something up for my partner.
I get satisfaction out of doing things for my partner, even if it means I miss out on something I want for myself.
It makes me feel good to sacrifice for my partner.

I feel distant from my child.
I do not feel related to my child most of the time.
I feel like an outsider with my child.
I feel close to my child.
Even around my child I do not feel that I really belong.
I am able to relate to my child.
I feel understood by my child.
I see my child as friendly and approachable.
I have little sense of togetherness with my child.

Parent-Child Involvement

Attend your child's activities (like a soccer game or something he/she is doing at school)?
Read books or magazines with your child?
Take care of your child (like fix him/her food or pick him/her up from school)?
Help your child with homework?
Make it easy for your child to talk to you?

Family Involvement

Play; have fun together.
Share happenings of your day with family members.
Make decisions together as a family.
We eat dinner together regularly.
Spending time together over the weekend has special meaning for our family.
In our family, vacations are important events.

Appendix B. Psychometric Properties of all Study Measures

Measure	M	SD	Range Potential	Actual	α
Religious Beliefs					
Wives' Beliefs	2.94	1.06	1-4	1-4	0.97
Purpose and Meaning	2.96	1.08	1-4	1-4	
Identity	2.99	1.10	1-4	1-4	
Life Decisions	2.89	1.10	1-4	1-4	
Husbands' Beliefs	2.65	1.10	1-4	1-4	0.97
Purpose and Meaning	2.67	1.14	1-4	1-4	
Identity	2.71	1.14	1-4	1-4	
Life Decisions	2.59	1.12	1-4	1-4	
Religious Practices					
Wives' Practices	1.77	1.39	0-6	0.09-5.45	0.94
I Pray Daily	2.60	1.10	1-4	1-4	
Couple Prayer	0.82	1.49	0-6	0-6	
Parent-Child Prayer	1.61	2.03	0-6	0-6	
Family Prayer	1.70	1.99	0-6	0-6	
Prayer at Meals	2.68	2.32	0-6	0-6	
Reading Religious Texts	1.05	1.50	0-6	0-6	
Religious Conversations	2.21	1.68	0-6	0-6	
Religious Gatherings	1.70	1.43	0-6	0-5	
Religious Music	1.05	1.50	0-6	0-6	
Religious Media	0.95	1.56	0-6	0-6	
Wives' Church Attendance	3.10	2.23	0-6	0-6	
Husbands' Practices	1.61	1.38	0-6	0.09-5	0.95
I Pray Daily	2.24	1.12	1-4	1-4	
Couple Prayer	0.92	1.52	0-6	0-5	
Parent-Child Prayer	1.42	1.95	0-6	0-6	
Family Prayer	1.45	1.94	0-6	0-6	

Prayer at Meals	2.59	2.34	0-6	0-6	
Reading Religious Texts	1.02	1.47	0-6	0-6	
Religious Conversations	1.93	1.52	0-6	0-6	
Religious Gatherings	1.63	1.46	0-6	0-6	
Religious Music	0.97	1.43	0-6	0-6	
Religious Media	0.86	1.41	0-6	0-6	
Husbands' Church	2.73	2.21	0-6	0-6	
Commitment					
Wives' Marital Commitment	5.86	0.75	1-7	1.7-7	0.84
Husbands' Marital Commitment	6.02	0.75	1-7	3.10-7	0.86
Wives' Parent-child closeness	5.22	0.76	1-6	2.22-6	0.90
Husbands' Parent-child closeness	5.06	0.80	1-6	2.33-6	0.88
Involvement					
Wives' Parent-Child	4.05	0.47	1-5	2.4-5	0.61
Attend Activities	4.45	0.66	1-5	2-5	
Read with Child	3.18	1.00	1-5	1-5	
Take Care of Child	4.55	0.56	1-5	3-5	
Help with Homework	3.81	0.89	1-5	2-5	
Talk to Child	4.28	0.64	1-5	2-5	
Husbands' Parent-Child	3.69	0.52	1-5	2.2-5	0.60
Attend Activities	4.11	0.73	1-5	1-5	
Read with Child	2.96	0.96	1-5	1-5	
Take Care of Child	3.84	0.84	1-5	1-5	
Help with Homework	3.50	0.90	1-5	1-5	
Talk to Child	4.03	0.76	1-5	2-5	
Wives' Family Involvement	3.87	0.58	1-5	2-5	0.74
Play Together	3.85	0.84	1-5	2-5	
Family Discussions	4.00	0.80	1-5	2-5	
Family Decisions	3.70	0.89	1-5	2-5	
Husbands' Family Involvement	3.82	0.65	1-5	1.17-5	0.76

