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Correlates of Marital Stability in Utah

Amy Lynn Andersen Harman
Utah State University

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by

Amy Lynn Andersen Harman

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ABSTRACT

Correlates of Marital Stability in Utah

by

Amy Lynn Andersen Harman, Master of Science

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Major Professor: Scot M. Allgood, Ph.D.
Program: Marriage and Family Therapy

This study investigated the relationship between marital stability and social support and negative interactions in Utah. Past research indicates that negative behavioral interactions have a negative correlation with marital stability. Past research also indicates that support of one's marriage positively correlates with marital stability. The data were taken from the Utah Marriage Movement Statewide Baseline Survey. The total sample for this study included 886 married men and women over the age of 18. Spearman's rho correlation and multiple regression were used to analyze the data. Results of the study show that negative interactions had a negative correlation with marital stability. Social support was shown to positively correlate with marital stability to a small degree. Demographic variables of gender and education were also analyzed. The correlation between negative interactions and marital stability was the strongest of the variables.

(77 pages)

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Amy Lynn Andersen Harman

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Marriage has been a compelling research topic in that state and federal agendas are advocating for healthier marriages (Popenoe & Whitehead, 2004b). A healthy marriage provides benefits to a person physically, mentally, financially, and sexually (Berger, 2001; Glen & Weaver, 1981; Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Kobrin & Hendershot, 1977; Lauer, Lauer, & Kerr, 1990; Popenoe & Whitehead, 2004a), which may be why healthy marriages are holding the attention of policy makers. Part of a "healthy" marriage is having stability in the relationship. The divorce rate has remained at about 50% since around 1980 after a dramatic increase between 1960 and 1980 (Berger; Goldstein, 1999; Popenoe & Whitehead, 2004b). More research must be done on marital stability to help educate society on how to keep a stable marriage in order to harvest the benefits of marital stability. Research results indicating the factors that make up a healthy marriage can be shared with the general public to increase their ability to sustain a healthy marriage. The more chances people have of staying in a healthy marriage, the better chance they will describe their lives as rewarding and report that their needs are being met (Berger; Glen & Weaver; Gottman & Levenson; Kobrin & Hendershot; Lauer, Lauer, & Kerr; Popenoe & Whitehead, 2004a).

While the likelihood of marital separation or divorce has stabilized at 50%, there are factors that increase the likelihood that one's marriage will stay intact, such as age at first marriage, level of education, homogamy, and social support (Allgood, Crane, & Agee, 1997; Bryant & Conger, 1999; Call & Heaton, 1997; Feng, Giarrusso, Bengtson, &

Frye, 1999; Julien & Markman, 1991; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kurdek, 1993; Lehrer, 2001; Popenoe & Whitehead, 2004a). Research has been done on factors to increase marital stability, but the area of social support as it relates to marital stability has not been as thoroughly researched. There is growing evidence that social support increases the likelihood that husbands and wives will perceive their marriages as stable (Allgood et al.; Bryant & Conger; Julien & Markman; Julien, Markman, Léveillé, Chartrand, & Bégin, 1994).

Level of education and gender are also related to marital stability (Allgood et al., 1997; Heaton & Albrecht, 1991; Huston & Geis, 1993; Julien & Markman, 1991; Julien et al., 1994; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kurdek, 1993). In addition, behaviors, specifically negative interactions, have been shown to have statistically significant relationships with and predict marital stability (Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Levenson, 1992, 2000; Stanley & Markman, 1992, 1997).

Additionally, no study has been conducted on marital stability using only the population of Utah until recently. Impetus for this study came as Utah is one of seven states using flexible dollars from the 1996 welfare reform bill to reduce the divorce rate and promote healthy marriages through pilot programs. In order to increase healthy marriages in Utah, the Utah Governor's Commission on Marriage funded a statewide baseline survey. This survey of 1,316 adults in Utah included many topics related to marriage, including marital quality, nonmarital or premarital cohabitation, attitudes about marriage and divorce, views on prevention policies and programs, low-income Utahns, mental health, and substance abuse (Schramm, Marshall, Harris, & George, 2003). The

focus of this thesis is to analyze the data from this study, more specifically to examine the relationship between perceived marital stability and perceived social support in Utah.

Conceptual Framework

A broad theoretical framework for understanding marital stability as it relates to social support is general systems theory (GST) because it explains relationships in the context of larger systems. In GST an individual is not studied individually, rather he/she is viewed as part of a larger system, such as family members or other relational contexts (Becvar & Becvar, 1999; Skynner, 1981). The idea is to look at the context, or the broader picture that encompasses the individual. The systemic approach has been used in therapy to treat couples and families with a variety of problems, including issues that relate to marital stability (Kaslow, Kaslow, & Farber, 1999; Nichols & Schwartz, 2001). Thus, in studying marital stability, it is important to consider an individual's relationship with other members within their system.

In GST, the concept of linear causality (i.e., A caused B without B influencing A) is replaced by circular thinking. The parts A and B interact reciprocally, rather than linearly or causally. In a family system, one member of the family does not *cause* another's behavior. Rather, the individual members' behaviors' are embedded in circular interactions where causality cannot be pinpointed (Becvar & Becvar, 1999). This idea of circular causality is prevalent in marital and family therapy research and practice (Gurman & Jacobson, 2002; Nichols & Schwartz, 2001; Sussman, Steinmetz, & Peterson, 1999).

Also included in GST, are the concepts of subsystems and suprasystems (Skynner, 1981). Just as our universe is organized in systems from galaxies to sub-atomic particles, living systems can be conceptualized in the same way. Larger systems (e.g., the body) are comprised of subsystems (organs, cells, and so forth). For example, in a family system, the husband and wife and their relationship may be conceptualized as a subsystem—a smaller system that is operating in the context of a larger system.

Similarly, a family can be considered a subsystem of a larger suprasystem, which may include various aspects of the community such as church, the neighborhood, or the nation. The family system receives input or feedback from its subsystems and from the suprasystem to which it belongs (Becvar, 2003; Becvar & Becvar, 1999), which may include extended family, friends, or faith community. Marital stability can be viewed in context of these many systems. Input from the suprasystem may exacerbate or mediate an individual's perception of marital stability and marital interactions. Additionally, one's individual factors (system of the self) may mediate one's perception of social support as it relates to marital stability. These individual factors could be level of education, age, or gender.

Considering that other people have an influence on how individuals perceive their relationships (e.g., marriage), it becomes logical to consider how perceptions of social support influence the marital system. Conversely, it could be argued that what matters is whether people in the suprasystems are *actually* supportive or not supportive. This philosophy becomes difficult to address in research, because researchers would need to conduct interviews with members of the various suprasystems (e.g., family, friends, and faith community) and still may not be able to obtain true objectivity. It can be argued

that the only thing that matters is how the individual perceives the social support. Postmodern theory suggests that no one can actually experience reality directly (Becvar, 2003; Becvar & Becvar, 1999; Walsh, 2003). What the individual perceives as truth is valid and acceptable, for their perception is their reality.

In terms of marital stability, researchers cannot pinpoint one variable that *causes* marital dissolution. One way to look at marital stability is to add the factor of perceived social support. Perhaps increased support from one's family, spouse's family, one's friends, and one's faith community are related to the amount of perceived marital stability. It may also be the case that perceived social support may decrease the amount of negative interactions in a marriage.

It is difficult to break down the construct of social support into true, unbiased measurements. If the individual perceives that he/she is receiving support (as indicated on self-report measures), then the researcher can accept the individual's perception of their experience as "real." Thus, the variable of perceived social support will be adequately measured by scoring the individual's responses of the degree to which they feel support from family, in-laws, friends, and members of their faith community.

Conceptual Definitions

Marital stability is defined as the likelihood that the marriage will stay intact, without dissolution or divorce. Included in this definition are the cognitions or thoughts about the marriage, affective states or feelings pertaining to the marriage, and behaviors taken to maintain stability or move toward separation, as identified by Booth, Johnson,

and Edwards (1983). Death of a spouse would not be considered dissolution of a marriage or separation, and thus would not affect marital stability.

Perceived social support is defined as the level of positive encouragement for a healthy marriage a spouse determines that he/she receives from outside the marriage. The term *social* refers to broader systems, such as friends, extended family, and faith community.

Marital interactions refers to specific behaviors between spouses, such as exchanged words or actions. Interactions can be interpreted as positive, negative, or neutral.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between marital stability and support of the marriage by family, spouse's family, friends, and members of the faith community in Utah. Factors of gender and education will be examined in relation to marital stability. The relationship between negative interactions and social support will also be investigated. Research questions to be explored are as follows:

1. Is there a relationship between perceived social support and marital stability?
2. Is there a relationship between gender and marital stability?
3. Is there a relationship between education and marital stability?
4. Is there a relationship between negative interactions and marital stability?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Interests in the area of marriage vary widely, including domestic violence, same-sex unions, divorce, remarriage, marital therapy, and marital satisfaction and stability. A greater emphasis is being put on marriage research, even though there are more adults in the United States who are single than in the last 100 years (Berger, 2001). The volume of research indicates that researchers are curious about this phenomenon. Contributing to the higher proportion of single adults is the fact that the divorce rate has increased to approximately 50% of the marriage rate (Berger; Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000; Popenoe & Whitehead, 2004b).

