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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Samantha C. Litzinger entitled "Exploring relationships among communication, sexual satisfaction, and marital satisfaction." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Psychology.

Kristina Coop Gordon, Major Professor

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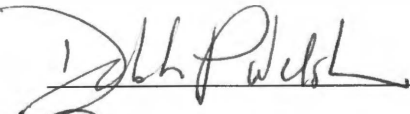
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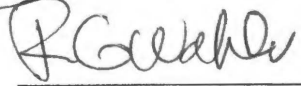
I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Samantha Litzinger entitled "Exploring Relationships among Communication, Sexual Satisfaction, and Marital Satisfaction." I have examined the final paper copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Psychology.



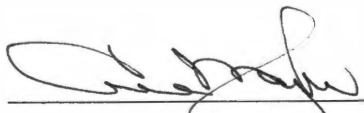
Kristina Coop Gordon, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and
recommend its acceptance:





Acceptance for the Council:



Vice Provost and Dean of
Graduate Studies

Thesis
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EXPLORING RELATIONSHIPS AMONG COMMUNICATION, SEXUAL
SATISFACTION, AND MARITAL SATISFACTION

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Samantha C. Litzinger

August 2003

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my loving parents
who have given me constant encouragement and unselfishly
fostered within me the drive, determination, and gumption to pursue
my dreams and achieve my goals.

They made me believe that I could do anything I set out to do—
and for this I am forever grateful.

This thesis is also dedicated to Ben, whose love, support, and patience
have enabled me to thrive in graduate school.

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In addition, I would like to recognize Farrah Hughes, Nate Tomcik, and Sharon Risch for their support and assistance with this project. Further, I would like to thank my family and close friends for their never-ending support and encouragement. My family has believed in me unconditionally and encouraged me to pursue anything I set my mind to complete. My friends have listened to my frustrations and congratulated me upon my successes. I am extremely grateful to them for standing by me throughout this process.

ABSTRACT

This study examined relationships among couple communication and sexual satisfaction in predicting marital satisfaction. The sample consisted of 387 married couples living in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Regression analyses demonstrated that communication and sexual satisfaction independently predict marital satisfaction and that there is a significant interaction among communication and sexual satisfaction in predicting marital satisfaction. Exploration of this interaction revealed that if couples are successful at communicating constructively, sexual satisfaction fails to contribute to marital satisfaction. However, if couples have difficulty communicating, if they are also satisfied in their sexual relationship, they will evidence greater marital satisfaction. Thus, sexual satisfaction may act as a buffer for poor communication in impacting marital satisfaction. Clinical implications and future directions for research are outlined.

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CHAPTER I

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is a startling yet now widely known fact that between one half and two thirds of marriages end in divorce (Martin & Bumpass, 1989; National Center for Health Statistics, 1995). With such a high rate of divorce, it is not surprising that many social scientists have vigorously pursued an answer to various forms of the question, "What makes marriage last?" Research has indicated that marital distress and destructive marital conflict are major risk factors for many kinds of dysfunction and psychopathology (Coie, Watt, West, Hawkins, Asarnow, Markman et al., 1993), whereas components of marital success have been linked to greater health and longevity (Lillard & Panis, 1996; Murray, 2000). Thus, it is important for researchers to examine and clarify major components relevant to both the dissolution and success of marital relationships.

Much of the considerable research targeted at answering this question has identified effective communication as a central component to marital satisfaction (e.g., Carrère & Gottman, 1999; Christensen and Shenk, 1991; Gottman & Levenson, 1988, 1998; Noller, 1988; Rogge & Bradbury, 1999; Spanier & Lewis, 1980). However, whereas communication may be extremely important to a couple's marital satisfaction, interdisciplinary research has suggested that satisfaction with the sexual relationship also plays a vital role in creating and maintaining a happy marriage (Apt, Hurlbert, Pierce, & White, 1996; Christopher & Sprecher, 2000; Donnelly, 1994;

Fields, 1983; Morokoff & Gilliland, 1993; Young, Denny, Luquis, & Young, 1998; Young, Denny, Young, Luquis, 2000). Consequently, the purpose of this study is to examine how communication and sexual satisfaction may interact to affect the quality of a marital relationship.

