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A Comparison of the Effects of Negative Communication and Spirituality on Relationship Quality Among Different Groups of Latino and Anglo Couples

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A Comparison of the Effects of Negative Communication and
Spirituality on Relationship Quality Among Different
Groups of Latino and Anglo Couples

Sergio B. Pereyra

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science

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ABSTRACT

A Comparison of Relationship Quality Among Different Groups of Latino and Anglo Couples

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This study examined the direct relationship between actor/ partner effects of negative communication, spirituality and relationship quality and also examined negative communication when mediated by spirituality among four types of couples. The sample included 300 heterosexual Anglo couples (AC), 319 heterosexual female Anglo/ male Latino couples (FAML), 292 heterosexual female Latina/ male Anglo couples (FLMA), and 177 heterosexual Latino couples (LC) who completed a survey questionnaire known as the RELATionship Evaluation (RELATE). Variables from this questionnaire that were used in the study included measures of negative communication, spirituality, and relationship quality. Results from Structural Equation Modeling indicated that negative communication significantly predicted relationship quality across all four groups, in support of the literature. Results revealed gender and cultural differences, suggesting that female spirituality did not have a significantly positive influence on relationship quality for either gender in any group, and that actor/ partner effects of male spirituality positively influenced relationship quality depending on the group.

Keywords: Latino, Latino couples, relationship quality, spirituality, negative communication, cultural differences, gender differences, comparative study, interethnic couples, cross cultural

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Introduction

As caseloads increase for clinicians working with Latino populations, the need for research on this underserved ethnic group becomes more urgent. Latinos are the largest and fastest growing minority population in the U.S. and with population estimates at over 45.4 million, they account for 15% of the nation's total population (U.S. Census, 2009). The 2006 Census reported that the Latino growth rate (24.3%) was more than three times the growth rate of the total population (6.1%) between the year 2000 and 2006, and it is projected that the Latino population would reach 59.7 million by the year 2020 (Census, 2006). Given these growth projections, research on Latino couples becomes more relevant to clinicians as they work to improve relationship quality and combat separation/ divorce in this population. Although separation and divorce rates are lower for Latino couples (10.5% for males and 20.1% for females) compared to the rest of the U.S. population (13.7% for males and 24.3% for females), these issues are still costly in terms of emotional, financial and societal impact.

Researchers have only recently begun to study Latino couples, investigating factors that contribute to relationship satisfaction (e.g., Harris et al., 2008), factors influencing divorce (Rogge et al., 2006; Bulanda & Brown, 2007), and other factors that can impact relationship quality (Fagan, 2009). Much of the literature on the improvement of quality of life in individuals, families and couples originated from Eurocentric perspectives, which often fails to represent a cultural minority's experience. It is important to consider that taking a "one size fits all" approach across cultures is not efficacious and that the experiences of minority families often differ from those in the dominant culture (Bernal & Domenech Rodríguez, 2009). When comparing Latino couples to the U.S. Anglo majority culture, it should be noted that cultural differences warrant a careful study of factors that influence relationship functioning. Given that

cultural factors can play an important part in issues that minority couples present or treatment they can receive (Orbuch et al., 2002; Fisher et al., 2000), researchers should continue to include culture and ethnicity as important variables in their studies in order to identify specific nuances that influence couple dynamics from the perspective of their own experience (Bermudez & Stinson, 2011).

In efforts to maintain cultural sensitivity, cross-cultural comparative studies are particularly effective in pin pointing differences and even similarities that allow for more appropriate conceptualizations and treatment applications with different cultural and ethnic groups. When more similarities than differences are found between cultural and ethnic couples (Negy & Snyder, 1997; Lindahl, & Malik, 1999), models and theories become more generalizable across populations. Culturally informed comparative studies also allow for deeper investigations of constructs within these models that could reveal differences in cultural meanings that better describe the relationship experience of those particular cultural groups (Parra-Cardona & Busby, 2006).

Recently, researchers have found a number of differences in comparative studies with Latino couples in areas such as financial and social support (Haxton & Harknett, 2009), the impact that relationship conflict has on certain positive parenting practices (such as reading, singing and talking to children; Sotomayor-Peterson, Wilhelm, & Card, 2011), and problems with alcohol and intimate partner violence (Caetano et al., 2008). The purpose of this comparative study is to explore how negative communication and spirituality influence relationship quality in 4 types of couple pairing groups: Latino couples (LC), Anglo female and Latino male couples (FAML), Latino male and Anglo female couples (FLMA), and Anglo couples (AC). Although the literature varies in its use of terms with cross cultural studies, for the

purposes of this study we will use the term “Anglo” to describe “White” U.S. populations and the term “Latino” to describe those who define their nationality or culture originating from a Latin-American country (e.g. Mexico, Argentina, Honduras, etc.) to be consistent with a comparison of cultures and not of races.

Literature Review

Relationship Quality of Latino Couples

Although research of relationship quality for Latino couples is lacking, studies have generally shown that the relationship quality of Latino couples and Anglo couples is more similar than different. For example, in one review of research, McLoyd and colleagues (2000) found that Latino couples do not differ in the frequency of serious or overt relationship conflict when compared to European American couples. In a three group comparison of relationship quality and divorce among African American, Anglo and Latino couples, Bulanda and Brown (2007) found that Latinos and Anglos had similar reports of relationship quality (higher than African Americans), yet they are more similar to African Americans than Anglos in their experiences of economic disadvantage (which has been shown to be correlated with poorer relationship quality; Conger et al., 1990). Seemingly contradictory findings like these give impetus to the study of cultural factors that influence relationship functioning and predictors of relationship quality. In this study, we attempt to answer a historical call (Dilworth-Anderson et al., 1993) to identify specific values in the Latino culture that can influence predictors of relationship quality. More specifically, the focus in this study is on negative communication and spirituality and their association to relationship quality.

Couple Communication

Research indicates that negative communication is correlated with relationship distress and divorce potential (e.g., Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002). Although much of Gottman's research is about conflict styles and matches of those styles (see Gottman, 1993), he presents four communication factors that significantly predict relationship dissolution and divorce, one of which is criticism (1994). In one study, criticism was not only found to predict marital distress, but it was the single best predictor (among expressed emotion and relationship distress) of relapse of unipolar depressives (Hooley & Teasdale, 1989). The damaging effects of negative communication have also been observed in committed relationships prior to marriage. Another study found that negative communication was a significant predictor of divorce and that negative pre-relationship communication was associated with lower relationship adjustment during the first 5 years of marriage (Markman et al., 2010). Given the vast breadth of conceptualizations of negative communication, the current study will focus on criticism and the lack of spousal respect as measures of negative communication.

