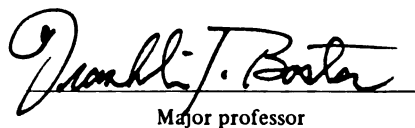This is to certify that the

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Management Behavior and Expressions of
Affect on Sexual and Relational Satisfaction

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THE IMPACT OF SATISFACTION WTH CONFLICT MANAGEMENT BEHAVIOR
AND EXPRESSIONS OF AFFECT ON SEXUAL AND RELATIONAL
SATISFACTION

By

Monique Marie Mitchell

A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF COMMUNICATION

Department of communication

1996

ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF SATISFACTION WITH CONFLICT MANAGEMENT BEHAVIOR AND EXPRESSIONS OF AFFECT ON SEXUAL AND RELATIONAL SATISFACTION

By

Monique Marie Mitchell

Research has indicated that a clear relationship exists between conflict management style, affect, relational satisfaction and sexual satisfaction (Constantine, 1986; Denney & Quadagno, 1992). This study examines these variables and predicts a causal model. Specifically, it is hypothesized that discrepancies between real and ideal affect and conflict management of Sexual Activity Preferences (SAP) are antecedents to relational satisfaction, which is a direct antecedent to sexual satisfaction. It is suggested that with both affect and conflict management, satisfaction with one's expressions in these contexts is a significant predictor of relational satisfaction. Surveys including measures for conflict management style, affect, relational satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction were administered to 391 participants. Discrepancies in conflict management was found to be a direct antecedent to relational satisfaction, as predicted, although affect did not fit the hypothesized model. Relational satisfaction, as predicted, was a direct antecedent to sexual satisfaction.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the help of many people. I would like to explicitly send thanks to the following people.

To my family: I thank you for your support and love through the beginning of my graduate career. The things you do never go unnoticed.

To Molly, Faith, and Tina: Thank you for all the wonderful memories. I will always cherish our friendship.

To all the wonderful friends I've made at Michigan State, including Maria, Shelly, Janet, Marge, Stef, and many others: thank you for helping me make it through those first few courses, I could'nt have made it without you!

To the professors I've had at MSU, especially Ron, Sandi, and Chuck. You are like family to me, my thanks is not enough.

To my committee members, David Imig and Bill Donohue, and my research assistants, David and Joanne: This thesis would not have been possible without you. THANK YOU!

To Frank, you are the best advisor I could ever wish for. Thank you for not teaching me what to think, but to think.

Finally, to the best friend I've ever had, Kimo. Thank you for being you and for making my masters program phenomenal. I love you.

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Introduction

More than one half of all marriages end with divorce. Approximately 75 percent of those divorced remarry, and at least 50 percent of those remarried divorced again. Only 54 percent of those who marry each year are doing so for the first time, in another 23 percent of marriages both the bride and groom have been married previously, and in the remaining 23 percent it is the first marriage for one partner and a remarriage for the other (Olson & Defrain, 1994).

Scholars have been exploring predictors of divorce for decades. A plethora of variables ranging from sexual compatibility to religiosity have been studied in order to understand the dynamics of marriage. In recent years research has more frequently focused on understanding the dynamics of conflict management and sexual satisfaction as predictors of relational longevity. According to Fowers and Olson (1989) among the top 10 reasons why people divorce in America, communication, conflict management, and sexual satisfaction were all listed. When asked, even the distressed couple could see the breakdown of communication and conflict resolution in their marriage (Fowers & Olson, 1989).

The relationship between a satisfying marriage and communication is straightforward. Communication is vital at every level of a committed romantic relationship. A committed romantic relationship refers to one in which the partners are

romantically involved to the exclusion of other partners, and in which the couple has been

dating for longer than three months. When close relationships succeed couples are likely to

cite effective, positive communication as an important element leading to this success

(Olson & DeFrain, 1994). One study assessing the importance couples place on

communication revealed that couples scoring low on communication were more likely to be

dissatisfied in their marriage or divorced three years later (Larsen & Olson, 1989).

