

Relational Spirituality Pathways Across Two Cultures

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Introduction

Long-term satisfying intimate relationships form the foundation of family life and positively correlate to the social, psychological, physical, financial, and spiritual well-being of couples and to a broad range of outcomes for their children. Before learning from other cultures, a certain level of understanding about relational processes in those cultures is imperative for educators, therapists, business people, policy makers, social workers, and others.

Relational Spirituality Framework

Religiosity is a cultural phenomenon that positively links to couple's satisfaction by promoting values and norms necessary to maintain committed relationships (Ellison, Burdette, & Wilcox, 2010; Fincham, Ajayi, & Beach, 2011) and may strengthen marriages that are not in distress (Mahoney & Cano, 2014; Waite & Lehrer, 2003). Mahoney's (2010, 2013) Relational Spirituality Framework describes positive relationship processes that couples employ to create, maintain, and transform their relationship using four relational virtues, such as commitment, forgiveness, sacrifice, and sanctification; this study surveys the maintenance stage in couples' relationship.

Relational Religiosity Model

Conversely, some research on religious couples reported inequality via unequal power in decision making that limits one partner's (wife's) access to personal economical, educational, and social resources and, thus, negatively affecting couple relationship (Dobash & Dobash, 2003; Ellison & Anderson, 2001; Solt, 2011; Tilly, 1999). The mixed effects of religiosity on couples' satisfaction are accounted by offering a model of relational religiosity in couples (see Fig. 1) that includes four relational virtues and equality in decision making. To date, little is known how this framework fits in other cultures; therefore, this study tested a model of couples' relational religiosity in an American (n = 1,529) and Russian (n = 529) sample. The model explores the paths connecting individual religiosity via mediating processes of relational virtues and equality toward couple's satisfaction.

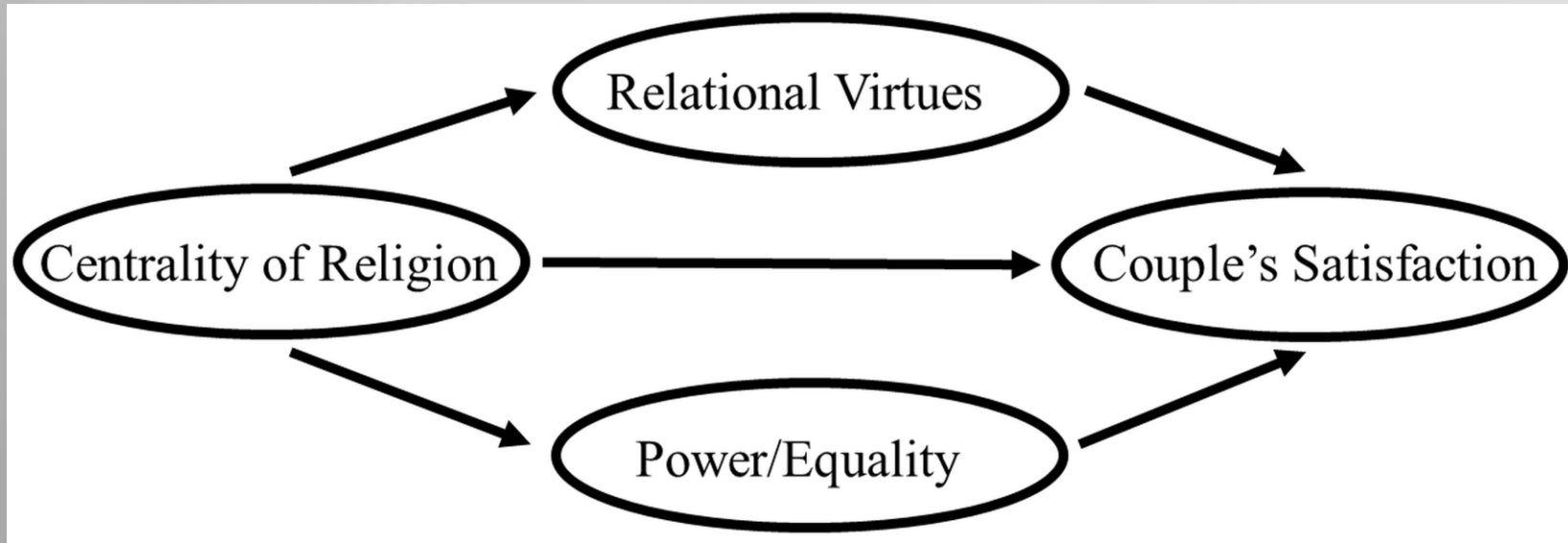


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Relational Religiosity in Couples

