

GENDER-RELATED INFLUENCES ON MARITAL SATISFACTION AND  
MARITAL CONFLICT OVER TIME FOR HUSBANDS AND WIVES

by

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ABSTRACT

With approximately one half of first-time marriages ending in divorce (Faust & McKibben, 1999) and approximately 33 percent of all first-time marriages disrupting in separation or divorce in the first ten years (Bramlett & Mosher, 2001), many individuals could experience physical and psychological health problems which have been linked to separation and divorce (Goodwin, 1997; Hibbard & Pope, 1993; Prigerson, Maciejewski, & Rosenheck, 1999). Given that marriage is often followed by marital disruption, an understanding of how marriage changes and develops over time and specifically what are the characteristics of marriages that succeed over time are salient issues needing to be explored (Kurdek, 1998).

Longitudinal secondary data for husbands and wives from first time marriages were analyzed from the National Survey of Families and Households (Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988), for the purpose of examining influences on husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction and marital conflict over time. This study addressed the limitations of previous studies by examining longitudinal influences on marital satisfaction and marital conflict. It also extended the line of thinking of previous research, which examined influences on marital dissolution, by taking a longitudinal look at predictors of marital satisfaction and marital conflict in stable marriages. Husbands and wives initial levels of marital satisfaction and marital conflict are predictive of subsequent relational satisfaction and conflict. Significant demographic, psychological, marital process, gender-related, and life transitional influences on models of marital satisfaction and marital conflict for husbands and for wives over time are presented. There is some support for gender-based influences on husbands and wives marital satisfaction and conflict. Additionally, there is some support to suggest that wives' marital and interpersonal functioning may be a greater predictor for husbands' marital satisfaction and marital conflict.

Previously, studies have largely ignored the role of gender in the examination of marital quality. The distinction and clarification of misconceptions between the terms "sex" and "gender" were addressed by measuring the ways in which gender influences marital satisfaction and marital conflict over time. Recommendations for clinicians are presented.

INDEX WORDS: Gender-roles, Marital satisfaction, Marital conflict, Marriage and Family Therapists, National Survey of Families and Households

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of  
Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2002

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincerest appreciation and gratitude to Jerry Gale, Maureen Davey, and Adam Davey for their unconditional support and encouragement throughout the past four years and especially during the culmination of this dissertation process. Thank you for believing in me and challenging me to try to always do my best, despite the obstacles. Over the past four years, you have helped me grow both professionally and personally.

I greatly appreciate the support and thoughtful contributions of my other committee members, Patricia Bell-Scott and Nancy Williams. I am deeply thankful for the committee's willingness to support me in my efforts to complete this difficult task while away on fellowship in Chicago. I am also thankful to the all those involved in making the National Survey of Families and Households database a resource available for this study.

Thank you to my dear friends, Lisa, Geeta, Penny, Kathryn, and Betsy for offering an empathic ear, a laugh, or a vote of confidence, at times when I needed it most during this process. I especially would like to acknowledge my parents for their endless unconditional love, guidance, and support. For as long as I can remember, you have told me with the utmost confidence "you can do anything you set your mind to". Without your support I would not have achieved this goal.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

With approximately one half of first-time marriages ending in divorce (Faust & McKibben, 1999) and approximately 33 percent of all first-time marriages disrupting in separation or divorce during the first ten years (Bramlett & Mosher, 2001), there is a strong link to physical and psychological health problems and the experience of separation and divorce (Burman & Margolin, 1992; Goodwin, 1997; Hibbard & Pope, 1993; Prigerson, Maciejewski, & Rosenheck, 1999). Despite these issues, marriage remains a well-accepted social institution, with approximately 85% of Americans marrying at some point in their lifetime (Knox & Schacht, 2000). Given that these high rates of marriage are often followed by marital disruption, empirical research increasingly has been conducted to examine predictors of relationship success. However, how marriage changes and develops over time and specifically what are the characteristics of marriages that succeed over time are salient issues that still need to be explored (Kurdek, 1998).

The aim of this study is to extend the previous research on predictors of marital satisfaction and marital conflict by examining first time marital relationships over time and in particular, examining sex (i.e., male or female) and gender roles (i.e., maleness or femaleness) and their relationship to marital satisfaction and marital conflict. This study describes and predicts patterns of change and stability in marital satisfaction and marital conflict for husbands and wives in first time marriages over a five-year period.

## Rationale

Although the institution of marriage can offer numerous psychosocial benefits, separation and divorce have been associated with many negative health and psychological outcomes (Gottman, 1999; Prigerson, Maciejewski, & Rosenheck, 1999; Prince & Jacobson, 1995). Marital distress and conflict have been proven to be significant risk factors for both physical and psychological problems (Beach & Nelson, Gottman, 1999; 1990; Prince & Jacobson, 1995). In comparison to remaining single, marriage has been linked to such psychosocial benefits as decreases in mortality rates and risk-taking behaviors, and increases in health monitoring, compliance with medical regimens, sexual satisfaction, financial saving, and employment wages (Rogers, 1995; Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Separation and divorce, however, have been associated with decreases in psychological well-being, sexual satisfaction, happiness, and self-acceptance; and increases in health problems, risk of mortality, social isolation, financial strain, negative life events, depression, and alcohol use (Amato, 2000; Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994; Cowan & Cowan, 1992). The threat of marital conflict, divorce, and out of wedlock births also has led to an increased risk for families to experience poverty, alienation, and antisocial behavior (Markman, Cox, Stanley, & Kessler, 1996). Therefore, marital satisfaction and marital conflict are important outcomes to study based on the large number of individuals who may experience separation and divorce and its consequential negative effects on physical and psychological health.

One predictor that may have particular importance to marital satisfaction is gender roles. Recently, scholars have noted that the influence of sex (i.e., male and female) and gender roles (i.e., maleness and femaleness) have been largely ignored in the

exploration of marriage over time, despite evidence in the extant literature that points to differences in marital satisfaction for men and women (Johnson & Lebow, 2000; Walker, 1999). In 1975, Bernard proposed the concept of a “his” and ‘her’ marriage” in which marriage is a qualitatively different experience for men and for women. Bernard (1975) has argued that there are two marriages in every marital union, a “his” and a “hers”, and that his is better than hers with men receiving more psychosocial benefit than women.

Other research has also substantiated that marriage disproportionately benefits men, with husbands reporting higher levels of marital satisfaction and well-being than their wives (Baslow, 1992; Bernard, 1975; Bird & Fremont, 1991; Heyn, 1997; McRae & Brody, 1989; Schumm, Webb, & Bollman, 1998). In addition, research has indicated that women derive mental and physical health benefits when they are in satisfying marriages, while men benefit from marriage despite its quality (Hess and Soldo, 1985). In Bernard’s proposal and subsequent research, gender roles (i.e., maleness and femaleness) were not considered as variables of interest when investigating sex differences (i.e., male and female). Bernard’s research was limited in that only sex differences were reported, with differences explained solely by being male versus female.

Most marriages begin with spouses who report being satisfied and having high hopes for a long-term, successful relationship (Gottman, 1999; Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994). Yet what still remains uncertain is which factors account for the differing degrees of marital satisfaction and the fluctuations in the marital quality (e.g. marital conflict) that spouses experience over time? According to Steil (1997) “There is a growing consensus that what is needed is a better understanding of the ways in which psychological, social, and cultural forces, including our conceptions of marriage and

gender, contribute to the different patterns of well-being for men and women, particularly husbands and wives” (p. 11).

This study examined secondary data collected at two points in time from the National Survey of Families and Households (Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988). Based on the following literature review, measures related to gender role influence on marital satisfaction and marital conflict were examined among husbands and wives in first time marriages in order to assess how marriage changes over time for husbands and for wives. Controlling for levels of initial relationship functioning, research questions will address the influence of the following predictors on marital satisfaction and marital conflict for husbands and wives over time: (a) demographic characteristics ; (b) psychological processes; (c) marital processes; (d) gender-related predictors; and (e) life transitions. Prediction models of how marital satisfaction and how marital conflict change over time for husbands and for wives will help provide useful information for marriage and family therapists, educators, and researchers.

CHAPTER II  
LITERATURE REVIEW  
Theoretical Framework

In order to examine the influence of gender roles on marital satisfaction and marital conflict, feminist theory (Brown, 1994; Gilligan, 1981) and John Gottman's (1999) evidenced based theory of marital satisfaction will be used to provide a theoretical lens for examining the influence of gender roles on marital satisfaction and marital conflict for husbands and wives over time. Feminist theory will be used as a framework for understanding the meaning and importance of gender versus gender roles, while Gottman's theory of marital satisfaction will be used to identify important variables, which are known to influence the quality of marriage (Gottman, 1979; Gottman, 1999; Gottman, 1999; Gottman & Levenson, 1992).

***Feminist Perspective on Gender Role Development***

Gender is defined as the socially determined role of an individual that is ascribed as a result of his or her sex (Juni & Grimm, 1994). The terms "gender" and "sex" are often used interchangeably, however, these terms are not synonymous. Sex refers to the biological distinction between females and males, while *gender* refers to the social and psychological characteristics often associated with being female or male. While we tend to impose a gender-based classification system on the world, it is important to note that gender is not a binary concept, as *maleness* and *femaleness* can occur on a continuum, as can *sex* (Knox & Schacht, 2000).

Gender roles are shaped by the social norms that dictate what is socially sanctioned as appropriate female and male behavior in a patriarchal society; general feminist theory places gender roles in the context of the individualistic patriarchal cultures prevalent in most Western societies today, in which male gender and activities associated with masculinity are privileged (Brown, 1994). From this perspective, gender differences are developed from the influence of social norms in a patriarchal society. Gender roles influence men and women in every aspect of their lives and relationships (Knox & Schacht, 2000). Men have historically and stereotypically been described as instrumental, dominant, rational, objective, independent, decisive, competitive, and superior in mathematics and science. Women, have been traditionally and stereotypically viewed as expressive, submissive to others, caring, nurturing, affectionate, cooperative, emotional, relationship oriented, and good at domestic tasks and child rearing (Worden & Worden, 1998).

A brief overview of various explanations for gender differences are presented in order to explore the possible influences of gender on marital satisfaction and on marital conflict. There are many theories attempting to explain why women and men exhibit different characteristics and behaviors. For instance, the biological perspective on gender role development emphasizes that the innate, biological, genetic, and hormonal structure of women and men account for differences in their behavior and gender role development (Goy & McEwen, 1980). For example, the popular self-help book by John Gray (1992) suggests that men and women are naturally and instinctively different and in order for men and women to maintain a successful relationship, they must simply accept their innate biological differences. Recently, Zimmerman, Haddock, and McGeorge (2001)

conducted a thematic analysis and feminist critique of Gray's best-selling self-help book, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*. They refuted Gray's basic argument that men and women are innately different, stating, "it is inconsistent with decades of research that has consistently found minimal biologically based differences between men and women...his recommendations for dealing with these (gender) differences serve to reinforce and encourage power differentials between men and women, thereby eroding the possibility of deep friendship and sustained intimacy in their relationships." (p. 63).

According to Chodorow (1978), psychoanalytic theorists believe that gender role development is acquired through identification of the child with his or her same sex parent. Chodorow assumes gender differences arise because typically, primary caretakers are women. By identifying with their mother, female children learn how to empathize with the needs and feelings of others; male children are socialized to identify with their father and to become more autonomous and independent from the primary caretaker (mothers) in order to identify with their fathers. Lang-Takac and Osterwell (1992) tested Chodorow's theory by examining men and women's self-report of perceptions on intimacy, empathy, and desires for closeness in relationships.

According to Lang-Takac & Osterwell (1992), "men are more differentiated and independent and women are more empathic and desire higher intimacy...consistent with the theories that propose that males are more separate and females are more connected" (p. 277). Social learning theorists emphasize the role of rewards and punishment in explaining how children learn gender role behavior (Maccoby, & Jacklin, 1974). From this perspective, gender roles are learned and shaped by parents, peers, family members, education, media, religion, ethnicity, and culture. Evolutionary and sociobiological

theorists use the survival of the fittest approach. This approach assumes gender roles are developed through selection of the reproductive fitness of males and females within their culture (Bjorklund & Kipp, 1996). For example, the “fittest” males and females will survive and procreate, thus recreating themselves and their gender roles. In other words, the qualities of gender roles that develop and endure are those, which contribute to the greater good of society.

Although there are many theories accounting for differences in gender (Knox & Schacht, 2000), the theory guiding this study is based on the feminist theory of gender role development (Brown, 1994; Gilligan, 1981). From this theoretical perspective, gender roles are defined through an interactive social consensus in a male-privileged, patriarchal society. Therefore, privilege in a patriarchal society creates gender-based inequalities in terms of power and resources. Women have been socially ascribed different roles than men, confining them to lesser opportunities and resources. For example, this imbalance can manifest in obvious or subtle ways such as purposeful exclusion of women from some valued activities or occupations, wage discrepancies, and violence. Culturally ascribed roles and values will then influence how men and women view and value relationships, family, and career.

Veroff, Douvan, Orbuch, and Actielli (1998) discussed how gender role expectations can influence marital satisfaction. These authors state:

One’s role, culture, gender, ethnicity, and class carry with them prescriptions and expectations that help the person establish the dimensions on which happiness should be evaluated and anchors for evaluating each dimension. Thus the individual evaluates his/her marriage according to the expectations of the groups

with whom he/she identifies....We can also ask whether some reference groups are more potent than others in affecting evaluations of marital happiness either with regard to the dimensions used or the evaluations made. We believe that one's gender identity represents a powerful grouping for determining affective responses to this all-important heterosexual bonding. Expectations about marriage for husbands as 'men' and for wives as 'women' or expectations based on any important social identity must in turn affect marital evaluations. If expectations are high, disappointments may be even greater (p. 154).