Research has also indicated that communication is a vital part of a satisfying sex

life (Denney & Quadagno, 1992; Masters, Johnson, & Kolodny, 1986). Nevertheless, due

to cultural or personal orientation many people find it difficult to discuss their sexual

preferences. Even people who feel free to discuss certain aspects of their sexual behavior

feel intimidated by discussing their likes and dislikes about sex (Denney & Quadagno,

1992). Failing to discuss these important issues, however, can have detrimental effects on a

relationship. For example, one college student writes,

> My girlfriend used to not talk to me when we were messing around. When I was
>
> going down on her, if she liked the way I was doing it she'd breathe heavily and
>
> move her pelvis around with what I was doing. But when she squirmed a certain
>
> way, I thought it was because she felt good, when in fact she did that when I was
>
> hurting her (Denney & Quadango, 1992).

Another study tested the relationship between relational satisfaction (the extent to

which each individual perceives overall satisfaction with the relationship) and

communication of sexual activity preferences (SAP). Again, discussion of SAP was found to be correlated significantly with relational satisfaction. SAP refers to the kinds and details of sexual activity from which an individual receives the most satisfaction, and therefore prefers. These activities can refer to sexual positions, times of day, places to engage in sexual activity, foreplay, and intercourse, as well as other sexual activities. The results of this research show clearly that relationships exist among the variables conflict management, sexual satisfaction and relational satisfaction.

Although many studies have examined the relationships among relational satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and conflict management none has attempted to articulate the relationships among these constructs. Furthermore, no study has assessed the impact of affect on these constructs. In subsequent paragraphs the causal relationships among these variables will be specified.

One form of communication crucial to an intimate relationship is conflict management. Conflict is a situation is which interdependent people express (latent or manifest) differences in satisfying their individual needs and interests, and they experience interference from each other in accomplishing these goals (Donohue & Kolt, 1992). People tend to believe that conflict is detrimental to a relationship, but careful examination challenges this common belief. Many times the absence of relational conflict results from one or both partners being afraid to do so. Therefore they either avoid the conflict or dismiss it. According to Millar, Rogers, and Bavelas (1984) the lack of conflict, often

interpreted as relational harmony, is actually detrimental to the relationship. In fact, research has revealed that with greater than 90% accuracy the success of a relationship can be predicted based on analysis of how the couple fights (Schmitz, 1995).

Traditionally, the research on conflict management has not been applied to the ways in which couples discuss SAP. According to Metz and Dwyer (1993) couples who have experienced sexual dysfunction in their relationship, such as inhibitions of sexual desire or physiological changes in the sexual response cycle, are less relationally satisfied and experience more conflict than couples who are non troubled. Exploring the ways in which couples discuss this area of their relationship could be informative.

Research has indicated that individuals have a personal style of managing conflict (Lewicki & Litterer, 1985). According to Lewicki and Litterer (1985) there are five fundamentally different perspectives, or orientations, that people can employ when in a conflict: (a) contending, (b) accommodating, (c) compromising, (d) collaborating and, (e) avoiding.

Contending occurs when the negotiators are competing with each other, or when one negotiator is competing against the other. Successful contenders apply persuasion, manipulation, concealment of true position, and the use of threats and pressure tactics (Lewicki & Litterer, 1985).

Accommodation is employed when the negotiator is focused on meeting the partner's objectives. Negotiators make the other the top priority and do nothing for themselves until the other's needs are met (Lewicki & Litterer, 1985).

Compromising is employed when the parties focus on splitting the difference rather than winning or losing (Lewicki & Litterer, 1985). Parties typically agree to compromise when they see the issue as a fixed sum or "mythical fixed pie" (Fisher & Ury, 1981). Persons who think there is only one perfect answer to a situation may not want to generate additional solutions to resolve conflict because they believe that those options only prevent them from reaching their desired solution.

Avoiding is applied when the content of the conflict is not addressed. Avoiding is used when individuals fear conflict, or when the issues are seen as insignificant (Lewicki & Litterer, 1985).

Collaboration occurs when both parties work together to maximize the joint outcome (Lewicki & Litterer, 1985). During collaboration the parties understand that they share a problem, and define their problem in terms of goals and interests. The parties state their needs, and they work together to invent options that will optimally fulfill those needs.

Although it is important to understand individual conflict management styles, it would be erroneous to propose that using one style over another leads to greater relational satisfaction. For example, it would be untrue to claim that only those who collaborate on a conflict laden topic are satisfied. Rather, examining the extent to which the couple are

satisfied with their conflict management style would prove more enlightening. In this case

it is the amount of discrepancy in conflict management that affect relational satisfaction

individuals experience. That is, to tap into what conflict management style individuals are

currently using and compare that score with the conflict management style they would

ideally use. For example, currently I may avoid conflict about my sexual activities, in fear

that discussing it with my mate may upset him. Ideally, I would collaborate on the issue.