Marital Satisfaction and Communication

Researchers have demonstrated in both cross sectional and longitudinal observational studies that couples' communication, when explored systematically, is consistently and significantly related to couples' satisfaction (Carrère & Gottman, 1999; Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Markman, 1979, 1981; Rogge & Bradbury, 1999). Specifically, researchers have suggested that unhappy couples suffer from a skills deficit that inhibits their ability to communicate effectively, and thus contributes to marital dissatisfaction. Results demonstrate that couples lacking the necessary skills to regulate their emotional expressiveness and successfully communicate tend to become defensive or withdraw from a conflict situation, and these behaviors in turn predict later marital dissatisfaction and perhaps dissolution.

In particular, Christensen and colleagues (1990, 1991) have examined couples' patterns of interaction using a self-report measure rather than more traditional observational measures. One extensively explored interaction pattern is the demand-withdrawal pattern in which one spouse exerts pressure, makes demands of his/her partner by criticizing or complaining, while the other partner withdraws, through passive inaction or defensiveness. Christensen and Sullaway (1984) created a

now well-validated self-report measure, the Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ), to explore couples' self-perpetuating interaction patterns such as the aforementioned demand-withdrawal pattern (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Christensen & Shenk, 1991). Using the CPQ, Christensen and Shenk found that distressed couples had less mutual constructive communication, more demand-withdrawal communication, more avoidance of communication, and more conflict or psychological distance than non-distressed couples.

It has been demonstrated that communication behaviors and interaction patterns are clearly related to marital satisfaction; however, an examination of the literature indicates that communication skill in and of itself is likely not the sole determinant to marital happiness. Several studies offer indications that other aspects of individuals and their marriages may serve to modify the effect of communication on marital happiness. Noller (1980, 1981) and Vincent, Weiss, and Birchler (1975) found that spouses were better at problem solving when they interacted with strangers than they were when they interacted with their partners. These results suggest that there may be something in addition to a skills deficit that might impede a couple's effective problem solving and impact their marital satisfaction. Additionally, Gordon, Baucom, Epstein, Burnett, and Rankin (1999) demonstrated that relationship-focused *standards* about marriage can influence or moderate the association between communication and marital distress. Therefore, a strong relationship between communication and marital satisfaction clearly exists, but it is more complex than researchers may have previously thought. It seems clear that communication is not

the sole determinant of marital bliss and that the relationship among communication and marital adjustment might be affected by other factors within the marital context.

Marital researchers have focused too narrowly, in research as well as practice, on communication and communication skills training, and have virtually neglected other factors relevant to the success of marital relationships. Relationship components that contribute to a happy marriage, such as satisfaction with the sexual relationship, have until recently been largely ignored in the marital literature. Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, and Michaels (1994) conducted a large survey study, entitled “Sex in America” and found that sexual (well-being) satisfaction and overall well-being were inextricably linked. However, Laumann et. al., (1994) also suggested that studies linking sexual problems (or strengths) with marital patterns and to other stresses experienced by individuals has thus far been neglected and should soon be initiated (p.373). Similarly, Christopher and Sprecher (2000) noted that although we may know more about marital sexuality than we have in the past, “we still have only a limited view of how sexuality is integrated into the normal flow of married life and how it influences and is influenced by other marital phenomena” (pg. 1013).

Marital Sexuality and Marital Satisfaction

The investigation of the role of the sexual relationship in married couples has indeed been largely been neglected in the literature. Apt, Hurlburt, and Clark (1994) surveyed diplomates of the American Board of Sexology on neglected subjects in sex research, and found that marital sexuality was ranked as the most neglected subject in the literature. The lack of research investigating sexuality within marriage is in and of

itself a compelling reason to explore this topic. Moreover, the high rate of sexual dysfunction in marriages provides an additional rationale for studying the sexual relationship of married couples. Researchers have demonstrated extremely high rates of sexual dysfunction among couples, as high as 50% (Masters & Johnson, 1970), and clinicians have noted the impact of this dysfunction upon couples' marital well-being (e.g., McCarthy, 1997). McCarthy noted a clinical adage that "when sexuality is dysfunctional or nonexistent, it plays an inordinately powerful role, from 50-70%, draining the marriage of intimacy and good feelings." Further, as Lauman, Paik, & Rosen (1999) note, "with the strong association between sexual dysfunction and impaired quality of life, this problem warrants recognition as a significant health concern (p.544)." Clearly, there is a need for research on the sexual functioning and relationship among married couples.

