

CHRISTIAN MEDIA CONSUMPTION AND MARITAL QUALITY AMONG PROTESTANTS

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BACKGROUND

- Religious activities such as prayer (Lambert, Fincham, & Stanley, 2012), church attendance (Goddard, Marshall, Olson, & Dennis, 2012), and bible reading (Gruner, 1985) have been associated positively with marital stability and satisfaction
- Religious activities also may affect marital communication, conflict resolution, commitment, and parenting (Hünler & Gençöz, 2005)

- Media consumption has been identified as a developmental influence within an ecological framework (Gentile & Walsh, 2002)
- Increase in social media use suggests negative impact on marital quality and satisfaction (Clayton, Nagurney, & Smith, 2013; McDaniel & Coyne, 2016; Roberts & David, 2016)
- Religious institutions are significant producers of multiple media, and religious media is big business (Campbell, 2017; Christian Bookseller's Association, 2017; Newman and Benchener, 2008; Scannell, 2016); marital quality often is addressed in these media
- Though religious activities and beliefs generally are associated with a positive impact on marital quality, no previous research has examined religious media and its association with marital quality.

QUESTION

- How is consumption of religious media associated with marital quality in a sample of Protestant Christians (in the context of other individual, dyadic, and family religious activities)?
- Note: Other religious activities were measured, but the novel information relates to religious media.

SAMPLE

- Secondary data from the Family Needs Survey administered by FamilyLife ($N = 6,613$) in Protestant churches during 2012 and 2013.
- Reported by FamilyLife to include diversity in denominations, location, geography, and size.

ANALYTIC STRATEGY

- Three 3-step hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to determine whether religious activities (including consumption of religious media) predicted marital satisfaction, positive bonding, and negative interaction.
- Only marital satisfaction is reported because of the similarity among the regression outcomes and to save time.

MEASURES: CRITERION VARIABLES

- Marital Satisfaction Scale ($\alpha = .913$; Schumm, 1986)
 - 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied
 - How satisfied are you with the way you connect with your spouse/fiancé/significant other?
 - How satisfied are you with how your relationship functions day-to-day?
 - How satisfied are you with your spouse/fiancé/significant other's contributions to your relationship?
 - How satisfied are you with your own contributions to your relationship?

- Positive Bonding (4 items from Stanley's Dedication Scale and Relationship Scale ($\alpha = .776$; Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002)
 - 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree
 - We regularly have great conversations where we just talk as good friends.
 - I want this relationship to stay strong no matter what difficult times we may encounter.
 - I believe we can handle whatever conflicts that may arise in the future.
 - My relationship with my spouse/fiancé/significant other is more important to me than almost anything else in my life.

- Negative Interaction (5-item Danger Signs Scale; $\alpha = .832$; Stanley, Markman, & Whitton)
 - 1 = almost never; 2 = once in a while; 3 = frequently
 - Little arguments escalate into ugly fights with accusations, criticisms, name calling, and/or bringing up past hurts. My partner criticizes or belittles my opinions, feelings, or desires
 - My spouse/fiancé/significant other seems to view my words or actions more negatively than I intended for them to be.
 - When we have a problem to solve, how often does it feel like we are on opposite teams.
 - When we argue, one of us withdraws... that is, doesn't want to talk about it anymore or leaves the scene.

MEASURES: PREDICTOR VARIABLES

- Step 1: Control Variables
 - Gender
 - Age
 - Length of marriage
 - Religious/spiritual status
 - How long have you been a Christian?
 - What is your current level of spiritual development?

- Step 2: Individual and family religious activities
 - 1 = rarely or never to 5 = almost every day
 - Reading the bible
 - Praying with spouse
 - Reading/discussing bible with spouse
 - Talking about spiritual values with children
 - Praying for children
 - Praying with children
 - Having a family devotion
 - Attendance at religious services
 - 1 = less than once a month to 5 = four or more times a month

- Step 3: Media-Related Religious Activities

1 = rarely or never to 5 = almost every day

- Watch Christian television/video
- Listen to Christian talk radio
- Listen to Christian music
- Read a Christian book and/or magazine
- Use online social networking tools (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.)
- Listen to sermon/teaching audio/podcast
- View Christian websites/blogs

RESULTS

- Step 1: Significant findings
 - Step 1 was statistically significant ($\Delta R^2 = .03, F(5,4306) = 28.34, p < .001$)
 - Individual variables
 - Gender ($\beta = -.372; t = -3.456; p = .001$)
 - Years married ($\beta = .110; t = 2.423; p = .015$)
 - Spiritual development ($\beta = .393; t = 9.756; p < .001$)

- Step 2: Significant Findings

- Step 2 was statistically significant ($\Delta R^2 = .06, F(9,4297) = 33.29, p < .001$)