This discrepancy indicates that the current style of managing conflict is unsatisfactory, or is

not working.

Studying discrepancies in this manner is not a novel idea. Thibaut and Kelly (1959)

discussed the issue in terms of rewards and costs in dyadic relationships. The terms Thibaut

and Kelley employ are current outcome, one's comparison level (CL), and one's

comparison level for an alternate relationship (CLALT). Here, outcome is defined as the

consequences for an individual participant of any interaction (Thibaut & Kelley, p. 13). CL

is defined as the standard against which the member evaluates the "attractiveness" of the

relationship or how satisfactory it is (Thibaut & Kelley, p. 21). CLALT is the standard the

member uses in deciding whether to remain in or to leave that relationship (Thibaut &

Kelley, p. 21). These scholars proposed that the satisfaction a person receives for a

relationship is a function of the difference between their current outcomes and their

comparison level. Specifically, to the extent outcomes exceed one's CL, one is satisfied in

the relationship. Conversely, to the extent CL exceeds outcomes one is dissatisfied in the relationship.

Thibaut and Kelley's logic can be extrapolated to the context of conflict management. That is, in order for relational satisfaction to occur, the current conflict management style needs to be more satisfactory than the alternative conflict management styles. In this context current conflict management style and Thibaut and Kelley's outcome are similar terms, just as ideal conflict management and CL are. The amount of discrepancy found between current and ideal conflict management styles will lead to the magnitude of relational satisfaction one experiences. Therefore, by calculating the actual difference between the current and ideal conflict management styles one could predict the individual's level of relational satisfaction.

By examining this discrepancy a new construct is developed. This construct can be labeled conflict management satisfaction. Indeed, it is logical to conclude that if one is satisfied with her/his style of handling conflict, it is indicative that the style is effective. If the couple's conflict managing is successful, it is likely that the relationship will not be stressful, or dissatisfying. Hence, the evidence suggests a first hypothesis.

H1: As the discrepancy between real and ideal conflict management style increases, relational satisfaction will decrease.

Relational origin influences what people communicate about and how they communicate within a specific relationship. For example, a family's desires, expectations,

and goals affect an individual's actions and choices (Constantine, 1986). Constantine

(1986) developed a paradigmatic approach to understanding these family dynamics. It is

based on four paradigms which can be distinguished on the basis of their goal directed

behavior over time. Families differ in how they are oriented to the fundamental duality of

continuity and change over time (Constantine, 1986). Kantor and Lehr (1975) distinguished

the first three paradigms; open, closed, and random, and Constantine (1986) distinguished

the fourth, synchronous. These paradigms have guiding images which aid understanding

the paradigm. The guiding image of the closed system is stability, security, and belonging.

The random system is guided by novelty, creativity, and individuality. The open paradigm

is an image of adaptability, efficacy, and participation. Finally, the synchronous family is

guided by images of harmony, tranquillity, and mutual identification (Constantine, 1986).

The family paradigm may be conceived as a system comprised of four levels: (a)

three interrelated levels of analysis (image, structure, behavior), (b) a co-textual family field

consisting of eight elements (time, energy, space, material, control affect, meaning,

content), (c) four behavioral categories called player parts (mover, opposer, follower,

bystander), and (d) three types of subsystems (family-unit, interpersonal, personal) (Imig,

1994). Human beings can experience different paradigm types for each of the eight

elements. For example, people can be extremely closed within the element of time having a

structured work schedule. At the same time they may have an open affectual paradigm,

being very willing to discuss matters of affection and willing to negotiate behaviors within

this realm. This study will examine the relationship between the affect component and relational satisfaction.