Play Together	3.92	0.78	1-5	2-5
Family Discussions	4.00	0.90	1-5	1-5
Family Decisions	3.64	0.86	1-5	1-5

Appendix C. Correlations for the Three Structural Models

Correlations among Religious Beliefs, Religious Practices, and Marital Commitment (Structural Model)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Wife Religious Beliefs	--					
2. Husband Religious Beliefs	.66***	--				
3. Wife Religious Practices	.71***	.70***	--			
4. Husband Religious Practices	.65***	.76***	.91***	--		
5. W Marital Commitment	.16**	.25***	.24***	.27***	--	
6. H Marital Commitment	.19**	.25***	.22***	.27***	.31***	--

**p < .01. ***p < .001 (two-tailed).

Correlations among Religious Beliefs, Religious Practices, and Parent-Child Closeness (Structural Model)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Wife Religious Beliefs	--					
2. Husband Religious Beliefs	.66***	--				
3. Wife Religious Practices	.71***	.70***	--			
4. Husband Religious Practices	.65***	.76***	.91***	--		
5. W Parent-Child closeness	-.003	-.008	-.054	-.069	--	
6. H Parent-Child closeness	-.007	.013	-.081	-.049	.41***	--

**p < .01. ***p < .001 (two-tailed).

Correlations among Religious Beliefs, Religious Practices, and Family Involvement (Latent Variables)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Wife Religious Beliefs	--					
2. Husband Religious Beliefs	.66***	--				
3. Wife Religious Practices	.71***	.70***	--			
4. Husband Religious Practices	.65***	.76***	.91***	--		
5. W Family Involvement	.095	.070	.16**	.104	--	
6. H Family Involvement	.016	.050	-.034	.061	.26***	--