Couple Communication in Latino Couples

Although research on couple communication as a predictor of relationship quality is well documented, there are no studies showing the direct effects of negative communication behaviors on relationship quality in Latino couples. In fact, there are only a handful of studies connecting communication processes and relationship functioning in Latino couples. When looking for causes of relationship problems in Latino couples, Snyder, Duncan, and Larson (2010) discovered that poor couple communication was one of the answers that both genders gave, indicating that Latino couples recognize the importance of couple communication in their relationship. In a qualitative study of strong Latino couples, Harris, Skogrand, and Hatch's

(2008) found that communication was “the number one way participants expressed love” in their relationships (p. 470). In one study, Bermúdez (2006) found that Latino couples identified themselves as having a validating style of conflict resolution when communicating with their partner. This was an important finding given that the conceptual literature would suggest that Latinos use more of an avoidant style of conflict resolution when talking about problems in their relationship, due to more collectivist values (Falicov, 1998; Ho, Rasheed, & Rasheed, 2004) and confirms the need for more empirical research with Latino couples regarding couple communication. Although these studies provide important information on couple communication with the Latino population, the question of how negative communication directly influences relationship quality in Latino couples remains unanswered.

When considering the effects of communication on relationship quality in Latinos, it is important to consider how culture influences the way Latinos communicate. For instance, Latinos are raised to be polite, respect their elders, and talk nicely to resolve their problems (Falicov, 2006). In general, Latinos communicate with a lot of indirect expressions to avoid conflict, especially with the use of “dichos” (common proverbs or sayings), “choteo” (humor), and allusions, although some Latino cultures (e.g. Cubans, Panamanians, Argentines) are more direct (Falicov 2006). Research suggests that these values influence the way Latinos communicate and resolve conflict (Bermúdez & Stinson, 2011). For example, Parra-Cardona and Busby (2006) noted that “armonia,” which refers to the importance of maintaining interpersonal relationships through politeness (Falicov, 1998), would be a better explanation for lower scores in “clarity of communication” in Latino couples rather than attributing low scores simply to poor communication. Another study took Latino cultural values into consideration by creating a new inventory of communication styles in a Mexican population to better represent

how Latino couples communicate (Sánchez Aragón & Díaz Loving, 2003). After comparing Latino communication style inventories with the U.S. majority culture, they found significant differences in communication styles, including styles particular to Latino forms of communication such as “Machiavellian” and “Rumor” styles (see Sánchez Aragón & Díaz Loving, 2003). Given these cultural differences in how Latino couples communicate, it is important to examine other factors that might buffer the effects of negative communication on relationship quality in this cultural group.

Spirituality

There is a body of literature that identifies spirituality and religiosity as protective buffer for couples struggling with health problems, family-of-origin issues, and conflict in their relationship (Cattich & Knudson-Martin, 2009; Fackrell et al., 2011; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006) as well as financial struggles, racism and oppression in minority couples (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Bean, Perry, & Bedell, 2002). Although there have been distinctions made in the literature between spirituality and religiosity (Worthington & Aten, 2009), some believe that the two concepts can be intertwined and may be difficult to separate (Carlson, Kirkpatrick, Hecker, & Killmer, 2002). For the purposes of this literature review, we will be using a using both terms because they have been used interchangeably in the limited research focused on minority couples, but will be using spirituality as the label for the study.

Even though spirituality is an under researched topic, more therapists are starting to see the role and importance of spirituality in their work with individuals and couples, and particularly with those that classify themselves as highly spiritual or religious. One study showed the effectiveness of employing the client’s relationship to God (regardless of religious preference) as an intervention in therapy (Griffith, 1986). Butler, Gardner, and Bird (1998) found

that invoking a “couple-God system” through prayer significantly reduced hostility and emotional reactivity, enhanced relationship and partner orientation and behavior, and increased a self-change focus (among other things) in religious couples. In addition, Jeffries (2006) found that religious ideas influenced couple interaction to increase benevolent love in long-lasting relationships. Cross cultural studies have also linked religiosity and spirituality with increases in relationship stability (Cutrona et al., 2011) and relationship satisfaction for both spouses (Fincham, Ajayi, & Beach, 2011).

In relation to predictors of relationship quality, there are also a handful of studies that connect spirituality with couple communication. In one study, religious couples were more likely to have lower levels of conflict and negative communication in their relationship than non-religious couples (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). Robinson (1994) found that a religious orientation enhanced couple intimacy, commitment, and communication, which are factors that can significantly predict relationship quality. Another study demonstrated the usefulness of religiosity in facilitating conflict resolution (Dudley & Kosinski, 1990), which is an integral factor of couple communication. Butler et al. (1998) was also helpful in describing how prayer influenced conflict resolution in couples by facilitating couple softening, allowing them to “better communicate” to handle difficult situations, and by enhancing empathy towards their partner (p. 8).

Although religion and spirituality are known to influence the life cycle of Latinos in general (Falicov, 1998), there has been little research to test the relationship between these variables and relationship quality for Latino couples. For Latinos, spirituality is an integral part of cultural identity (Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, & Gallardo-Cooper, 2002) and when compared to Anglos, religion plays more of a central role in the lives of Latinos (Maldonado, 2000). It is

not uncommon to hear a Latino use the phrase "si Dios quiere" (if it is God's will), which is a form of acceptance of divine fate or intervention and submission to God's will (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). Although many Latinos consider their spirituality as an extension of who they are rather than what they believe, there is a great deal of diversity among Latino's religious beliefs (Montilla & Smith 2006; Espinosa, Elizondo, & Miranda, 2003). In terms of empirical research, Ellison and his colleagues found that religiosity among Latino couples (and African American couples) correlated with higher relationship quality (2010). Given the influence that spirituality has on the Latino culture and scarcity of empirical research on this topic, spirituality merits careful consideration when studying relationship satisfaction in Latino couples.

Effects of Communication and Spirituality on Latino Couples

Only two articles were located that directly addressed Latino couples' communication, spirituality and their effects on relationship quality. The first article is a qualitative study of twenty five Latino couples describing key factors in strong Latino couples (Skogrand, Hatch, & Singh, 2009). Snowball sampling and a semi-structured interview schedule was used to gather the data from the couples. The study included twenty eight open-ended questions about the relationship including: the makeup of a strong relationship, qualities of a strong relationship, and the role of church or religion in their relationship. One of the factors identified as being correlated to a strong Latino relationship was good communication, which included spending time together and talking often, understanding each other, and talking to solve problems or make decisions. They also identified religion as another key factor in increased relationship quality with Latinos. Religion gave guidance in building upon virtues (respect, compassion, etc.) that would strengthen the relationship, in avoiding negative behaviors detrimental to the relationship (drinking, infidelity, etc.), and in finding help through religious leaders when they needed

intervention. Commitment (to each other) was another aspect of the relationship that was described in the context of religion by every single participant in the study. With Skogrand and colleagues' study as part of the foundation for the current paper, we hope to build on the literature by finding out how these two important factors interact with each other quantitatively to influence relationship quality in these four groups of Latino and Anglo couples.