So, why does it matter if less people are in a marriage relationship? Studies have shown that there is a relationship between people who are married and physical and mental illnesses, and people who are married report being happier and richer (Berger, 2001; Glen & Weaver, 1981; Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Kobrin & Hendershot, 1977; Lauer et al., 1990). Of course, higher reports of marital quality are also associated with all around happiness (Bloom, Asher, & White, 1978; Stack & Eshleman, 1998). Given the benefits of marriage, it is important to understand factors that contribute to marital stability. This review will explore marital stability and specifically how social support and negative interactions relate to marital stability. The review will also cover how demographic variables of gender and education relate to both constructs of marital stability.

Marital Stability

The operational definition of marital stability varies depending on the type of research being done. In longitudinal studies, marital stability refers to marriages that do not end in dissolution (divorce or separation) (e.g., Glenn, 1998). True marital stability is difficult to measure because researchers would need to wait until one partner died to determine for certain that the marriage stayed intact.

One study by Chinitz and Brown (2001) determined marital stability by simply asking when the subject's birth parents were divorced. This is a weak way to operationalize marital stability because some people's birth parents are never married. Secondly, findings in a study of intergenerational transmission of marital instability by Feng et al. (1999) contraindicate, reporting, "Parental divorce does not significantly predict the likelihood of adult children's divorce"; there are several mediating variables (e.g., younger age at marriage) that complicate the picture (p. 460). Karney and Bradbury's (1995) review also refutes the notion that parental divorce is a strong predictor of stability.

In the quest to operationalize marital stability, the term "long-term marriages" is becoming more prominent in the research. Unfortunately, "long-term" is a vague description. For example, Bryant and Conger (1999) considered their sample of couples who were married for an average of 20 years to be "long-term"; Lauer et al. (1990) studied a "long-term" sample of couples who had been married for an average of 54 years. While researchers have yet to agree on a standard measurement for long-term

marriages, the theory behind it is clear: long-term marriages show a desirable level of marital stability.

In other studies, marital stability is often defined by self-reports indicating the marriage is at low risk of dissolution (Allgood et al., 1997; Bryant & Conger, 1999; Conger et al., 1990; Feng et al., 1999; Heaton & Albrecht, 1991; Kalmijm, 1999; Lauer et al., 1990; Thomson & Colella, 1992). These measures of marital stability may be arguably not a "true" measure because we cannot tell for certain if dissolution will happen in the future; however, measurements of couples' discussions and thoughts of divorce or separation are strongly correlated to future dissolution (Booth & White, 1980; Gottman & Levenson, 1992, 2000). Thus, self reports can be a valid measure of marital stability. Also, Gottman and Levenson (1992) stated, "It is easier to predict variables such as...considerations of dissolution than it is to predict separation and divorce."

It is important to note that marital stability differs from marital satisfaction, even though marital quality can serve as a moderator for marital stability (Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kurdek, 1993). Lewis and Spanier (1979) identified four categories of marriage: satisfied-stable (high quality), satisfied-unstable, unsatisfied-unstable, and unsatisfied-stable marriages, emphasizing the difference between marital satisfaction and marital stability. Not all stable marriages are happy, but this category is relatively small with estimates that 7.4% of married men and 7% of married women are in stable unhappy marriages (Heaton & Albrecht, 1991). Marital stability is being used in this research instead of marital quality because the data provides more information about marital stability as compared to the marital happiness ratings (Schramm et al., 2003).

While marital satisfaction correlates with marital stability, it is certainly not the only correlate. Numerous constructs have been associated with marital stability, including demographic variables (e.g., religion, education, socioeconomic status, race, age, and so forth), economic hardship, intergenerational transmission (i.e., parental divorce), premarital cohabitation, premarital parenthood, positive interactions, and social support networks (Allgood et al., 1997; Bryant & Conger, 1999; Call & Heaton, 1997; Feng et al., 1999; Julien & Markman, 1991; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kurdek, 1993; Lehrer, 2001; Popenoe & Whitehead, 2004a). Additionally, researchers often find that homogamy, meaning marriage partners share the same traits (demographically or otherwise), contributes to greater levels of marital stability (Call & Heaton; Karney & Bradbury; Kurdek; Lehrer). Correlates to marital stability relating to this study will be discussed below.

Social Support

Social support in marriage has been studied relatively little, but is now starting to gain more momentum judging by the increase in recent research articles. Social support has traditionally been studied in the context of premarital romantic relationships, usually focusing on parental support (Bryant & Conger, 1999). Parental support has been shown to be positively associated with relationship stability, and conversely, parental interference has been shown to be associated with relationship deterioration or instability (Julien et al., 1994). Only recently has the context been expanded to include long-term marriages (Bryant & Conger).

Some studies on social support use Milardo and Lewis's (1985) model of support and inference (Bryant & Conger, 1999; Julien et al., 1994). The support model depicts the process in which outsiders reaffirm to the spouse that the marriage will succeed. The deterioration model depicts the opposite process in which outsiders reinforce negative beliefs that the marriage will not succeed or that the marriage is unhealthy.

The definition of social support is also used in other ways in the literature (Allgood et al., 1997; Bryant & Conger, 1999; Julien & Markman, 1991). Some studies measure effects of having conversations about marriage with friends or family, which could lead to increased or decreased marital stability and/or satisfaction. For example, Allgood and colleagues measured social support using the Fischer-McCallister network procedure (Fischer, 1982). Basically, social support was determined by how likely respondents were to talk to friends or family about their marital concerns, using items such as: "When you do talk to someone, who do you talk to?" and "When you are concerned about your marriage—for example, about how you and your spouse are getting along—do you talk about it with someone other than your spouse?" Unfortunately, this measure of social support yields no indication of whether the friends and family were actually *supportive* during these conversations. From this study, we cannot determine whether these outside conversations about marital concerns had a positive or negative valence.

Results of the study (Allgood et al., 1997) indicate that, for wives, talking to friends about *marital* problems and the number of friends a spouse had negatively impacted marital satisfaction and marital stability (quantified using the Marital Status Inventory, which assesses divorce potential). However, both husbands and wives who

talk to others about *family* problems had increased levels of marital satisfaction and stability. It is possible that wives in this study were having conversations with friends about their marital problems that would not be considered supportive and that the conversations were dominated by negative interactions.

Similarly, another study on social support by Julien and Markman (1991) measured "social networks' supportive functions" (p. 556) by using The Northern California Community Study Interview Schedule (McCallister & Fischer, 1978). Questions in this measure asked: (1) with whom the respondent usually talks for sharing personal interest; (2) with whom he/she usually talks for asking advice…; and (3) to whom he/she usually confides when bothered by personal problems. Julien and Markman adapted this measure to collect names of friends and family members who were mobilized in the last year for talking about marital problems, creating the construct "Outsiders' mobilization for marital problems." Julien and Markman found that the more outsiders that a spouse confided in about their marital problems, the lower their marital adjustment score was. Again, there is no indication of whether these conversations about marital problems were actually in support of the marriage (positive valence) or were focused on the benefits of divorce (negative valence) or after problems were severe.

Julien and Markman (1991, p. 562) hypothesized that outside involvement and marital distress are related "when outside relationships are developed or maintained to the exclusion of the other spouse, and when confidants are made aware of existing marital conflicts." If the other spouse is being excluded, then the conversations with outsiders are most likely negative.

In a later study, Julien and Markman expand their research on social support to study the quality (positive or negative influence) of interactions wives are having with their confidants about marital problems (Julien et al., 1994). Participants were made up of 28 Caucasian middle-class couples and the wives' closest confidants. Marital adjustment was measured by the Marital Adjustment Test (MAT); 15 couples were maritally adjusted and 13 were maritally maladjusted. There were no statistically significant demographic differences between the 2 groups, suggesting that differences between well adjusted and poorly adjusted couples are most likely due to the independent variables in the study.

Julien et al. (1994) interviewed wives' confidants about their own marital status and satisfaction. Wives completed an assessment before and after having a conversation with their confidant in which they reported levels of marital distress and feelings of closeness to husbands. The conversation that wives had with their confidants was videotaped and coded using the Social Support Interaction Coding System for Disclosure of Marital Problems (SCIS-PC). The mean coders' agreement was 96%.

The results of the study (Julien et al., 1994) indicated that the more maritally adjusted confidants the wives had in their network, the more likely confidants reciprocated wives' support of the marriage. On the other hand, maritally unadjusted wives' had a high proportion of confidants that were single, divorced, unhappily married, or widowed and could not validate supportive statements about husbands and marriage. Additionally, the authors found that the "higher the proportion of confidant interference during the interactions, the less reduced was the wives' distress after the interactions and the greater the distance they felt from their husbands" regardless of marital adjustment

scores. Julien et al. (1994) show that merely confiding in someone outside the marriage could not be defined as "support." Studies must distinguish between supportive conversations and interfering conversations in regard to the marital relationship.

A flaw in Julien and colleagues' (1994) research is that their sample only included 28 wives, which is quite small. This sample does not include a diverse population either, as every participant was Caucasian middle-class. A larger, more diverse sample would generalize to a greater number of marriages in the country.

Bryant and Conger (1999) conducted a study on social support networks in long-term relationships, which is similar to the current research project. They begin by differentiating terms "social network" and "psychological network." According to Bryant and Conger (1999), a social network is defined as "a collection of people known by an individual;" whereas, a psychological network is found within a social network and is "composed of people whom an individual is most likely to confide in" and by whom the individual is influenced (pp. 437-438). This psychological network could include family, in-laws, friends, and faith community. It is important to include faith community in a study of social support because studies have shown that religious involvement correlates with increased marital stability (Booth, Johnson, Branaman, & Sica, 1995; Bumpass & Sweet, 1995; Call & Heaton, 1997; Lehrer, 2001).