**$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$ (two-tailed).

Appendix D. Standardized AMOS Output for Full Structural Models
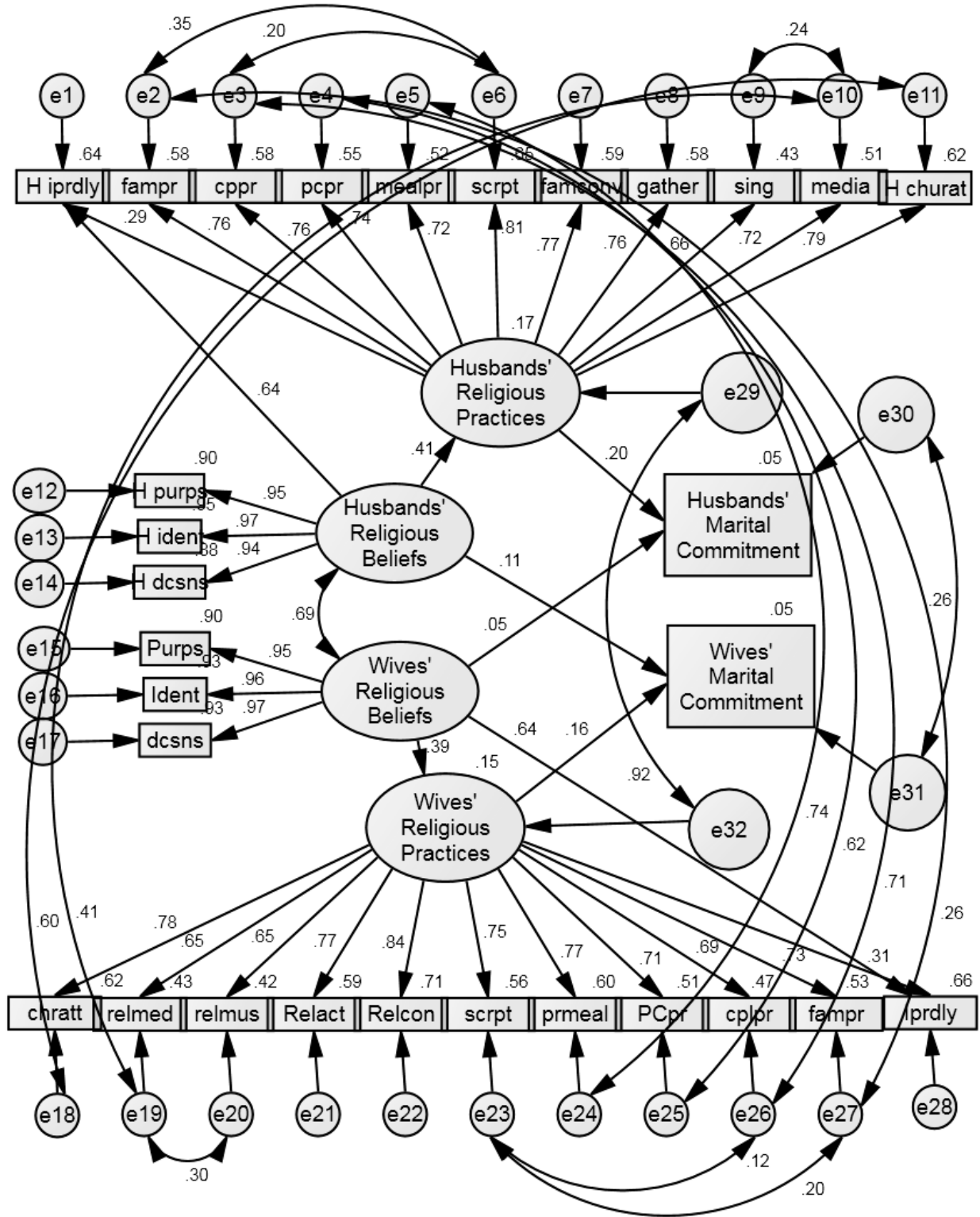
Standardized AMOS estimates for the religiosity and marital commitment framework. $\chi^2(384) = 1114$; IFI = .928; and RMSEA = .079. *p< .05, **p< .01, ***p< .001.
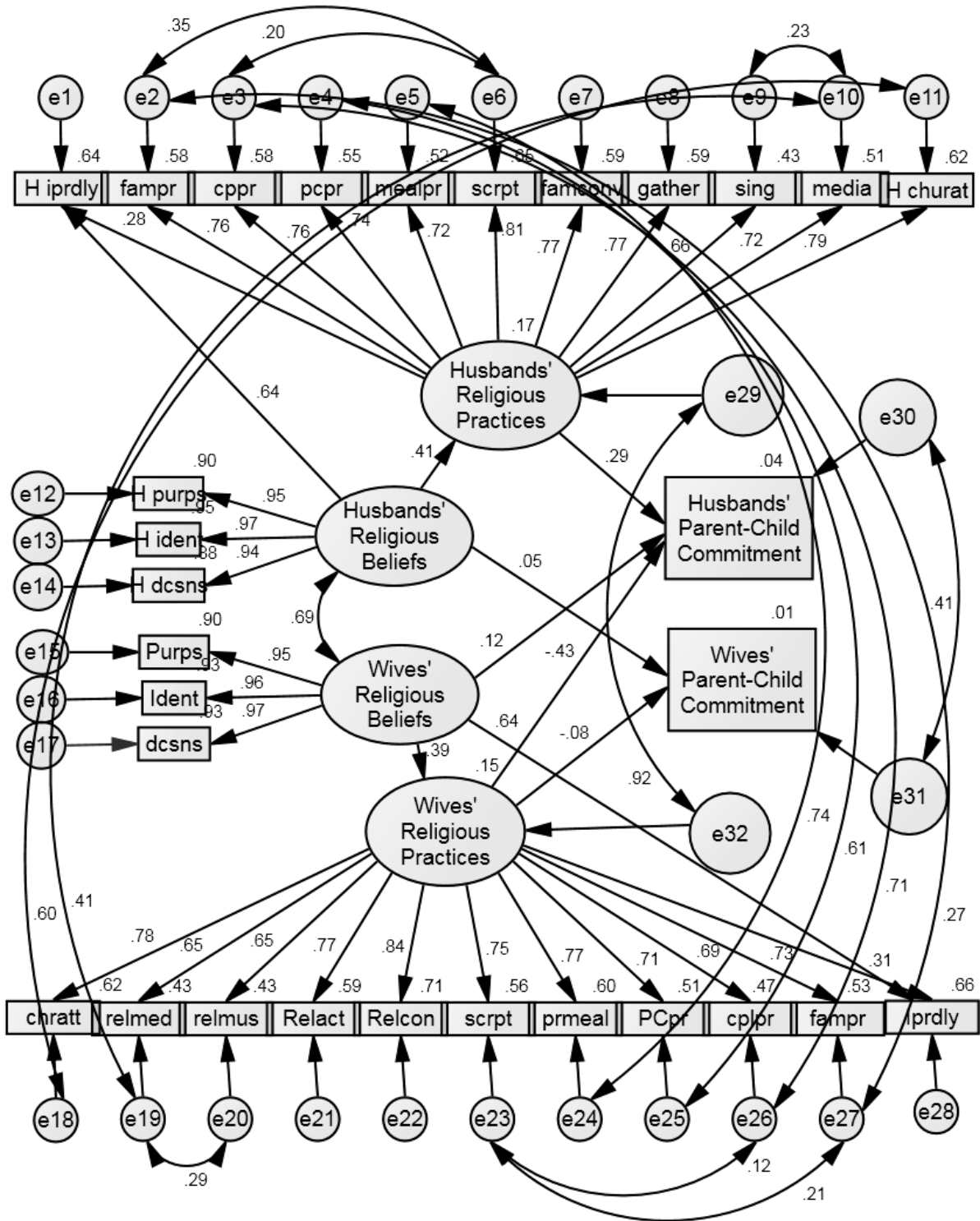