The second article of interest was a comparative study of the effects of religion on married and unmarried Latinos in urban America (Wolfinger, Wilcox, & Hernández, 2010). This study used data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Survey (FFCW) which was a project that collected data on 48,000 families of newborn children in twenty cities around the U.S. between 1998 and 2000. This data set included 375 married and non-married Latino couples that were analyzed in three waves (wave 1 was at birth of the new child, wave 3 was about 36 months after the birth, and wave 2 was somewhere between). Religiosity was measured in terms of level of church attendance. The findings showed that church attendance for Latino fathers was positively correlated with their own perceptions of relationship quality and supportiveness, but for Latina mothers, the father's church attendance was only helpful when they were married. Interestingly, while the Latina's church attendance had no effect on her perceptions of relationship quality, it was negatively correlated with the father's overall perceptions of relationship quality. This article was particularly helpful in describing the influence of religion on relationship quality while taking into account gender differences, which seemed to be prominent in some situations. The current study will also examine gender differences and how they correlate with direct effects of communication and spirituality as a mediating factor of relationship quality in the four types of couples being compared.

Gender Issues in the Latino Culture

In any study of Latino couples, it is important to consider gender differences because of culturally specific identity and values about gender that influence relationships. Yet gender differences as they relate to relationship processes are under explored, especially in Latino couples. In the literature, terms such as “marianismo” and “machismo” are usually generalized to define gender roles among Latinos (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). Even though many scholars have accepted the popular term “marianismo” as the conceptualization of the Latina gender role, it usually carries a negative connotation suggesting that Latinas are weak, ignorant and need to “please men at all costs,” especially in the sexual context (Moreno, 2007, p. 349). Other Latina feminist scholars are concerned that these stigmas might be undermining the value that some Latinas place on traditional gender roles (Torres & Pace, 2005). Still others recognize the importance of being the primary caretaker in their home and feel empowered by their role (Torres & Pace, 2005). In such cases, women are making important decisions regarding the family behind the scenes (Penn, Hernández, & Bermúdez, 1997) and are challenging the tradition of a meek submissive Latina. Because of the contradictions that exist regarding the Latina gender role, studies should take into consideration the context of the relationship when describing the female’s experience within Latino relationship quality.

Machismo, a term used to describe Latino male gender roles, is another controversial term in the literature. Some interpretations present machismo in a way that gives Latino males an excuse to be promiscuous, aggressive and domineering (Cofresí, 2002; Moreno, 2007). But not all Latino men value machismo the same way (Torres, Solberg, Carlstrom, 2002). In fact, Torres and colleagues (2002) found that the traditional concept of machismo was not sufficiently able to capture or describe the whole variety of gender role experiences of Latino men. Many agree that

when working with Latino men, it is best to focus on the positive cultural traits of machismo like respect, dignity, valor, and perseverance (Falicov, 2010; Neff, 2001). For instance, Parra-Cardona and colleagues (2009) made it explicit that a therapist becomes more successful in getting a Latino male to be more expressive and open to the sharing of emotions when a therapist plays to the idea of the “hombre noble” which, “can become a strong motivator for change and a precursor of emotional intimacy among Latino men” (p. 363). As scholars find ways to describe gender experiences in culturally appropriate ways, research will improve in delineating relationship functioning in Latino couples.

In efforts to discover gender and cultural interactions in the study of relationship quality, interethnic/ interracial studies have recently emerged in the literature of relationship studies (Negy & Snyder, 2000; Troy et al., 2006; Leslie & Letiecq, 2004). Interracial/ Interethnic studies with Latino couples are helpful to identify influences of gender and culture as a function of relationship quality and factors that influence the relationship. In another study of alcohol problems, anger, and relationship satisfaction in Latino and Anglo couples (including mixed ethnicity couples), the females in Anglo couples reported lower relationship satisfaction when their partners had higher self-reports of anger and the females in the mixed Latino couples reported higher relationship satisfaction when their partners had higher self-reports of anger (Johns, 2007). In this study, there were no gender distinctions made in the “biethnic” (interethnic) couples, which makes it difficult to discover whether the finding above is explained by a function of Latino male gender, Latina female gender, or a combination of cultural and gender interactions. Although there are a few studies that show differences in relationship outcomes in interracial couples depending on gender (see Bratter & King, 2008; Bratter & Eschbach, 2006), no interracial couple comparison studies have been found describing Latino

relationships. Given the marked difference between Latino gender roles, the current study will differentiate between Latino male and female spouses in the interethnic couples for the purposes of more a thorough explanation of findings.

Purpose of this Study

We have reviewed what limited literature exists on couple communication with Latino couples, and hope to contribute to the literature by studying the direct effects that negative communication have on relationship quality and compare these effects among four types of Latino couples and Anglo couples. We also highlighted the importance of studying spirituality in Latino couples and will fill the gap in the literature by investigating direct effects of spirituality on relationship quality and mediating effects of spirituality on negative communication and relationship quality within the 4 groups. Finally, we will analyze gender and cultural effects and how they interact with the variables of communication and spirituality to influence relationship quality on our all our couples. Four fundamental research questions drive this study:

1. Is negative communication significantly associated with both partners' perception of relationship quality across all groups?
2. Does spirituality mediate the relationship between negative communication and relationship quality in any of the four groups depending on gender or partner actor effects?
3. Does negative communication influence spirituality in any of the four groups depending on gender or partner/ actor effects?
4. Is spirituality significantly associated with relationship quality in any of the four groups depending on gender or partner/ actor effects?

Method

Participants

This study utilized paired data from a random sample of 300 heterosexual Anglo couples, 319 heterosexual Anglo female/ Latino male couples, 292 heterosexual Latina female/ Anglo male couples, and 177 heterosexual Latino couples who participated in the RELATionship Evaluation (RELATE). The mean age of the male respondents was 29 years old with a range of 17-68 and 27 years old for females with a range of 17-68. In terms of relationship status, 21.7% of the couples were married, 3.8% were remarried, 17% were cohabiting with their partner, 5.9% were divorced, and 51.2% were not married. Of those couples that were married, 31.4% of them were married for less than one year, 35.2% were married between one and five years, 21% were married between six and fifteen years, and 12.4% were married for more than sixteen years. Of those that reported being single, 26.2% of them were in a “serious or steady” relationship and 35.1% of them were engaged. In terms of religion, 27.9% of the males identified themselves as Catholic, 20.1% as Protestant, 29.2% as Latter-day Saint (Mormon), 9.8% as some other religion, and 12.7% as having no religious affiliation. For females, 27% identified themselves as Catholic, 21.8% as Protestant, 29.9% as Latter-day Saint (Mormon), 10.3% as some other religion, and 10.8% as having no religious affiliation.