Kantor and Lehr (1975) defined affect as the patterns family members engage in to acquire an affirmative sense of intimacy and nurturance. Constantine (1986) conceptualized intimacy as an attribute of warmth, closeness, or engagedness. Affect also includes how feelings are expressed and how they are received (Constantine,1986). Individuals have specialized ways to express affect depending on the paradigm with which they are associated with. For example, those who are open will express affect candidly. They will share feelings, and not feel constrained by rules or tradition. Those who are closed express affect based on tradition. Their expressions are limited, reserved, and regulated. Random persons express affect in a spontaneous, enthusiastic, and public fashion. Finally, those who express affect in a synchronous manner do so in a limited, and reserved fashion (Constantine, 1986). It is proposed that expression of affect is a precursor to relational satisfaction. One reason why this is hypothesized is the effect affect has on people. Behavioral therapists have been utilizing this knowledge for decades (e.g. Bartz, 1970). Research has indicated that attributes such as positive reinforcement and love has resulted in successful behavior (Bartz, 1970). Bernstein (1992) found that psychiatric patients are more willing to express themselves openly when given positive reinforcement, empathy, and unconditional acceptance. It is important in any intimate relationship to express concern and support for one another. For the satisfaction experienced in the relationship to

be significant the parties involved need to believe they are cared for, given affection, and nurtured.

Understanding the relational paradigm system provides a window into the intricacies of relationships. For one to say, however, that one specific paradigm will lead to greater relational satisfaction than another would be erroneous. In order for one to assess the effect of affect paradigm system on relational satisfaction it is necessary to examine discrepancies. Discrepancy in this context is defined as the extent to which individuals expresses affect in ways that they desire to express affect, or current affect style minus the ideal affect style. A large discrepancy between the way one expresses affect and the way one desires to express affect is indicative of low relational satisfaction. Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) argument applies here as well. If the ways in which one expresses affect (outcome) is more satisfactory than the alternative (CLALT), the standards (CL) or both that the individual has developed, then the relationship will be satisfactory. If a person's standards for expressing affect or the alternative (a different relationship, for example) is more favorable than the affect received, then it is more likely that satisfaction will be low. In fact, research has revealed that the larger this discrepancy, the more stress relational partners will experience (Constantine, 1986). For a relationship to continue satisfactorily under a great deal of stress, increased amounts of effort become necessary (Constantine, 1986; Imig, 1993). One study (Imig, 1993) examining the discrepancies couples experience in their relationship revealed that as discrepancies increased, so did stress. Families

indicating that they had low stress in the relationship also had very little discrepancy in their real and ideal images of the relationship (Imig, 1993). By calculating the amount of discrepancy between real and ideal conflict management styles a second new construct is developed, affect satisfaction. The amount that people are satisfied with their expressions of affect will determine the amount they are satisfied relationally. Hence, the evidence suggests a second hypothesis.

H2: As the individual's discrepancy between real and ideal expressions of affect increases, relational satisfaction will decrease.

As proposed previously, this thesis is aimed at understanding the relationships among conflict management, affect, relational satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction. Therefore, it is important to explicate the relationship between relational satisfaction and sexual satisfaction. Relational satisfaction is defined as the extent to which couples experience or perceive their relationship as rewarding. Sexual satisfaction is defined as the extent to which couples experience or perceive their sexual relations as rewarding. Relational satisfaction and sexual satisfaction are positively and highly correlated (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Denney & Quadagno, 1992). It is proposed here that relational satisfaction is an antecedent of sexual satisfaction. Research has indicated that, especially for females, in order for sexual intercourse to be satisfying there need to be emotional bonds between members of the dyad (Hurlbert, Apt, & Rabehl, 1993). Other research has revealed that people equate good sexual relations with feelings of love and

bondedness (Hurlbert, Apt, & Rabehl, 1993). It is not surprising that for individuals to

report very high sexual satisfaction they need to feel a certain amount of love and

bondedness. Thus, relational satisfaction is likely a precursor to sexual satisfaction.

Similarly, when couples experience stress or dissatisfaction in their relationship (as

indicated by high amounts of discrepancies) sexual satisfaction decreases. Invariably, when

stress is overwhelming, and the relationship suffers, so does sexual relations (Denney &

Quadagno, 1992). Hence, the evidence suggests a third hypothesis.

H3: As relational satisfaction increases, so will sexual satisfaction.

Given this knowledge about the proposed relationships among affect

discrepancies, conflict management discrepancies, relational satisfaction and sexual

satisfaction, the following model is proposed (see figure 1). Subsequent paragraphs will

describe the experiment designed to test the model.

Affect Satisfaction
Conflict Manage. Satisfaction → Relational Satisfaction ⟶ Sexual Satisfaction

Figure 1. The hypothesized path model.