From a general feminist perspective, norms for gender roles in a male-dominated society are seen as restrictive for both men and women. Although men and women may be comfortable in following socially prescribed, "normal" gender roles, they may ultimately be destructive and restrictive (Brown, 1994). The rigidity of traditional gender roles can be harmful not only to women, but also to men. According to McCreary, Wong, Wiener, Carpenter, Engle, and Nelson (1996) men's interpersonal experiences are restricted to a narrowly defined set of options, which can cause men to avoid any behavior that resembles the feminine gender role. For example, in a stereotypically traditional male gender role, husbands may feel uncomfortable or unable to express emotion or dependence. This may have implications for marital satisfaction as the ways in which women have been socialized to connect and express emotion may be very different from the ways in which men express emotion, suggesting that men and women may experience marital satisfaction differently depending on their gender role identification. The following literature review will offer further description of the

influence of gender role differences on husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction and marital conflict.

### ***Theories of Marital Satisfaction***

The lack of consensus in defining “marital satisfaction” is reflective of the lack of adequate theory to explain marital functioning. Labels such as “satisfaction”, “adjustment”, “success”, “happiness”, and “quality” have all been used in describing the quality of marriage (Fincham, Beach, & Kemp-Fincham, 1997). Studies examining marital satisfaction vary in design, measurement, and outcomes, leading to a number of explanations accounting for marital satisfaction (Bradbury, 1988; Gottman, 1999). Global marital quality has been hypothesized to reflect both positive and negative dimensions (Fincham et al. 1997). In the past, measuring marital satisfaction as a unidimensional approach of assessing couples as distressed or not distressed has failed to capture the complexity of the marital relationship and provides little information beyond the categorization of the couple as distressed or not distressed (Fincham, et al. 1997).

Previously, studies have presented a U-shaped model of marital satisfaction, in which marital satisfaction declines during child-rearing years and then increases during the “empty-nest” life cycle stage, when children leave home and are launched to pursue life as young adults (Rollins & Feldman, 1970; Schram, 1979). The stress and strain of parenting children seems to have a negative effect on marital satisfaction, with the presence of young children decreasing marital satisfaction for wives in particular (Glenn & McLanahan, 1982). However, most studies citing the finding of the U-shaped pattern of marital satisfaction have been disputed due to the use of cross-sectional data

interfering with result validity by using a cohort of people at one period of time (Glenn, 1990).

John Gottman's (1999) scientifically validated theory of marriage, based on 25 years of longitudinal research, is one of the leading theories in the study of marital satisfaction. Gottman's theory (1999) states that positive interaction and friendship is the key to marital satisfaction and the prediction of marital stability over time. Despite the recent critique that Gottman's ability to accurately predict divorce may be overgeneralized based on the lack of cross-validation analyses (Heyman & Smith-Slep, 2001), Gottman's theory of marital satisfaction continues to be regarded as a leading theory in the field of marital study. His theoretical framework is valuable in this study, as the goal is not to predict divorce, but to predict marital stability, particularly, marital satisfaction and marital conflict. According to Gottman (1999), a ratio of 5:1 positive to negative interactions is necessary for marital stability. Gottman defines marital stability as a satisfying marital relationship that is not disrupted by separation or divorce. He states, "The most important finding was that more positive affect was the only variable that predicted both marital stability and happiness" (p. 21).

In Gottman's theory (1999), there is a process of what he calls "sentiment override" in couples. He states, "Sentiment override can be either positive or negative. Negative sentiment override means that people have 'a chip on their shoulder'. These types of partners are hypervigilant, looking for slights or attacks by their partner. Positive sentiment override means that even negativity by the partner is interpreted as informative rather than as a personal attack" (p. 164). Positive sentiment override creates a milieu in which the partners are more tolerant and accepting of each other, while

negative sentiment override creates a set of expectations that one's spouse will behave negatively.

Similarly, O'Leary and Smith (1991) refer to this phenomenon as cognitive attributional correlates of marital satisfaction. These authors state that distressed couples are less likely to objectively interpret positive behaviors from their spouses as positive and more likely to interpret the intent of their spouse's statements more negatively than they were meant to be. Compared to nondistressed couples, dissatisfied spouses make attributions that cast their partners' behavior in a negative light and these attributions in turn negatively influence marital satisfaction (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990). In summary, according to Gottman (1999) as well as O'Leary and Smith (1991) and many other marital researchers (Bradbury, 1998; Fincham, et al. 1997; Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1994) it is not what happens in the marriage, but how the partners perceive and define what has happened that is critical.

In a study examining aspects of positive and negative sentiment overrides, Notarius, Benson, Sloane, Vanzetti, and Hornyak (1989) uncovered interesting gender differences in their support for the validity of this phenomena. They found that distressed wives were more negative, were more likely to evaluate their partner's neutral and negative messages as negative (suggesting the operation of a negative sentiment override), and given a negative evaluation of their partner's antecedent message, were more likely to offer a negative reply than were all other spouses.

Gottman posits that 69% of couples' problems will be what he calls, "perpetual problems", meaning largely unresolvable. He has found that in the case of the perpetual problems, it is important for couples to establish a dialogue, as opposed to a solution in

these instances. When couples cannot dialogue about these issues, they often become “gridlocked”, where each partner becomes frustrated and eventually emotionally disengaged. The role of communication therefore plays an important role in marital satisfaction.

#### Demographic Predictors of Marital Satisfaction and Marital Conflict

Demographic characteristics including age, race, income, education, length of marriage, and religiosity, have been linked to marital satisfaction and marital conflict (Knox & Schacht, 2000). Individuals who marry when they are at least into their ‘20’s are predicted to have greater marital satisfaction and marital stability (Tzeng, 1992). In particular, teenage marriages are more vulnerable to divorce, as these unions are typically associated with premarital pregnancy, lower education and income, less social support, and individuals choosing marriage at an early age may also exhibit interpersonal characteristics which place marital stability in danger such as poor decision making (Stanley & Markman, 1997).

Education and income have also been linked to marital satisfaction and marital conflict, with greater levels of education and income predicting greater marital satisfaction and less conflict. Economic stress has a negative effect on marital satisfaction and a positive influence on relationship dissolution (Johnson & Booth, 1990).

Race has been linked to marital satisfaction, with white couples reportedly experiencing greater marital satisfaction than minority couples (Knox & Schacht, 2000). Although minority couples report being happier than never-married, separated, or divorced couples, they tend to be less happy than white spouses (Staples, 1988). Reasons for this are primarily thought to be caused by the economic, racial and social

discrimination experienced by minority couples. External stressors exist in a racist society, which give minority couples both covert and overt messages about their self-worth in comparison to majority couples, which has been found to decrease levels of marital satisfaction and increase levels of marital conflict. African-American men in particular, often must deal with negative societal stereotypes. According to Staples (1988), some of these stereotypes may become self-fulfilling prophecies because the dominant society is structured such that African-American men may be prevented from achieving socially approved goals, contributing to decreases in marital satisfaction as compared to White couples.

According to previous research, religiosity has been found to have an influence on couples' marital satisfaction and marital conflict (Call & Heaton, 1997; Mahoney, Pargament, Tarkeshwar, & Swank, 2001). According to Call and Heaton (1997) when both partners attend church regularly, these couples report higher marital satisfaction and are at decreased risk for divorce. This research suggests that religiosity is a protective buffer for couples' marital satisfaction and marital conflict.

Partners with similar social, psychological, and physical characteristics are more likely to experience marital satisfaction (Kurdek, 1993). According to Huston and Houts (1998) compatibility can significantly influence the likelihood that spouses will agree or disagree on marital issues. The authors state, "The less well matched partners are, the more negativity they are likely to express toward each other, the more ambivalence they are likely to feel about their relationship, and the more turbulent their relationship is likely to be. Couples who are well matched, in contrast, presumably will be more affectionate and engaged in the relationship" (p. 120). In particular, spouses who differ

in age, race, education, and religion may be more vulnerable to marital conflict and marital dissatisfaction, and women are significantly more likely than men to prefer a mate with similar characteristics (Houts, 1996).

Based on Gottman's (1999) research, length of marriage is also a significant predictor for marital satisfaction and marital conflict. He identifies two critical time periods of vulnerability in the marital trajectory, with the majority of couples divorcing within the first seven years of marriage. Couples' who divorce within the first seven years of marriage have relationships characterized by having high levels of marital conflict. Conversely, a second vulnerable time period for the marital trajectory is 16 to 24 years of marriage. This is the next most likely time frame for couples to divorce. These relationships are characterized by spending little time together, lack of communication, and a lack of conflict expression. Gottman (1999) refers to these couples as "two ships passing in the night".

#### Psychological Predictors

##### ***The Influence of Well-Being on Marital Satisfaction and Marital Conflict***

Lower psychological well-being is a major risk factor for relationship distress. Higher rates of relationship problems have been consistently linked to persons suffering from severe psychiatric disorders, including depression, substance abuse, and anxiety disorders (Bradbury, 1998). Many studies link marital conflict to depression (Beach, Arias, & O'Leary, 1987; O'Leary and Beach, 1990). Although the authors propose a bi-directional causal relationship between marital conflict and depression, they suggest that marital conflict is typically a more powerful contributing factor to depression. These authors report that for women participants in cognitive therapy, those who believed that

their marital conflict preceded or was the primary cause of their depression were more likely to experience depression at post treatment, as opposed to women who did not believe that marital conflict caused their depression. Again, it is not depression per se that influences these women's post-treatment success, but how they account for the cause of the depression, in this instance, marital conflict.

Individual personality traits have also been linked to couples' relationship functioning for both men and women. Personality traits of neuroticism, anxiety, and emotional instability have been shown to impair relationship functioning and reduce relationship satisfaction (Watson & Clark, 1984). Additionally, personality characteristics of agreeableness and expressiveness have been referred to as individual-protective factors, which may enhance marital satisfaction (Bradbury, Campbell, & Fincham, 1995). Buss (1992) states that emotional instability among husbands' and wives' personalities is linked to their tendency to perceive their spouse as moody, jealous, dependent, self-centered, and condescending. Compared to spouses high in agreeableness, husbands and wives low in agreeableness were perceived as more self-centered by their spouse. Huston and Houts (1998) report that husbands with expressive personalities are seen by their wives as more affectionate, more in love, and more satisfied with their marriage, and when married to wives with expressive personalities, husbands report less conflict. This finding supports the feminist perspective which views traditional gender roles as restrictive for husbands and wives by confirming that husband's expressive personality traits benefit the marital relationship.

## Marital Processes

### *Marital Conflict & Gender*

From a feminist perspective, gender roles influence differences in the ways in which men and women manage conflict. Women are more likely to initiate discussions of conflictual relationship issues (Gottman, 1999). Men have been found to be more likely to withdraw from negative marital interactions, while women are more likely to pursue the conversation or conflict (Johnson, 1996). Women are more likely to be attuned to the emotional quality of marital functioning and more sensitive to events that occur in the relationship (Johnson, 1997).

Couples' conflict interactional patterns have been linked to relationship satisfaction (Gottman, 1979; 1999b; Jacobson & Addis, 1993; Kurdek, 1995). The demand-withdrawal pattern of interaction response to conflict is most often linked negatively to relationship satisfaction, with the most common pattern reportedly being for the wife to demand and the husband to withdraw (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). In this pattern of response, one spouse demands that the issue be resolved while the partner tries to withdraw from the conflict. While this interactional style is not helpful for couples, avoiding conflict is also detrimental to relationships (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989). Gottman (1999) found if wives express anger during conflict, marital satisfaction improves, however, if wives express sadness or fear during conflict this led to a decline in marital satisfaction over time. The wife's fear predicted deterioration in her marital satisfaction, whereas her sadness predicted deterioration in both partners' marital satisfaction. For husbands, his "whining" (complaining about conflict while finding no

resolution) predicted deterioration in his satisfaction. In summary, Gottman's research (1999) has revealed that a balance of positive exchanges between spouses results in marital satisfaction. He suggests that partners in stable marriages use positive affect in ways that produce a positive sentiment override, which buffers them from negative perceptions and interactions with their spouses (Gottman, 1999).

Kurdek (1995) found that husbands' marital satisfaction is more frequently affected by how their wives resolve conflict than wives' marital satisfaction is affected by how their husbands resolve conflict. Withdrawal as a specific style for resolving conflict seems to operate differently for husbands and for wives. For husbands, the negative effect of withdrawal on their marital satisfaction depended on their wives level of compliance, conflict engagement, and withdrawal. In contrast, wives' use of withdrawal was negatively related to their own marital satisfaction independent of how their husbands tended to resolve conflict. In accounting for the imbalance Kurdek (1995) states:

One possibility involves the frequently noted finding that females are socialized more than males from very young ages to be 'relationship experts'. Such socialization may predispose wives to respond to their husbands not on the basis of what husbands do, but rather on the basis of wives' own feeling or sentiment toward their husband. This 'sentiment override' may, in turn, influence how wives process and interpret marriage-related information (p. 162).