- Individual variables

- Gender ($\beta = -.235; t = -2.190; p = .029$)
 - Age ($\beta = -.197; t = -3.307; p = .001$)
 - Years Married ($\beta = -.103; t = -2.294; p = .022$)
 - Spiritual Development ($\beta = .297; t = -7.045; p < .001$)
 - Reading the Bible ($\beta = -.269; t = -5.483; p < .001$)
 - Praying with your spouse/significant other ($\beta = .301; t = 5.818; p < .001$)
 - Reading or discussing the Bible with your spouse ($\beta = .635; t = 10.226; p < .001$)
 - Talking about spiritual values with your children ($\beta = -.214; t = -3.942; p < .001$)
 - Praying for your children ($\beta = .140; t = 3.046; p = .002$)
 - Praying with your children ($\beta = -.119; t = -2.609; p = .009$)

• Step 3: Significant Findings

- Step 3 was statistically significant ($\Delta R^2 = .01, F(7,4290) = 8.93, p < .001$)
- Individual variables (entered in Steps 1 & 2)
 - Age ($\beta = -.216; t = -3.462; p = .001$)
 - Years Married ($\beta = -.098; t = -2.188; p = .029$)
 - Spiritual Development ($\beta = .302; t = 7.164; p < .001$)
 - Reading the Bible ($\beta = -.188; t = -3.662; p < .001$)
 - Praying with your spouse/significant other ($\beta = .317; t = 6.152; p < .001$)
 - Reading or discussing the Bible with your spouse ($\beta = .672; t = 10.821; p < .001$)
 - Talking about spiritual values with your children ($\beta = -.181; t = -3.336; p = .001$)
 - Praying for your children ($\beta = .123; t = 2.694; p = .002$)
 - Praying with your children ($\beta = -.102; t = -2.261; p = .024$)

– Individual variables (entered in Step 3)

- Listen to Christian talk radio ($\beta = -.215$; $t = -4.446$; $p < .001$)
- View Christian websites/blogs ($\beta = -.155$; $t = -2.623$; $p = .009$)

POSITIVE ASSOCIATIONS

- Spiritual Development ($\beta = .302; t = 7.164; p < .001$)
- Reading the Bible ($\beta = -.188; t = -3.662; p < .001$)
- Praying with your spouse/significant other ($\beta = .317; t = 6.152; p < .001$)
- Reading or discussing the Bible with your spouse ($\beta = .672; t = 10.821; p < .001$)
- Praying for your children ($\beta = .140; t = 3.046; p = .002$)

NEGATIVE ASSOCIATIONS

- Age ($\beta = -.216; t = -3.462; p = .001$)
- Years Married ($\beta = -.098; t = -2.188; p = .029$)
- Reading the Bible ($\beta = -.188; t = -3.662; p < .001$)
- Talking about spiritual values with your children
($\beta = -.181; t = -3.336; p = .001$)
- Praying with your children ($\beta = -.102; t = -2.261; p = .024$)
- Listen to Christian talk radio ($\beta = -.215; t = -4.446; p < .001$)
- View Christian websites/blogs ($\beta = -.155; t = -2.623; p = .009$)

DISCUSSION

- Directionality cannot be inferred.
- The final model explained slightly over 10% of the variance.
- Consistent with previous research, joint spousal religious activities were positive predictors of marital satisfaction (praying with your spouse and reading or discussing the bible with your spouse).
- Praying for children positively predicted marital satisfaction.
- Individual activities (bible reading) and parent-child dyadic activities (talking about spiritual values and praying with children) were associated negatively with marital satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

- The only two media-related activities that were significant predictors (Christian talk radio and Christian websites/blogs) had a negative relationship with marital satisfaction.

SPECULATION

- Perhaps individuals are more likely to seek out the bible, Christian talk radio, and Christian websites looking for answers when they have distressed marriages.
- Marital satisfaction and spousal dyadic activities (prayer and reading/discussing the bible) may be bidirectional. Having a satisfying marriage could make it easier to share these spiritual activities, and sharing these dyadic spiritual activities might promote marital satisfaction.
- Individuals in distressed marriages may be more likely to discuss spiritual values and pray with their children in order to moderate potential harmful effects of marital distress on children or to encourage children to avoid choices leading to distressed marriages.

IMPLICATIONS

- Producers of Christian media (viz., Christian talk radio and Christian websites) may be glad to know that individuals with troubled marriages are more likely to seek out their products. On the other hand, they may be less enthusiastic to learn that there is no evidence that consuming their products improves marital satisfaction.
- Religious organizations desiring to deliver marital education to individuals (specifically Protestant Christians) in distressed relationships can reasonably consider the use of Christian radio or websites as possible venues.

IMPLICATIONS

- While it would be an overstatement for Protestant clergy to tell parishioners that shared prayer and Bible reading/discussion cause marital satisfaction, it would be accurate to note that couples sharing these activities are more likely to be satisfied with their marriages.