Methods

Participants

Students (n=319) in communication courses at Michigan State University were recruited to participate in this study. Of the subjects recruited, 135 (41.9% of the sample) were male and 185 (57.1% of the sample) were female. The vast majority of this sample was unmarried (98%). The mean age was 20 years. Students in the communication undergraduate courses were offered extra course credit for participating in the study.

Instrumentation

Respondents were given a hypothetical conflict about a sexual issue, and asked to answer questions about how they would deal with it. The questions were those items forming the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory II (ROCI II) (see Appendix A) (Rahim, 1983); a 35-item measure of five styles of handling interpersonal conflict. The styles are the five outlined by Lewicki and Litterer (1985) previously discussed: collaboration, accommodation, competing, avoiding, and compromising (Rahim refers to these as integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising respectively). Internal consistency reliabilities were satisfactory, and are as follows: collaboration (alpha = .77), accommodation (alpha = .72), competing (alpha = .72), avoiding (alpha = .75), and compromising (alpha = .72). Participants were asked to indicate both their ideal and current styles of managing conflict. The absolute value of the difference between the real and ideal scores was calculated and used as an indicator of conflict management satisfaction.

Affect was measured using the Family Regime Assessment Scale (FRAS). The FRAS is a 40-item questionnaire (see Appendix B) that quantifies a person's perception of attributes describing family regime (closed, random, open, and synchronous), and family target dimensions (control, affect, meaning, and content). The four regime types are crossed with all eight dimensions to create a total of 32 different regime-dimension combinations. Individuals are asked to provide real and ideal responses regarding their perceptions about the importance of the regime-dimension combinations. Only the affect component was assessed in this experiment. The absolute value of the difference between the real and ideal scores was calculated and used as an indicator of affect satisfaction.

To measure relational satisfaction the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Locke & Wallace, 1959), a 15-item scale (alpha = .90) which asked participants to indicate their agreement on a seven point scale ranging from always agree to always disagree, was used (see Appendix C). Items on this scale reflected degrees of relational harmony such as demonstrating affection, discussing divorce, and philosophy of life. Locke and Wallace claim that by using the known groups technique they found that the well-adjusted groups scored significantly higher than the poorly adjusted groups. Only 17 percent of the poorly adjusted group had scores over 100, whereas the well-adjusted group had 96 percent scoring over 100. Hence, this scale is argued to be highly valid (Locke & Wallace, 1959).

To measure sexual satisfaction Hudson's (1981) sexual satisfaction inventory was employed. The reliability of this scale was tested in three different environments and the alphas ranged from .90 to .92. The test-retest reliability was found to be .93.

Procedures

The participants were asked to read and sign a consent form prior to taking part in the study. The consent form detailed the participant's complete confidentiality and anonymity in the study. They were given the last 15 minutes of a class period to complete the questionnaire; all participants found this amount of time ample.

Any participant who answered no to being in a sexual relationship was not used in this study. This number was not substantial. Further, any participant whose relationship was less than three months or who did not fill out a significant portion of the survey was not included in the data analysis. Again, this number was not substantial.

Results

A confirmatory factor analysis was performed on the conflict management scale. An eight item unidimensional solution was found in which both checks internal consistency and parallelism yielded small errors (see Appendix A). Paring down of the original scale yielded an adequately reliable scale (alpha=.77). The mean conflict score was 8.97 with a standard deviation of 5.9. Scores were distributed normally although slightly leptokurtic.

A confirmatory factor analysis was also performed on the affect scale. Internal consistency and parallelism checks on the four items produced small errors (see Appendix

B). This scale was found to be acceptably reliable (alpha=.68). The mean score on the affect scale was 3.17 with a standard deviation of 2.8. The scores on the affect scale were skewed positively and leptokurtic.

A confirmatory factor analysis performed on the relational satisfaction scale indicated that both internal consistency and parallelism errors were trivial Four items were retained (see Appendix C), although the reliability of this index was modest (alpha=.54). The mean score on relational satisfaction was 20.4 with a standard deviation of 3.7. The scores on the relational satisfaction scale were skewed negatively and leptokurtic.

Finally, a confirmatory factor analysis performed on the sexual satisfaction survey yielded trivial errors. Six items were retained (see Appendix D), and the resulting index was highly reliable (alpha=.88). The mean score on sexual satisfaction was 24.00 with a standard deviation of 5.00. The scores on the sexual satisfaction scale were skewed negatively and leptokurtic.