### ***Marital Communication & Gender***

Couple communication has been widely examined as a predictor of relationship satisfaction, a predictor of couples' therapy outcomes, and as a focus of intervention in

couples' therapy (Bradbury, 1998; Gottman, 1999; Levenson, et al. 1994). Couples in satisfying marital relationships report being together two hours longer per day than couples in unsatisfying relationships. Additionally, they report spending more time talking, discussing personal topics, and less time in conflict than unhappy couples (Kirchler, 1989).

The extent to which couples understand each other's verbal and nonverbal messages contribute to how they communicate and how satisfied they are with their relationship. Noller (1980) found that spouses who are less accurate at decoding (receiving) their spouses' nonverbal messages are more likely to experience marital dissatisfaction. In particular, she reports a stronger relation between marital satisfaction and nonverbal accuracy for husbands. Wives were found to be more accurate encoders (senders) of nonverbal messages than husbands, particularly for positive messages. White, Speisman, Jackson, Bartis, and Costos (1986) also found that men are less able to take their mate's perspective than women are. In addition, Thompson and Walker (1989) found that women are more sensitive and responsive to what is going on in their marriages than their husbands are, in terms of sending and receiving messages accurately. From a feminist perspective, this difference could be explained by the gender role socialization of men and women to value relationships and communication differently.

Ball, Cowan, and Cowan (1995) examined gender differences during marital problem solving discussions. Transcribed audiotaped accounts of couples working on solving a problem concerning division of family labor and self-report questionnaires of 27 couples were examined. Findings revealed that women tended to raise the issues and draw men out in the early phase of the discussion, while men controlled the content and

emotional depth of the later discussion phases, and largely determined the outcome. In relationship to overall marital satisfaction, women's marital satisfaction was higher when there was agreement between spouses in their accounts of the problem solving discussion.

Acitelli (1992) conducted interviews with 42 married couples and found that wives talked more about their relationships than their husbands did. Wives' marital satisfaction was positively associated with the husband's degree of relationship talk during the interview. Husbands' marital satisfaction was not related to either spouse's relationship talk. This finding suggests that gender role norms and relationship expectations are different for wives' and for husbands', leading to subsequent differences in marital quality.

In a study conducted by Eels and O'Flaherty (1996), men and women ( $N=248$ ) were given a series of marital inventory items designed to assess men's and women's perceptions of a problem area and the way the respondent perceives his or her spouse's response to the same inventory item. Their analysis indicated that the primary areas of marital discord revolved around communication issues. They report that females perceive more problems than males and that females are more likely to perceive males as responsible for these problems. Males were more likely to perceive the problems as being mutually shared.

Just as good communication skills promote healthier conflict resolution in couples, destructive conflict behaviors of coercion, manipulation, and avoidance are likely to have negative effects on couple relationships. Gottman (1999) has found that there are certain negative communication patterns that lead to marital disruption. He

calls these, “The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse”. They are identified and defined as follows:

(a) *criticism*---any statement that implies there is something globally wrong with one’s partner, something that is probably a lasting aspect of the partner’s character; (b) *defensiveness*---any attempt to defend oneself from a perceived attack; (c) *contempt*---statement or nonverbal behavior that puts oneself on a higher plane than one’s partner; and (d) *stonewalling*---this occurs when the listener withdraws from the interaction. (p. 46).

Gottman has found sex-based differences in these four predictors; women are more likely to criticize and men are more likely to stonewall. In Gottman’s work on predicting marital disruption, he has found that anger in marital interaction did not predict divorce, however, the four horsemen did reliably predict divorce. Anger is not in itself harmful to relationships, rather, it is *how anger is expressed* that can be detrimental to marital satisfaction.

Baucom, Notarius, Burnett, and Haefner (1990) provided support for the gendered communication patterns of men taking on instrumental roles and women taking on expressive roles. Women have been described as emotional expressive pursuers of intimacy, and men as task-oriented problem solvers who want relationships but withdraw during emotionally charged conflict (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). Christensen and Heavey (1990) found that this wife-demand, husband-withdraw pattern was more likely to occur when the issue being discussed is one that has been raised by the wife. Feminist theory suggests that women are socialized to bring issues up for discussion in relationships. Interestingly, Levenson, Carstensen, and Gottman (1994) claim there are

biological sex-based differences in men's and women's physiological responses to conflict which may account for the finding that men are more likely to withdraw when a conflictual issue has been raised by the wife. According to these authors:

Wives push toward resolution of conflicts, apparently undaunted by emotional arousal, whereas husbands attempt to end conflictive discussions quickly, either by attempts toward reconciliation (when conflict levels are low) or by blatant withdrawal (when conflict levels are high). In this social psychophysiological theory of gender differences in marital behavior, marital conflict is viewed as producing high levels of negative affect, especially in unhappy marriages. High levels of negative emotions, such as anger, fear, and sadness, result in high levels of autonomic arousal. Men and women have different reactions to this heightened arousal. Women have considerable tolerance for physiological arousal and, thus, can maintain high levels of engagement. Men, in contrast, experience this arousal as being highly aversive and act to dissipate it by withdrawing from the conflict. (p. 58).

Overall, Gottman suggests that given the gender differences in physiological arousal, relationship satisfaction can be mediated by wives' use of a "soft start-up", meaning that when women raise an issue, if they use a softened type of "I" statement, as opposed to a more harsh, "blaming" type of criticism, this heightened emotional response is unlikely to ensue for men.

Noller and Feeney (1994) examined couples' ( $N=33$  couples) communication in early marriage and assessed their relationship satisfaction using the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976). Over their two-year study, communication behaviors were found

to predict relationship satisfaction for wives only. Wives who reported negativity (blame, threat, physical and verbal aggression), disengagement, and destructive processes (demand-withdrawal interactions) in their relationship, were more likely to be less satisfied with their marriage over time. The authors found that in general, husbands and wives' relationship satisfaction was positively related to the "quality" of the relationship, which was defined in terms of time spent together, disclosure and overall relationship satisfaction. Conversely, couple conflict was negatively related to relationship satisfaction for both husbands and wives. Happy couples reported communication high in mutual disclosure, recognition, satisfaction, and low in conflict. Conflict predicted lower marital satisfaction for husbands over time, while earlier relationship dissatisfaction for wives predicted later conflict.

#### Gender-Related Predictors of Marital Satisfaction and Marital Conflict

Feminist theory (Brown, 1994) promotes an awareness of power differentials associated with gender. The traditional female gender role is a social orientation that emphasizes closeness and solidarity, while the traditional male gender role emphasizes power and status (Tannen, 1990). Tannen suggests that female/male miscommunication results when males and females use different gender frames when speaking and listening to each other. The assumption is that males communicate in terms of power and status, while females communicate from a perspective of closeness and solidarity. Ickes (1993) reviews the findings that androgynous gender roles are linked with increased marital satisfaction for men and for women. Ickes reports that androgynous women paired with androgynous men reported considerable success in communicating and solving problems

with their partners. In addition, they reported high levels of satisfaction with their lives as a whole, control over life events, and optimism for the future.

### ***Division of Household Labor***

Division of household labor is one source of gender inequity (Brown, 1994). In 1989, Hochschild proposed that women who work outside the home work a “second shift” in the sense that after working a full-time job, women are disproportionately faced with additional demands of caring for the home and for the children in comparison to men. Hochschild (1989) discusses the gender role norms that influence women to take a deeper interest than men in the problems of juggling work with family life. She states,

Wives felt more responsible for home and children. More women kept track of doctor’s appointments and arranged for playmates to come over. More mothers than fathers worried about the tail on a child’s Halloween costume or a birthday present for a school friend. They were more likely to think about their children while at work and to check in by phone with the baby-sitter ... (working) women felt torn between one sense of urgency and another” (p. 8).

From a feminist perspective, gender discrepancies in the division of household labor are related to patriarchal-based societal differences in power and resources. Chafetz (1990) states, “Women tend to shoulder the bulk of the responsibilities associated with children and the household, and vary in the extent to which they participate in other types of work; men are universally involved in extra domestic work tasks and vary in the extent of their domestic and child-rearing work” (p. 31). The proportion of hours spent on household chores is about 72% for employed wives and about 81% for non-employed wives (Ehrlich, 1984).

The division of household labor falls under relatively traditional gender roles, with the wife performing a far greater proportion of household tasks than the husbands, even in households where the wife earns more than her husband (Greenstein, 1995). In his study, of marital satisfaction among employed women, Greenstein (1995) found that gender role identification influenced outcomes on marital satisfaction. Hours employed per week did not have a statistically significant effect for women holding traditional gender role ideologies, but it had a strong negative effect on marital stability for women identifying with non-traditional or androgynous gender role ideologies.

Similarly, in a study exploring changes in gender role attitudes, Amato and Booth (1995) found that when wives adopt less traditional gender role attitudes their perceived marital quality declines, however when husbands adopt less traditional attitudes, their perceived marital quality increases. In their discussion, these authors hypothesize that as wives become less traditional in outlook (more egalitarian) “they may perceive that they are disadvantaged or exploited and thus become less happy with their marriages...in terms of behavior, they may demand more decision-making power or press their husbands to spend more time doing housework and childcare. Because the status quo benefits men, many husbands resist these changes. Thus when wives’ attitudes become more progressive, there is likely to be more overt conflict between spouses and less stability in the relationship” (p. 58). They assume that the implications of gender role attitudes are the opposite for husbands, hypothesizing that when husbands adopt progressive, egalitarian attitudes there is less overt conflict between spouses and more stability in the relationship. Further examination of gender role differences among women and the wives’ perception of the fairness of the division of labor are needed in

order to predict the influence of household task inequality on marital satisfaction and marital conflict over time.

In addition to the division of labor in regard to household tasks, traditionally women have also assumed more responsibility for childcare and child rearing tasks (Steil, 1997). While fatherhood has been shown to have no negative effects on husbands' well-being, parenthood is often related to poor well-being for wives (Steil, 1997). From the feminist perspective, this difference can be attributed to the gender role inequities for men and for women in a society that conditions women to more likely have responsibility for parenting children. In 1995, Simon examined men and women's perceptions of work and family roles. Men and women were asked to describe the meaning of being a "good" mother or father. Simon (1995) found that for men, providing economic support was a central part of being a "good father", while few women viewed employment as an added responsibility separate from their primary obligations to their family.

### ***Marital Commitment***

Rusbult and Buunk (1993) explored how marital commitment can affect marital satisfaction. Commitment is defined as the internal representation of long-term orientation and the notion of being invested in a relationship for better or for worse. Commitment is said to be stronger when relationship satisfaction is higher than the quality of alternatives, or rather from a cost-benefit perspective, the benefit of being in the relationship outweighs the cost or the perceived alternatives of being single or in another relationship. Similarly, Beach and Broderick (1983) examined the relationship between commitment to one's marriage at the onset of therapy and changes during marital therapy. In a sample of 42 couples seeking marital therapy, wives' commitment

level accounted for a significant amount of the variance in marital satisfaction before therapy and gains in marital satisfaction at termination. Strikingly, commitment was not of significance for men. Commitment was defined as the intent of a person to maintain a relationship. This finding is consistent with the feminist perspective on gender role development, which posits that women are socialized to value relationships more than men.

In a study examining treatment outcome for couples participating in a form of therapy called Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (Johnson, 1996), Johnson and Talitman (1997) found outcome differences among husbands and wives that seem to be related to socialized gender differences. Women's faith and trust that their spouse still cared for and was committed to them significantly predicted follow-up relationship satisfaction for both husbands and wives. Husbands who were older, whose partners had higher levels of faith in them, and whose partner had initially rated them as less expressive on self-disclosure measures made the most gains at treatment termination. Johnson and Talitman's findings suggest important gender-related differences in couples' therapy outcomes. It seems that wives' marital perceptions and relationship satisfaction may predict positive outcomes for their husbands' in couples' therapy. From a feminist-based standpoint, wives' gender-role socialization makes them more attuned to relationships and relational functioning more so than husbands' and their sense of relationship security and trust may be an important unexplored aspect in the prediction of marital satisfaction and marital conflict.

## Life Transitions

Premarital cohabitation has been associated with lower marital satisfaction, higher rates of marital conflict, and higher rates of divorce for couples (Demaris & Leslie, 1984; Rogers & Amato, 1997; Shelton & John, 1993; Spanier, 1983; Stack & Eshleman, 1998; Stanley, Markman, Peters, & Leber, 1995). However, there is an ongoing debate in the marriage literature to explain this linkage. One possible explanation is that individuals who choose to cohabit have certain characteristics which make them more vulnerable and more likely to divorce while another explanation is that cohabitation places stress and pressure on the couple causing the relationship deterioration (Demaris & Leslie, 1984; Rogers & Amato, 1997). Regardless of the explanation, extant literature suggests that those who transition into marriage after premarital cohabitation will more likely experience lower marital satisfaction and higher marital conflict as compared to couples who did not cohabit before marriage.

Parental transitions are also linked to marital satisfaction and marital conflict. The division of labor becomes more traditional after the birth of a child, and marital satisfaction typically declines, particularly when children are young (Walker, 1999). Parenthood has been found to have a stronger impact on women's well-being, as compared to men (Kandel, Davies, & Raveis, 1985). Motherhood leads to both role overload and role conflict for women (Barnett & Baruch, 1985). Reilly, Entwisle, and Doering (1987) suggest that motherhood is more difficult for working women because they have more life stress and are more likely to feel conflicted from a gender-role related standpoint in balancing work and motherhood.