Combining the support and interference models, the uncertainty reduction hypothesis, and the social comparison hypothesis, Bryant and Conger developed their own model to be tested. Using a longitudinal design, they compared the marital success rates (combination of satisfaction, perceived stability, and commitment measures) at Time 1 and Time 3, while analyzing how marital success influenced and was influenced

by three variables—social network support for marital relationship, affective overlap, and personal support—measured at Time 2. Their goal was to see if marital success predicted types of social networks and vice versa.

Bryant and Conger's final sample included a sample of 350 wives and 348 husbands in a rural Midwestern state. All participants were white, had two parents and at least two children, were married for an average of 20 years, and had an average income of $33,700. Participants who dropped out were not shown to systematically differ from those who completed the study. Participants were recruited through schools and each family member was paid ten dollars per hour for their time.

Bryant and Conger (1999) measured social support using three questions assessing support from friends, own family, and in-laws. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale. Marital stability was assessed through five interview questions about considering divorce, discussing divorce, and so forth. The answers were rated from 1 to 4, reverse coded, and added to the other responses about satisfaction and commitment to give a total marital success score. Couples who divorced or separated between Time 1 and Time 3 were not analyzed separately due to small sample size; consequently, these couples were given the lowest possible rating for marital success.

Bryant and Conger's results demonstrated "that, even after an average of two decades of marriage, relationship-specific support from friends and relatives leads to increased marital success" (p. 448). They found that social support for the marriage was the strongest *and only* predictor of marital success (as compared to the variables of support overlap and personal support). Bryant and Conger suggested that the influence of

social networks and marital success is cyclical, but cannot definitely conclude this because they did not obtain more than one measure of social support.

Bryant and Conger (1999) combined marital stability with marital satisfaction and commitment to make up their construct of "marital success." Researchers intending to look specifically at marital stability or marital satisfaction would not be able to draw conclusive information that positive social support does indeed increase marital stability. While their sample is very large, their sample could be improved by including more racial diversity. Every participant in this study was white. These results would not adequately generalize to a more diverse population. The sample also included only rural, Midwestern Americans. Research with urban or suburban populations may or may not yield the same results, as social lives differ depending on the type of community.

In summary, perceived social support is defined as the level of positive encouragement for a healthy marriage a spouse determines that he/she receives from outside the marriage. Social support will not be defined as whether someone has confidants or that the spouse confides in an outsider. Given the recent research on social support, it is important to identify whether conversations by one spouse to an outsider about marital problems are positive or negative—supportive or interfering. The studies that merely look at whether or not spouses confide in others about problems show detrimental effects on marital stability. The studies that have specifically studied supportive conversations about marital problems show an increase in marital stability. Research measuring social support to this point has not included support from spouses' faith communities. Additionally, research on social support has not broadened to more

diverse populations. There are many unexplored angles to social support that would be worth researchers' time to include in their studies.

Gender Differences

Stereotypically, wives are seen as more likely to have confidants outside of marriage and more likely to talk about their problems, including marital problems, to outsiders (Allgood et al., 1997; Julien et al., 1994). Perhaps it is because women are socialized to maintain relationships and seem to be more influenced by relational factors than men. Much of the research on social support in marriage supports this gender difference. Men and women differ in frequency of conversations with outsiders, number of confidants, and other correlates of marital stability (Allgood et al.; Heaton & Albrecht, 1991; Huston & Geis, 1993; Julien & Markman, 1991; Julien et al., 1994). For example, Allgood and colleagues (p. 114-115) found that "discussing marital problems with friends decrease satisfaction and stability for the wives but not for the husbands." They also found that wives confide in more friends than husbands do. The likelihood that wives confide in more outsiders and confide in outsiders more often is the entire premise for Julien and others' (1994) research, which examined qualities of only wives' confidants and conversations in relation to marital adjustment.

Interestingly, Bryant and Conger (1999) did not find any gender differences in husbands and wives perceptions of social support influences. In fact, Bryant and Conger purposefully analyzed husbands' and wives' data separately, citing evidence (Johnson & Leslie, 1982; Sprecher & Felmlee, 1992) that they expected gender differences. Lack of gender differences in this study is probably not due to small sample size (decreasing

variability) either, because Bryant and Conger's final sample was fairly large, including complete data for 350 wives and 348 husbands over 20 years. (A sample size of 600 will yield a 70% chance of detecting a "small" effect at level .05 according to Cohen [1977]). They also used an adequate assessment of social support, or psychological networks, including friends, family, and in-laws.

Similarly, Julien and Markman (1991) expected to find gender differences, again citing several sources that supported their premise (e.g., Belle, 1987; Rands, 1988; Weiss, 1985). They did not, however, find gender differences in outsider's mobilization for marital problems or outsider's mobilization for companionship. Julien and Markman state that their findings show "help-seeking and involvement outside marriage generally affect husbands and wives in a similar way" (p. 562). Again, the lack of gender differences in this study is not likely due to sample size (87 couples), nor to choice of assessments, as Julien and Markman combined four measures (Symptom Checklist 90-R, Marital Adjustment Test, Brown's Scale of Stress-inducing Events, and The Northern California Community Study Interview Schedule) with a 45-minute structured interview to gather data.

Another study used a cross-sectional design to track marital success and failure in different cohorts (Glenn, 1998). Glenn reports that his data indicate "some small male-female difference in the course of marital success or failure, but the differences seem too small to be important." However, Glenn did not collect data on social support. Additionally, a review of 115 longitudinal studies done by Karney and Bradbury (1995) indicates that gender differences are typically in the "same direction" and of "similar magnitude" (p. 19). Again, the variable of outside social support was not included for

review. It could be that gender differences in stability as it relates to social support might be more significant.

Kurdek (1993) conducted a longitudinal study examining predictors of marital dissolution. He found several gender differences, including social support and level of education. For example, participants were more likely to dissolve their marriage (separation or divorce in this study) if the wife had a low level of education at the beginning of the marriage and if the wife perceived that she had low social support, as measured by the Social Support Scale. To a lesser degree, spousal discrepancy on social support also significantly predicted dissolution. Kurdek suggests that his findings do not support the popular notion that the wife is the barometer of the relationship; rather, he surmises that both husband and wife factors predict marital stability, and that gender differences usually run parallel to each other. Kurdek still recommends that longitudinal studies analyze gender differences for patterns of change.

There are some limitations to Kurdek's (1993) study, first of all because it only studied the first five years of marriage. The results of this study may not be generalizeable to couples married longer. Kurdek also has a very high non-response rate. Surveys from 538 couples (both husbands' and wives' data) were returned that first year, and an additional 299 couples dropped out of the study over the course of five years. It could be that those who dropped out of the study might be qualitatively different from those who participated all five years. Despite this, Kurdek had a relatively large sample for a longitudinal study and was able to obtain reports from both spouses.

Researchers (Allgood et al., 1997; Bryant & Conger, 1999; Glenn, 1998; Heaton & Albrecht, 1991; Huston & Geis, 1993; Johnson & Leslie, 1982; Julien & Markman,

1991; Julien et al., 1994; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kurdek, 1993; Sprecher & Felmlee, 1992) seem to agree that analyzing for gender differences is standard practice, even though some studies revealed there are no statistically significant differences between husband and wife variables as they relate to marital stability. Further research would either support or contradict the notion that women rely more heavily on social support than men. Not analyzing for gender differences in this case would be an oversight.

Education

Demographic variables also correlate with marital stability. Demographic variables commonly used in marital research are income, age, race, religion, and education (e.g., Booth et al., 1983; Call & Heaton, 1997; Conger et al., 1990; Feng et al., 1999). Since this research is focused on social support in marriage, the education variable would seem to distinguish types of social support because level of education plays a role in the type of society in which one lives. Are people with higher levels of education more likely to perceive support from friends and family? Research on social support has not traditionally included the variable education. The following literature correlates education with marital stability, excluding social support.

Karney and Bradbury (1995) compiled a review of over 115 research articles. They aggregated effect-sizes of independent variables on marital stability for husbands, wives, and couples. They found that education positively correlates with marital stability, however, not as much as marital satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, or positive behaviors. The education variable is at least as good of a predictor as—if not better than—age and income, as far as demographic variables are concerned. So using

education as a correlate of marital stability would seem to produce some measurable effects.

Kurdek (1993) conducted a 5-year longitudinal study on newlywed couples in order to better predict marital dissolution. He measured distal and proximal risk factors from intrapersonal and dyadic perspectives. Distal risk factors are characteristics that exist at the beginning of the marriage; proximal risk factors are the characteristics that fluctuate with the development of the marriage. Education is categorized as an intrapersonal distal risk factor. Education was measured using eight intervals ranging from completion of less than seventh grade to the receiving a doctorate degree. Kurdek found that husbands and wives who had statistically significantly lower levels of education had less stable marriages and were more likely to dissolve marriage. Furthermore, Kurdek claims that wife's education at year one and husband's time sampled education "contributed unique predictive information in the 'best' set of predictors" of marital stability among demographics (p. 238). Because this was only a five year study, the author cautions that these results may not generalize to couples who have been married longer.