Our measure of acculturation among the Latino participants consisted of inquiries of residency and country of origin (nationality). In the LC group, over 90% of them reported having U.S. residency, 67% of the males reported a U.S. nationality, 63% of the females reported a U.S. nationality, 15% of the males reported a Mexican nationality, 13% of the females reported a Mexican nationality, 18% of the males reported nationalities in other Latin-American countries and 24% of the females reported nationalities in other Latin-American countries. In the FAML

group, 94% of the males reported having U.S. residency, 65% of the males reported a U.S. nationality, 11% of the males reported a Mexican nationality, and the remaining 24% of the males reported nationalities in other Latin-American countries. In the FLMA group, 95% of the females reported U.S. residency, 57% of the females reported a U.S. nationality, 16% of the females reported a Mexican nationality, and the remaining 27% reported nationalities in other Latin-American countries. We would suggest a moderate to high level of acculturation among the Latino sample given the data and considering the fact that they all took the survey in English.

Procedure

The RELATE questionnaire (Holman, Busby, Doxey, Klien, & Loyer-Carlson, 1997), which is a multidimensional measure consisting of more than 300 items, was used to collect the data from 1997 to 2010. The couples that take this questionnaire respond to items about perceptions of themselves and their partner on four major contexts: (1) individual, (2) couple, (3) family, and (4) social.

The RELATE questionnaire has gone through rigorous validity and reliability testing, proving to have good test-retest and internal consistent reliability and content, construct, and concurrent validity (Busby, Holman, & Taniguchi, 2001). For assessments of measurement reliability (internal consistency and 2 test-retest samples), reliability coefficients for most measures were found to be between .70 and .90, which includes a test-retest of a Latino version. Further examination of construct validity showed that 92% of the items loaded in the correct subscale and while testing for overlap, appropriate correlations for similar items emerged (range between .45 and .65). Measures of RELATE were also compared with scales from the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS) (Busby, Crane, Larson, & Christensen, 1995) to measure

concurrent validity and revealed strong correlations in the appropriate direction with every subscale that was tested.

Measures

The variables used in this study from RELATE data are the male's and female's negative communication, male's spirituality, female's spirituality and both partners' perceptions of relationship quality. Actor/partner data from the negative communication variable (AC male alpha = .633, female alpha = .741; FAML male alpha = .675, female alpha = .694; FLMA male alpha = .550, female alpha = .721; LC male alpha = .693, female alpha = .590) included a combination of items from the *Respect* scale (AC male alpha = .790, female alpha = .816; FAML male alpha = .744, female alpha = .767; FMLA male alpha = .785, female alpha = .767; LC male alpha = .792, female alpha = .752) and *Criticalness* scale (AC male alpha = .646, female alpha = .794; FAML male alpha = .678, female alpha = .745; FLMA male alpha = .640, female alpha = .656; LC male alpha = .640, female alpha = .585) of both the male and female. The *Respect* scale consisted of four multiple choice items measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Never" to "Very Often." A sample from this scale reads, "I have no respect for my partner when discussing an issue." The *Criticalness* scale consisted of three multiple choice items measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Never" to "Very Often." A sample from this scale reads, "I use a tactless choice of words when I complain."

In choosing between measuring spirituality or religiosity, we choose to use spirituality as our measure because we feel that spirituality is more inclusive. For measuring spirituality, actor/partner data from three items of the *Spirituality* scale (AC male alpha = .923, female alpha = .894; FAML male alpha = .865, female alpha = .884; FLMA male alpha = .897, female alpha = .856; LC male alpha = .804, female alpha = .867) was used, which was measured on three five-

point Likert scale (two ranging from one to five and one ranging from zero to four). Items on this scale included: how much spirituality is an important part of one's life, how often one prays, and how often one attends religious service. The range of responses included "Never" to "Very Often" or "Never to "Weekly" (religious service attendance) and an average was take for each participant.

The measure of *Relationship Quality* (AC male alpha = .692, female alpha = .698; FAML male alpha = .794, female alpha = .828; FLMA male alpha = .799, female alpha = .834; LC male alpha = .781, female alpha = .834) consisted of three variables: *Relationship Satisfaction* (AC male alpha = .881, female alpha = .880; FAML male alpha = .871, female alpha = .865; FLMA male alpha = .850, female alpha = .861; LC male alpha = .886, female alpha = .881), *Relationship Stability* (AC male alpha = .776, female alpha = .784; FAML male alpha = .778, female alpha = .792; FLMA male alpha = .805, female alpha = .772; LC male alpha = .863, female alpha = .849), and *Problem Areas* (AC male alpha = .840, female alpha = .790; FAML male alpha = .666, female alpha = .725; FLMA male alpha = .837, female alpha = .808; LC male alpha = .857, female alpha = .852). *Relationship Satisfaction* was measured with seven items using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Very Dissatisfied" to "Very Satisfied." *Relationship Stability* contained three items measured with a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Never" to "Very Often." An example item read, "How often have you and your partner discussed ending your relationship (or marriage)?" *Problem Areas* contained eleven items including areas like "Communication" and "Time spent together". It was measured with the same scale and range as *Relationship Stability*.

Proposed Analysis

Mean and standard deviation scores were reported for all variables using basic statistical methods (see table 1). A bivariate correlational analysis was conducted to check for the possibility of multicollinearity (see Table 2). The multivariate correlation procedure, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), was used because of its ability to test both direct and indirect relationships among several different variables that may be correlated using the AMOS (Analysis of Moment Structures) program (Kline, 2005). Effects of negative communication on spirituality and relationship quality were investigated, and spirituality was tested for any moderating effects on the relationship between the two variables. An actor/ partner model was used, taking into account associations between all three variables within each gender and the effects of their partners on all three variables, creating a total of 12 associations with each of the four groups.