Hypotheses one, two, and three were consistent with these data. The original model hypothesized that affect satisfaction and conflict management satisfaction are direct antecedents to relational satisfaction which is an antecedent to sexual satisfaction (see Figure 1). The correlations between each variable (see Table 1) are presented below. This model failed. Although affect and relational satisfaction are correlated negatively, as predicted, affect does not fit in the path model. Specifically, its correlation with sexual

satisfaction is much stronger than would be predicted by this model. Uncorrected and corrected path coeffecients are presented in figures 2 and 3.

Table 1. Correlations between the variables in the path model. The upper triangle in this matrix includes the correlations corrected for attenuation due to error of measurement. The bottom triangle includes the uncorrected correlations.

	Affect	Conflict Management	Relational Satisfaction	Sexual Satisfaction
Affect	1.00	.50	-.57	-.47
Conflict	.36	1.00	-.53	-.29
Rel Sat	-.31	-.35	1.00	.58
Sex Sat	-.36	-.24	.41	1.00

Figure 2. Path model before correcting for attenuation due to error of measurement.

Affect Satisfaction (-.35)

(.58)

(.50)   Relational Satisfaction ————→ Sexual Satisfaction

Conflict Manage. Satisfaction (-.42)

Figure 3. Path model with corrected path coefficients.

Although the hypothesized model does not fit, a reduced model was tested. This model is a simple causal string in which conflict management is a direct cause of relational satisfaction which is a direct cause of sexual satisfaction. The data are consistent with the reduced model (see Figures 4 and 5).

Conflict Sat. ——————→ Relational Sat. ———→ Sexual Satisfaction
                -.35   .41

Figure 4. Reduced model with uncorrected path coefficients.

Conflict Sat. ——————→ Relational Sat. ———→ Sexual Satisfaction
            -.53   .58

Figure 5. Reduced model with corrected path coefficients.

To test the fit of this reduced model two operations were performed. First, the size of the path coeffecients was considered. The path coefficients as labeled in Figures 4 and 5 are substantial. Second, the difference between the predicted and the obtained correlations was considered. The chi-square for the uncorrected path coefficients was 1.36 (p>.05). The

error was -.10. Given the sample size, this error is not substantial. The chi-square for the

corrected correlations was .91 (p>.05) with a corrected error of -.07.

Discussion

This study was an examination of the relationships among discrepancies in conflict

management styles, affect, relational satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction. Although the

obtained correlations were in the directions hypothesized, the proposed model (see Figure

1) did not fit. When affect was deleted from the model the reduced model was consistent

with these data. There are several reasons for this outcome. First, affect is likely related to

relational satisfaction. When people feel that they are cared for and supported, they will

feel satisfied relationally, hence the substantial correlation (r'=-.57). On the other hand, the

data were not consistent with a model in which affect directly lead to relational satisfaction.

This relationship may be mediated by other variables not explored in this study. For

instance, research has revealed that the three leading reasons why people divorce are

money, religion, and sex. It is reasonable to assume that if persons feel support from others

they may be more open about conflict due to money matters, religion, or sex.

Limitations

Several limitations of this research must be acknowledged. First, limitations due to

the available population should be recognized. Ninety-seven percent of this sample was

unmarried with a mean age of 20 years. Given the nature of this study, it would have been ideal to have additional subjects who were older and married. In addition, the unit of analysis was the individual. Future research might profit from examining dyads. Research examining a sample of older married persons would be more generalizable to relational satisfaction. It can be erroneous to purport that young college students who have never married, divorced, had children, or dealt with marital conflict have truly experienced a serious relationship, and the satisfaction found therein. Furthermore, such research would profit from examining married people since they have to contend with variables such as money management, children, and in-laws which can hamper relational satisfaction. In addition, using dyads as the unit of analysis would prove gainful. In such an analysis one could examine discrepancies between the spouses' said satisfaction. Moreover, examinations of the differences among conflict management styles between spouses could be performed. For example, if a couple scores low on relational satisfaction it could be due to one spouse avoiding conflict while the other attempts to compete. Finally, using dyadic analysis one could examine the differences between reported ideal conflict management styles and relational satisfaction.

A second limitation to this study was the low amount of variance in affect, relational satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction. It would be advantageous to attain a sample with greater variance in affect, relational satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction. Likely, this goal could be attained by studying a more heterogeneous sample.