Conversely, Heaton and Albrecht (1991) found that a higher socioeconomic status, which included the variable education (along with employment, income, and spouse income) lead to less stability. The authors explained that perhaps husbands and wives in higher socioeconomic statuses perceive fewer barriers to marital dissolution. Their study indicates, however, that when education is measured independent of socioeconomic status, that higher education leads to more stability. Reasons for this have not been speculated on.

In summary, education is often included in research on marital stability and when measured independently, often correlates with higher marital stability (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kurdek, 1993). It seems, however, that when education is combined with other factors to make up the construct of socioeconomic status that marital stability actually has a negative correlation with socioeconomic status (Heaton & Albrecht, 1991). Given the literature, education seems a widely enough used variable that it should be included in research on marital stability.

Negative Marital Interactions

A review of marital stability would be incomplete without including the prominent research conducted by John Gottman. He uses physiological and interactional (behavioral) variables to predict divorce (Gottman & Levenson, 1992, 2000). One particular study in Gottman and Levenson's laboratory (1992) involved connecting couples to apparatuses that measure cardiac interbeat intervals, skin conductance levels, general somatic activity, pulse transmission time to the finger, and finger pulse amplitude. On top of the physiological measure, couples' interactions were videotaped and coded using complex coding systems—the Rapid Couples Interaction Scoring System (RCISS), Marital Interaction Coding System (MICS), and Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF). The RCISS differentiates *regulated* couple from *nonregulated* couples; regulated couples have more positive codes (interactions) than negatives codes. The MICS measured categories of negativity—defensiveness, conflict engagement, stubbornness, and withdrawal from interaction. The SPAFF classified partners' affect (a

combination of verbal content, voice tone, facial expression, gestures, and body movement) into positive and negative categories.

The results of Gottman and Levenson's 1992 study validated their balance theory of marriage. That is, they found regulated couples to have a ratio of five positive interactions to one negative interaction, based on RCISS scores. Regulated couples in this longitudinal study were also more likely to stay together and less likely to discuss dissolution. Ultimately, Gottman and Levenson suggest that marital stability requires a 5:1 ratio of behavioral interactions. It is possible that social support may soothe negative interactions and help remind spouses of positives, which would help restore this delicate balance in marriage (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

Gottman identifies four predictors of divorce that are based on negative interactions; he calls them the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" (Gottman, 1994). These Four Horsemen are criticism, defensiveness, withdrawal, and contempt. Observed negative interactions often include some aspect of these attitudes. Again, social support could help mediate some of the effects of these Four Horsemen by reminding spouses about reasons that the marriage is worth saving. Perhaps family or friends may gently point out ways to help the negative interactions. The faith community the spouse subscribes to may hold values that contradict criticism and contempt.

Gottman and Levenson (2000) have also studied the timing of divorce—whether divorce occurs early (sample averaged 5.2 years of marriage before divorcing) or late (sample averaged 16.4 years of marriage before divorcing). While the timing of divorce in this study differed, both were studied by observing negative interactions, using the RCISS and SPAFF again as in 1992 study mentioned above. This study showed that

"criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling" (Four Horsemen) led to early divorce. Lack of positive affect led to later divorcing.

Stanley and Markman (n.d., 1997) also maintain that negative interactions have a strong influence on marital stability. They stated that "there's clear evidence that how couples communicate and handle conflict foretells an important story about their future—more important than their premarital level of satisfaction" (p. 11). They talked about the importance of prevention work done in marriage and identifying risk and protective factors. They call for more prediction studies to identify targets for prevention and intervention.

Behavioral research, specifically on interactions, is becoming more precise with the developments of technology. As the research becomes more precise, more research is conducted, and more evidence is added to the body of literature that indicates that negative interactions are strongly correlated to marital stability.

Summary

Marital research is becoming evermore popular, as debates about marriage not only in the marital studies field, but the realm of politics increase. Marital stability has been has been determined to be decidedly different from marital satisfaction (Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Heaton & Albrecht, 1991; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kurdek, 1993; Lewis & Spanier, 1979). Marital stability is measured by self reports from husbands and wives about their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors concerning marital dissolution.

Research is now correlating social support with marital stability (Allgood et al., 1997; Bryant & Conger, 1999; Julien & Markman, 1991; Julien et al., 1994). The results

of research on social support and marital stability are varied, usually because definitions of social support differ from study to study. Negative interactions are getting a lot of attention as predictors of divorce. Negative interactions have been shown to have a negative correlation with marital stability (Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Levenson, 1992, 2000; Stanley & Markman, 1992, 1997). These variables have not been studied together in the same study to the current knowledge of the researcher. Additionally, demographics of education and gender have shown to significantly influence marital stability and social support, though the research is still contradictory about the direction of influence (Allgood et al.; Bryant & Conger; Glenn, 1998; Heaton & Albrecht, 1991; Huston & Geis, 1993; Julien & Markman; Julien et al.; Karney, & Bradbury, 1995; Kurdek, 1993).

In light of the literature, null hypotheses generated are as follows:

1. There will be no association between perceived social support and marital stability.

2. There will be no association between gender and marital stability.

3. There will be no association between education and marital stability.

4. There will be no association between negative interactions and marital stability.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

This was a correlational (O) study based on the self-report answers given by participants in the Utah Governor's Commission on Marriage statewide survey. The researcher did not manipulate the variables and will measure the relations between them ex post facto. No attempts to establish causation were made with this study.

Selection bias should not be a concern as telephone interviews were conducted using a random household sample of 1,186. In order to assure inclusion of lower-income Utahns (and those who may not have a phone), an over sample of 130 interviews were completed from a random sample of people receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funds. They were mailed a letter and asked to call a toll-free number to participate. The letter informed participants that they would receive $15 for their time (Schramm et al., 2003).

Demand characteristics were controlled for by training interviewers to follow a very detailed script. Interviewers were trained to read each question verbatim; however, we cannot positively say that no interviewers made mistakes or leading comments.

Sample

One thousand three hundred and sixteen Utahns participated in the survey across the state, all of which were required to be 18 years of age or older. Using statistical analyses, Schramm et al. (2003) have claimed that the error attributable to sampling and

other random effects is within plus or minus 2.67 percentage points of 95%. This study consisted of two samples. The first was a stratified random-digit telephone sample of households in Utah obtained from the Survey Sampling of Fairfield, Connecticut (Schramm et al., 2003). This was done to ensure equal representation from all parts of the state. This first sample totaled 1,186 participants who completed the survey, with a response rate of 30.3% (Welch & Johnson, 2003).

The second sample was an oversample of low-income households. The Utah Department of Workforce Services randomly drew 900 current TANF consumers from their data file. Letters were mailed to these selected individuals requesting them to participate in the survey by calling the OSU BSR at a toll-free number. The letter assured confidentiality and indicated that persons who completed the interview would receive $15 (Schramm et al., 2003). Respondents who completed the survey for this second sample totaled 130 with a response rate of 89.7% (Welch & Johnson, 2003).

In the current study examining perceived marital stability and perceived social support, those who have never been married or are currently divorced, separated, or widowed were not be included. Of the original sample, 57.5% were married, making the sample size for this study 886.

Measurements

The Utah Marriage Movement Statewide Baseline Survey was a replication of the 2001 Oklahoma Baseline Statewide Survey on Marriage and Divorce. Thus, the questions for the Utah survey were taken directly from the questions in the Oklahoma survey, which "were mainly taken from other surveys that have been conducted around

the U.S., allowing direct comparisons between state and national findings" (Schramm et al., 2003). The survey included the Marital Instability Index developed by Booth and colleagues (1983) to measure instability called the using a cognitive, affective, and behavioral perspective. The reliability of this scale was .93. This scale also shows validity because it highly correlates with a separate ranking of items made by 36 judges. The Marital Instability Index also relates to findings in previous research because variables identified in this scale are the same variables that indicate marital stability/instability in the research.

Booth and colleagues (1983) narrowed the Marital Instability Index down from 25 to 5 questions, claiming that these five questions "best predict the entire Marital Instability Index" compared to the other 20 (p. 388). These five questions were used to assess marital stability in the present study with a slight modification to increase variability. The Marital Instability Index calculates yes/no responses; this study measured responses on an 8-point Likert scale. Questions assessing marital stability were:

1. Sometimes couples experience serious problems in their marriage and have thoughts of ending their marriage. Even people who get along quite well with their spouse sometimes wonder whether their marriage is working out. Have you ever thought your marriage might be in trouble?

2. Has the thought of getting a divorce or separation crossed your mind?

3. Have you discussed divorce or separation from your spouse with a close friend? (Close friend could be another relative).

4. Have you or your spouse ever seriously suggested the idea of divorce?

5. Have you and your spouse talked about consulting an attorney regarding a possible divorce or separation?

There were eight possible responses to these questions: (1) never, (2) yes, but not within the last 3 years, (3) yes, within the last 3 years, (4) yes, within the last year, (5) yes, within the last 6 months, (6) yes, within the last 3 months, (7) don't know, and (8) refused. A higher response to the item indicates lower marital stability, except for responses "don't know" and "refused," which were excluded from data analysis. This item was reverse coded for data analysis, however, with higher scores indicating higher level of marital stability.

Questions assessing perceived social support of the marriage in the Utah study were the same as the Oklahoma Baseline Statewide Survey on Marriage and Divorce. These questions were obtained from similar surveys used in Minnesota and Arizona which were taken from the General Social Survey (A. Hawkins & S. L. Nock, personal communication, October 11, 2004).