Results

Models and Direct Paths

Anglo couples model. A model was created using the AMOS program to examine the effects of negative communication and spirituality on the relationship quality of four different sets of couples. For the first couple group, the Anglo Couples (AC), the CFI was .952, the TLI was .879, and the RMSEA was .093, with a chi-square $\chi^2 = 78.808$, $p < .000$ (df = 22, N = 300). The results from the Anglo model indicated that the model was an adequate fit for the data. CFI and TLI values above .95 (Byrne, 2001) and RMSEA values below .05 (Arbuckle, 2006) indicate the data are a good model fit for the model. In the AC model, the female's negative communication was significantly and negatively related to both his ($\beta = -.37$, $p < .001$) and her relationship quality ($\beta = -.68$, $p < .001$). The male's negative communication was significantly and negatively related to both his ($\beta = -.60$, $p < .001$) and her relationship quality ($\beta = -.31$, $p <$

.001). There was also a significantly negative association between the female's negative communication and both her ($\beta = -.18, p < .001$) and his spirituality ($\beta = -.13, p = .005$), but no significant associations were found between his negative communication and his or her spirituality. The male's spirituality was positively associated with his relationship quality ($\beta = .19, p = .006$) and the female's spirituality was negatively associated with his relationship quality, at trend level ($\beta = -.12, p = .06$). All other paths were non-significant. The overall variance (R^2) explained in the model for the males' relationship quality was 68% and 63% for the females' relationship quality.

Female Anglo/ male Latino model. The CFI for the Female Anglo/ Male Latino (FAML) model was .961, the TLI was .903, and the RMSEA was .083, with a chi-square $\chi^2 = 70.482, p < .000$ (df = 22, N = 319), indicating a similar model fit to the AC model. In FAML model, the female's negative communication was significantly and negatively related to both his ($\beta = -.37, p < .001$) and her relationship quality ($\beta = -.65, p < .001$). The male's negative communication was significantly and negatively related to both his ($\beta = -.64, p < .001$) and her relationship quality ($\beta = -.33, p < .001$). The female's negative communication was negatively associated with her ($\beta = -.16, p = .01$) and his spirituality ($\beta = -.13, p = .035$), but the negative relationship between his negative communication and his spirituality ($\beta = -.11, p = .063$) only reached trend level. The male's spirituality was positively associated with his relationship quality ($\beta = .17, p = .028$) and the female's spirituality was also negatively associated with his relationship quality at trend level ($\beta = -.13, p = .096$). All other paths were non-significant. The overall variance (R^2) explained in the model for the males' relationship quality was 73% and 67% for the females' relationship quality.

Female Latina/ male Anglo model. The CFI for the Female Latina/ Male Anglo (FLMA) model was .978, the TLI was .946, and the RMSEA was .059, with a chi-square $\chi^2 = 44.35$, $p = .003$ (df = 22, N = 292), indicating a better model fit than the AC model. In FLMA model, the female's negative communication was significantly and negatively related to both his ($\beta = -.28$, $p < .001$) and her relationship quality ($\beta = -.61$, $p < .001$). The male's negative communication was significantly and negatively related to both his ($\beta = -.65$, $p < .001$) and her relationship quality ($\beta = -.22$, $p < .001$). The male's negative communication was negatively associated with his spirituality ($\beta = -.20$, $p = .001$), as was the case with the female's negative communication and her spirituality ($\beta = -.16$, $p = .012$). The male's spirituality also had a significantly positive relationship with his ($\beta = .21$, $p = .022$) and her relationship quality ($\beta = .21$, $p = .008$) but the female's spirituality was negatively associated with her ($\beta = -.16$, $p = .048$) and his relationship quality ($\beta = -.19$, $p = .035$). All other paths were non-significant. The overall variance (R^2) explained in the model for the males' relationship quality was 68% and 55% for the females' relationship quality.

Latino couples model. The CFI for the Latino Couples (LC) model was .951, the TLI was .878, and the RMSEA was .088, with a chi-square $\chi^2 = 52.234$, $p = .000$ (df = 22, N = 177), indicating a similar model fit to the AC model. In LC model, the female's negative communication was significantly and negatively related to both his ($\beta = -.23$, $p < .008$) and her relationship quality ($\beta = -.53$, $p < .001$). The male's negative communication was significantly and negatively related to both his ($\beta = -.66$, $p < .001$) and her relationship quality ($\beta = -.38$, $p < .001$). The male's negative communication was negatively associated with his spirituality ($\beta = -.20$, $p = .017$), and negative relationship between the female's negative communication and her spirituality reached trend level ($\beta = -.15$, $p = .08$). The female's spirituality was not significantly

associated to neither her nor his relationship quality. The positive relationship between his spirituality and both his ($\beta = .14$, $p = .094$) and her relationship quality ($\beta = .15$, $p = .081$) reached trend level. All other paths were non-significant. The overall variance (R^2) explained in the model for the males' relationship quality was 70% and 71% for the females' relationship quality.

Indirect Paths

Sobel tests were performed on all four models in order to test the mediating effect of spirituality on the relationship between negative communication and relationship quality. Of all possible mediating relationships in all four models, only one was significant. In the FLMA group, female's spirituality was a significant mediator of the relationship between communication and relationship satisfaction (sobel = 2.485; $p = .006$), suggesting that her spirituality actually exacerbates the adverse effect of negative communication on relationship quality for the Latina partners in this group.

Between Group Comparison

All four models (AC, FLMA, FAML, LC) were compared for equivalency using multiple group comparison in AMOS. When examining the similarity of models for four different groups, AMOS compares one model where the path coefficients are constrained to be equal between all four groups with an unconstrained model where paths are free to vary. This comparison produces a structural weights statistic which represents the difference between the constrained and unconstrained models. If this statistic is significant, there is a significant difference between the models (Arbuckle, 2006). The difference between the chi-square values for the constrained and unconstrained models comparing all four groups with 66 degrees of freedom was 88.744 with a significance of $p = .032$, indicating a significant difference among the

models. Coefficient paths were examined among all four groups in order to identify significantly different paths between models.

Of the twelve path coefficients (between exogenous, mediating and endogenous variables) analyzed for equivalency, two were significantly different between groups. The path between the female's spirituality and her own relationship quality was significantly different between the FLMA group and the LC group, suggesting that when the females in the FLMA group reported increased spirituality, their own relationship quality suffered, but when compared to the LC group, the female's spirituality was not a significant predictor, and also was in the positive direction. In addition, the path between the female's spirituality and his relationship quality was also significantly different between the FLMA group and the LC group, indicating that Latina female spirituality negatively influenced relationship quality for Anglo males, but in comparison with the Latino group, female spirituality did not significantly influence the male relationship quality and was in a positive direction.

Discussion

Negative Communication and Relationship Quality

One of the main purposes of the study was to examine relationships among negative communication, spirituality and relationship quality in four types of couples (AC, FAML, FLMA, LC) taking into account gender and culture. In response to the first research question, male's and female's negative communication adversely influenced relationship satisfaction for both genders among all four ethnic groups, which was the only finding consistent across all models. This finding is supported in the literature (Hooley & Teasdale, 1989; Gottman & Notarius, 2000; Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002), even across cultures (Zhang & Fang, 2011). Clinical experience suggests that negative communication adversely impacts relationship

satisfaction in at least two ways, it can leave the person on the receiving end feel attacked and hurt, while potentially alienating the attacking person from their partner, which may explain the partner and actor effects in Latino and Anglo romantic relationships.