Methods

This cross-sectional study used original data collected via online survey from 09/01/2016 to 12/31/2017 (approved by IRB) sampling from various occupational settings (e.g., education, social and professional networks, religious groups, etc.) among English and Russian speaking individuals through email, electronic mailing lists, social media, such as Facebook, Russian BKOHTAKTE (analogous to Facebook) and so on. The American sample (n = 1,529) consisted of individuals between 18 and 96 years of age (M = 41.7, SD = 14.7), mostly female (63.5%), white (84.3%), married (70.2%), and educated with undergraduate degrees or higher (70.1%). The Russian respondents (n = 529) were between 19 and 72 years of age (M = 38.8, SD = 10.1) mostly female (64.7%), married (92.4%), well-educated with undergraduate degrees or higher (65.0%), ethnically self-identified as Russians (59.4%) and other ethnicities.

Measures

Centrality of religiosity Scale (CRS-15; Huber & Huber, 2012) was used to record the individual's responses in five dimensions of religiosity—public & private practices, religious experience, ideology, & intellectual—on a 5-point ordinal scale (Huber & Krech, 2008), Cronbach's alpha range: .92-.96.

Commitment. This measure used a 7-item scale of commitment (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998) recording responses from completely disagree (0) to completely agree (8). Alpha range: .91-.95.

Sacrifice. This 6-item scale with 7-point Likert responses was used to record a degree to which a partner considered sacrifice for the relationship to be fulfilling; alpha = .74 (Stanley & Markman).

Forgiveness. The Decision to Forgive Scale (DTFS) was used to record a degree to which decision to forgive the spouse or partner was exhibited by respondents on a 6-point ordinal scale (Fincham & Beach, 2002); alpha was .92-.94.

Sanctification. The 9-item Perceived Sacred Qualities Scale (Mahoney et al., 1999) was used to record respondents' scores of the attitudes toward sanctification of marriage on a 7-point Likert-type semantic differential scale with the middle rating being zero indicating neutral response. The scale measured the degree to which partners associated their marriage with adjectives that were antonyms (e.g., *Holy, Unholy; Blessed, Cursed*, and so on; Mahoney et al.); alpha was between .87-.88.

Equality. Relational equality was measured using items from Day and Acock (2013); participants responded to 15 items, for instance “*My partner tends to discount my opinion*,” “*My partner makes decisions that affect our family without talking to me first*,” and “*My partner has more influence in our relationship than I do*” (A. Acock, personal communication, March 10, 2016) on a 5-point Likert scale; alpha was between .91-.92.

Couple's satisfaction. The 16-item Couples Satisfaction Index [CSI(16); Funk & Rogge, 2007]] was used to record responses. Higher scores indicate higher levels of satisfaction with the relationship. Total score range was 0–81, M = 61, SD = 17; the Cronbach's coefficient of reliability alpha was .98 indicating very high internal consistency of responses (Funk & Rogge, 2007). Across all scales, the scores were kept continuous.

Results

The path analysis using maximum likelihood estimation in AMOS (IBM, v. 24) was employed to test the model in each culture and sex. First, fully saturated models yielded a marginal fit to the data (RMSEA = 0.34-.36); thus, favoring parsimony, we tested four simplified models (see Fig. 2-4).