Despite women's employment status, women tend to have 79% of the childcare responsibilities in families (Peterson & Gerson, 1992). According to Walker (1999), "Mothers and fathers with more young children are more depressed, an effect that operates through their more precarious financial circumstances, but children also directly increase women's depression. So, children directly affect women but not men both positively and negatively" (p. 450). Marital satisfaction is said to increase when children reach young adulthood and leave the home, during the "empty-nest" stage of adulthood. Additionally, when older adult parents move with their married children, wives provide more care giving than husbands. Even when sons are designated the primary caregiver, care-giving tasks are more likely to be carried out by their wives (Birkel & Jones, 1989).

Parenthood continues to be an important aspect of marital satisfaction and well-being for parents even after children are grown. When adult children continue to be dependent or move back into the home, both mothers and fathers experience stress (Greenberg & Becker, 1988). According to Walker (1999), little research on parenthood reflects a gendered perspective and there is a need to know how employment and parenthood effects marital satisfaction and well being for husbands and wives.

### ***Limitations of Previous Studies***

According to Levenson, Carstensen, and Gottman (1993) most of the marital research has focused on relatively young couples and has been more concerned with marriages that dissolve than with marriages that stay together. These authors advocate for an increase in the study of stable marriages to determine predictors of their longevity in a culture of marital disruption.

Schumm, Webb, and Bollman (1998) analyzed a nationally representative sample from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) with the goal of examining sex differences in marital satisfaction. In their study, ( $N=5,274$  couples), marital satisfaction was measured by overall self-reported ratings of marital quality: “Taking all things together, how would you describe your marriage?”. There was an overall “sex” effect, with wives significantly less satisfied with the marriage than their husbands ( $p<.002$ ). However, Schumm’s et al (1998) study has several limitations. In particular, data was analyzed from only one point in time, not longitudinally. The basic analysis of paired samples t-test was employed to test for mean differences in satisfaction for husbands and wives. These authors advocate for future research that analyzes the influence of gender roles on marital satisfaction over time. They also recommend using a longitudinal perspective to examine gender differences in marital satisfaction for types of couples in terms of gender roles, age of the couple, parents and non-parents.

In 1993, Lye and Biblarz used wave one data of male and female primary respondents from the NSFH database to explore the effects of attitudes toward family life and gender roles on marital satisfaction. According to these authors, men and women who hold nontraditional attitudes toward family life are less satisfied with their marriages, as are men and women whose attitudes diverge from their spouses’ attitudes. Lye and Biblarz’ (1993) study has a major methodological weakness, similar to other past studies on marital satisfaction, in that the data was collected on individuals (males and females) with the subsequent inferences being made to the post parental family unit (husbands and wives). When data is taken from the individual perspective without matching the pair, then one cannot validly infer to the dyad (Bradbury, 1998; Schram,

1979). The other flaw in Lye and Biblarz' study, similar to previous studies on marital satisfaction, is that data was taken cross-sectionally at one point in time, without attention to longitudinal change.

Orbuch, House, Mero, and Webster (1996) examined marital well-being with a particular emphasis on the latter half of the marital life course, using a cross-sectional sample of men and women from both the NSFH dataset as well as data from the American's Changing Lives study. These authors found that reduced work and a reduction in parental responsibilities in later life were linked to an increase in marital satisfaction in later life. Similar to the methodological flaws discussed with previous studies, these authors examined data at one time point and they used information from primary respondents only, not accounting for dyadic influences on perceptions of marital well-being.

#### Statement of the Problem

Despite evidence that marriage disproportionately benefits men, with husbands reporting higher levels of marital satisfaction and well-being than wives (Baslow, 1992; Bernard, 1975; Bird & Fremont, 1991; Heyn, 1997; Levenson, Carstensen, and Gottman 1993; McRae & Brody, 1989; Schumm, Webb, & Bollman, 1998), many studies have ignored the influence of gender and gender roles on marital satisfaction and marital conflict. Studies that have examined gender roles and marital satisfaction are limited because they are often cross-sectionally designed. In addition, many studies have previously confounded the concept of gender with sex, limiting the interpretation of results and understanding of how each may influence marital satisfaction. Longitudinal research provides more potential for explaining how marriages succeed or fail rather than

simply describing differences between two groups at one point in time (Bradbury, 1998; Bradbury & Karney, 1993). The quality of our effort to prevent marital distress depends on our understanding of the longitudinal course of marriage and the time has come to include the exploration of gender roles in understanding these processes.

The present study examines how marital quality changes over time for husbands and wives. Additionally, this study expanded and extended the line of thinking of others who have examined marital satisfaction using the NSFH database (Lye & Biblarz, 1993; Orbuch, House, Mero, & Webster, 1996; Schumm, Webb, & Bollman, 1998). In particular, longitudinal models of prediction were developed and tested for gender role differences in marital satisfaction and in marital conflict.

The purpose of this study is to examine how marital satisfaction and marital conflict changes over time for husbands and for wives, with a focus on the influence of gender roles in the prediction of husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction and marital conflict. Given the extant literature reviewed, there is a need to understand the conditions leading to a marital relationship of dissatisfaction and which factors can be used to predict the maintenance of positive, satisfying relationships.

#### Research Questions and Hypotheses

Based on the preceding literature review, this study tested the following research questions:

*Research Question 1: What predictors influence marital satisfaction and marital conflict for husbands and for wives over time?* Past research has examined marital satisfaction, however, few studies have examined the longitudinal predictors of marital satisfaction and marital conflict for husbands and for wives as a dyadic unit. This study

will control for initial levels of marital functioning in order to develop models of prediction for husbands' and wives' marital conflict and marital satisfaction over time.

Hypothesis 1: It is hypothesized that demographic, psychological, marital process, and life transitions will significantly effect marital satisfaction and marital conflict for husbands and wives over time. Specifically, it is hypothesized that (a) healthier levels of psychological predictors (i.e. depression, well-being, physical health) will have a positive influence on husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction and marital conflict over time; (b) more adaptive marital processes (i.e. constructive conflict resolution) will have a positive influence on husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction and marital conflict over time; and (c) life cycle transitions will have a negative influence on husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction and marital conflict over time.

*Research Question 2: Does gender influence marital satisfaction and marital conflict over time?* Despite the amount of research on marital satisfaction and marital conflict, little is known about the influence of gender roles on husbands and wives' marital quality. Based on the availability of measures in the NSFH dataset, indirect measures of gender role influences on marital satisfaction and marital conflict over time were examined.

Hypothesis 2: It is hypothesized that gender-related predictors of (a) gender role attitudes; (b) perceived relationship fairness, (c) marital commitment, (d) marital equality, and (e) employment will predict differing models of longitudinal marital satisfaction and marital conflict for husbands and wives, with relationship equity predicting a positive influence on relationship satisfaction and a negative influence on marital conflict for husbands and wives.

*Research Question 3: Is there as “His” vs. “Hers” Marriage and if so, do “Her” Experiences in Marriage Predict “His”?* Previous studies have reported that men and women experience the same marriage differently, with wives’ marital satisfaction, relationship expectations, and communication skills having greater influence on marital outcomes than husbands (Gottman, 1999). However, these studies are limited in that differences are explored and explained based only on “sex” and not “gender”, as well as being limited in the nature of their cross-sectional or one-data point design.

Hypothesis 3: It is hypothesized that wives’ psychological predictors (i.e., depression, well-being, and physical health), marital process predictors (conflict management skills and marital violence), gender-related predictors (gender role attitudes, perceived relationship fairness, marital commitment, marital equality, employment, and wives’ income), and life transition predictors (cohabitation, presence of children in the household, empty nest, adult child moving back into the home, birth of a new child, having an adult parent move into the home, and job loss) will have an influence on husband’s Time 2 outcomes for marital satisfaction and marital conflict. It is hypothesized that wives’ gender roles socialize them to be more focused on relationships, and as a result, their relationship experiences will influence husbands’ relationship experience over time.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The following is a discussion of the methodology employed to conduct this study. The methodology discussed includes a description of the use of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) dataset; demographics of the sample including age, income, racial distribution, and education; and a description of the instrumentation used for this study including identification of the scales, sample items, and reliability information.

#### National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) Dataset

This study utilized secondary data from the first two waves of the NSFH dataset, for a detailed description of the NSFH see Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, (1988). Data were initially collected between 1987 and 1988 from a randomly selected household member age 19 or older and his/her her spouse ( $N=13,008$ ). The same primary respondents and their spouses were again interviewed from 1992 through 1994 ( $N=10,008$ ) representing a 77% response rate from wave 1 to wave 2.

#### ***Sample***

From the NSFH dataset, a sample was selected based on the following criteria: (1) husbands and wives from the same marriage were present at waves one and two; (2) at wave two, the husband and wife agreed that they were married to the same spouse from wave one; and (3) husbands and wives agreed that this was their first marriage.

Respondents who met the inclusion criteria included 1561 couples. Mean age for husbands' was 46 years old and wives' mean age was 42 years of age. The average

household income was \$38,867 and the natural log likelihood of income was 10.15. The racial distribution of the sample was predominantly White (85%), with (7%) African-American, (6%) Hispanic, and (2%) Other. Sixty-five percent of the couples reported having children. Husbands and wives both reported having an average of a 12<sup>th</sup> grade high school education.

### ***Instrumentation***

Previous researchers have used the NSFH dataset and have identified items in the dataset to measure particular constructs. In order to examine the research questions in this study, items were extracted from the NSFH dataset and similar procedures of previous research were used to operationalize the variables of interest.

#### Dependent Variables

Marital Conflict. Marital conflict was measured following the procedures of other researchers who have used the NSFH dataset and have operationalized this variable in their research (Davey & Szinovacz (in press); Szinovacz, 1993). Marital conflict was measured using three items from the NSFH dataset where the respondents indicated their frequency of disagreements on three items including: household tasks, money, and time spent together. Respondents rated their frequency of disagreements using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from “1 = Never” to “6 = Almost everyday.” Possible scores for this scale ranged from 1 to 6, with higher scores indicating greater marital conflict and lower scores indicating less marital conflict. Total marital conflict scores for husbands and wives were calculated by multiplying number of items by the mean of the three items to develop accurate scales, which would correct for missing data. Cronbach alphas for the

index respondents at waves one and two were 0.71 and 0.70, respectively. Cronbach alphas for spouses at wave one and two were 0.74 and 0.70, respectively.

Marital Satisfaction. Based on a study conducted by Lye and Biblarz (1993) using the NSFH dataset, marital satisfaction was based on items referring to relationship satisfaction and divorce potential. Husbands and wives overall marital satisfaction is measured by items assessing self-reported marital satisfaction, amount of time spent together talking or sharing an activity, and perceptions of divorce likelihood. The first item addressed overall relationship quality: “Taking all things together, how would you describe your relationship?” Respondents rated this question on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from “1 = Very unhappy” to “7 = Very happy”. The second item measuring shared time asks, “In the past month, how much time did you and your spouse spend together talking or on a shared activity?” Respondents rated this question on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from “1=Never” to “6=Almost every day”. The third set of items assesses spouses’ predictions of divorce potential. The initial question states, “It is always difficult to predict what will happen in a marriage, but realistically, what do you think the chances are that you and your husband/wife will eventually separate or divorce?” This item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “1 = Very low” to “5 = Very high”. The item was reverse coded, in accordance with the direction of the other corresponding items, so that high scores reflect a positive report of marital satisfaction and low scores reflect a negative report of marital satisfaction.

The remaining items assess for potential for future divorce as follows: (a) “During the past year, have you ever thought your marriage might be in trouble?”, (b) “Do you feel that way now?”, and (c) In the past year, have you and your spouse

discussed separating?” Respondents answered “yes” or “no” on the three items. Responses were dummy coded with a “yes” response equaling “1”, or presence of future divorce potential, and other responses =0, or no reported divorce potential. Total divorce likelihood scores for husbands and wives were calculated by multiplying number of items by the mean of the three items to develop accurate scales, which would correct for missing data. Because these items for marital satisfaction, shared time, and divorce likelihood are on three differing Likert point scales (7,6,and 5 respectively), divorce likelihood and shared time were divided by 7 in order to place responses on the same metric. Mean scores were then averaged for overall marital satisfaction for respondents and spouses at time 1 and time 2, by multiplying the number of items by the means of the three items in order to correct for missing data. Total scores of Marital Satisfaction ranged from 1 to 21, with 21 indicating the highest level of marital satisfaction. Chronbach alphas for the index respondents at waves one and two were 0.53 and 0.58, respectively. Chronbach alphas for spouses at wave one and two were 0.61 and 0.63, respectively.

### ***Independent Variables***

Demographic Variables of Age, spousal differences in ages, race, spousal differences in race, income, education, length of marriage, and religiosity are also included as independent predictors in the models. Because this sample is predominantly White (85%), White was used as the category of reference, and dummy codes were created for African-American (7%), Hispanic (6%), and Other (2%).

Length of marriage was collapsed into two distinct groups consisting of those couples married 0-7 years and 16 or greater years. Based on Gottman’s (1999) research,

these two groups exemplify critical time periods in the marital trajectory, with the majority of couples divorcing within the first seven years of marriage. These couples' relationships are characterized by having high levels of marital conflict. Conversely, a second vulnerable time period for the marital trajectory is 16 to 24 years of marriage. This is the next most likely time frame for couples to divorce. These relationships are characterized by spending little time together, lack of communication, and lack of conflict.