The General Social Survey is an on-going assessment tool conducted annually in U. S. households by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC). It was put together by several researchers to track changes over time, starting in 1972 (Davis & Smith, 1992). The General Social Survey has content and face validity because experts in the field develop the questions. A search on PsychInfo yielded roughly 668 articles that used the General Social Survey as a research tool. Additionally, about 18 of those articles specifically addressed marriage. Four questions derived from the General Social Survey address social support:

1. Some couples feel pretty much on their own to handle the challenges of marriage, and other people feel a good deal of support from others for their relationship. Thinking about your own marriage (current or last one), how much support do/did you feel from YOUR OWN relatives for keeping your marriage healthy in good times and hard times? (YOUR OWN relatives=parents, brothers, sisters, and so forth)

2. How much support do/did you feel from you SPOUSE'S relatives for keeping your marriage healthy in good times and hard times?

3. How much support do/did you feel from you FRIENDS for keeping your marriage healthy in good times and hard times?

4. How much support do/did you feel from you FAITH COMMUNITY for keeping your marriage healthy in good times and hard times?

There were five possible responses to these questions: (1) no or little support (if no faith community, then no support), (2) some support, (3) a lot of support, (4) don't know, and (5) refused. A higher response up to number 3 indicated a higher score of perceived social support for the marriage.

Negative interactions were determined by responses to four questions regarding behavioral risk factors in marriage, which are similar to Gottman's Four Horsemen—criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and withdrawal (Gottman, 1994). These questions were taken from Stanley and Markman's telephone survey (1997):

1. Now I'd like you to tell me how often you and your spouse/partner experience each of the following situations. Little arguments escalate into ugly fights with accusations, criticisms, name calling, or bring up past hurts. Is that…

2. My spouse/partner criticizes or belittles my opinions, feelings, or desires. Is that…

3. My spouse/partner seems to view my words or actions more negatively than I mean them to be. Does that happen…

4. When we argue, one of us withdraws…that is, does not want to talk about it anymore, or leaves the scene. Does that happen…

Responses ranged from (1) never or almost never, (2) once in a while, (3) frequently, (4) don't know, and (5) refused. Items with "don't know" or "refused" will not be included in the analysis. High scores from 1 to 3 indicated higher score of negative interaction. Responses to these 4 questions were totaled for one score of negative interaction.

Level of education was gathered from respondents by the question, "What is the highest grade in school that you finished, and got credit for, or the highest degree you have earned?" Possible responses include (1) less than high school graduate (0-11), (2) high school graduate (12), (3) some college, (4) trade/technical/vocational training, (5) college graduate, (6) postgraduate work/degree, (8) unsure/don't know, and (9) refused. Responses up to 6 indicated a greater level of education.

Gender was not asked directly by the interviewer, as some respondents may take offense. Rather, the interviewer was asked to record gender as male, female, or unsure at the end of the interview.

Procedure

The 2003 Utah Marriage Statewide Baseline Survey was conducted by the Bureau for Social Research (BSR) at Oklahoma State University (Schramm et al., 2003). Data

was collected between February and April 2003 by trained and supervised students at Oklahoma State University. All interviews were conducted between 5:30 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. central time Monday through Thursday, and between 1:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. central time on Friday (Welch & Johnson, 2003).

The first sample was recruited by using random-digit dialing throughout the state of Utah. Known business numbers were excluded and selected telephone numbers were screened for disconnected numbers. The second sample, or the TANF over sample as described above, was randomly drawn by the Utah Department of Workforce Services (Schramm et al., 2003). Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) was the data collection technology used for this project (Welch & Johnson, 2003).

Respondents who were called or who called in were asked a series of questions on the following topics: (1) attitudes about marriage, divorce, intimate relationships, and cohabitation; (2) qualitative information on couples' relationship quality; (3) involvement and support from family members and friends; (4) knowledge and acceptance of prevention education; (5) religious involvement; (6) utilization of government services; and (7) demographic data on marriage, divorce, remarriage, patterns of cohabitation, intent to marry/remarry, and other demographic data (Schramm et al., 2003). This study will analyze data from nine questions taken from the survey, assessing social support and perceived marital stability, as well as demographics of education and gender.

Each null hypothesis was analyzed by using Spearman's rho correlation statistics. In other words, marital stability, social support, education, gender, and negative interactions were analyzed for statistically significant relationships to one another (Sprinthall, 2000). Pearson's *r* requires that data are at least interval level, while

Spearman's rho can use ordinal level data. The data from this study did not meet requirements for Pearson's *r* so Spearman's rho was used to analyze the data.

Spearman's correlation coefficient can be defined as "a numerical statement of the linear relationship between two variables" (Sprinthall, 2000, p. 258). Assumptions of Spearman's rho are first that the sample has been randomly selected as correlational analyses are based on probability. This study yielded data collected from a stratified random sample. Secondly, distributions of scores must be in ordinal form. The data from this study fit this criterion of ordinal measurements, including gender because it was coded as an ordinal variable. An ordinal scale provides a rank order measurement without specifying equal distance between ranks. The third assumption is that the relationship between the two measures is linear. In utilizing correlational statistics, it is always important to remember that correlations do not show causation. Correlation simply identifies that there is a relationship between the two variables (Sprinthall).

Next, a multiple regression was run on the data, which was used to intercorrelate multivariate data (Sprinthall, 2000). In other words, the variables of marital stability, social support, education, and gender, and negative interactions were correlated simultaneously and in step-wise fashion in order to increase the ability to predict marital stability. Measures of marital stability were reverse-coded. Marital stability was the criterion variable, or the variable whose value is being predicted. Social support, education, gender, and negative interactions were the predictor variables.

The researcher hoped to find statistically significant associations between variables of marital stability, social support, education, and gender by using Spearman's rho and multiple regression. Conclusions drawn from this research were used to direct

marital therapists of the use of social support and negative interactions in a marriage. The therapist will also be aware of static factors, such as education and gender.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This section will provide results of the data analysis pertaining to each variable. Social support, negative interactions, gender, education, and marital stability have been analyzed by a Spearman's rho correlation and multiple regression to answer each null hypothesis. Spearman's rho was judged as the best method for correlations (as opposed to Pearson's *r*) because the variables were a combination of dichotomous and ordinal level data (Sprinthall, 2000). Cronbach's alpha was used to calculate the interitem reliability of the constructs with three or more items. The construct of marital stability had an acceptable reliability of $\alpha = .83$.

Null Hypothesis #1

In order to measure the relationship between marital stability and social support, the measures of social support were combined into one total score. This was done as the individual social support items had a high rate of multicollinearity, meaning they are hard to distinguish one from another as they all inter-correlate (see Table 1).

The interitem reliability for the construct of social support was found to be acceptable at $\alpha = .82$. The Spearman's rho correlation between social support and marital stability was slight, rho = .21, $n = 882$, $p < .01$ (see Table 2). The explained variance is low at 4%, but does suggest that as one perceived more social support he or

Table 1

Spearman's rho Correlation of Social Support Items

	Own family	Spouse's family	Friends	Faith community
Own family	1 ($n = 882$)			
Spouse's family	.67** ($n = 881$)	1 ($n = 881$)		
Friends	.64** ($n = 879$)	.56** ($n = 879$)	1 ($n = 879$)	
Faith community	.49** ($n = 876$)	.44** ($n = 875$)	.49** ($n = 873$)	1 ($n = 876$)

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table 2

Spearman's rho Correlation of Independent and Dependent Variables

	S. support	Gender	Education	Neg. int.	Stability
S. support	1 ($n = 882$)				
Gender	-.02 ($n = 878$)	1 ($n = 878$)			
Education	.10** ($n = 877$)	.12** ($n = 877$)	1 ($n = 877$)		
Neg. int.	-.17** ($n = 882$)	-.04 ($n = 878$)	-.03 ($n = 877$)	1 ($n = 883$)	
Stability	.21** ($n = 882$)	.08* ($n = 878$)	.09* ($n = 877$)	-.51** ($n = 883$)	1 ($n = 885$)

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

she also rated his or her marriage as more stable. The null hypothesis was rejected; there was a statistically significant positive relationship between perceived social support and marital stability.

Null Hypothesis #2

Gender, as a nominal variable, was coded as 0 = female and 1 = male to put in ordinal form and allow flexibility in data analysis (Sprinthall, 2000). The gender ratio was uneven with females comprising 68.6% of the respondents. The correlation between gender and marital stability was rho = .08, $n = 878$, $p < .20$, which means that men were more likely to rate their marriage as stable. This relationship, while statistically significant, accounts for .6% of the explained variance. The null hypothesis was rejected because there is a statistically significant relationship between gender and marital stability.

Null Hypothesis #3

Two responses to the education question were combined—3 (some college) and 4 (trade/technical/vocational training) —because response category 4 had a very low number ($n = 38$) and they are about equal in rank with some college amounting to about the same number of years that one may complete for trade, technical, or vocational training. Education correlated slightly with marital stability, rho = .09, $n = 877$, $p < .05$. With a large data set, statistical significance is more likely (Sprinthall, 2000), but statistical significance may not be clinically meaningful (Jacobson & Truax, 1991). The explained variance is .7%. This means that education has virtually no relationship with marital stability. Again, the null hypothesis was rejected as there is a statistically significant, though meaningless, relationship between education and marital stability.