Some researchers have pursued such exploration in recent years, demonstrating that satisfaction with sexual aspects of the relationship indeed plays a significant role in the relationship satisfaction of married couples (Apt et al., 1996; Christopher & Sprecher, 2000; Fields, 1983; Young et al., 1998). Specifically, researchers have found that couples rated sexual satisfaction as one of the most important contributors to marital happiness and functioning (Fields, 1983; Henderson-King & Veroff, 1994; Kumar, 1986; Trudel, 2002). In addition, Morokoff and Gilliland (1993) found sexual satisfaction, perception of spouse's sexual satisfaction, and frequency of sexual intercourse to be positively associated with marital satisfaction. Similarly, whereas much of the research conducted has addressed the contribution of sexual satisfaction to the marital relationship, other researchers

have investigated the converse, exploring the contribution of relationship satisfaction components to couples' sexual satisfaction. Researchers have demonstrated that among factors most highly related to sexual satisfaction, marital satisfaction is among the most important contributors (Perlman & Abramson, 1982, Young et al., 1998, 2000). In addition, Donnelly (1994) demonstrated that the lower the marital satisfaction the greater the probability of sexual inactivity and separation, demonstrating a strong link between marital and sexual satisfaction.

Thus, it is clear from this research that sexual satisfaction and overall marital satisfaction are indeed related. However, regardless of whether marital satisfaction predicts sexual satisfaction, vice versa, or whether each reciprocally impact one another, the simple fact that the two are related tells us very little about *how* the two might be related and fails to provide us with information about the nature of that relationship.

Sexual Satisfaction and Marital Communication

Whereas marital researchers have performed nearly exhaustive research into understanding the role that communication plays in marital distress and marital satisfaction, they have not adequately explored communication in combination with other marital factors, such as sexual satisfaction. However, recently some researchers have indeed begun to investigate relationships between sexual satisfaction and communication. Many of these researchers have examined communication related to sexual matters in the relationship, termed "sexual communication." Purnine and Carey (1997) found evidence that sexual satisfaction is related to sexual

communication. Specifically, they found that couples are sexually satisfied when they agree about sexual matters and when men understand women's sexual preferences, suggesting that when couples can communicate successfully about sexuality, there may be an added benefit to the sexual satisfaction of couples.

Other researchers have conducted research within more clinical populations, investigating the link between communication behaviors and sexual dysfunction. Zimmer (1983) found that clients with sexual dysfunction exhibited poorer communication behaviors, suggesting that these two may be intertwined in some way. Similar research suggests that sexual communication, sexual satisfaction, and marital communication all improve after a treatment program for sexual dysfunction (Chesney, Blackeney, Chan, & Cole, 1981). These results suggest, again, a link between communication--particularly sexual communication--and sexual satisfaction and they demonstrate that altering one relationship component, such as sexual satisfaction, initiates change in other areas, such as in sexual communication.

Whereas sexual satisfaction and *sexual* communication have been examined, few researchers have examined the relationship between sexual satisfaction and more general kinds of marital communication. Because marital communication and sexual satisfaction both have considerable associations with marital satisfaction, it is extremely important to examine these two aspects of the marital relationship in combination. In his longitudinal studies of the Premarital Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), Markman (1993) found that sexual satisfaction improved as a result of PREP, a primarily communication skills based program that includes minimal discussion of the couple's sexual relationship. This result suggests that when couples

learn to communicate better, their sex lives improve, which further demonstrates a link between the two. Sexual satisfaction and general marital communication are indeed related, and it would be beneficial for researchers, clinicians, and married couples to better understand this relationship.

It is important that researchers develop an understanding of the relationships between communication and sexual satisfaction and their associations to marital satisfaction because these relationships are likely to be complex, and further, because communication and sexual satisfaction are major contributing factors to the success or dissolution of marital relationships. Although the association between communication and marital satisfaction is usually extremely high, as previously described, Gordon et al., (1999) demonstrated that this association might be attenuated when examined in concert with individuals' satisfaction with specific relationship standards. In their study, women's relationship focused standards significantly affected the relationship between communication and marital satisfaction, such that the association between marital satisfaction and communication was much higher when women held highly relationship focused standards for their relationship (e.g., partners should share everything together; partners should decide all decisions mutually; partners should invest a great deal of time and energy into their relationship) than for women who did not hold relationship focused standards. Thus, these studies show that the importance of communication varies according to the context of the relationship and consequently, it may be important to explore other factors with which communication may interact to predict marital satisfaction.