$\chi^2(20) = 16.98, p = .654$
CFI = 1.00
RMSEA < .001

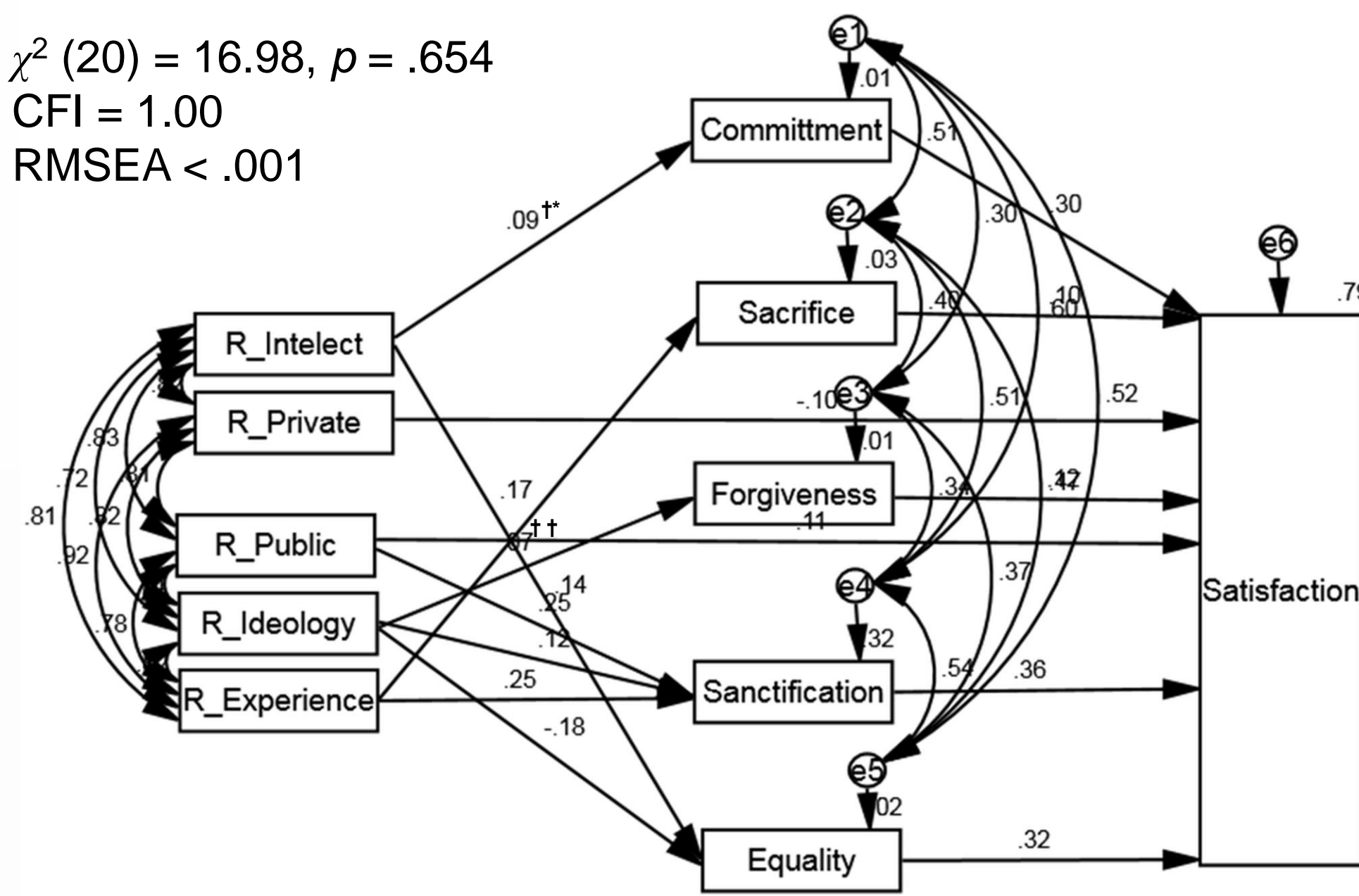


Figure 2. Results from the test of simplified path of American Female Relational Religiosity Model (n = 1,001). Standardized coefficients are reported, all at p < .001 but *p = .002, **p = .017