Null Hypothesis #4

The negative interactions construct had a lower reliability than social support and marital stability at $\alpha = .68$. Researchers would generally prefer a higher reliability coefficient, but reliabilities above .60 are acceptable (Dooley, 2001). Negative interactions had the largest correlation to marital stability at rho = -.51, $n = 883$. This correlation was statistically significant, $p < .01$, and the explained variance was 25%. As the report of negative interactions increased, the reported level of marital stability decreased. The null hypothesis was not supported here, either, because there was a statistically significant negative relationship between negative interactions and marital stability.

Multicollinearity between variables was explored using a Spearman's rho correlation matrix. It was determined that the variables were not collinear, thus the variables were appropriate to analyze by multiple regression.

Multiple Regression

Simply reporting the correlations would not give an accurate picture of the data since the large sample size tends to yield statistically significant relationships more easily (Dooley, 2001; Sprinthall, 2000). While this may still be a problem with a regression analysis, a multiple regression will clarify the picture a little more by establishing how much information about marital stability is contained in social support, gender, education, and negative interactions. In other words, the multiple regression will allow us to see how well these variables predict marital stability (Dooley; Sprinthall).

The forced entry multiple regression analysis yielded an R^2 of .336. This means that social support, gender, education, and negative interactions accounted for 33.6% of the variance in marital stability (Sprinthall, 2000). The closer R^2 is to 1, the better the set of variables predict the constant (Dooley, 2001). An R^2 of .336 is relatively large, as coefficients of determination above .25 are considered large for the behavioral sciences (Sprinthall). In the regression, social support was a statistically significant variable that helped explain variance in marital stability at the .01 level, $t = 2.84$, $p = .005$ (see Table 3).

Gender was statistically significant at the .05 level, $t = 2.36$, $p = .02$. Education was also statistically significant in explaining marital stability—to about the same degree that gender was. Education was statistically significant at the .05 level, $t = 2.37$, $p = .02$.

Table 3

Summary of Forced-Entry Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Marital Stability

Variable	B	SE B	β
Social support	.12	.04	.08**
Gender	.59	.25	.07*
Education	.28	.12	.07*
Negative interactions	-1.39	.07	-.54**

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Negative interaction was the best predictor of marital stability. It was statistically significant in explaining variance in marital stability at the .01 level, $t = -19.40$, $p = .00$.

Next, a step-wise multiple regression was run in order to see the degree to which variables contributed to predicting marital stability (see Table 4). Negative interactions, social support, and education remained statistically significant at the .01 level ($t = -20.26$, $p = .000$; $t = 2.97$, $p = .003$; $t = 2.71$, $p = .007$, respectively), and gender remained significant at the .05 level, $t = 2.36$, $p = .019$. However, only one variable made a large contribution to the regression model predicting marital stability.

Table 4

Summary of Step-Wise Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Marital Stability

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1 ($R^2 = .319$)			
Negative interactions	-1.44	.07	-.57**
Step 2 ($R^2 = .326$)			
Social support	.13	.04	.08**
Step 3 ($R^2 = .332$)			
Education	.31	.12	.08**
Step 4 ($R^2 = .336$)			
Gender	.59	.25	.07*

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

The step-wise regression shows that negative interactions alone accounted for 31.8% of change in marital stability. Social support added .07 to the R^2, education added .06, and gender added .04.

Conclusion

Simple correlation models were used to test the four research hypotheses. Each of the four variables, social support, gender, education, and negative interactions, were shown to be correlated to marital stability, thus the null hypotheses were rejected. The multiple regression takes the analysis a step further by analyzing the predictability of the variables on marital stability. Of the four variables, negative interactions predicts marital stability best. Social support, education, and gender were statistically significant contributors to the model, but in essence contributed little to the model.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This chapter will review the implications of the results of this study. Each hypothesis will be compared to the existing literature and theory. The implications for putting this information into practical use will also be discussed. This chapter will end with the limitations and recommendations for future research.

Null Hypothesis #1

There was a small, but statistically significant relationship between social support and marital stability. As perceived social support increased, so does one's report of marital stability. This positive correlation was consistent with the small bit of literature that measured social support, which shows that when a spouse has positive conversation with a confidant—parent, friend, or clergyman—their marriage is reported as more stable (Allgood et al., 1997; Bryant & Conger, 1999; Julien et al., 1994). Allgood and colleagues found that husbands and wives who talk to others about family problems had a higher degree of marital stability.

Julien et al. (1994) showed that wives who had maritally adjusted confidants were more likely to receive support for their marriage. This study did not categorize confidants, which is where the current study picks up. The current data analyzed whether the type of confidant affected marital stability. Because the items in social support were highly correlated, it can be inferred that the origin of support does not matter as much as the fact that getting support from somewhere is a protective factor for marital stability.

Bryant and Conger (1999) divided origins of social support into categories of friends, family, and in-laws. There data correlated friend support, in-law support, and family support with marital stability. Each of the tests was statistically significant. This also shows that the origin of support does not matter. The present research adds faith community to the categories of social support, but did not find that this variable changed conclusions that social support had a statistically significant relationship with marital stability.

The correlation between social support and marital stability in this research was not as strong as expected, however. It was expected to be more of a prominent correlate based on the literature, the inclusion of faith community (a factor thought to better operationalize social support), and on the premises of General Systems Theory, which indicates that positive feedback (social support) maintains systems (marriage) (Becvar & Becvar, 1999).

Additionally, stability in Utah seems to be higher than in Oklahoma, where this study was originally done (Schramm et al., 2003). For example, Schramm et al. found that 47% of respondents in Utah reported they have never thought their marriage was in trouble, compared to 56% of respondents in Oklahoma. Only 27% of respondents in Utah reported that they have thought their marriage was in trouble in the last three years, compared to 33% in Oklahoma. It could be that the variable of social support was not as significant in Utah because Utah has higher levels of marital stability, washing out the variance in social support. Perhaps social support shows as more important in states where stability is lower.

Null Hypothesis #2

In this study gender was shown to have a statistically significant relationship with marital stability, with males being more likely to rate their marriages as stable. This gender difference is inconsistent with the literature wherein the general consensus is that gender effects in overall marital stability are about equal (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kurdek, 1993). In fact, Karney and Bradbury's study reviewed 115 research articles in order to come to the conclusion that gender does have a statistically significant relationship with marital stability. Gender was used in this study because the majority of marital researchers recommended that looking at gender differences was standard practice (Allgood et al., 1997; Bryant & Conger, 1999; Glenn, 1998; Heaton & Albrecht, 1991; Huston & Geis, 1993; Johnson & Leslie, 1982; Julien & Markman, 1991; Julien et al., 1994; Karney & Bradbury; Kurdek, 1993; Sprecher & Felmlee, 1992).

One study seemed to find similar results, however. Glenn (1998) found some small differences between males and females in his study of marital success or failure, but indicated that "the differences seem too small to be important." Sprinthall (2000) writes, "...don't read the word *significant* as being synonymous with *profound.* Statistically significant differences are not always especially meaningful..." (p. 228, emphasis in original). While examining the gender effects in this study, it is important to keep in mind that statistical significance does not always indicate clinical significance, thus while statistically significant, the relationship between gender and marital stability is weak and not very helpful in the process of helping couples (Jacobson & Truax, 1991).

The gender ratio from the sample could have skewed the results that show men rate their marriage as more stable. The sample consisted of two-thirds women (68.6%) which may make the effect for the men greater than if there would have been more of an even gender ratio.

Null Hypothesis #3

Results showed that the higher one's education, the more likely they are to report having a stable marriage. Karney and Bradbury (1995) in their review of over 115 research articles on marital stability found that education does correlate positively with marital stability, but not as much as other variables. They, along with Kurdek (1993) indicate that education is one of the better demographic predictor of marital stability. The present results are consistent with the literature (Heaton & Albrecht, 1991; Karney & Bradbury; Kurdek) that shows that education does correlate to marital stability to some degree, but the effect is not as strong as other variables.

The education variable was included because the literature indicated that it did have a relationship with marital stability and because the 2003 census (United States Census Bureau) shows that Utah ranked 12th in the nation (including District of Columbia) in percent of college graduates. Those who hold a bachelor's degree or higher make up 28.4% of Utah's population. This variability within education helped meet the assumptions for correlational tests (Dooley, 2001). This factor, however, did not seem to separate Utah from the other studies that found education related to marital stability to a small degree (Heaton & Albrecht, 1991; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kurdek, 1993).

Null Hypothesis #4

Of the four variables, negative interactions had the strongest correlation with marital stability. The correlation was negative, which indicates that the more couples in this study report experiencing negative interactions, the less stable they will report their marriage to be. The explained variance was 25%.

This correlation was consistent with the literature which showed that negative interactions negatively correlate with marital stability (Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Levenson, 1992, 2000; Stanley & Markman, n.d., 1997). Gottman and Levenson (1992) found that regulated couples have a ratio of five positive interactions to one negative interaction. This ratio implies that the less negative interactions are present in a marriage, the more stable that marriage will be.

Additionally, Gottman (1994) identified four predictors of divorce based on negative interactions, which are criticism, defensiveness, withdrawal, and contempt. These are often present in negative interactions which lead to divorce (Gottman; Gottman & Levenson, 2000). The measure used in this study for negative interactions specifically asked about criticism and withdrawal, while subtly asking about defensiveness and contempt.