The Present Study

The present study is interested in exploring how sexual satisfaction and communication might interact to impact marital satisfaction. Specifically, it is hypothesized that weakness in one area, such as communication, could be compensated for by strengths in another area, such as sexual satisfaction. The author's clinical observations suggest that sex might be the "glue" that holds the pieces of the relationship together. More specifically, it might be that sexual satisfaction acts as a buffer for poor marital communication, such that if a couple has a satisfied sexual relationship, poor communication patterns have less of an impact upon their marital satisfaction. Clearly, the converse might also be true as well. Couples who have strengths in communicating may be able to compensate for the weaknesses in their sexual relationship, and consequently be satisfied as a couple, despite the weakness.

Therefore, it is hypothesized that sexual satisfaction and couple communication will be predictive of marital satisfaction. In addition, it is predicted that the two will interact to predict dyadic satisfaction. In other words, it is predicted that for those who are high in effective communication, the relationship between sexual and marital satisfaction will be weak. Further, it is also expected that for those couple members who are low in effective communication, sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction will be much more strongly related, such that individuals who are more satisfied sexually will also be more satisfied maritally. Thus, it is hypothesized that sexual satisfaction may act as a buffer for poor communication in couples, resulting in greater marital satisfaction.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 387 community couples investigated as part of a large study conducted at the University of North Carolina (e.g., Baucom, Epstein, Rankin, & Burnett, 1996; Gordon et al., 1999). The sample was procured through the use of a commercial mailing list. Couples were randomly chosen from the list to form a stratified sample of married couples based on age, education, and race to match the national census data. The average age for female participants was 42.2 years, and for males it was 44.2 years. Female participants had an average of 15.1 years of education; the males had an average of 15.7 years of education. The sample was 89% white, and 11% African American. The couples had been married an average of 1.2 times, and the mean length of the current marriage was 17.5 years. The couples also reported an average of 2.0 children.

Materials

Inventory of Specific Relationship Standards (ISRS; Baucom et al., 1996).

The ISRS is a 60-item self report measure that assesses standards about marriage, for example, how a person thinks the marriage *should* work, across twelve content areas (e.g. leisure, finances, sex) on three different dimensions: Boundaries, Control, and

Investment. The questionnaire is organized in the following way: respondents are given questions containing three parts--part one asks respondents how often they believe they and their partner should act towards one another in certain ways (never to always); part two asks whether respondents are satisfied that this standard is being met in their relationship (yes/no); and part three asks respondents how upsetting it is to them when this standard is not met (not at all upsetting to very upsetting).

Validation studies have shown that the five original relationship focused standards are highly predictive of marital adjustment ($R=.71$, $p<.001$) as measured by the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Baucom et al., 1996, Spanier, 1976).

The current study focused on part two of each question, concentrating on items regarding the extent to which respondents felt that their standards for their sexual relationship were being met. We operationalized sexual satisfaction as the degree to which respondents endorsed that certain sexual relationship standards were being met in their relationship. Respondents were asked to respond "yes" or "no" to the question, "Are you satisfied with the way this standard is being met in your relationship?" Respondents answered this "yes" or "no" question for five questions regarding various sexual relationship standards. Sample items included: (part 1): Both of us should get the same enjoyment out of having sex. (part 2): Are you satisfied with the way this standard is being met? Yes/No. By summing the items that compose the sexual satisfaction subscale, we were able to investigate how satisfied respondents were that their standards for their sexual relationship were being met. The ISRS sexual satisfaction subset achieved good internal consistency with Cronbach alphas of .80 for both men and women.