Religiosity is measured by two items assessing the presence of husbands and wives' religious affiliation and the frequency of their attendance at religious services. Religious affiliation is measured by respondents self-report of whether they identify with some type of religious affiliation (e.g., Baptist, Catholic, etc.). A response of "no religious affiliation" was dummy coded into 0's, while a selection of a religious affiliations are coded into 1's, indicating presence of religious affiliation. Secondly, the frequency of attending religious services are "How often do you attend religious services?" (1=about once per year, 2=about once per month, 3=about once per week, 4=several times per week).

#### Psychological Predictors

Depression is measured from 12 items taken from the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale or CESD (Radloff, 1977). Respondents were asked, "Next is a list of the ways you might have felt or behaved during the past week. On how many days during the past week did you: (a) feel bothered by things that don't usually bother you; (b) feel like not eating; your appetite was poor; (c) feel that you could not shake off the blues even with help from your family or friends; (d) have trouble keeping your mind on

what you're doing; (e) feel depressed; (f) feel that everything you did was an effort; (g) feel fearful; (h) sleep restlessly; (i) talk less than usual; (j) feel lonely; (k) feel sad; and (l) feel you could not get going." Respondents reported the number of days they had felt any of the above symptoms of depression. The mean response was calculated and entered into the models as predictors of depression for husbands and wives. (Cronbach alpha= .92).

Well-being. This global measure is taken from the Global Positive Affect measure from the Quality of Life Survey (Staines, 1973), developed by the Institute for Social Research at Michigan. The item asks, "Taking all things together, how are things these days?" (1=very unhappy, 7=very happy). Additionally, a transition or change in husbands' and wives' well-being was measured by taking the difference score from reported well-being at Time 2 minus reported well-being at Time 1.

Physical Health Measure. Replicating the work of Szinovacz (1993) health is measured globally by the following question: "Compared with other people your age, how would you describe your health"? (1=very poor to 5=excellent). This item was initially taken from the Health Quality of Life Survey (Staines, 1973) and integrated into the NSFH surveys. Additionally, a transition or change in health (positive or negative) was measured by taking the difference score from husbands and wives health at Time 2 minus health reports at Time 1.

### Marital Processes

Conflict Management. Conflict management was measured using three items, replicated from the work of Scinovacz (1993). Respondents rated the likelihood of using various conflict resolution strategies when they were dealing with a serious disagreement

with their spouse. These three strategies included “discussing the disagreements calmly, arguing heatedly or shouting at each other, and end up hitting or throwing things at each other.” Respondents’ reports were scaled from “1 = Never” to “5 = Always.” The first item was reverse coded, so that all scores for conflict management ranged from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating more marital conflict and lower scores indicating less marital conflict. Total conflict management scores for husbands and wives were calculated by multiplying number of items by the mean of the three items to develop accurate scales, which would correct for missing data. Chronbach alphas for the index respondents as well as spouses at waves one and two were 0.50 and 0.50, respectively.

Conflict Tactics Scale items were used to assess for marital violence. The three items from the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1990) were asked of couples are as follows: (1) “Sometimes arguments between partners becomes physical. During the past year, has this happened in arguments between you and your spouse?”; (2) “Have you been cut, bruised, or seriously injured by your spouse?” and (3) “Has your spouse been seriously injured by you?”. Yes or no responses to all three items were dummy coded so that 1=presence of violence and 0=no violence in the relationship. Total conflict tactics scores for husbands and wives were calculated by multiplying number of items by the mean of the three items to develop accurate scales, which would correct for missing data. Chronbach alphas for the index respondents at waves one and two were 0.35 and 0.43, respectively. Chronbach alphas for spouses at wave one and two were 0.45 and 0.45, respectively.

## Gender Related Predictors of Marital Satisfaction and Marital Outcome

Gender Role Attitudes. Replicating the work of Szinovacz (1993) in a study using the NSFH dataset, gender role attitudes were measured using the following two items: “It is much better if the man earns the main living and the woman takes care of the home and family,” and “If a husband and a wife both work full-time, they should share household tasks equally.” Respondents indicated their degree of agreement on these two items using a 5-point Likert ranging from “1 = Strongly agree” to “5 = Strongly disagree”. Gender role attitude was made up of the provider-role and household task attitude items. Answers to the second item were reverse coded, so that low scores indicated more “traditional” attitudes and high scores more “egalitarian” gender role attitudes and a mean score were obtained. Total gender role attitude scores for husbands and wives were calculated by multiplying the number of items by the mean response for each of the two items to develop accurate scales, which would correct for missing data.

Relationship Fairness was measured with three items: “How do you feel about the fairness of your relationship in each of the following areas?”: Household chores, (1=very unfair to me, 2=somewhat unfair to me, 3= fair to both, 4= somewhat unfair to spouse, and 5=very unfair to spouse). Items 1 and 5 were recoded to =0, items 2 and 4 were recoded to equal 1, and item 3 was recoded to equal 2, so that higher scores indicate a perception of equity in relationship fairness. Total relationship fairness scores for husbands and wives were calculated by multiplying number of items by the mean of the three items to develop accurate scales, which would correct for missing data.

Marital Commitment is measured by the following item, “Marriage is a lifetime relationship and should never be ended except under extreme circumstances”.

(1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree). Responses were reverse coded so that higher numbers indicate higher levels of marital commitment.

Marital Equity is measured by the respondents' attitudes toward the following statement; "In a successful marriage, the partners must have freedom to do what they want individually." Responses range from 1="strongly agree" to 5="strongly disagree". Responses were reverse coded so that higher numbers indicate lower levels of marital equity.

Employment Respondents were asked to report how many hours they worked last week, as well as how many hours per week they would typically work in a week's time. Hours worked greater than 0, were coded to equal 1, meaning presence of employment. Change in typical hours worked was coded as a job loss for respondents and spouses.

#### Life Transitions

Cohabitation is also used as a predictor in the analysis, as it has been significantly linked to greater incidence of marital instability and marital distress (Knox & Schacht, 2000; Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994). Respondents and spouses were asked to respond "yes" or "no" as to whether or not they had cohabited in their present relationship prior to marriage.

Household Transitions were coded into presence of children in the home under age 18 and presence of children in the home over 18 years of age. Additionally, changes in parental status were included in the analysis by including the following: the birth of a new child from Time 1 to Time 2; the launching of children, placing couples in the empty nest phase of marriage at Time 2; and having an adult child move back into the home.

Finally, having an adult parent move into the couples' home was also included as a predictor in the analysis.

### Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (*mean*  $\pm$  *SDs*) were calculated for all demographic and marital measures (see Table 1.). Due to the large sample size, the Likert type scale responses were treated as continuous data and therefore means and SDs were used to perform descriptive statistics. Multiple regression analysis was used to predict models of change in marital conflict and marital satisfaction for husbands and for wives over time. Initial Time 1 predictor variables are controlled for in order to assess for change in marital satisfaction and marital conflict over time for husbands and for wives.

A two-tailed *p* level of .05 and under was considered statistically significant in all analyses. Initial multiple regression analyses were performed with SPSS software. Because the National Survey of Families and Households dataset contains clustered and stratified samples, the standard errors calculated in SPSS do not adjust for design effects, which can lead to incorrect inferences (Johnson & Elliott, 1998). All analyses are weighted with probability weights that are inversely proportional to the likelihood of being selected into the sample. Probability weights allows for generalization to the population of inference. Therefore the advanced statistical software package Stata (Stata Corporation, 1997), a statistical program which produces unbiased parameter estimates and correct variance estimates when using complex survey data was used in order to adjust the standard errors and to address issues of sample weights.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### Data Analyses results for Research Questions and Hypotheses

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to address the research questions in this study. Time 1 predictors of initial levels of marital functioning for husbands' and wives' were used to predict change over time both for husbands' and for wives' marital satisfaction and marital conflict. Descriptive statistics along with models predicting change in the marital satisfaction and marital conflict for husbands and for wives were examined. **Stata** software (Stata Corporation, 1997) was used in data analysis in order to correct parameter and standard errors inherent in the clustered sampling design used in the National Survey of Families and Households (Johnson & Elliott, 1998).

Means and standard deviations were calculated for each predictor and outcome variable for husbands and wives (see Table 4.1). Mean age for husbands and wives were 46 and 44 years of age, respectively. The average number of years that spouses differed in age was 2.23 years. Race was collapsed into four categories, with White as the category of reference, the mean number of African-Americans in the sample was .07, the mean number of Hispanics was .06, and the mean number of those categorized as "other race" was .02. Of this sample, a mean .02 number of couples differed in race from their spouse. The mean number of years of education was 12.9 for husbands and 12.7 for wives. The mean natural log income was 10.2, with a mean income of \$38, 867. Religious affiliation was dummy coded into 0=no religious affiliation and 1=some type of religious affiliation. The majority of husbands and wives in the sample identified

some type of religious affiliation, with husbands reporting a mean of .92, and wives reporting a mean of .95. Frequency of attendance at religious services ranged from 0=no attendance, 1=yearly, 2=monthly, 3=weekly and 4= more than once per. The mean religious attendance reported for husbands was 1.84 and wives was 2.10, with most wives attending religious services more frequently than husbands. Length of marriage was dummy coded into two categories of marital length of zero to seven years and a second category of 16 and greater years married. The majority of couples in this study have been married 16 and greater years. Mean for length of marriage zero to seven years was .19, while mean for length of marriage 16 and greater years was .60.

Mean scores were calculated for husbands' and wives' outcome variables of interest. Scores of marital conflict range from 1 to 18, with 1 indicating couples' never have conflict on household tasks, spending money, and working for pay and 18 indicating couples' report of arguing over these items almost every day. Husbands reported a mean 5.80 of marital conflict, while wives reported slightly less conflict with a mean of 5.75. Scores for overall marital satisfaction ranged from 1 to 21, with 21 indicating the highest level of marital satisfaction. Mean scores for husbands and wives' marital satisfaction were 18.46, and 18.44, with husbands indicating a somewhat higher level of overall marital satisfaction.

Psychological predictors of depression, well-being, and health were measured for husbands and wives. Possible scores of depression ranged from 0 to 84, respondents indicating how many days of the week they had felt any of the 12 symptoms of depression. Husbands' mean score of depression was 10.11. Wives reported slightly more depression, with a mean of 13.13. Well-being scores ranged from 1 to 8, with

lower scores indicating poor well-being and higher scores indicating positive self-reports of well-being. Husbands reported a mean of 5.61 on the measure of well-being, while wives reported slightly higher well-being, mean=5.68. Self-reported physical health was scaled from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating very poor health and 5 indicating excellent health. Husbands and wives both reported mean scores of good health, with mean scores of 4.06 and 4.07 for husbands and wives respectively.

Marital process means were calculated for husbands and wives ability to manage conflict and incidence of marital violence. Scores for conflict management ranged from 1 to 15, with lower scores indicating positive conflict management (e.g. discussing disagreements calmly) and higher scores indicating negative conflict management (e.g. end up hitting or throwing things at each other). Husbands' mean score for conflict management was 5.64 and while wives' mean score was 5.88. Incidence of marital violence was measured on a scale of 0 to 4, 0 indicating no marital violence, and 4 indicating four or more episodes of physical violence occurring in the past year. Husbands' mean score of physical violence was .04, while wives' mean score was .39. Although husbands and wives reported little incidence of marital violence, wives reported more than husbands.

Gender-related predictors of marital satisfaction and marital conflict were measured in terms of gender role attitudes, perceived relationship fairness, marital commitment, marital equity, employment, job loss, and wives' relative income. Gender role attitudes were scaled from 1 to 10, with lower scores reflecting traditional types of gender role attitudes and higher scores reflecting egalitarian gender role attitudes. Husbands' mean score for gender role attitudes was 6.38, while wives' reported slightly

more egalitarian gender role attitudes with a mean score of 6.83. Perceived relationship fairness was scaled from 0 to 9, with 0 reflecting the perception of unfairness in the marital relationship and 9 reflecting perceptions of relationship fairness. Husbands' mean score for perceptions of relationship fairness was 5.89, while wives' reported a mean score of 5.12, indicating that wives perceived their marital relationships to be less fair to them than husbands. Marital commitment was measured on a scale of 1 to 5, with low scores reflecting lower levels of marital commitment and higher scores reflecting higher levels of marital commitment. Husbands' mean score for marital commitment was 4.22, while wives' mean score for marital commitment was 4.11. Marital equity was scaled from 1 to 5, with low scores indicating lower marital equity and higher scores reflecting higher levels of marital equity. Husbands' mean scores of marital equity was 3.65, while wives' mean score was 3.70. Number of employment hours typically worked was dummy coded so that 0=not employed and 1=employed. The majority of husbands in the sample were employed, with a mean of .74. Fewer wives were employed, with a mean score of .53. Job loss was dummy coded as well, with 1=job loss and 0 indicating no job loss. Husbands' mean score for job loss was .26, while wives' mean score was .20. A measure of wives' income relative to the amount of income contributed by the husband was calculated as an indirect measure of marital equity. Wives mean amount of income relative to husbands' was 24.6.