$\chi^2(19) = 38.963, p = .001$
CFI = .99
RMSEA = .05

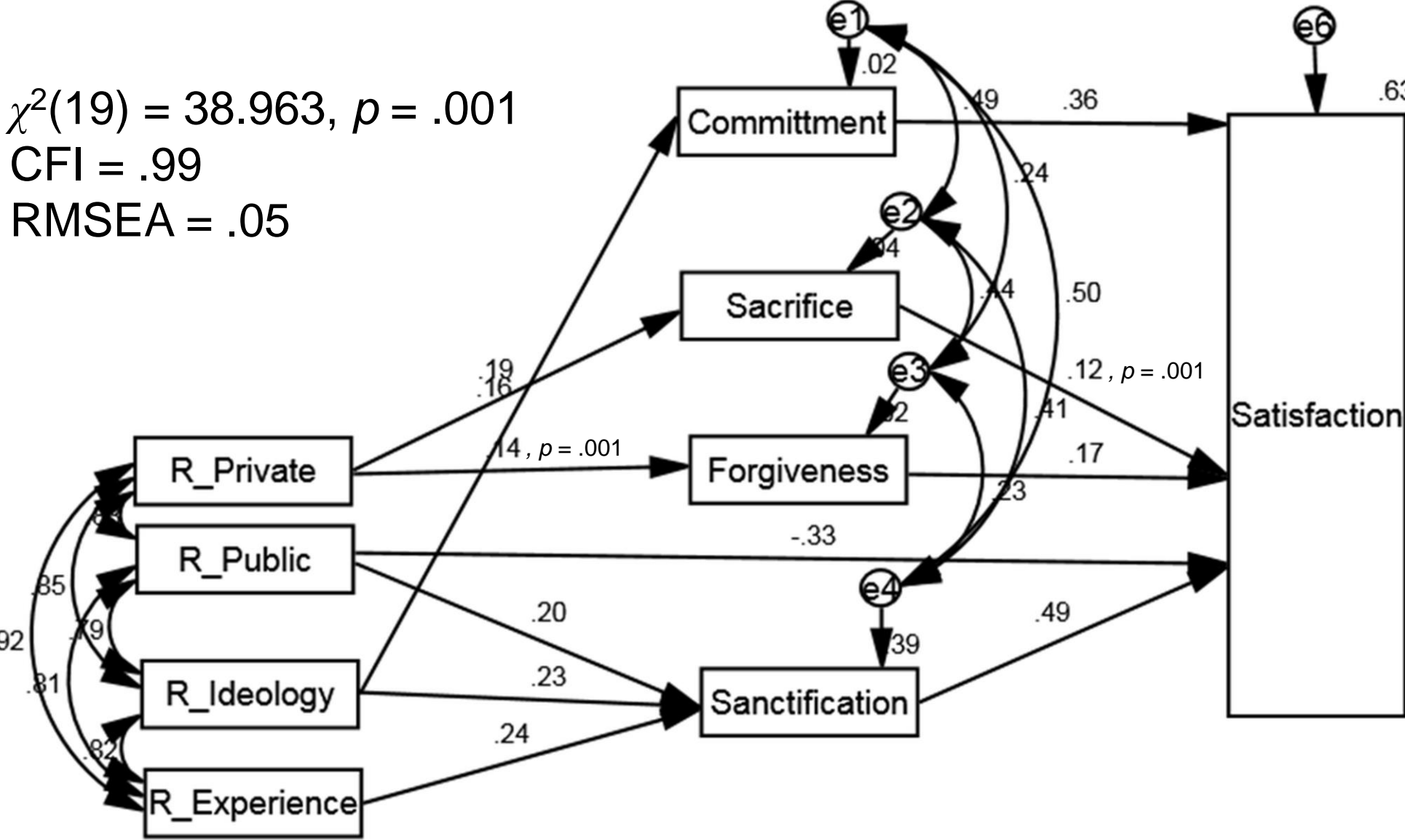


Figure 3. Results from the test of simplified path of American Male Relational Religiosity Model (n = 528). Standardized coefficients are reported, all at p < .001 if not posted otherwise.

Both models in the American sample demonstrated good fit to the data. Pathways to couple satisfaction between American male and female samples were different but similarities were with regard to how public religiosity, ideology and religious experience connected to sanctification of marriage that partially mediated their connections to couple's satisfaction. Likewise, male (r = -.33, p < .001) and female (r = -.11, p < .001) public religiosity scores were inversely associated with the scores on couple's satisfaction.

Compared to females, the relational religiosity showed that the male sample excluded intellectual religiosity, equality, and did not directly connect private religiosity to couple's satisfaction.

Russian model in the female sample resembled the patterns of paths in the American Female sample but did not include religious Intellect dimension of religiosity and differed on many other paths (see Fig. 4).