Communications Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ; Christensen & Sullaway, 1984). This self-report questionnaire assesses patterns of communication that couples demonstrate when discussing a relationship problem. Spouses rate themselves on a nine-point likert scale on items that fall into three subscales: Mutual Constructive Communication, Mutual Avoidance/Withdrawal, and Demand/Withdraw. An example item includes: “Both members suggest possible solutions and compromises” (Mutual Constructive Communication). Cronbach alphas for this measure have been demonstrated to be acceptable, ranging from .62-.82, with a mean of .71 (Christensen & Shenk, 1991). In the current study, the most recent version of the Mutual Constructive Communication subscale was utilized (see Heavey, Larson, Christensen, & Zumtobel, 1996, for full description). The new version is a bipolar scale in which high scores indicate adaptive, constructive communication behaviors and low scores indicate more maladaptive or destructive communication behaviors.

Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976). The DAS is a 32-item, widely used and well-validated measure of marital adjustment. Higher scores indicate better marital functioning. The DAS yields five scores which include the following four subscales: Affectional Expression, Cohesion, Consensus, and Satisfaction, and 1 Total score for all items. Spanier reported adequate reliability with alphas ranging from .73 for Affectional Expression to .96 for the Total score. A recent reanalysis of the DAS provided additional reliability information, demonstrating coefficient alphas ranging from .70 for the Affectional Expression subscale to .95 for the Total score. (Carey, Spector, Langtina, & Krauss, 1993). For the present study, the Satisfaction

subscale was used, and coefficient alpha for the Satisfaction subscale was reported at .87 (Carey et al., 1993).

Procedures

Letters were sent to the couples explaining the purpose of the study and offering them \$50 for participating. Follow up phone calls were initiated to answer any questions and to assess couples' interest in participating. Those who agreed to participate were mailed questionnaires and instructed to fill them out separately and not to discuss their answers. There were two separate packets, one for each spouse, containing the above measures among additional measures included for the larger study. If the questionnaires were not completed within the time allotted, follow up phone calls were made to the couples. After returning the packets, couples were compensated for their participation. Of the couples initially contacted, 52% agreed to participate and completed the packets. The final sample was 387 couples.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Means and standard deviations for husbands and wives are presented in Table A-1. As can be seen in Table A-2, the correlations provide support for the associations among communication, sexual satisfaction, and marital satisfaction. Analyses were run separately for husbands and wives in the present study. For this study, the participant's scores on the five "satisfaction with standards" questions from the sexual content area were first summed, and the distribution of responding was observed descriptively. The distribution was skewed in the direction of healthier sexual satisfaction, probably because of the relatively healthy normative sample acquired. Thus, scores were dichotomized into two groups: completely sexually satisfied and not completely sexually satisfied. In addition, the constructive communication scores were centered to reduce multicollinearity among predictor variables in the regression equation (Aiken & West, 1991). Then, three regression equations were performed to assess the relative importance of constructive communication in predicting marital satisfaction, sexual satisfaction in predicting marital satisfaction, and the interaction among constructive communication and sexual satisfaction in predicting dyadic satisfaction.

Data analyses indicate support for our hypotheses. For husbands and wives, sexual satisfaction and constructive communication patterns were both strongly predictive of marital satisfaction. Furthermore, as predicted, the interaction between

sexual satisfaction and couple communication was significant for husbands and wives indicating that sexual satisfaction may indeed mitigate the effects of destructive communication on marital satisfaction, and vice versa husbands ($R^2=.44$, $F(3,370)=94.80$, $p<.0001$) and wives ($R^2=.54$, $F(3,373)=137.35$, $p<.0001$). See Tables A-3 and A-4.

To further explore these results, we decomposed the interaction and investigated the simple slopes of sexual satisfaction on marital satisfaction at high and low levels of communication. (See Aiken & West, 1991, for a description of this procedure.) At high levels of constructive communication, the effect of sexual satisfaction on marital satisfaction was not significant for either husbands or wives. However, at low levels of constructive communication, there was a significant effect of sexual satisfaction upon marital satisfaction for both husbands ($B=-3.64$, $t(370)=-5.80$, $p<.0001$) and wives: ($B=-3.70$, $t(373)=-6.50$, $p<.0001$), such that for couple members who did not demonstrate highly constructive communication patterns, sexual satisfaction may have buffered the effects that poor communication may have had upon their marital satisfaction.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