Standardized AMOS estimates for the religiosity and parent-child closeness framework. $\chi^2(383)$ = 1090; IFI = .930; and RMSEA = .078. *p< .05, **p< .01, ***p< .001.
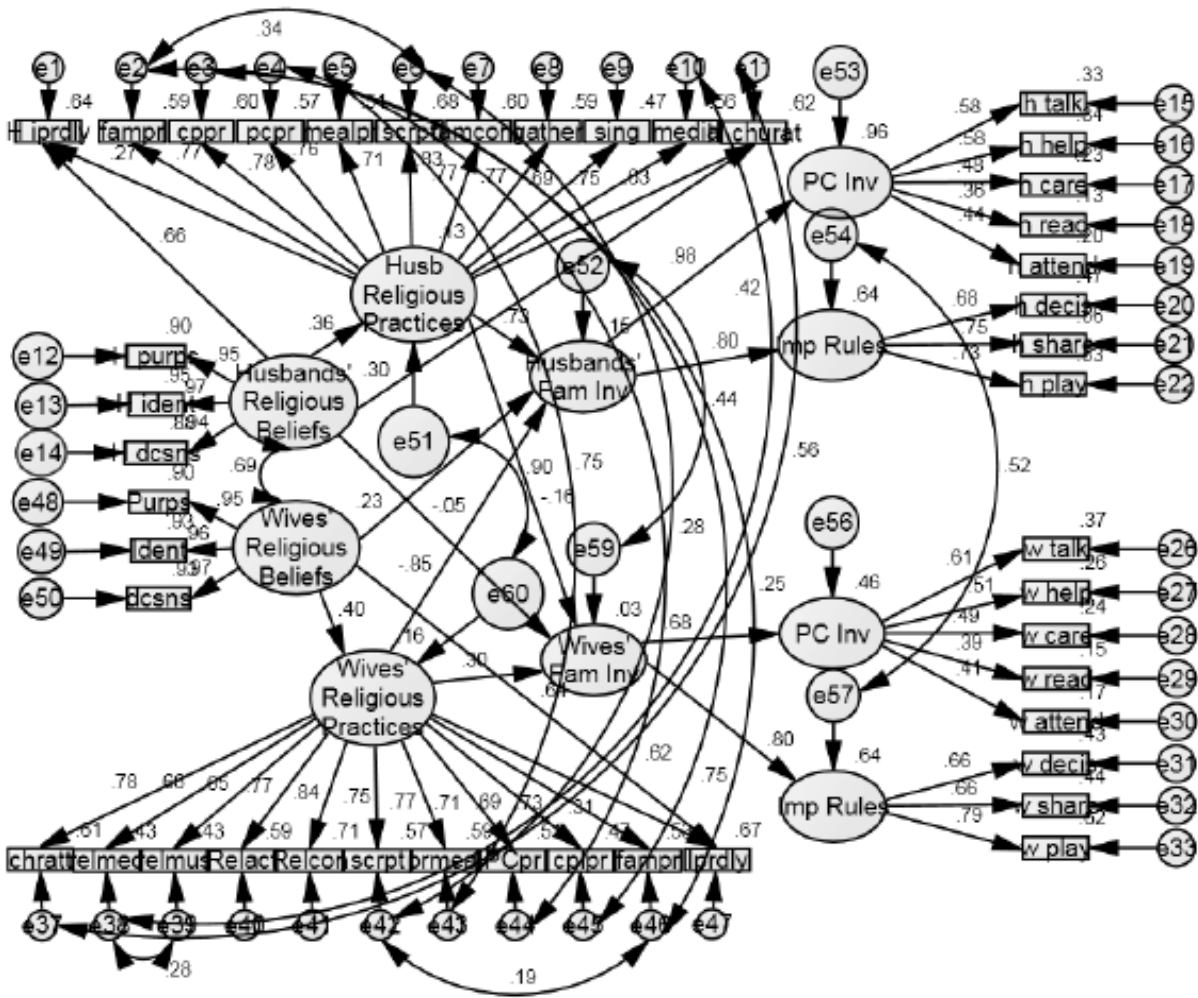
Standardized AMOS estimates for the religiosity and family involvement framework. $\chi^2(873) =$ 1748; IFI = .921; and RMSEA = .057. *p< .05, **p< .01, ***p< .001.

