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ABSTRACT

MARITAL EXPECTATION FULFILLMENT AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO
HEIGHT OF MARITAL EXPECTATIONS, OPTIMISM, AND RELATIONSHIP
SELF-EFFICACY AMONG MARRIED INDIVIDUALS

by

Kristina D. Johnson

Chair: Nancy J. Carbonell

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

School of Education

Title: MARITAL EXPECTATION FULFILLMENT AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO HEIGHT OF MARITAL EXPECTATIONS, OPTIMISM, AND RELATIONSHIP SELF-EFFICACY AMONG MARRIED INDIVIDUALS

Name of researcher: Kristina D. Johnson

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Date completed: July 2015

Problem

The literature is clear that individuals report higher marital satisfaction when their expectations are fulfilled in marriage, but there is disagreement in the literature as to what role height of expectations plays in expectation fulfillment. Further research in this area was needed to clarify these disagreements and identify variables that interact with height of expectations to determine marital satisfaction.

Method

Participants completed surveys that measured their a) marital satisfaction, b) optimism, c) relationship self-efficacy, d) height of marital expectations, and e) the extent

to which participants felt their marital expectations were being met. Structural equation modeling was used to test a proposed model of the relationship between participants' height of marital expectations, optimism, relationship self-efficacy, belief that their marital expectations are being met, and their marital satisfaction.

Results

Structural equation modeling indicated that the original model was a poor fit for the data. Modification indices were used to revise the model. The revised model excluded optimism, as it did not contribute much to the model. It also accounted for relationships that had not originally been considered. The revised model revealed that high expectations were negatively correlated with marital satisfaction, unless they were fulfilled. Fulfillment of expectations was positively correlated with marital satisfaction. Having a combination of high expectations and high relationship self-efficacy was the best predictor of feeling that one's expectations were met in marriage. Relationship self-efficacy accounted for the largest variance in marital expectation fulfillment.

Conclusions

This study lays to rest the long-standing disagreement in the literature about whether high marital expectations are good or bad. It suggests that whether one's expectations are fulfilled impacts marital satisfaction more than the height of their expectations. This has implications for marriage researchers, marriage educators, and mental health professionals who work with couples. It suggests the need to shift focus from modifying the expectations of the couples we work with and instead focus on how

the couple can get their expectations met. This study suggests that one way to do this may be to increase each partners' relationship self-efficacy, a variable that is related to expectation fulfillment.

Andrews University

School of Education

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HEIGHT OF MARITAL EXPECTATIONS, OPTIMISM, AND RELATIONSHIP
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A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by

Kristina D. Johnson

July 2015

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Dedicated to Seth.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Despite high divorce rates, marriage continues to be a highly sought-after and respected institution (Gibson-Davis, Edin, & McLanahan, 2005; Meier, Hull, & Ortyl, 2009; Schoen & Standish, 2001; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). Most Americans believe that married people are happier than singles (Axinn & Thornton, 2000) and research suggests that they may be right—as long as the marriage is healthy. Being in a satisfying marriage has consistently been associated with better physical health, mental health, and overall life satisfaction (Fincham & Beach, 2010; Gove, Hughes, & Briggs-Style, 1983; Wilcox, Doherty, Fisher, Galston, Glenn, & Gottman, 2005). For decades, researchers have attempted to identify the underlying elements of satisfying marriages in the hopes of being able to help distressed couples and also prepare the next generation to have better relationships.

The extensive literature on marital satisfaction suggests that a myriad of factors interact to determine marital satisfaction. Factors that have been linked to marital satisfaction include characteristics of the relationship such as: parenthood (Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2003), socioeconomic status (Fincham & Beach, 2010), and sexual satisfaction (McCabe, 1999). Certain behaviors that spouses engage in have also been linked to marital satisfaction, such as self-disclosure (Fitzpatrick & Sollie, 1999),

forgiveness (Kim, Johnson, & Ripley, 2011), empathy (Busby & Gardner, 2008), and the ability to manage conflict (Mackey, Diemer & O'Brien, 2000). Marital satisfaction has also been linked to the individual characteristics of the partners involved in the marriage such as personality variables (Zentner, 2005), family of origin dynamics (Sabatelli & Bartle-Haring, 2003), attachment style (Fitzpatrick & Sollie, 1999), and attributional style (Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994).