The aim of the current study was to investigate the relationships between sexual satisfaction and communication in predicting marital satisfaction. We hypothesized that sexual satisfaction would act as a buffer for poor communication in marital relationships, resulting in adequate marital satisfaction. Overall, our results demonstrate that sexual satisfaction and communication are both independently related to marital satisfaction. In addition, there is a significant relationship between sexual satisfaction and communication in determining marital satisfaction, such that sexual satisfaction appears to buffer the effects of poor communication on marital satisfaction. Specifically, our results suggest that when couple members are good at communicating, sexual satisfaction fails to contribute significantly to marital satisfaction. However, when couple members have difficulties communicating, if they are sexually satisfied, they will have greater marital satisfaction than those individuals who are not sexually satisfied. Whereas these results provide further support for research suggesting the importance of communication to a happy marriage, the present study data also suggests that communication is not the only important contributing factor to marital satisfaction. Moreover, these results demonstrate that sexual satisfaction may be able to compensate for some of the negative effects that poor communication may have on relationship satisfaction.

While these results are very preliminary, they may be seen as optimistic for couples. If couples have strong communication skills, it may be that their sex life is less essential to their marital satisfaction than in relationships in which couples are less adept at communicating. These results may also provide initial support to suggest that couple members experiencing sexual dysfunction might still be relatively satisfied in their marriage despite the lack of sexual satisfaction, if they are able to communicate constructively. These results clearly maintain the importance of adaptive communication to a relationship, regardless of satisfaction level with the sexual relationship.

However, there may also be a dark side to this type of counterbalancing. Couples who have difficulty in their sexual lives but who are able to communicate adaptively may feel satisfied with their overall marital relationship. If they are satisfied in their marriage, they may not be likely to explore the difficult task of making improvements in their sexual relationship, possibly resulting in a sexually inactive marriage. On the other hand, for more sexually adept couples, these results suggest that communication might take a back seat to more steamy relations. Further, feeling satisfied with the sexual relationship might aid couple members in staying in relationships that are not adaptive for them; in other words, their level of high sexual satisfaction may contribute to couple members' persistence in a relationship that may not be healthy for them. Thus, it is important to consider some of the negative implications that may stem from relationships among sexual satisfaction and communication and their potential to mitigate the effects of one another in affecting dyadic satisfaction.

Limitations and Future Directions

The present study suffers from several limitations. A major limitation of the study is that the data collected are entirely self-report survey data. In addition, the data are purely correlational and cross-sectional and thus we cannot infer direction or causation from the results. Further, the data was collected from a relatively healthy middle class sample, limiting the generalizability of the findings to populations with characteristics different from our sample.

Future research could improve upon the limitations and address some of the clinical implications described above. More in depth, longitudinal analysis of the relationships among communication, sexual satisfaction, and marital satisfaction should be initiated. In addition, it would be particularly useful for research to be conducted in less healthy populations so that a broader perspective could be gained with regards to the nature of the sexual relationship in marital relationships. In addition, investigating relationships that evolve in lower socioeconomic conditions or within multicultural, or urban settings would also be of interest. These explorations could be initiated as part of a larger, much needed research initiative directed toward understanding the role that sex and the sexual relationship play in the marital dyad.

Further, utilization of multiple methods including physiological measures, observational measures, and more qualitative measures such as diary data also would add significantly to the depth and texture of our understanding about how sexual satisfaction affects marital satisfaction. In addition, it would be important in the future to be able to distinguish sexual sequelae from nonsexual physical affection in order to determine the relative importance of each to marital satisfaction. It might also be of

merit to investigate a more global “physical intimacy” variable to determine whether or not distinguishing sexual relationship factors from non-sexual physical intimacy provides us with new information relevant to a more complete understanding of the marital relationship.

Despite these limitations, the present study has important clinical implications. This study reiterates the importance of communication to marital satisfaction, but also demonstrates that communication is not the only important factor essential to couples satisfaction. Aspects of the sexual relationship also are integral to the satisfaction and success of marital relationships, an obvious, yet infrequently explored relationship. Although it is clear that the sexual relationship is central to marital satisfaction, often marital therapists neglect sexual aspects in treatment in favor of pursuing other avenues. Further, sex therapy and marital therapy have thus far been largely separate endeavors with little overlap among them. According to Sager (1986), “although sex and marital therapists deal with essentially the same population, many have avoided moving into the others’ presumed area of competence.” Further he notes that, “Many sex therapists still remain focused on treating the sexual dysfunction, even though they recognize on some level of consciousness that sex is but a part of a particular couple’s relationship. Similarly, significant numbers of marital therapists, if they take a sex history at all, do so in a perfunctory fashion” (Sager, pg. ix). Results of the present study indicate a need to investigate couples’ communication and sexual satisfaction in an integrated way. It is important that we consider each as important in their own right in contributing to

marital satisfaction, but that we also see them as interrelated parts of the larger relationship whole.