$\chi^2(8) = 19.83, p = .179$
CFI = 1.00
RMSEA = .03

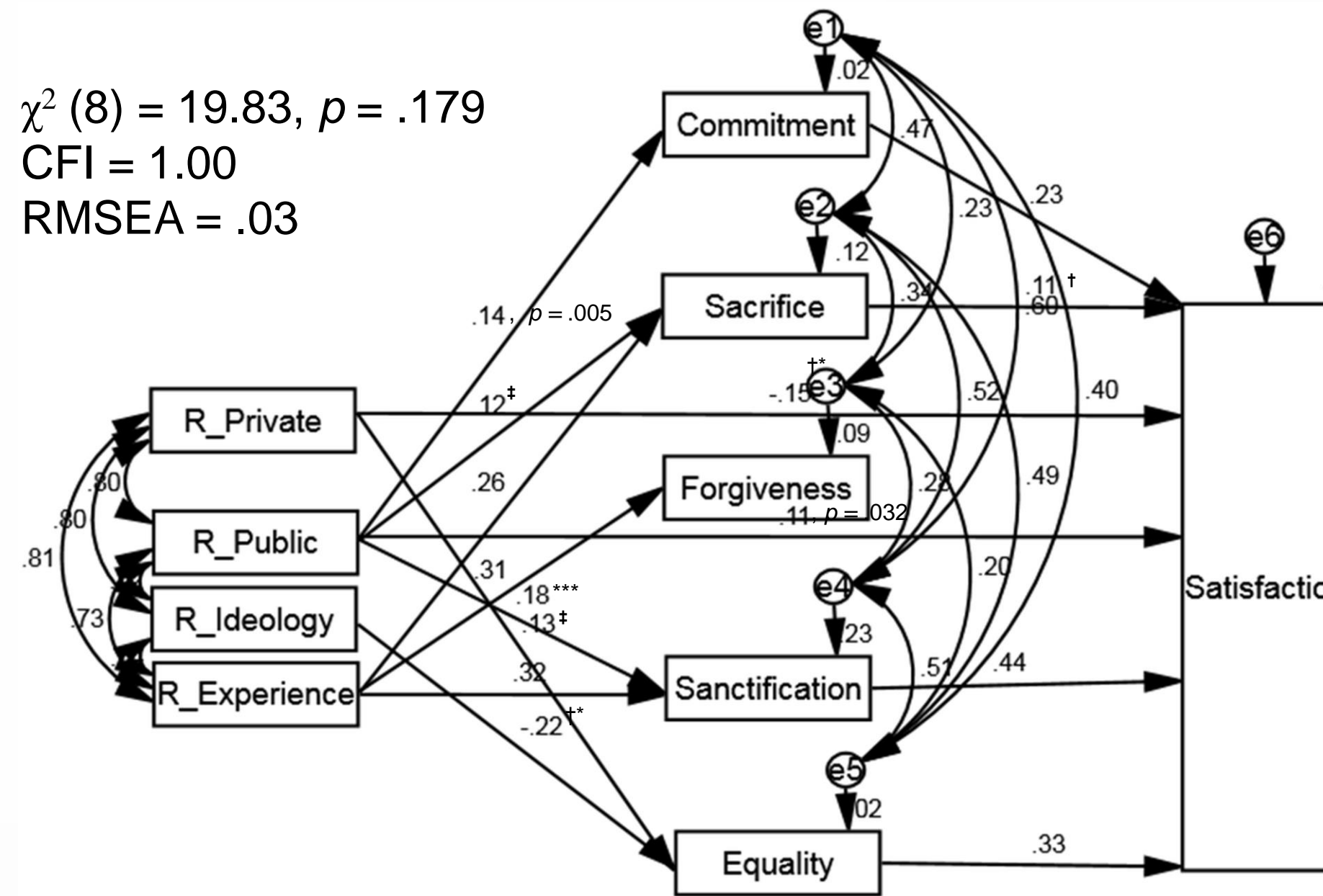


Figure 4. Results of testing the simplified path of Russian Female Relational Religiosity Model (n = 355). Standardized coefficients are reported, all at p < .001, if not posted otherwise. *p = .004, **p = .002, ***p = .001, # non-statistical.