Life transitions for husbands' and wives' included the transition from cohabitation to marriage, having children under age 18 in the home, having children over age 18 in the home, launching children from the home, having a parent move into the home, having an adult child move back into the home, and becoming a new parent. These items were all

dummy coded, with 1 indicating yes, or presence of the life transition, and 0 meaning no presence of life transition. A mean of .19 husbands and wives in the sample made the transition from prior cohabitation to marriage. Half of the sample had children under age 18 living in the household, mean of .50, while .17 mean children over 18 were present in the home. A mean of .21 husbands' and wives' in the sample had moved into the empty nest life transition of launching children from the home. In this sample, a mean of .02 couples had a parent move into the home, and a mean of .03 couples experienced the birth of a new child into their family household.

Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics for Predictor Variables of Marital Satisfaction and Marital Conflict

Variable	Husbands		Wives	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<b>Demographics</b>				
Age	46.2	1.17	44.3	1.15
Age Differences Between Spouses	2.23	1.25	2.23	1.25
<b>Race</b>				
White (Reference Category)	---	---	---	---
African-American	0.07	1.17	0.07	1.17
Hispanic	0.06	13.7	0.06	13.7
Other Race	0.02	1.25	0.02	1.25
Race Differences Between Spouses	0.04	2.01	0.04	2.01
Education	12.9	4.09	12.7	4.08
Natural Log Income	10.2	3.63	10.2	3.63
Religious Affiliation	0.92	1.89	0.95	1.56
Religious Attendance	1.84	0.03	2.10	0.03
<b>Outcome Variables</b>				
Marital Satisfaction Time 1	18.46	1.45	18.44	1.44
Marital Conflict Time 1	5.80	0.05	5.75	0.05
<b>Psychological Predictors</b>				
CESD (Depression)	10.11	1.93	13.13	1.52
Well-Being	5.62	0.87	5.68	1.18
Health	4.06	1.90	4.07	1.99
<b>Marital Processes</b>				
Conflict Management	5.64	1.93	5.88	1.94
Conflict Tactics Scale	0.04	0.58	0.39	0.40

Gender-Related Predictors				
Gender Role Attitudes	6.38	1.83	6.83	1.94
Perceived Relationship Fairness	5.89	1.61	5.12	1.22
Marital Commitment	4.22	1.83	4.11	1.46
Marital Equity	3.65	1.69	3.70	1.47
Employment	0.74	1.57	0.53	1.82
Job Loss	0.26	1.16	0.20	1.32
Wives' Relative Income	---	---	24.6	1.84
Life Transitions				
Cohabitation	0.19	1.22	0.19	1.22
Having Children Under 18 in	0.50	1.23	0.50	1.23
Having Children Over 18 in Home	0.17	1.90	0.17	1.90
Empty Nest	0.21	1.45	0.21	1.45
Parent Moves into Home	0.02	1.10	0.02	1.10
Adult Child Moves Back into	0.06	1.04	0.06	1.04
Becoming a New Parent	0.03	2.18	0.03	2.18

### ***Predictors of Change in Husbands' Longitudinal Marital Satisfaction***

The regression model for husbands' marital satisfaction predicted 35% of the variance ( $F(50,2)=16.78, p < 0.0000$ ) and is statistically significant. Several demographic variables were statistically significant in predicting husbands' marital satisfaction at Time 2 (See Table 4.2). Racial differences for husbands' marital satisfaction indicate that African-Americans reported being less satisfied in their marriages than Whites (the category of reference for the model) and husbands' from the category "Other Race" indicated that they were more satisfied with their marriages over the five-year period. Husbands and wives' religiosity also influenced husbands' longitudinal marital satisfaction. Husbands' whose wives do not identify with a particular religious affiliation indicated that they were less satisfied with their marriages, while husbands' who attend religious services more frequently, report being more satisfied with their marriages. Husbands' who have been married 16 or more years, also reported being more satisfied with their marriages over the five-year time period.

Husbands' and Wives' psychological predictors are important in predicting husbands' longitudinal marital satisfaction. Husbands and Wives' higher levels of depression led to a decrease in husbands' marital satisfaction over time. Conversely, positive well-being for both husbands' and wives' predicted husbands' increase in longitudinal marital satisfaction, with a transition or change in both husbands' and wives' well-being predicting less marital satisfaction for husbands over the five year period. Marital Processes measuring husbands and wives' conflict management skills indicated that poor conflict management skills predict a decrease in husbands' marital satisfaction over time. For husbands', their higher levels of marital satisfaction at Time 1 predicted greater marital satisfaction five years later. In regards to gender-related predictors, husbands who reported having more traditional gender roles were generally less satisfied in their marriages. Additionally, the more hours husbands' worked per week outside the home, the less satisfied they were in their marriages.

Life Transitions also influence marital satisfaction for husbands over time. Having children under the age of 18 in the home predicts a decrease in husbands' marital satisfaction over time. Additionally, launching children and transitioning to the empty nest phase of marriage leads to an increase in marital satisfaction for husbands' over time. Finally, having an adult child move back into the home leads to a decrease in marital satisfaction for husbands over the five-year period.

### ***Predictors of Change in Wives' Longitudinal Marital Satisfaction***

The regression model for wives' marital satisfaction predicted 37% of the variance ( $F(50,2)=15.31, p < 0.0000$ ) and is statistically significant. The demographic variables of race and length of marriage were statistically significant in predicting wives'

marital satisfaction at Time 2 (See Table 4.2). African-American wives reported being less satisfied with their marriages over time, in comparison to Whites. Wives' who have been married 0-7 years report being less satisfied with their marriages at Time 2.

Psychological predictors of wives' depression and well-being were significant predictors of wives longitudinal marital satisfaction. Wives who reported being depressed experienced a decrease in marital satisfaction, while conversely, wives' with positive well-being reported an increase in marital satisfaction over time. Both husbands' and wives' transition and change in their physical health predicted a decrease in wives' satisfaction over time.

In regards to gender-related predictors, the more hours husbands' spent at work negatively influenced wives' marital satisfaction over time. The life transitions of having children under the age of 18 in the home lead to a decrease in marital satisfaction over time, as did having an adult child move back into the home.

Table 4.2 Predictors of Change in Husbands' and Wives' Longitudinal Marital Satisfaction.

Marital Satisfaction	Husbands		Wives	
	b	SE(b)	b	SE(b)
<b>Demographics</b>				
Age Differences Between Spouses	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.03
African-American	-0.60**	0.19	-1.13**	0.33
Hispanic	0.46	0.30	0.33	0.42
Other Race	0.90*	0.44	0.97	0.54
Race Differences Between	-0.20	0.32	-0.30	0.54
Husbands' Education	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.03
Wives' Education	-0.04	0.03	-0.02	0.03
Natural Log Income	-0.01	0.08	-0.08	0.07
Husbands' Religious Affiliation	-0.37	0.29	0.45	0.31
Wives' Religious Affiliation	-0.64*	0.27	-0.05	0.11
Husbands' Religious Attendance	0.15*	0.07	0.02	0.09
Wives' Religious Attendance	-0.08	0.07	-0.17	0.38
Length of Marriage (0-7 Years)	-0.27	0.21	-0.64*	0.25
Length of Marriage (16 > Years)	0.68**	0.21	0.24	0.26

Time 1 Marital Satisfaction		0.04		0.04
Psychological Predictors				
Husbands' Depression	-0.02**	0.01	-0.00	0.01
Wives' Depression	-0.02*	0.01	-	0.01
Husbands' Well-Being	0.20**	0.08	0.07	0.08
Wives' Well-Being	0.12*	0.06	0.26**	0.75
Husbands' Change in Well-Being	-	0.16	-	0.14
Wives' Change in Well-Being	-	0.15	-	0.18
Husbands' Physical Health	-0.09	0.09	-0.09	0.12
Wives' Physical Health	-0.07	0.09	0.10	0.11
Husbands' Change in Health	-0.04	0.17	-0.63	0.14
Wives' Change in Health	-0.07	0.09	0.17	0.16
Marital Processes				
Husbands' Conflict Management	-0.10*	0.04	-0.10*	0.05
Wives' Conflict Management	-0.12*	0.04	-0.18**	0.05
Husbands' Conflict Tactics Scale	-0.15	0.27	0.40	0.24
Wives' Conflict Tactics Scale	0.06	0.24	-0.33	0.28
Gender-Related Predictors				
Husbands' Gender Role Attitudes	-0.09*	0.04	-0.01	0.54
Wives' Gender Role Attitudes	-0.03	0.06	-0.04	0.06
Husbands' Perceived Rshp	0.06	0.05	-0.01	0.06
Wives' Perceived Rshp Fairness	0.01	0.05	0.12	0.09
Husbands' Marital Commitment	0.13	0.08	0.12	0.10
Wives' Marital Commitment	-0.04	0.06	0.01	0.08
Husbands' Marital Equity	0.13	0.07	-0.01	0.07
Wives' Marital Equity	-0.07	0.07	-0.00	0.09
Husbands' Employment	-	0.18	-0.65*	0.26
Wives' Employment	-0.29	0.18	-0.12	0.16
Wives' Relative Income	0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00
Husbands' Job Loss	0.39	0.21	0.26	0.20
Wives' Job Loss	0.31	0.16	0.53*	0.25
Life Transitions				
Cohabitation	-0.28	0.19	-0.18	0.25
Having Children Under 18 in	-0.50*	0.22	-0.77**	0.23
Having Children Over 18 in Home	-0.23	0.24	0.12	0.25
Empty Nest	0.65**	0.21	0.41	0.28
Parent Moves into Home	0.04	0.52	0.09	0.56
Adult Child Moves Back into	-0.62*	0.25	-1.12***	0.30
Becoming a New Parent	0.50	0.35	0.74	0.43

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$

### ***Predictors of Change in Husbands' Longitudinal Marital Conflict***

The regression model for husbands' marital conflict predicted 37% of the variance ( $F(50,2)=17.90, p < 0.0000$ ) and is statistically significant. Husbands' initial levels of marital conflict significantly predicted husbands' overall marital conflict at Time 2 as well. Two demographic variables were statistically significant in predicting husbands' marital conflict at Time 2 (see Table 4.3). Husbands' who did not attend religious services frequently reported an increase in marital conflict over time. Additionally, husbands who have been married 16 years or longer report having less marital conflict over time.

Both husbands' and wives' psychological predictors influenced the amount of marital conflict reported by husbands at Time 2. For husbands with depression, both their own depression as well as their wives' depression led to an increase in husband's report of marital conflict over the five-year period. A transition or change in husbands' well-being predicted an increase in marital conflict for husbands' at Time 2. Additionally, husbands' who reported being in poor health experienced greater levels of marital conflict over the five-year period of time.

The marital process measurement of conflict management influenced the amount of marital conflict experienced by husbands over time. For both husbands and their wives who handled conflicts poorly, there is an increase in overall levels of marital conflict for husbands over the five year time period. The gender-related predictor of wives' perceptions of relationship fairness also predicted husbands' levels of marital conflict. For husbands' whose wives did not perceive an equitable sense of fairness in their relationship over household chores, spending money, and working for pay, the

husbands' report experiencing greater levels of marital conflict over time. Finally, the life transitions of having children in the home under age 18 predicts an increase in marital conflict for husbands, as does having an adult child move back into the home.

### ***Predictors of Change in Wives' Longitudinal Marital Conflict***

The regression model for wives' marital conflict predicted 42% of the variance ( $F(50,2)=18.61, p < 0.0001$ ) and is statistically significant. Wives' initial levels of marital conflict significantly predicted wives' overall marital conflict at Time 2 as well. The demographic variables of race and religious affiliation were statistically significant in predicting wives' marital conflict at Time 2 (See Table 4.3). African-American and Hispanic wives reported increased levels of marital conflict at Time 2. In addition, wives' lack of religious affiliation was significant in predicting increased levels of marital conflict.

The psychological predictors of depression and well-being were significant in predicting wives' levels of marital conflict at Time 2. For wives' both their own and their husband's experience of depression led to increased levels of marital conflict over time. Additionally, a negative change in wives' well-being led to increased reports of marital conflict for wives' over the five-year period. Husbands' poor well-being was also significant in predicting wives' increased levels of marital conflict. The marital process variable of conflict management significantly predicted wives' levels of conflict at Time 2, with poor ability to manage conflict leading to an increase in wives' experience of overall conflict over the five year period. The gender-related predictors did not influence the amount of marital conflict reported by wives over the five-year period. The life transition of wives' job loss predicted wives' increased levels of marital conflict as well.

This was the only significant life transition predictor for wives' change in marital conflict.

Table 4.3. Predictors of Change in Husbands' and Wives' Longitudinal Marital Conflict.