Gottman and Levenson (2000) stated that they could predict earlier divorcing "using only pure interactive models" (p. 742) by analyzing negative codes during conflict. They also were able to predict divorce by using only the negative interaction codes for the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" (Gottman, 1994). Stanley and Markman (1997) also found that negative interactions correlate negatively with marital

stability. This current study was able to replicate findings from these other studies by simply using a self-report measure of negative interactions.

Again, this relationship could be looked at from a couple different angles. Those who experience negative interactions may perceive that their marriage is less stable because of the interactions. In other words, the negative interactions lead to instability in marriage. On the other hand, those who perceive that their marriage in unstable may engage in greater amounts of negative interactions because of the stress and worry that their marriage may not last. The latter explanation is not likely, however, because the body of literature makes quite a strong case for causality—negative interactions occur before marital dissolution (Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Levenson, 1992, 2000; Stanley & Markman, n.d., 1997).

Multiple Regression

The multiple regression was used to explain which variables account for the most variance in the presence of the other variables. While perceived social support was shown to have a statistically significant positive relationship with marital stability, the correlation was low, so it would be expected to be about the same in the regression. Social support played a small role in explaining marital stability, so couples who are looking for a way to improve the stability of their marriage may wish to examine the role their family and social contacts play in supporting their marriage. If a spouse engages in conversations that are unsupportive of their marriage, it may influence him or her to see their marriage as unstable. On the other hand, if they engage in positive conversations with social contacts, it could be helpful.

Gender and education were not the main predictors in the regression analysis, but did add to the model. Kurdek (1993) went so far as to say that education is one of the "best predictors" among demographic variables (p. 238) in his study. The current study is different from Kurdek because it only measured two demographic variables, so no conclusion can be drawn about which of several demographics is the best predictor. Both gender and education were relatively equal in explaining marital stability. Gender and education are both predictors of marital stability, but have relatively little to do with predicting marital stability compared to negative interactions.

The multiple regression also showed that negative interactions account for more change in marital stability than social support, gender, and education, which contributed relatively little to the model. Thus, if one were debating about whether to focus on social support or negative interactions in order to increase marital stability, this data set would point to a sure focus on reducing negative interactions. These results certainly correlate with the body of research on the ability to predict divorce by observing negative interactions alone (Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Levenson, 1992, 2000).

This prediction model adds to the body of research by analyzing social support, gender, education, and negative interactions together in the same study. Karney and Bradbury's (1995) review showed that studies that used "conflict behavior" or negative interactions as variables did not usually use any other variables. No studies of the 115 in this article analyzed both social support and negative interactions together in the same model to predict marital stability. After combining social support and negative interactions to predict marital stability, negative interactions was shown to be a much better predictor of marital stability than social support.

Implications

Results of this research could be used to educate the general public about contributors to marital stability or practicing clinicians who are working with couples. Marital therapists would be wise to incorporate this research in their practice if the treatment goal is to increase marital stability and/or save a marriage that is on the verge of divorce. For example, marital therapists or educators might recommend that more associations with friends and family who support one's marriage are healthy for the marriage relationship. Or it could be that marital therapists may decide to use a behavioral intervention to decrease the negative interactions. The following section will cover ways that this information could be used in marital therapy from a general systems theory base.

General Systems Theory

The concept of circular causality can be a frame for looking at negative interactions (Becvar & Becvar, 1999). The term "negative interactions" implies that it is not one spouse that is causing negativity in the marriage. This means that it is not one spouse who is to blame for marital dissolution. Often if there is criticism or contempt in a marriage, then both partners are guilty of engaging in this negativity. From a treatment perspective, using the lens of circular causality helps the marital therapist stay balanced when intervening in the marital system. This point-of-view allows the therapist to not take sides, but rather identify points of change for both the husband and wife.

Another helpful concept from GST to explain the results is feedback. Feedback is the information the system incorporates that either maintains or disrupts functioning (Becvar, 2003; Becvar & Becvar, 1999). This means that the marital system may receive feedback from social outlets. The data show that as social support and education increase, so does marital stability. This could be due to the positive feedback that the marital system is receiving from suprasystems (e.g., extended family, friends, faith community, and educational atmosphere). The more feedback the marital system receives about maintaining a healthy relationship, the more likely the system will have healthy functioning.

Assessment

As treatment begins, therapists start by assessing the system. Assessment is a continual process throughout therapy (Becvar & Becvar, 1999; Nichols & Schwartz, 2001). One tool marital and family therapists use to assess relationships is the Circumplex Model (Olson, 1999). This model uses three dimensions to come up with a "relational diagnosis." These dimensions are cohesion or closeness, flexibility, and communication. Cohesion ranges from disengaged (not close) to enmeshed (very close). Flexibility ranges from chaotic (no structure) to rigid (strict rules). The hope for most family or, in this case, marital relationships is that they are balanced somewhere between the extremes or cohesion and flexibility. Additionally, communication is used in assessment, specifically listening skills, speaking skills, self-disclosure, clarity, respect, and regard (Olson).

Olson (1999) described different aspects of assessment that should be included in a marital system. These methods could be used to assess all variables discussed in this study. Assessment tools that compliment the Circumplex Model could assist in treatment. FACES II assesses cohesion and flexibility (Olson, 1986). The ENRICH instrument assesses communication (Olson, Fournier, & Druckman, 1986). These paper and pencil methods could be used to get an "insider's perspective," while therapists' observations will provide an "outsider's perspective" (p.13). This also accounts for Olson's recommendation of multi-trait assessment, which would include the three dimension of the Circumplex Model.

Olson (1999) has also recommended that the therapist get perspectives from different people in the system through clinical interviewing, calling this multi-person assessment. Finally, Olson included multi-system assessment, which focuses on different subsystems and suprasystems that the couple is a part of. This will include the realm of social support. Using the Circumplex Model as a frame, a discussion of assessment relating to social support, gender, education, and negative interactions will follow.

First of all, while gender in and of itself is usually an easy assessment, a therapist may want to assess for gender stereotypes or gender expectations that the couple may hold (Rampage, 2002) because the data from this study shows that there is a slight possibility that men and women perceive marital stability differently. If ideas about gender are rigid and inflexible in a marriage, the couple may have a hard time making necessary shifts. For example, one or both spouses may hold the belief that "men are clueless about relationships." This may lead to expectations that the husband is not responsible for bettering negative interactions. In this case, the goal in therapy would be

to help both partners feel capable and knowledgeable about interacting in ways that will improve their chances of staying together. This may require a little more flexibility in order to allow for change. On the other hand, a couple who has absolutely no ideas about gender may need to develop some flexible rules about the roles each person will play in the marriage.

Gender stereotypes and social support may go hand-in-hand in some issues. Hypothetically speaking, a couple may hold to a gender stereotype that women are "gossipy" or "chatty," which gives a negative connotation to conversations a woman may have with family and friends about her marriage. One goal may be to talk about the supportive role family, friends, and faith community can have for the marriage. If the couple is balanced between flexibility and cohesion, then they will be better able to adapt to the role social support will play in their relationship (Olson, 1999).

Inquiring about social support would also be an important part of treatment as social support was shown to be a predictor of marital stability. By having an understanding of the role each spouse's family of origin plays, the therapist can make treatment goals to address those issues that are affecting the marriage. The therapist may be able to assess the family of origin using the Circumplex Model to give an idea about how this family may contribute in healthy and supportive ways to the marriage. It may also be necessary to recommend some individual treatment if there are unresolved family issues that are directly involving the other spouse at the time.

The role of friends and faith community will also be important information to gather. "Even if a couple is *not* complaining about inequities in the marriage or the families of origin, the culturally competent marital therapist must address the impact of

cultural stereotypes on the couple's functioning" (Roberto-Forman, 2002, p. 130, emphasis in original). Culture here includes religion and faith community (Roberto-Forman). Couples may disagree about friends or faith thus making it hard to access the supports these avenues may supply. Perhaps the faith community is providing feedback to the marriage that is influencing the marital structure to be too rigid. Or perhaps support from the faith community will provide structure for a chaotic marriage by offering values to live by. After assessing the social supports available to the couple, the therapist may want to include select members from this support system in some treatment sessions to solidify the supportive relationship.

Assessment of negative interactions (and positive interactions) will be important throughout treatment as the kind of interactions a couple engages in could determine whether their marriage will survive (Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Levenson, 1992, 2000; Stanley & Markman, n.d., 1997). The communication style, as explored in the Circumplex Model, will facilitate balance between cohesion and flexibility, thus leading to greater marital functioning (Olson, 1999). Identification of negative interaction and communication styles will provide a starting point for therapists to intervene behaviorally and indicate the degree of progress the couple is making.

Therapy Models

The information from this study can be applied to marital therapy in a variety of ways. Throughout the years in the field of marriage and family therapy, different models have been developed to adapt to therapeutic styles and perspectives on how people

change in a therapy setting. A few of these models will be discussed to provide some input on therapeutic directions to improve marital stability.

Bowenian model. The Bowenian Model of family therapy was developed by Murray Bowen in the 1950s. This model identifies generational patterns that lead to insight about the problem by creating genograms. Genograms are maps of family generations that include important identifying information about family members (Gurman & Jacobson, 2002; Nichols & Schwartz, 2001). Examining a genogram focused on support (or non-support) from family may give the couple ideas about where to look for more familial support and identify family members who are traditionally not supportive for various reasons. By identifying and cultivating supportive relationships the couple may experience an increase in marital stability.