Mediating Effects of Spirituality

The second research question focused on the potential for mediation between negative communication and relationship quality. Spirituality did mediate that relationship, but only for one path and with one couple pairing. Interestingly, the greater the level of spirituality reported by the female in the FLMA, the more her negative communication adversely influenced her own relationship quality. This finding is not supported in previous research on minority groups where researchers have consistently found that the mediating effects of spirituality improve relationship quality (Cattich & Knudson-Martin, 2009; Fackrell et al., 2011), especially in minority groups (Ellison, Burdette, & Wilcox, 2010; Boyd-Franklin, 2003). It seems that when a female Latina is married to a Anglo male, the cultural difference in spirituality may be a point of disappointment or conflict in the relationship. Among fourteen countries (not including any Latin American countries), the United States was depicted as having a decline of traditional moral values, including church membership and adherence to traditional Christian doctrines (Houtman & Aupers, 2007). When comparing spirituality between Latino men and women, it is usually the woman who instills religious values and keeps spiritual rituals alive in Latino families (Loya, 1992; Rodriguez, 2002). Thus, the spiritual decline in U.S. mainstream culture could clash with a Latina's strong spiritual identity and accentuate the large gap between the two, which would negatively influence her own perception relationship quality. A post hoc analysis was performed to compare spirituality scores between genders in both inter-ethnic couples in our sample and T-tests revealed that although mean scores of spirituality were significantly different for both

groups (FLMA, $p < .001$; FAML, $p < .002$), the magnitude is nearly twice as large in the FLMA group ($T = -.652$) than it is in the FAML group ($T = -.310$). This finding supports the assumption about the relationship conflict that exists in the FLMA group may be due to the gap between the Anglo male's spirituality and Latina female's spirituality as measured in this study.

Negative Communication and Spirituality

In response to the third question, this study suggests that there are several key gender and cultural differences in the relationships between negative communication and spirituality and between spirituality and relationship quality. Although a small body of literature exists linking spirituality and couples communication (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006; Dudley & Kosinski, 1990), no studies have been found that examine the effects of negative communication on a person's spirituality. In the present study, Anglo female's negative communication in both groups (AC and FAML) adversely impacted both her and his spirituality, while the Latina female's negative communication only significantly influenced her own spirituality in the FLMA relationship and in the LC relationship at trend level. This culture difference between the females in our groups regarding negative communication and spirituality might be explained by the value of "armonia" in the Latino culture, which implies strong determination to keep a harmonious relationship (Falicov, 1998). This cultural value would help the Latina female keep her negative communication from boiling over into the spiritual realm of her partner.

The other finding regarding negative communication and spirituality revealed that Anglo male's negative communication had no influence on his or her spirituality in the AC group but did influence his own spirituality when with a Latina partner. The homogeneity of culture could make it easier for the male to compartmentalize his spirituality so that it is not influenced by his negative communication in the AC group, but when he is with a Latina female whose spirituality

is assumed to play more of an important role in her life (Maldonado, 2000), his spirituality could be influenced by hers and it may become less easy for him to compartmentalize.

Spirituality and Relationship Quality

Data from this study provided many interesting answers to the fourth research question, the first of which highlights a statistical difference in models between the FLMA group and the LC group. The more spiritual the females were in the FLMA group the more relationship quality declined for both males and females. In comparison, female's spirituality in the LC group, although in the positive direction, was not a significant predictor of his or her own relationship quality. These two significant differences between groups seems to contradict a general assumption of Anglo and Latino couples being more similar than different (McLoyd et al., 2000; Bulanda & Brown, 2007) including interracial couples (Troy et al., 2006). This discrepancy of the effects of spirituality between these two groups may be more a function of cultural variance in gender between the Anglo and Latino culture. One possible explanation for this could be related to a Eurocentric misconception of Latina gender role identity (Torres & Pace, 2005) where Anglo males might think that their Latina partners are weak and passive, which is not the case with Latina female spirituality. This misconception could leave the Anglo male feeling deceived and could cause the Latina female to feel misunderstood and underappreciated. A Latina female who feels misunderstood in this way by her Anglo partner because of her increased spirituality, which she considers to be a strength or positive quality, could feel less happy in her relationship.

When with a Anglo partner, male spirituality of both cultures were associated with higher ratings of their own relationship quality, but when with a Latina partner, the Anglo male's spirituality was positively associated with higher ratings of relationship quality for both genders.

While consistent with the literature that confirms spirituality as a positive influence on relationship quality (Butler et al., 1998; Jeffries, 2006), the female's ethnicity was the deciding factor of whether the male's spirituality influenced his partner's relationship quality, his own or both. When with a Anglo partner, who has more of an individualistic culture, male spirituality would have more of an intrinsic effect on their own relationship quality would be less influential on the Anglo female's relationship quality. When with a Latina female who has more of a collectivist culture (Falicov, 1998; Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002), the influence of the Anglo male's spirituality reaches the context of the relationship. The Latina female is happier with a Anglo male who values spirituality as much she and her culture does.

Finally, two general observations are made regarding gender differences in the effects of spirituality on relationship quality. First, female spirituality was not found to have a significant positive effect on relationship quality for either gender in any group. Second, the male's spirituality was not found to have a negative effect on relationship quality for either gender in any group, although partner and actor effects varied depending on the cultural makeup of the couple. These two findings are congruent with our second springboard reference (Wolfinger, Wilcox, & Hernández, 2010), which also reported that female's spirituality was negatively associated with the male's perception of relationship quality and that the male's spirituality was positively associated with his own perception of relationship quality. The general positive relationship of actor and partner effects between male's spirituality and relationship quality is similar to findings in other studies of actor/ partner effects of spirituality on relationship quality in minorities couples (Fincham et al., 2011), which might be because of the humbling effect that spirituality has on men, making them both easier to get along with and happier in their own perceptions. The female's negative influence of spirituality on relationship quality reported in

this and other studies might have to do with the way the female employs spirituality and religion in her relationship. For instance, spirituality can contribute to relationship problems in couples who use deity to triangulate against their spouse (Gardner, Butler, & Seedall, 2008).

Interestingly in Gardner, Butler and Seedall's (2008) study, the females were also more likely to triangulate with Deity in harmful ways than were the males, which parallels similar findings in the current study.