$\chi^2(8) = 3.57, p = .894$
CFI = 1.00
RMSEA = .001

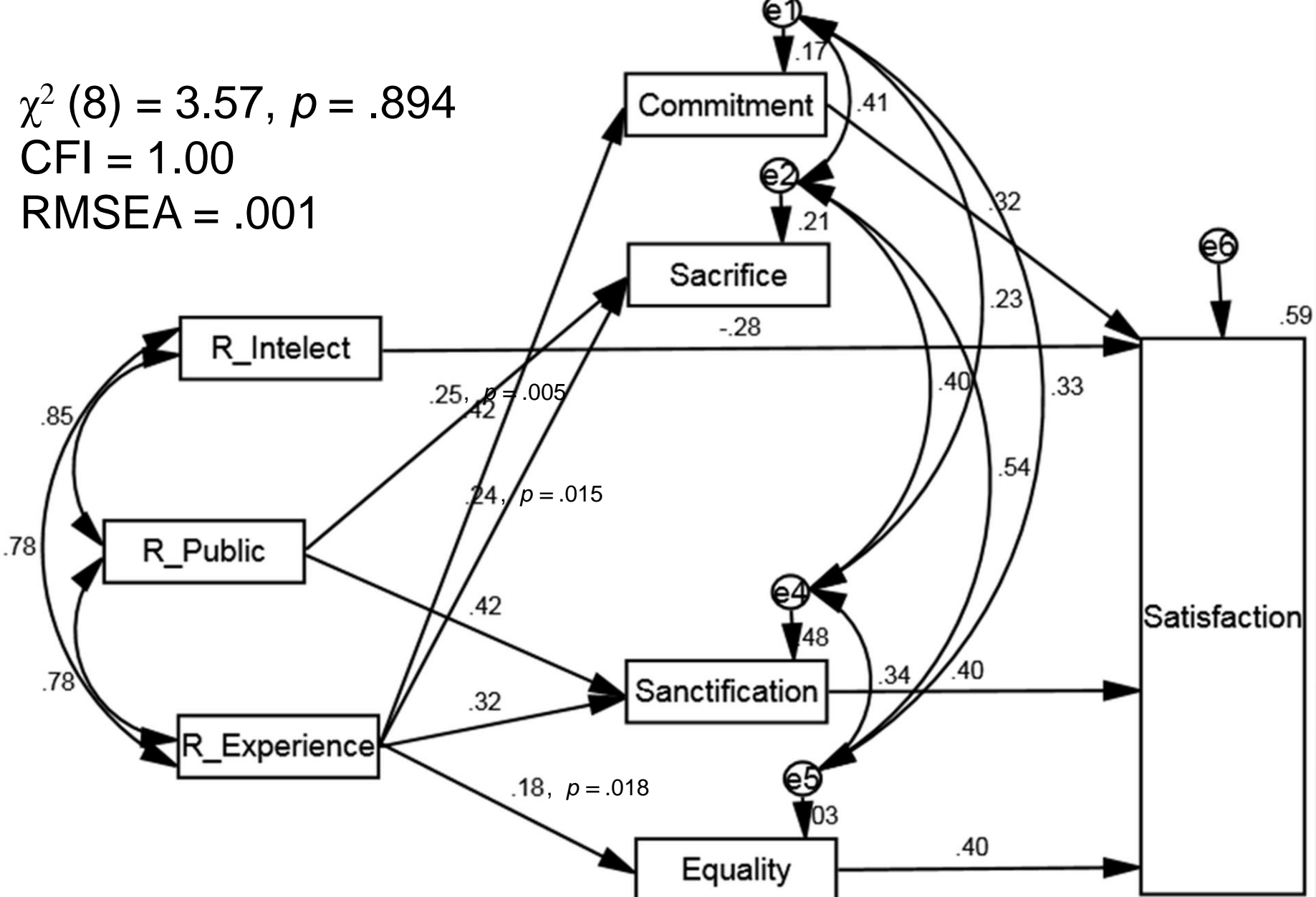


Figure 5. Results from the test of simplified path of Russian Male Relational Religiosity Model (n = 174). Standardized path coefficients are reported, all at p < .001, if not posted otherwise.

Conclusion

In pursuit of exploring cultural diversity, including ethnic and religious diversity, the current study offered evidence of both similarities and differences between the two cultures in the understanding of how relational virtues and equality function in American and Russian samples. Results provided new knowledge on relational processes across two cultures; specifically how commitment, sacrifice, forgiveness, attitude toward sanctification of marriage and equality connect five dimensions of religiosity with the couple's satisfaction at the individual level of analysis. Findings are limited to the nonprobability sample, nonetheless, tentatively suggesting meaningful variations between and within cultures and sexes.