Appendix E. Copyright Permission Email

Question about using your theoretical model   dissertation   X

Appendix E, IRB Approval Letter

VirginiaTech
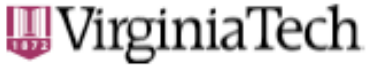
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FWA00000572(expires 1/20/2010)
IRB # is IRB00000667

DATE: August 31, 2009

MEMORANDUM

TO: Jay A. Mancini
           Bryce Jorgensen

Approval date: 8/31/2009
Continuing Review Due Date:8/16/2010
Expiration Date: 8/30/2010

FROM: David M. Moore

SUBJECT: IRB Expedited Approval: "Flourishing Family Research Project" , IRB # 09-716

This memo is regarding the above-mentioned protocol. The proposed research is eligible for expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. As Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval to the study for a period of 12 months, effective August 31, 2009.

As an investigator of human subjects, your responsibilities include the following:

1. Report promptly proposed changes in previously approved human subject research activities to the IRB, including changes to your study forms, procedures and investigators, regardless of how minor. The proposed changes must not be initiated without IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.
2. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.
3. Report promptly to the IRB of the study's closing (i.e., data collecting and data analysis complete at Virginia Tech). If the study is to continue past the expiration date (listed above), investigators must submit a request for continuing review prior to the continuing review due date (listed above). It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain re-approval from the IRB before the study's expiration date.
4. If re-approval is not obtained (unless the study has been reported to the IRB as closed) prior to the expiration date, all activities involving human subjects and data analysis must cease immediately, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

Important:
If you are conducting federally funded non-exempt research, please send the applicable OSP/grant proposal to the IRB office, once available. OSP funds may not be released until the IRB has compared and found consistent the proposal and related IRB applicaton.