Implications for Clinicians

The results from this study indicate that negative communication has a significantly adverse impact on relationship quality for both genders of both cultures. In general, improving couple communication is a protocol employed in clinical work with a myriad of couples and problems (Gurman, 2008; O'Farrell & Fals-Stewart, 2006; Miller et al., 1991). Miller and colleagues' (1991) Couple Communication is a good program to use to decrease negative communication, improve empathy and promote positive forms of communication in couples. Apart from the availability of materials in Spanish for Latino couples, this program offers a more hands on learning experience and allows room for clinicians to facilitate topics, issues and discussions relevant to the Latino culture with Latino couples. When working with the Latino population whether it be with one partner or both who identify with the Latino culture, clinicians should adapt models to allow room for cultural relevancies in communication skills training. Clinicians would do well to address cultural values that might influence couple communication such as "armonia," "respeto," "simpatia" and "machismo" (Falicov, 1998) and work through a cultural framework (see McGoldrick, Giordano, & Garcia-Preto, 2005) to diminish negative communication and in Latino couples.

Spirituality was also found to have a significant impact on the relationship quality of most of the couples in the current sample, although varying in quality depending on gender. While there were some actor/ partner differences between spirituality and relationship quality among males in our study, interventions to increase the male's spirituality could be beneficial to the couple. For example, the therapist could invite the male to turn towards a higher power for help with softening his emotions and frustrations. As a general note for clinicians addressing spirituality with couples, some preliminary work needs to be done in order to improve comfort levels in talking about certain spiritual topics and "knowing each particular couple and honoring their beliefs" is also extremely important (Beach et al., 2008, p. 663). The clinician can then discuss with the male advantages and resources of help and guidance through spiritual means, such as prayer. Individually, he could resort to prayer for personal comfort, feeling heard and validated, and even for help with calming his emotions if he gets too upset (Butler, Gardner & Bird, 1998). Research also suggests that prayer is strongly related to positive couple outcomes (Lambert et al., 2009; Fincham et al., 2010).

Although not explored in the current study, gender differences found between spirituality and relationship quality might be more of a function of spiritual homogamy than gender per se. Research suggests that couples who are more spiritually unified and who engage in formal and informal spiritual activities report higher relationship quality (Mahoney et al., 1999; Vaaler, Ellison, & Powers, 2009; Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2008). Clinicians who discover discrepancies in spirituality could focus on unifying the couple more in spiritual matters by finding some common ground between the two and building upon them to improve relationship quality. For instance, with couples who differ in church attendance, clinicians could help them focus on their beliefs in divine grace, helping them to forgive each other for minor mistakes in the relationship

or creating spiritual rituals that the couple can do together, such as couple prayer, couples scripture reading, etc.

In efforts to address negative effects of female spirituality on relationship quality and consistent with Bowenian theory of harmful triangulation processes (Kerr & Bowen, 1988), power dynamics in the couple can be analyzed to find out why the female would feel a need to triangulate with Deity against her partner. Gardner and colleagues (2008) identified three possible types of triangles that those in unbalanced power dynamics could employ against their partner: alliance/coalition, substitution-intimacy, and substitution-power. In alliance coalitions, the female would attempt to ratify her power position by teaming up with Deity against the male. Females in lower power positions would be inclined to search for compassion through substitution intimacy or only submit to Deity in substitution-power. It should be noted that women usually resort to these triangles after the male in the relationship abuses his power over her or when uneven (and unfair) power differentials between the male and female impel her to get back some of that power in the relationship. In terms of a spiritual intervention, clinicians could help the couple work towards a healthier triangulation of Deity in order to receive divine help with their relationship instead of harming it (Butler & Harper, 1994).

The other intervention for diminishing harmful triangulation would be to get at the root of the problem by focusing on the power dynamics of the relationship. Clinicians could address issues of unbalanced power in careful ways and Emotion Focused Therapy (EFT) offers a good approach to deal with such power dynamics in couples because the problem is reframed in terms of the negative cycle and not the male's dominance (Johnson, 2004). Using an EFT framework, Greenberg and Goldman outlined five steps in working with couples struggling with power imbalances including: Validation and alliance formation, Negative cycle de-escalation,

Accessing underlying feelings, Restructuring the negative interaction and the self, and Consolidation and integration (2008). According to their theory, power issues “arise out of struggles to maintain and enhance identity,” concerns for how they are perceived by their partner and whether they feel their agency is not too constrained (p. 284). By getting at the underlying issues driving the male to misuse his power, the clinician is able to provide a safe environment for both partners to validate and meet each other’s underlying needs, and restore the balance of power in the relationship, which would eliminate the need for the female to appeal to triangulation with Deity.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

There are a few limitations of this study that can provide researchers direction in the study of Latino couples and relationship quality. A couple of methodological areas could be considered, including having an equal and ample group size for each of the four types of couples studied, which would probably improve the validity and reliability of the results between the four groups. An Anglo couples sample was large enough to select a randomized group, but this could not be done with any of the other groups and because of this, our results are not as generalizable to the rest of the Latino population or those interethnic Latino couples. Another limitation is the weakness of our measure of acculturation among the Latinos in the current sample. The sample also consisted of a variety of relationship statuses including those who are married, engaged or seriously dating. Effects of spirituality on relationship quality and other relationship dynamics can vary with couples who are married as opposed to those who are not, as demonstrated by Wolfinger and colleagues’ (2010) study. Due to the cross-sectional nature of the data collection, we are not able to consider the direction or causal nature of the relationships among negative

communication, spirituality and relationship quality. This can be a significant issue given the way couples and relationship dynamics change and mature over time.

One of the actor/ partner effects discovered in this study included the path from negative communication to spirituality, which varied depending on the couple. But what we did not explore in the study was how talking about spirituality affected the relationship and if it differed by gender and a more in-depth analysis could answer this question. Another possible limitation of the study could be the way we defined spirituality, which was only made up of three criteria (how often one prays, how often one attends religious service, and how much spirituality is an important part of one's life). Given some inherent differences in spirituality between Latinos and Anglos (Maldonado, 2000), future research should consider a more culturally sensitive construct of spirituality to be more inclusive of the Latino culture.

Results of this study give rise to questions that could be answered by future research. Studies have shown that high levels of positive communication are consistently correlated with higher relationship quality (Ledermann, Bodenmann, Rudaz, & Bradbury, 2010), how might positive communication influence spirituality and relationship quality? In a similar vein, how might spirituality influence couple communication in Latino relationships? Jurkowski and colleagues (2010) studied the relationship between spirituality and overall health in Latina women, but what type of relationship would exist between spirituality and overall health in Latino couples, as opposed to just women?

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to work to fill the large gap of research among predictors of relationship quality for the Latino population. In support of previous research, the results indicated that negative communication significantly diminishes relationship quality among

Anglo couples, Latino couples, and mixes of the two cultures. In addition, this study's findings confirm existing research that implies a positive relationship between male spirituality and relationship quality. Although there are mixed findings in the literature regarding female spirituality and relationship quality, the current study found a generally negative relationship between the two variables. Further research is needed more accurately capture the concept of spirituality among people of the Latino culture and find other significant predictors of relationship quality to help clinicians provide competent service to the largest and fastest growing minority population in the United States.