Clearly, more research is warranted to understand more fully the relationship among communication, sexual satisfaction, and marital satisfaction. We know that these variables are indeed related and it seems that when there are deficits in one area, areas of strength can potentially compensate for those weaker areas. Results of the present study demonstrate that when couples are communicating well, the sexual relationship may have less of an impact upon marital satisfaction than in couples that have difficulty communicating. A more integrated comprehensive study of the roles sexual satisfaction, satisfaction with non-sexual affection, and couple communication play within the marital relationship is warranted.

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APPENDICES

Table A-1

Means and Standard Deviations for Husbands and Wives

	Husbands		Wives	
	M	SD	M	SD
Sexual Satisfaction:	6.00	(1.47)	5.80	(1.35)
Communication:	7.08	(10.30)	7.95	(10.10)
Marital Satisfaction:	38.63	(5.68)	38.58	(5.60)

Note: Sexual Satisfaction = Sexual standards subscale of the ISRS; Communication = Constructive communication subscale of CPQ; Marital Satisfaction = Dyadic Satisfaction subscale of the DAS.

Table A-2
Correlation Matrix for Husbands and Wives

	Communication	Sexual Satisfaction	Marital Satisfaction
Communication	--	-.35**	.69**
Sexual Satisfaction	-.27**	--	-.49**
Marital Satisfaction	.62**	-.50**	--

Note: Values for wives are printed above the diagonal; values for husbands are below. ** $p < .01$. Two tailed. Sexual Satisfaction = Sexual standards subscale of the ISRS; Communication = Constructive communication subscale of CPQ; Marital Satisfaction = Dyadic Satisfaction of the DAS.

Table A-3

Summary Regression Analyses Investigating Interactions Between Sexual Satisfaction and Couple Communication for Husbands

	B	SE	β
Sexual Satisfaction	-2.34	.47	-.20***
Constructive Communication	.26	.03	.48***
Sexual Satisfaction * Communication	.13	.05	.15***

Husbands: $R^2 = .435$, $F(3, 370) = 94.79$, $p < .0001$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .005$

Table A-4

Summary Regression Analyses Investigating Interactions Between Sexual Satisfaction and Couple Communication for Wives

	B	SE	β
Sexual Satisfaction	-2.28	.43	-.19***
Constructive Communication	.29	.03	.52***
Sexual Satisfaction * Communication	.14	.04	.17***

Wives: $R^2 = .525$, $F(3, 373) = 137.35$, ($p < .0001$). * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .005$

VITA

Samantha C. Litzinger was born in Fayetteville, Arkansas on September 2, 1975. She attended Fayetteville public schools and graduated Fayetteville High School as a Co-Valedictorian in May, 1993. She attended Bryn Mawr College in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania and graduated in May, 1997 with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, *Magna Cum Laude* and with Honors in her major. She received an Intramural Research Training Award (Pre-IRTA fellowship) from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NIH) and worked as a research fellow in this position for two years post-baccalaureate. Afterwards, she worked as Project Manager for a large NIH-funded grant to study depression prevention in children at the University of Pennsylvania, under the direction of Martin E.P. Seligman. She entered the doctoral program in Clinical Psychology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in August of 2001. Her Master of Arts degree in Psychology was received in August, 2003.

She is presently receiving clinical training at the University of Tennessee Psychological Clinic, is conducting psychological evaluations and psychotherapy with clinic clients, under supervision, and is also teaching psychology courses as a Graduate Teaching Assistant. Her current research interests and clinical work focus on exploring the role that sex and the sexual relationship play within the context of other factors relevant to marital satisfaction, including but not limited to couple communication. She hopes to graduate from the doctoral program in May, 2006.