Marital Conflict	Husbands		Wives	
	b	SE(b)	b	SE(b)
<b>Demographics</b>				
Age Differences Between Spouses	0.00	0.02	-0.02	0.02
African-American	0.03	0.19	0.56*	0.21
Hispanic	0.33	0.27	0.95*	0.39
Other Race	0.14	0.68	0.28	0.61
Race Differences Between Spouses	0.31	0.39	-0.35	0.33
Husbands' Education	0.04	0.03	0.04	0.03
Wives' Education	-0.05	0.03	-0.02	0.03
Natural Log Income	0.05	0.07	-0.06	0.08
Husbands' Religious Affiliation	0.21	0.27	0.08	0.18
Wives' Religious Affiliation	0.29	0.20	-0.45*	0.20
Husbands' Religious Attendance	-0.11*	0.05	-0.04	0.06
Wives' Religious Attendance	0.10	0.07	0.05	0.06
Length of Marriage (0-7 Years)	-0.07	0.17	0.15	0.15
Length of Marriage (16 > Years)	-0.58**	0.18	-0.42	0.22
Time 1 Marital Conflict		0.03		0.04
<b>Psychological Predictors</b>				
Husbands' Depression		0.00	0.01**	0.01
Wives' Depression	0.00	0.00		0.01
Husbands' Well-Being	-0.09	0.07	-0.10*	0.05
Wives' Well-Being	0.04	0.07	-0.06	0.06
Husbands' Change in Well-Being	0.44**	0.13	0.01	0.12
Wives' Change in Well-Being	0.20	0.14	-	0.12
Husbands' Physical Health	0.06**	0.14	-0.00	0.08
Wives' Physical Health	-0.06	0.09	-0.14	0.09
Husbands' Change in Health	0.06	0.14	0.10	0.13
Wives' Change in Health	0.03	0.15	-0.14	0.09
<b>Marital Processes</b>				
Husbands' Conflict Management	0.10*	0.04	0.03	0.04
Wives' Conflict Management	0.07*	0.03	0.09**	0.03
Husbands' Conflict Tactics Scale	-0.08	0.17	0.02	0.17
Wives' Conflict Tactics Scale	0.13	0.22	-0.00	0.17
<b>Gender-Related Predictors</b>				
Husbands' Gender Role Attitudes	0.05	0.04	-0.00	0.04
Wives' Gender Role Attitudes	0.02	0.04	0.08	0.04
Husbands' Perceived Rshp	0.02	0.05	-0.07	0.06
Wives' Perceived Rshp Fairness	-0.20**	0.07	0.00	0.07

Husbands' Marital Commitment	-0.03	0.09	0.07	0.05
Wives' Marital Commitment	-0.07	0.06	0.02	0.05
Husbands' Marital Equity	-0.06	0.06	0.01	0.05
Wives' Marital Equity	0.03	0.06	-0.10	0.06
Husbands' Employment	0.13	0.19	0.11	0.16
Wives' Employment	-0.08	0.14	0.17	0.14
Wives' Relative Income	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Husbands' Job Loss	-0.09	0.21	0.24	0.18
Wives' Job Loss	-0.03	0.16	-0.31*	0.15
Life Transitions				
Cohabitation	0.06	0.18	0.05	0.19
Having Children Under 18 in	0.31*	0.15	0.10	0.16
Having Children Over 18 in Home	-0.02	0.24	-0.07	0.18
Empty Nest	-0.08	0.24	-0.20	0.21
Parent Moves into Home	-0.42	0.44	0.12	0.67
Adult Child Moves Back into	0.62*	0.27	0.20	0.25
Becoming a New Parent	0.09	0.43	0.49	0.48

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

#### Results Discussion: Hypothesis 1

##### ***Demographic Predictors of Husbands' and Wives' Marital Satisfaction and Conflict***

Results from this study support the hypothesis that demographic, psychological, marital process, and life cycle transitional predictors influence changes in marital satisfaction and marital conflict for husbands' and wives' over time. In comparing the models of husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction and marital conflict, the demographic predictor of race was significant in both husbands' and wives' models of satisfaction and for wives' model of marital conflict.

African-American husbands and wives both reported a decrease in marital satisfaction over time. This finding is consistent with the literature, which posits that the primary reason for this is due to the economic and social discrimination experienced by African-American couples, with African-American women having twice the divorce rate as white women (McAdoo, 1998). According to Staples (1988), African-American wives may be particularly unhappy because, there are fewer eligible partners to select from who may share their level of education in particular.

For husbands' in the "other race" category, there was an increase in marital satisfaction over time. This small 2% category is comprised of persons indicating "Asian", and "Other" from choices of ethnicities. It is unclear who makes up this category exactly, however, it could be hypothesized that persons from smaller minority

groups share a sense of community and social support with others in their minority group, which may account for their increase in marital satisfaction.

Race did not predict husbands Time 2 overall marital conflict, however, African-American wives and Hispanic wives indicated increased levels of marital conflict at Time 2 in comparison to the reference category of Whites. Again, the implications noted earlier regarding the influences on African-American wives' decreased marital satisfaction may also explain their increased levels of marital conflict (Staples, 1988). Unfortunately, due to the small sample size of minority couples in the NSFH dataset, it is not possible to make global inferences about the implications of minority race on husbands and wives longitudinal marital satisfaction and marital conflict. This finding is only applicable to this discussion of marital satisfaction and marital conflict for minority couples in comparison to the reference category of Whites.

Religiosity was an important predictor of changes in marital satisfaction and marital conflict for husbands, and for wives' model of marital conflict. Husbands' whose wives' indicated no religious affiliation were less satisfied with their marriages, while husbands' own frequency of religious attendance was predictive of husband's increased longitudinal marital satisfaction and decreased marital conflict. Wives' indication of a lack of religious affiliation also predicted wives' increased levels of marital conflict. The finding of religiosity's positive influence on marital satisfaction has been previously documented in the marital literature (Stanley & Markman, 1997). However, religiosity is typically discussed as a marital buffer, with increased religiosity leading to increased social support and disapproval of divorce. Lack of religiosity has not previously been linked to decreased marital satisfaction, nor have sex or gender based differences for

husbands or wives been previously established. Absence of religious affiliation and its influence on marital satisfaction and marital conflict has not previously been explored in the literature, and clearly warrants further investigation in the future.

Length of marriage was found to have opposite effects for husbands' and wives' changes in marital satisfaction and marital conflict over time. This finding contributes new direction to the work of Gottman (1999) and his assertion that there are two distinct time periods in which marriage is vulnerable. The first time period being 0-7 years which is typically characterized by high levels of marital conflict, while the second time period of vulnerability is 16 and over years, in which couples are likely to divorce due to lack of communication and feeling that they "don't know each other anymore". Interestingly, length of marriage has converse effects for husbands and wives, with wives' married from 0 to 7 years reporting decreased marital satisfaction, while husbands in marriages lasting 16 years and over report higher levels of marital satisfaction and decreased levels of conflict.

This difference in length of marriage and its effects on husbands and wives marital satisfaction and marital conflict has not been explored in previous literature. Gender-based inequities may account for wives' decrease in marital satisfaction in marriages of 0 to 7 years. This is the time period when couples are more likely to have young children in the home and wives are more likely to assume childrearing and household responsibilities, which may lead to greater conflict and decreased marital satisfaction. Ehrlich (1984) found that employed wives managed 72% of household tasks, while non-employed wives were responsible for 81% of the household tasks. From a feminist-informed perspective, this discrepancy is reflective of gender-based inequities

in power and resources in a patriarchal society, where women are socialized to shoulder the bulk of responsibilities associated with childrearing and household tasks.

As noted earlier, it is likely that wives in marriages of 0-7 years are also in the life cycle stage of parenting young children. According to the literature, the presence of young children in the household significantly affects wives' psychological well-being, predisposing wives to a higher risk of depression (Walker, 1999). From a feminist lens, wives are socialized to provide the majority of childcare and often suffer from role conflict and role overload as a result (Peterson & Gerson, 1992). Thus, wives in marriages of 0 to 7 years in length, may be significantly less satisfied in their marriages as a result of societal gender-based inequities, given the association between their length of marriage and developmental stage in the family life cycle.

The stage of life course may also account a gender related increase in marital satisfaction for husbands in marriages of 16 years or longer. Younger children may no longer be in the home, and husbands in traditional relationships may not experience as much financial pressure to provide for the family. Interestingly, educational level, income, and differences in spouses race and age did not influence marital satisfaction or marital conflict for husbands or for wives. Although these demographic variables are supported in the literature as contributing influences to marital satisfaction and marital conflict, it may simply be that they are not of as much significance when compared to the influence of psychological well-being, conflict management, and gender-related influences.

### ***Psychological Predictors of Husbands' and Wives' Marital Satisfaction and Conflict***

The psychological predictors of depression and well-being were significant predictors of husbands' and wives' changes in marital satisfaction and marital conflict over time. Husbands' own depression as well as their wives' reported depression decreased husbands' marital satisfaction over time and husbands' own depression led to husbands' increased marital conflict. Husbands' and wives' positive self-reports of well-being seem to buffer husbands' marital satisfaction over time, while decreases in husbands' and wives' well-being leads to decreased marital satisfaction for husbands and wives over time. Wives' own experience of depression reduced wives' marital satisfaction over time, while wives own depression and their husbands' depression led to an increase in wives' marital conflict. Wives' own change in well-being also led to greater marital conflict for wives, as did having husbands with decreased well-being. These findings are consistent with findings from previous studies in which depression and well-being have been linked to marital satisfaction and marital conflict (Beach, Arias, & O'Leary, 1997; Halford, 1995). Previous research has proposed a bi-directional causal relationship between marital conflict and depression, however, marital conflict has been found to be a more powerful contributing factor to depression (Beach et al., 1997).

Surprisingly, physical health or changes in health did not predict a change in marital satisfaction for husbands or wives, however, husbands' own poor physical health was related to increased marital conflict. One explanation for this finding may be related to the mean age of this sample population. With mean age for husbands and wives being approximately 45 years old, these couples are more likely to be in good health and less likely to experience some of the marital stress experienced by older couples with greater

health-related difficulties. A possible explanation for husbands' experience of a change in physical health predicting increased marital conflict may be gender-related. Husbands in a patriarchal society are often valued by others for gender restrictive characteristics such as athleticism and amount of income earned (McCreary et al., 1996). Husbands who experience a change in their physical health functioning may also experience depression and low-self esteem, which are both related to increased marital conflict and decreased marital satisfaction.

### ***Marital Process Predictors of Husbands' and Wives' Marital Satisfaction and Conflict***

Husbands' and wives' inability to manage conflict effectively is proven to have a negative influence on marital satisfaction for both husbands and wives over time.

Husbands and wives who are unable to discuss things calmly and resort to yelling, throwing things, and hitting are found to have decreased marital satisfaction over time (Gottman, 1999; Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1994). For husbands', their own as well as their wife's poor conflict management is positively associated with marital conflict, while for wives, only their ability to poorly manage conflict results in an increase in their reported levels of marital conflict over time.

This finding supports both the hypothesis that gender is related to marital conflict and the hypothesis that there may be distinctively different experiences of marriage for women versus men, with hers predicting his. Wives are more likely to perceive their husbands to be responsible for their marital conflict, while husbands generally see their marital conflict as mutually shared (Eels & O'Flaherty, 1996). Wives' are more often the ones to initiate discussion of topics related to conflict (Gottman, 1999). This could be in part because wives are socialized to be more comfortable discussing emotions and

problems, in addition to their socialization and position as “relationship barometers”.

This point is also illustrated by the assertion that wives are much more likely to bring the couple into marital therapy as compared to husbands (Knudson-Martin, 1999). This too may be gender-related in that wives may be more attuned to the marital difficulties, therefore realizing the couple is in need of therapy. Additionally, wives’ are more likely to feel that asking for help from a third party therapist is socially acceptable.

Marital violence did not prove to be a significant predictor in neither models of marital satisfaction nor marital conflict for husbands or for wives over time. It may be that couples in violent relationships did not meet the study’s inclusion sampling criteria, and these couples may have divorced or separated when wave 2 data was collected five years later. Additionally, the Chronbach alphas for these items were quite low, ranging from .35 to .45, indicating that these items might not be getting at the construct of marital violence in this NSFH sample.

### ***Life Transitional Predictors of Husbands’ and Wives’ Marital Satisfaction and Conflict***

Having children under the age of 18 in the household was a significant predictor for both husbands’ and wives’ decreases in longitudinal marital satisfaction, and for husband’s increased marital conflict. The role conflict and role overload experienced by wives’ who are socialized to bear the bulk of childrearing and household responsibilities may influence husbands and wives levels of marital satisfaction and marital conflict. The division of household labor becomes more traditional after the birth of child and marital satisfaction typically declines when children are young (Walker, 1999).

These gender-based inequities may relate to the other aspects of gender-role differences discussed throughout this paper. Wives are more likely to initiate conflictual discussions and are more likely to pursue husbands to participate in conflict. Wives are also disproportionately overburdened by the presence of young children in the household, which may lead to wives' initiation of more conflictual discussions, leading to husbands' increased levels of marital conflict when there are children under the age of 18 in the home.

However, having adult children in the household or the addition of a new child into the family did not prove to be predictive of husbands' or wives' marital satisfaction or marital conflict. This finding supports assertions made previously regarding the stress of having young children in the home. The presence of young children is a stronger predictor of husbands' and wives' well-being and marital conflict, as compared to caring for older children.

Having an adult child move back into the home was predictive of decreased marital satisfaction for husbands and wives and also led to increased marital conflict for husbands. According to Greenberg and Becker (1988), having an adult child move back into the home is stressful for both mothers and fathers. In this study however, while having an adult child move back into the home predicted decreased marital satisfaction for husbands and wives, only husbands indicated an increase in marital conflict when an adult child moved back into the home. This difference may be gender related and may also be linked to the finding that launching children from the home predicted husbands' positive change in marital satisfaction over the five-year period.

From a gender informed perspective, husbands may be socialized to feel responsible for the financial aspects of family life and having an adult child return home may be related to husbands increase in marital satisfaction after the children are launched. In addition, it is plausible that if wives are disproportionately burdened by childcare and household tasks, once the children are launched, this may reduce levels of conflict initiated perhaps by wives who are feeling overburdened by this inequitable responsibility. Surprisingly, having an adult parent move into the home was not a significant predictors of husbands' or wives' longitudinal marital satisfaction or conflict.