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Table 1*Means, SDs, and Ranges for key variables*

| | Anglo Males | | | | Anglo Females | | | Latino Males | | | Latina Females | | | |
|----------------------|-------------|-------|-------|------|---------------|-------|------|--------------|-------|-------|----------------|-------|-------|------|
| | Min - Max | Range | Mean | SD | Range | Mean | SD | Min - Max | Range | Mean | SD | Range | Mean | SD |
| Neg Comm. | 2 – 10 | 6.67 | 4.49 | 1.27 | 8 | 4.79 | 1.48 | 2 – 9.25 | 7 | 4.68 | 1.37 | 7.5 | 4.76 | 1.01 |
| Spirituality | .67 – 4.75 | 4.08 | 3.39 | 1.19 | 4.08 | 3.56 | 1.43 | .67 – 4.75 | 4.08 | 3.34 | 1.04 | 4 | 3.52 | 1.43 |
| Rel Sat | 1 – 5 | 3.71 | 3.87 | .76 | 4 | 3.87 | .82 | 1 – 5 | 4 | 3.93 | .76 | 4 | 3.42 | .81 |
| Rel Stability | 1 – 5 | 4 | 4.06 | .82 | 4 | 4.07 | .81 | 1 – 5 | 4 | 4.04 | .87 | 4 | 3.94 | .90 |
| Problem Area | 35-70 | 35 | 56.82 | 7.31 | 29 | 56.02 | 6.59 | 34 – 70 | 32 | 56.82 | 6.95 | 36 | 58.15 | 7.94 |

Table 2*Males- Bivariate Correlations for observed variables in SEM model.**Females SEM Model*

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|------------------------------|---------|--------|--------|--------|---|---------|--------|--------|--------|---|
| 1. Negative Communication | – | | | | | – | | | | |
| 2. Spirituality | -.202** | – | | | | -.206** | – | | | |
| 3. Relationship Satisfaction | -.474** | .206** | – | | | -.518** | .158** | – | | |
| 4. Relationship Stability | -.524** | .188** | .533** | – | | -.487** | .129** | .560** | – | |
| 5. Problem Areas | -.634** | .156* | .576** | .460** | – | -.638** | .208** | .624** | .536** | – |

Notes: $p \leq .05$, * $p \leq .01$, *

Empirical Results From a Structural Equation Model

Figure 1

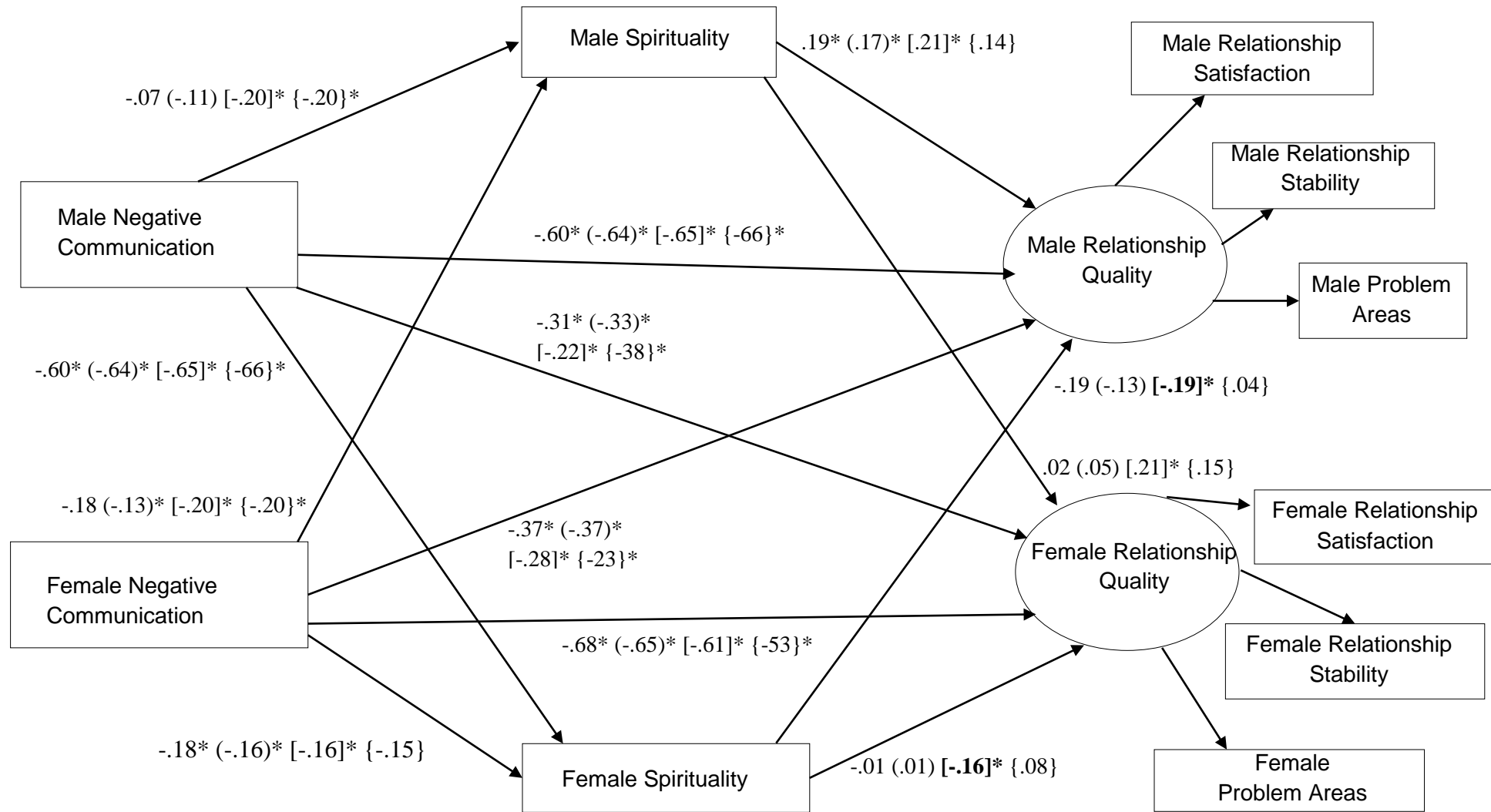


Figure 1. SEM and Results for all four models. Notes: AC couples, (FAML in parentheses), [FLMA in brackets], {LC in other brackets} * $p \leq .05$, and more intriguing results from FLMA group are bolded