The examination of family generations may lead a spouse to a decision to increase his or her level of differentiation, which is defined as "the capacity for autonomous functioning" in Nichols and Schwartz (2001, p. 140). Differentiation from certain family members may help the spouse to have the strength to disregard negative messages they may be sending about the marriage, thus being more open to focus on positive messages received from social supports. It is still important to listen to concerns family member may have as long as the spouse is able to formulate opinions within his or her self. If ending the marriage is the best decision, that decision should be made by a spouse, not by intervening family members.

Religion and faith may also become a topic of a genogram. Understanding how family members were able to access support from faith communities may also be

insightful for couples. By increasing the ability of the couple to feel support from their faith community, their ability to feel stable in the marriage increases.

Structural-strategic model. The structural model developed by Salvador Minuchin in the 1970s may be a helpful way for a family therapist to incorporate the contributions of social support to increase marital stability. Focus is given to hierarchies and boundaries in the system (Keim & Lappin, 2002; Nichols & Schwartz, 2001). By setting appropriate boundaries for social contacts, the couple may be able to filter positive and negative messages from social contacts in a way that they will perceive more stability in their marriage. This is a possibility as the data show that as social support increases, so does marital stability.

For example, a wife could have very diffuse or thin boundaries with her friends, but have an almost rigid or solid boundary with her husband. The structural model uses symbols to represent boundaries, with diffuse and rigid boundaries illustrated as dotted or almost solid lines (· · · · and --------, respectively). This would mean that the wife was closer to her friends, sharing more experiences with them than she was with her husband. The marital therapist could help re-align the boundaries so the wife was closer to her husband than to her friends using the model of social support. By explaining how to access support from friends in a way that would not be detrimental to the marriage, the therapist would help establish more appropriate boundaries in the system, thus increasing marital stability.

A therapist who preferred to use the strategic model, developed by Jay Haley and Cloe Madanes also in the 1970s (Keim & Lappin, 2002; Nichols & Schwartz, 2001), would be more interested in the role negative interactions play in the system. This

therapist would likely draw a diagram of the negative interaction in circular form for the couple to see. Interrupting this cycle at particular points could circumvent the negative interaction altogether. The couple would need to agree to choose different ways of interacting when they notice the negative cycle begin. These strategic interruptions of negative cycles will help the couple avoid criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling in order to improve marital stability.

Narrative model. Narrative therapy began in the 1980s by Australian Michael White. Narrative therapy examines the role that dominant cultural discoursed play in clients' stories or narratives that make up their reality (Anderson, 2003; Freedman & Combs, 2002; Nichols & Schwartz, 2001). Addressing the issue of social support would fit nicely into this model for increasing marital stability. As social support increases, so does marital stability based on the results of this study. It may be that the couple's narrative about their family culture or their faith culture is disempowering and is thus affecting their marriage. By deconstructing these pieces of the story, a therapist may help the couple access support from their social context or learn to overcome the negative messages about their marriage from the social context.

Additionally, finding "unique outcomes," which are events outside of the problem (e.g., marital instability), and incorporating these in into the narrative may help increase stability. For example, a spouse may discover that a unique outcome was having a conversation with a friend or family member about positive things in his or her marriage. After this event is identified, the therapist could help the couple incorporate this into their story and give it significant meaning. When the couple has created a narrative of

empowerment for their relationship and storied in social support, they are most likely going to view their marriage are more stable.

Often narrative therapists will ask their clients to document their narratives onto paper. Another technique to utilize social support may be to have each spouse write about a time when they experienced social support that helped them feel more stable in the relationship. Each spouse could share their writings about their experience to solidify social support in the couple's narrative. The narrative model could be a good choice for a marital therapist wants to intervene in the area of social support to increase a couple's marital stability.

Cognitive-behavioral model. Cognitive-behavioral therapy is probably the most mainstream of the models. The main form of intervention for cognitive-behavioral therapists is to focus on changing thoughts and behaviors (Baucom, Epstein, & LaTaillade, 2002; Nichols & Schwartz, 2001). This discussion will be focused on behavioral interventions, as the construct of negative interactions in the study is based solely on behavior. The results show that decreasing negative interactions correlates with a rise in marital stability. In fact, decreasing negative interactions could be the intervention that could help increase marital stability the most of the other areas to intervene in this study.

Much of the negative interaction studies have been done by Gottman and colleagues (1992, 1994, 2000) and so his model of marital therapy would be ideal to discuss (Driver, Tabares, Shapiro, Nahm, & Gottman, 2003; Gottman, 1999). As mentioned earlier, Gottman's work centers on the Four Horsemen of criticism contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling. Reducing negative interactions based on these attitudes

will increase marital stability. Often the goal of reducing negative interactions is met with the goal of learning and implementing positive interactions. Couples in danger of divorce may have behaviors described as "negative reciprocity" wherein the spouses respond to negativity with negativity. This can be replaced with validation of partner's opinions and feelings (Driver et al.). For example, a husband may respond to an angry comment by his wife by saying, "I can see that you are angry...."

Another way to tool for developing positive interactions is for couples to develop a "love map," which is a memory about "the major event in each other's history" and an attempt to "keep updating these facts/feelings as their partner's world changes" (Driver et al., 2003, p. 509). Love maps increase awareness in the marriage, which can lead to more positive interactions. For example, a wife may cook her husband's favorite meal when he comes home from a bad day at work. The wife is aware of her husband's favorite meal, and she is aware that he had a bad day at work.

Stanley and Markman have also researched negative interactions (1992, 1997, n.d.) and have developed a program called Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP). PREP "targets changes in attitudes and behaviors that are specifically related to risk and protective factors in a wide array of marital research" (2005, p. 6). Specific behaviors that PREP teaches to reduce negative interactions are communication skills and interpersonal skills, and conflict management. By increasing these skills, couples can increase their "positive bond."

Limitations and Recommendations

Social support, gender, education, and negative interactions were shown to have

statistically significant relationships to marital stability. However, there were some limitations to this research. First of all, the construct of social support could have been more detailed. Respondents could interpret "support" in a variety of ways. Perhaps the measure could have asked more specifically about disclosure of problems like Allgood and colleagues (1997) or Julien and Markman (1991). These researchers specified whether spouses were talking to confidants about marital problems or family problems, and based their study on the content of the conversations. They did not, however, specify whether the conversations were supportive or not.

This study attempted to make a clear distinction that input from outside a marriage was positive, but may have been unclear about the definition of support in the measure. Could respondents have thought this was financial support? Do they think that support means that people do not interfere in their marriage? Julien et al. (1994) measured a positive valence of social input, again focusing on actual conversations with confidants. Perhaps this study could have clarified that support meant having specific conversations about problems that had a positive overtone. Bryant and Conger (1999) measured support by specifically measuring the spouse's perception of others' beliefs. For example, "My friends think I have a good marriage" and "sometimes I think my family does not believe I should be married to my husband/wife" (p. 442). More specific questions about conversations with confidants and/or specific questions about perceptions of how others view the marriage may have made for a social support measure better able to elicit thoughtful responses from participants. A better measure of social support may have made the relationship to marital stability more clear.

This study had a relatively low response rate of 30.3% for the stratified random-digit telephone sample. The TANF sample had a good response rate of 89.7% (Welch & Johnson, 2003). The 30.3% who did respond in the first sample may be qualitatively different than those who did not respond. Certainly a larger response rate would provide a better representation of the true population (Dooley, 2001).

Another limitation to this study was that most of the respondents indicated that they were very stable on the marital stability measure. On the first question, 51.8% of respondents indicated that they have *never* thought their marriage might in trouble. 66.6% of respondents said that the thought of getting a divorce or separation has *never* crossed their mind. 84.4% said that they have *never* discussed divorce or separation from their spouse with a close friend. 86.2% said that they or their spouse has *never* seriously suggested the idea of divorce. And 97.5% said that they or their spouse *never* talked about consulting an attorney regarding a possible divorce or separation. This leaves room for little variability in the marital stability data. Greater variability would help provide a more accurate picture of marital stability and its correlates.

There was sample bias with regard to gender in that females were overrepresented. As stated earlier, two thirds of the sample was female (68.6%). A more even distribution of males and females would have more closely approximated the population and yielded results with more generalizability. Again, it was shown being male had a positive and statistically significant correlation with marital stability. This result should be interpreted with caution, as the data may be skewed in respect to gender (Dooley, 2001; Sprinthall, 2000).

Recommendations for further research would include better social support measures. With more specific social support measures, researchers will be able to pinpoint specific attitudes or behaviors that influence marital stability. This would also provide more information for marital therapists who wish to incorporate aspects of social support in their work to increase stability in marriage.

Further research could delineate rural and urban differences within the sample. Does social support differ based on location? Does that affect marital stability? Research could also focus on types of education as it relates to marital stability. Or a researcher could measure education at time intervals as in Kurdek's 1993 study, where wife's education at year one and husband's time sampled education were statistically significant predictors of marital stability.

While there were limitations to this study and improvements that could be made, these results still contribute to the body of literature that attempts to explain marital stability by analyzing numerous constructs thought to influence it. Research on this topic will likely continue as a healthy marriage provides benefits to a person physically, mentally, financially, and sexually (Berger, 2001; Glen & Weaver, 1981; Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Kobrin & Hendershot, 1977; Lauer et al., 1990; Popenoe & Whitehead, 2004a). Using knowledge from marital research and educating the public about how to keep a marriage healthy and stable will in turn benefit society.

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