One line of research is that of marital expectations: the beliefs an individual holds about what marriage *should* be like (Vangelisti & Daly, 1997). Marital expectations are preconceptions about what behaviors should or should not take place within the marriage. They include beliefs about the extent to which spouses should share values, how much time couples should spend together, how disagreements should be handled, and any number of other issues an individual believes are important in marriage (Alexander, 2008; Vangelisti & Daly, 1997).

It has often been assumed by marriage counselors and educators that having high expectations of marriage is destructive to the marital relationship (Lederer & Jackson, 1968; Sharp & Ganong, 2000). They argue that individuals with high expectations are setting themselves up for disappointment when the reality of marriage does not live up to their ideal (Sharp & Ganong, 2000). Interestingly, studies that have attempted to confirm the assumption that high expectations are negative have found mixed results. One line of research suggests that couples are at increased risk for dissatisfaction and divorce when marital expectations are too high (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982; McNulty & Karney, 2004; Sharp & Ganong, 2000; Sullivan & Schwebel, 1995). Other research suggests that those who expect a great deal of their marriage are more likely to get a great deal from their

marriage (Baucom, Epstein, Rankin, & Burnett, 1996; McNulty & Karney, 2004; Vangelisti & Daly, 1997).

Why might holding high expectations be detrimental to some marriages and protective to other marriages? One explanation is that high expectations are positive in a marriage so long as the marriage lives up to the expectations. There has been a consistent correlation found between the fulfillment of marital expectations and marital satisfaction (Dixon, Gordon, Frousakis, & Schumm, 2012; Epstein, Chen, & Beyder-Kamjou, 2005; Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000; McNulty & Karney, 2004; Vangelisti & Daly, 1997). Baucom, et al. (1996, p. 85) asserts: “Regardless of what the standards are, when they are not being met in the relationship, the person demonstrates relationship distress in a variety of ways.”

McNulty and Karney (2004) found evidence of two variables that appear to play a role in this dynamic. In their study, individuals with high expectations were most satisfied with their marriage when they had a positive attributional style (i.e., the ability to interpret events within the marriage as positive) and also demonstrated positive behaviors during a problem-solving discussion with their partner (e.g., staying on topic and working toward problem resolution). Conversely, individuals with high expectations but a negative attributional style (i.e., tendency to interpret events in the marriage as negative) and negative behaviors during the interaction (e.g., criticizing their partner) were less satisfied with their marriage. The authors concluded that for the satisfied couples, high expectations were a goal toward which the spouses actively strove. To try to meet this goal, the spouses would behave in relationship-affirming ways and give their spouse the benefit of the doubt.

As one delves further into this topic of marital satisfaction, it would seem reasonable to assume that, like attributional style, there might be other personal characteristics that influence whether an individual believes his or her expectations are fulfilled in marriage. One possible variable, for example, might be an individual's level of optimism. Optimism is the tendency to anticipate positive outcomes and believe that negative outcomes are only temporary (Seligman, 2006). Another possible variable is relationship self-efficacy. Relationship self-efficacy is an individual's confidence in his or her ability to perform relationship-maintaining behaviors such as openly communicating with one's partner, providing support and nurturance, and controlling feelings of hurt and anger (Lopez, Morúa, & Rice, 2007). Since optimists and people high in relationship self-efficacy do not give up easily, might they be more likely to work at their marriage until it resembles their expectations? Additionally, optimists' overall positive attitude and the specific self-directed positivity of those who are high in relationship self-efficacy would seem to cause them to interpret ambiguous events in the relationship as being consistent with their expectations. More research in this area of study is needed and would help clarify the role expectations play in marriage as well as add to the knowledge of what contributes to marital happiness.

Statement of the Problem

Although the literature is clear that individuals report higher marital satisfaction when their expectations are fulfilled in marriage, very little is known about how individuals get their expectations fulfilled in marriage. Some research suggests that couples are at increased risk for dissatisfaction and divorce when marital expectations are too high (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982; McNulty & Karney, 2004; Sharp & Ganong, 2000;

Sullivan & Schwebel, 1995). Other research suggests that those who expect a great deal of their marriage are more likely to get a great deal from their marriage (Baucom, et al. 1996; McNulty & Karney, 2004; Vangelisti & Daly, 1997). Still other research suggests that high expectations in and of themselves are not destructive to marriage. Rather, other variables interact with height of expectations to determine marital satisfaction (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982; McNulty & Karney, 2004). Further research in this area was needed to clarify these disparities and identify variables that interact with height of expectations to determine marital satisfaction.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to better understand the complex relationship between height of expectations and marital satisfaction by looking at how expectations are met in a marriage. In particular, this study sought to determine in what way the height of an individual's marital expectations interacts with two other important variables, one's own optimism and one's sense of relationship self-efficacy, in order to predict expectation fulfillment and therefore marital satisfaction. The data from this study contributes to the literature on marital satisfaction and to the knowledge of what makes healthier coupling in marriage.