Interestingly, job loss was not a significant predictor of husbands' marital satisfaction or marital conflict over time, however, wives' job loss was predictive of increased marital satisfaction and decreased marital conflict over time. From a feminist-informed perspective, this finding may be linked to wives' experience of role overload. Hochschild (1989) proposed that women who work outside the home work a "second shift" in the sense that after working a full-time job, women are disproportionately faced with additional demands of caring for the home and for the children in comparison to men. When wives are not burdened by the demands of outside employment and household tasks, they appear to have higher levels of marital satisfaction and decreased levels of marital conflict over time.

In summary, these findings support previous assertions made in the literature regarding the stress of parenting on marriage (especially for parents with younger children), with wives' in particular taking more responsibility for childcare and as a result experiencing a decrease in psychological well-being (Walker, 1999). It is possible that husbands' and marital satisfaction during the empty-nest life transition is related to

gender-role influences. Our society often places stress on husbands to provide for families financially and once children are launched, husbands' stress over the family finances may be mitigated, leading to increased well-being and increased marital satisfaction.

#### Results Discussion Hypothesis 2

Some gender-related aspects of marriage were predictive of husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction and marital conflict over time. Interestingly, husbands who reported having more traditional gender role attitudes also reported experiencing a decrease in marital satisfaction over time. As discussed in the previous literature review, traditional gender roles can be restrictive for both men and women (Brown, 1994; McCreary et al., 1996). Traditional gender roles are linked to less ability to express emotion for men, which may lead to depression or decreased well-being, which in turn is related to marital satisfaction. Furthermore, husbands who assume traditional gender roles may experience more conflict with their wives in relation to relationship fairness and decision-making.

For example, this finding may be associated with the experience of husbands' in this sample whose wives' reported a perception of relationship inequality, resulting in the husbands experiencing higher levels of marital conflict over time. Wives' who felt their marital relationship was unfair to them may be more likely to initiate conflict related to gender-based inequities in the marital relationship. Surprisingly, gender role attitudes were not predictive of wives' changes in marital satisfaction or marital conflict over time. Also surprising is that marital commitment, and marital equity did not significantly predict Time 2 marital satisfaction or marital conflict for husbands or for wives.

Previous studies from couples' therapy outcome literature indicate that marital commitment is important to wives. From a feminist-based perspective, wives are socialized to value relationships and are also more attuned to relationships and relational functioning more so than husbands (Johnson, 1996). A limitation of the NSFH dataset is that there is only one question related to husbands and wives perceptions of marital commitment and this question is a global attitudinal question regarding perceptions towards marital commitment in general, not necessarily commitment to one's own personal relationship. Wives' job loss predicted increased levels of marital satisfaction and decreased levels of marital conflict for wives over time. These wives may have quit their job, gotten fired or laid off, or retired. This proves to be an interesting finding related to gender differences. Wives' role overload and the notion of employed wives working a "second shift" (Hochschild, 1989) in the home seems to lead to an increase in wives' marital satisfaction and a decrease in wives' marital conflict.

Finally, an increase in the number of hours husbands' worked per week was predictive of decreased marital satisfaction for both husbands and wives. It is difficult to determine the exact influence of this finding, however, it seems that husbands' increased work hours could be linked to financial stress for husbands or wives, or it could also be linked to discrepancies in relationship equality, division of household labor, and time spent together, which all may lead to decreased in satisfaction for the husbands and wives. Again, due to limitations of this database, these questions could not be fully addressed.

### Results Discussion Hypothesis 3

Based upon findings in this study, there is support for the assertion that wives are socialized to be “relationship barometers”, with “her” marital and interpersonal functioning being more predictive of “his” and not vice versa. In the models of marital satisfaction, wives’ depression predicted a decline in husbands’ satisfaction, however, the opposite did not hold true. Wives’ well-being also seemed to be a mitigating factor in husbands models of marital satisfaction, with greater wife well-being leading to greater husband marital satisfaction at Time 2 and not vice versa. The only husband psychological predictor variable for wives’ marital satisfaction was a change in husbands’ well-being. As discussed, wives typically are overburdened by role strain and a decrease in husbands’ well-being may lead wives to feel they have to care for another aspect of their partner or the marriage, leading to decreased marital satisfaction.

Wives’ religious affiliation also predicted husbands’ marital satisfaction. This finding may also be gender-related. Husbands’ married to wives’ who did not identify themselves with a religious affiliation experienced decreases in longitudinal marital satisfaction. Although given the constraints of the NSFH database it is not clear if this finding is directly related to traditional vs. egalitarian gender role attitudes, it is possible that wives who do not identify with a particular organized religion may also not subscribe to other societal conventions related to gender which may in turn have a negative influence on husbands’ marital satisfaction over time.

As discussed previously, from the models predicting marital conflict, wives’ conflict management was predictive of husbands’ overall levels of marital conflict, however, husbands’ conflict management did not predict wives’ overall levels of conflict.

The gender difference in wives' conflict management skills predicting husbands' overall levels of marital conflict at Time 2 may be related to other factors related to gender.

Wives are more likely to initiate conflict, and have been found to see their husbands as the cause of the problem, whereas husbands are more likely to view problems as mutually shared. This may also be related to wives' being more attuned to relational functioning than husbands in our patriarchal society.

Additionally, wives' perceived relationship fairness also predicted husbands' overall levels of marital conflict, but again, not vice versa. Wives' perceptions of equality likely contribute to their initiating conflict in the relationship, explaining the increased levels of marital conflict for husbands. The only two husband predictors of wives' overall levels of marital conflict were husbands' depression and poor well-being.

Interestingly, the only influence of husbands' marital functioning was related to psychological well-being, and only for the negative pole of our exploration of marital quality (marital conflict), not for the positive pole (marital satisfaction). It may be that poor psychological well-being for husbands influences wives from a feminist gender-related standpoint. It is possible that wives are socialized to be caretakers and nurturers and when husbands' are depressed, this is another person for wives' to take care of, in addition to wives' bearing more of the burdens of childcare and household tasks. Findings from these models provide support for the hypothesis that gender roles influence marital satisfaction and marital conflict over time as well as for the hypothesis that wives' experience of marriage predicts husbands marital satisfaction and marital conflict.

On a final note to conclude this discussion, I believe that Bernard's (1975) initial assertion that there is a "his" and "hers" marriage and that "his" is better than "hers", is

somewhat supported in this study. I also believe that Bernard would support the study of how gender influences marital satisfaction, in addition to addressing sex based differences, in order to more fully understand and the phenomenon of marriage and how it changes over time.

### Limitations

As with any secondary data analysis, there are methodological confounds involved regarding the researcher's lack of control of the measures included in the initial data collection. This constraint led to the use of indirect measures to assess gender role influences, as there was not a direct instrument or measure of gender role attitudes and behaviors included in the original NSFH study.

Additionally, there are other factors that may contribute to the prediction model variance which were unable to be measured given the questions and measures used in the NSFH dataset. For example, more information on items such as sexual relationship satisfaction, spouses' levels of attachment, negative life events, direct measures of couples' social support, direct measures of marital power, and parents' and friends' acceptance of spousal selection may have influenced the prediction models, however, this information could not be ascertained from questions administered in the dataset.

A more racially diverse sample would also have strengthened the study and lead to more generalizable results for marital satisfaction and marital conflict among minority couples. Because of the lack of minority couples in this dataset as well as in other nationally available datasets, we are unable to make predictions about minority husbands' and wives' changes in marital satisfaction and marital conflict over time. We can only speak to the results found in this particular study as they related to our reference category

of White couples, given the demographics of the sample. Additionally, increased ethnic diversity and measures of cultural values would increase the study's generalizability and offer more insight to the influence of culture on marital satisfaction and marital conflict.

Selection bias is inherent in the design of this study. The goal of assessing marital satisfaction and marital conflict over time automatically selects those couples in stable marriages, therefore, the couples who are most distressed likely drop out from the sample due to divorce or separation at the five year follow-up. Therefore, we may be unable to assess influences on marital satisfaction and marital conflict for the highly distressed couples that are in greatest need of supportive intervention.

Missing data in general is a limitation of the study. Subject attrition as well as some inconsistencies in questions asked and scales of question responses used are also inherent in the use of secondary data and in the NSFH dataset. For example, respondents and spouses were asked for self-reports of frequency of sexual relations, however, the large amount of missing data on this item restricted its inclusion in the prediction models. The fact that there was so much missing data on this item in particular is interesting to note and seems informative in and of itself. In our society, many people are not comfortable discussing sexuality or difficulties in that area. This database is limited in that there was only one question regarding the frequency of sexual relations, information on spouses' perceptions of the quality of their sexual relationship would have been most helpful and informative.

In addition to these limitations, self-report data or survey data is perhaps not the best way to measure marital satisfaction and marital conflict. For example, Gottman (1999) and his colleagues espouse observational data, replete with videotaping and

coding, as the best approach to studying couples and marital stability. Ideally, following couples over time using both self-report and observational data would allow these questions to be more fully addressed. Even more helpful would be a clinical outcome study, designed to follow couples over time in the course of therapy to determine if these predictors (e.g. demographics, psychological for husbands and wives, marital processes, gender-related predictors, and life transitions) significantly predict change over time in marital satisfaction and conflict in a clinical sample.

#### Implications for Future Research

There is a need for future research to extend the exploration of the influence of gender roles on marital functioning and marital relationships. Future research designs are recommended to include more direct measures of gender role attitudes and behaviors on marital satisfaction and marital conflict. Currently, there are limited measures available to study gender roles and to further understand the meaning of gender to husbands and wives in our society. Future research is needed to address the definition and operationalization of gender roles so that we may continue to explore gender roles and their implications on marital quality. Additionally, it would be helpful to gain greater understanding of how family of origin influences on gender role development affect marital functioning.

More studies should be designed to examine differences in marital satisfaction and marital conflict with groups of couples from “egalitarian” marriages and control groups of “traditional” marriages to further explore the effects of gender roles on marital quality over time. Future studies examining the influence of gender roles when working with couples in marital therapy would help us to understand the role of gender in relation

to outcomes in couples' therapy as well. Finally, future studies including more than two points in time would be beneficial in predicting long-term marital trajectories with more sophisticated research designs such as growth curve modeling.

#### Recommendations for Clinicians

Based on findings from this study, clinicians must become more aware of gender related influences on marriage and on couples' therapy. In the words of Knudson-Martin (1997) "Just as we cannot *not* communicate, we also cannot *not* do gender" (p. 429). Clinicians must attend to gender differences in power, communication, relationship perceptions, decision-making, and conflict management. Marriage and family therapists' can empower couples by educating them about societal-based expectations for gender role behavior and gender role influences on communication and conflict management. In addition to educating couples and defining gender inequalities, therapists should help clients accept and access the widest possible opportunities, rewards, and benefits of married life. It is recommended that therapists take a feminist-informed approach in helping clients to appreciate the socialization process and the societal and cultural context that defines what is normative from what is deviant behavior for a woman, a man, or a "healthy adjusted adult" (Brown, 1994).

Clinicians should keep in mind that a couple's gender roles may prevent them from recognizing and expressing empathy for each other's experience. By encouraging spouses to confront and challenge their own gender biases, they become more receptive to considering their partner's gender biased perspective as well, creating a culture of empathy.

It is recommended that therapists take a collaborative stance with husbands' and wives' in assessing issues of gender. In addressing and exploring gender, the therapist can ask questions, provide observations, and offer education on gender differences based on research and experience, as opposed to making interpretations and stereotypical labels that may not fit for the client. In addressing gender and power differences, it is advised that the therapist establish a non-judgmental atmosphere with respect for each partner as a human being acculturated by societal norms for acceptable means of relating. Finally, in doing so, the therapist must also remain empathic and aware of his or her own gender biases, as we are all affected by societal gender role expectations in some manner.

By taking a gender-informed approach to therapy, therapists may enact first-order change within the couple as a result of educating men and women about their gender role differences. The couple's application of this new research and education may promote understanding, self-exploration, expression, and empathy. This may result in a second-order change in which the husband and wife understand themselves, each other and the world differently and thereby producing a new set of rules and new interactions for "doing" gender in a patriarchal society.

### Conclusions

This study has addressed the limitations of previous studies, by examining the influences on marital satisfaction and marital conflict over time. It has extended the line of thinking of previous research, which has examined influences on marital dissolution, by taking a longitudinal look at predictors of marital satisfaction and marital conflict in stable marriages. Husbands and wives initial levels of marital satisfaction and marital conflict are predictive of subsequent relational satisfaction and conflict. Demographic,

psychological, marital process, gender-based, and life transitional predictors influence marital satisfaction and marital conflict for husbands and for wives over time. There is some support for gender-based influences on husbands and wives marital satisfaction and conflict. Additionally, there is some support to suggest that wives' marital and interpersonal functioning may be a greater predictor for husband's marital satisfaction and marital conflict.

Previously, studies have largely ignored the role of gender in the examination of marital quality. This study calls for a distinction and clarification of misconceptions between the terms "sex" and "gender" by addressing the ways in which gender influences marital satisfaction and marital conflict over time. Further research is needed to develop more meaningful ways of measuring and operationalizing "gender" and "gender" roles so that we may better understand the influence of gender on marital quality over time. This information will be helpful for marital therapists, educators, and researchers in their work with couples and attempts to preserve marital quality and promote in-tact relationships.

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