Implications of the Study

  The results of this research have several implications. First, much conflict management research has concentrated on recommending specific conflict management strategies for individuals (Fisher & Ury, 1981). Although recommendations certainly have merit, it may also be profitable to examine individuals' satisfaction with their current conflict management style. Furthermore, the factor analyses performed on these data gave no indication of five distinct conflict management styles, rather the scale was unidimensional. This may have occurred for a few reasons. First, there may have been problems with the scale. Rahim (1983) designed his conflict management scale with organizations in mind. The ROCI II was not designed for utilization within an interpersonal domain. It is feasible that this change in context caused problems. Second, it could also be the case that the five independent styles of managing conflict do not exist. This is also feasible since it is recognized that people change their styles of managing conflict constantly, depending on the context. For example, one could be accommodating on issues of finances and competitive on issues of religion. Finally, conflict management styles were not tapped into by the questionnaire administered. Although the questions on the instrument were taken directly from the ROCI II, the participants were asked to reply to each question with both their ideal and current conflict management styles. As mentioned previously this created a new construct, conflict management satisfaction, which is unidimensional.

A second implication of this study is that although discrepancies in expressions of affect did not fit the causal model, it is reasonable to conclude that affect plays a large role in relational satisfaction because the correlation between affect and relational satisfaction was substantial (r'=-.57). This result suggests that the relationship between affect and relational satisfaction is mediated by other variables. One potential mediating variable is self disclosure. When people are given positive forms of affect they are more likely to disclose personal information about themselves (Bartz, 1970; Bernstein, 1992), because this reinforcement increases feelings of not being judged. Research has indicated a positive linear relationship between levels of self disclosure and relational satisfaction (Jorgenson & Gandy, 1980; Shapiro & Swenson, 1969; Tolstedt & Stokes, 1983). It is likely that positive affect leads one to feel comfortable about self disclosing, which in turn leads to greater marital satisfaction. A second potential variable mediating the relationship between affect and relational satisfaction is reciprocation of affect. That is, when one partner gives positive affect, this may cause the other partner to give positive affect as well. This positive cycle could generate increased levels of relational satisfaction.

Directions for Future Research

This thesis provides many ideas for future research. First, these data presented were consistent with the hypothesis that discrepancies in their conflict management style predicts relational satisfaction. It might also be profitable to examine with which conflict management styles the majority was dissatisfied. Likewise, examinations of which conflict

management styles most persons found ideal should be conducted. Results from such a study would be interesting and helpful for family and marital counseling sessions. For example, if the research determined that the majority of persons were dissatisfied with the avoiding style of managing conflict, and wished to move to a collaborative method, counselors could utilize this information to guide subsequent therapy sessions.

A second study that could develop out of this study is the examination of other communication variables as predictors of relational and sexual satisfaction. This study showed that the extent to which satisfaction with one's conflict management style predicts relational satisfaction is ample. Perhaps communication satisfaction is indicative of relational satisfaction. Previous research has indicated that self disclosure is positively correlated with relational satisfaction. One might find larger effect sizes if communication satisfaction is analyzed. As this study indicated with conflict management, communication satisfaction discrepancy might cause relational satisfaction. That is, the amount that one discloses might not be as strong an antecedent to relational satisfaction as disclosing one's desired amount. In this regard it would be interesting to determine the extent to which the discrepancy between real and ideal communication affects satisfaction.

Third, one's satisfaction with expressions of affect is correlated with relational satisfaction. Other research should attempt to uncover variables mediating this proposed relationship as discussed previously.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Items of the Conflict Management Scale

At times, couples may have incompatibilities, disagreements, differences or conflict about his/her sexual relationship with his/her partner. Rank each of the following statements, as if the following hypothetical argument is one you have had with your current (or past) partner by circling a number on the scale provided after each statement. For the purposes of this survey, consider how you would handle the following situation with your partner: *For you to enjoy sexual activity, it's important that you are intimate 3 or 4 times a week at varying times and places (spontaneously). Your partner wants to engage in sexual activity once a week, always at the same time and place. Frustrated with this situation, think about how you would handle such a dilemma.*

	F1	F2	F3	F4
* 1. Generally, I would try to satisfy the needs of my partner.	.28	.48	-.14	.33

2. I would attempt to avoid being "put on the spot" and try to keep conflict with my partner to myself.

3. I would try to work with my partner to find solutions to the problem that would satisfy our expectations.

4. I usually avoid open discussions of my differences with my partner.

5. I would try to find a middle course to resolve an impasse.

6. I would use my influence to get my ideas accepted.

7. I would use my authority to make decisions in my favor.

	F1	F2	F3	F4

8. I usually accommodate the wishes of my partner.

* 9. I would give in to the wished of my partner.   -.09 .38 -.11 .24

10. I would exchange accurate information with my partner

   so that we could solve the problem together.

* 11. If we reached a deadlock, I would propose a middle ground.   -.40 .55 -.21 .39

* 12. I would negotiate with my partner so that a compromise   -.31 .46 -.27 .24

   could be reached.

* 13. I would try to stay away from disagreement with my partner.   -.22 .62 -.12 .20

* 14. I would use my expertise to make a decision in my favor.   -.35 .65 -.25 .31

* 15. I would "give and take" so that a compromise could be made.   -.43 .72 -.10 .23

16. I would try to bring all our concerns out in the open so that

   the issues could be resolved in the best possible ways.

* 17. I would try to satisfy the expectations of my partner.   -.27 .46 -.08 .28

18. I would use my power to win in that competitive situation.

19. I would try to keep my disagreement with my partner to

   myself in order to avoid hard feelings.

20. I would try to work with my partner for a proper understanding

of a problem.

* Indicates items used in the final analysis. Factor loadings (F) of these items are provided.

Appendix B: Items of the Affect scale

In what manner do you and your mate express caring and support for each other?

	F1	F2	F3	F4
* 1. Expressive, responsive and given willingly.	-.30	.31	-.25	.60
* 2. Private, formal, and regulated.	-.37	.27	-.27	.59
* 3. Spontaneous, public and enthusiastic.	-.32	.20	-.33	.60
* 4. Limited, reserved and rarely expressed because we know how deeply we care for each other.	-.29	.42	-.26	.57

* Indicates items used in the final analysis. Factor loadings (F) for these items are provided.

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Appendix C: Items of the Relational Satisfaction survey

Most persons have disagreements in their relationships. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list.

	F1	F2	F3	F4
1. Matters of recreation.				
2. Demonstrations of affection.				
* 3. Friends.	.41	-.21	.29	-.18
* 4. Goals that are believed to be important.	.46	-.29	.20	-.14
5. Making major decisions.				
* 6. Interests.	.65	-.27	.34	-.34

_____

For the following questions, use this scale

7=All of the time 4=More often than not 1=Never

7. How often do you discuss or have you considered

   divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship.

8. In general, how often do you think that things between

   you and your partner are going well?

9. Do you ever regret that you are in this relationship?

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Appendix C: Items of the Relational Satisfaction survey

Most persons have disagreements in their relationships. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list.

	F1	F2	F3	F4
1. Matters of recreation.				
2. Demonstrations of affection.				
* 3. Friends.	.41	-.21	.29	-.18
* 4. Goals that are believed to be important.	.46	-.29	.20	-.14
5. Making major decisions.				
* 6. Interests.	.65	-.27	.34	-.34

_____

For the following questions, use this scale

7=All of the time 4=More often than not 1=Never

7. How often do you discuss or have you considered

   divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship.

8. In general, how often do you think that things between

   you and your partner are going well?

9. Do you ever regret that you are in this relationship?

	F1	F2	F3	F4
* 10. How often do you and your mate "get on each other's nerves?"	.38	-.27	.29	-.34

* Indicates items used in the final analysis. Factor loadings (F) for these items are provided.

Appendix D: Items of the Sexual Satisfaction survey

	F1	F2	F3	F4
* 1. My sex life with my partner is very exciting.	.45	-.25	.87	-.37
* 2. Sex is fun for my partner and me.	.50	-.23	.85	-.44
3. I feel that my partner sees little in me except for the sex I can give.				
4. My sex life is monotonous.				
* 5. I feel that my sex life is lacking in quality.	.45	-.29	.56	-.33
* 6. My partner is very exciting sexually.	.42	-.21	.82	-.31
* 7. I feel that our sex life adds a lot to our relationship.	.33	-.10	.64	-.22
* 8. My partner is very sensitive to my sexual needs and desires.	.47	-.25	.67	-.39

* Indicates the items used in the final analysis. Factor loadings (F) for these items are provided.

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