Research Questions

The present study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Is fulfillment of expectations related to height of expectations?
2. Is fulfillment of expectations related to optimism?
3. Is fulfillment of expectations related to relationship self-efficacy?

4. Is height of expectations related to relationship self-efficacy?
5. Is height of expectations related to optimism?
6. Is relationship self-efficacy related to optimism?
7. Is marital satisfaction related to fulfillment of expectations?

Conceptual Framework and Assumptions

Three areas of the literature influenced the development of my research: (a) marital expectations, (b) optimism, and (c) relationship self-efficacy. The following sections will conceptualize each individually. Then, their application to the present study will be outlined.

Conceptualization of Marital Expectations

In this study, I built upon the work of Vangelisti and Daly (1997) when it comes to how marital expectations are conceptualized and how individuals judge the fulfillment, or lack of fulfillment, of their expectations in marriage. Vangelisti and Daly (1997) define marital expectations as preconceptions about what behaviors should or should not take place within the marriage. These include beliefs about the extent to which spouses should share values, how much time couples should spend together, how disagreements should be handled, and any number of other issues an individual believes are necessary in marriage (Alexander, 2008; Vangelisti & Daly, 1997). The overall height of an individual's expectations is based on how important he or she considers these things to be to the overall success of marriage. For example, an individual who believes it is very important for spouses to share values, spend a lot of time together, and solve disagreements, has higher expectations than an individual who feels these things are

unimportant for the success of a marriage (Vangelisti & Daly, 1997). In the present study, height of marital expectations was conceptualized as a variable that interacted with other personal characteristics (i.e., optimism and relationship self-efficacy) to affect couples' perceptions that their expectations were being fulfilled in their marriage.

Vangelisi & Daly (1997) indicate that when an individual's marital expectations are met, he or she will be satisfied in the relationship. Conversely, when marital expectations are not met, the individual will experience dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the relationship. Whether one's marital expectations are met or not has a subjective air that one cannot ignore.

The person's perceptions of whether his or her expectations are being met appears to be crucial in one's overall impression of the marriage. Theorists (McNulty & Karney, 2004; Mellers, Schwartz, Ho, & Ritov, 1997) have proposed that people perceive their expectations as being met via one of two routes: either through behavioral confirmation or perceptual confirmation. In behavioral confirmation, an individual's expectations lead one to act in a way that confirms the expectations. For example, one study found evidence that women who expected to be rejected by their partner proceeded to engage in behaviors that evoked negative feelings from their partner (Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998).

In perceptual confirmation, an individual's expectations cause him or her to interpret events as being consistent with what was expected (McNulty & Karney, 2004; Miller & Turnbull, 1986). For example, one study found evidence that spouses' expectations of how a problem-solving discussion would go later predicted their

evaluation of the interaction, regardless of what behaviors had actually taken place (McNulty & Karney, 2002).

In this study, I built on Vangelisti and Daly's (1997) work by identifying variables that were associated with feeling that one's expectations were being met in marriage. The independent variables that this study examined, which were height of expectations, optimism, and relationship self-efficacy, were conceptualized as individual characteristics that might interact to affect people's likelihood of engaging in behavioral or perceptual confirmation.

Conceptualization of Optimism

The second important variable in my study, with regards to the fulfillment of expectations, had to do with the studies done in the area of optimism, and in particular, built on the work done by Assad, Donnellan, and Conger (2007). Optimism is the tendency, the natural push of one, to anticipate positive outcomes and believe that negative outcomes are only temporary. Optimism's counterpart, pessimism, is the tendency to believe bad events will continue for a long time and have permanent negative consequences (Seligman, 2006).

Research has consistently found that optimism has a variety of benefits. When faced with a challenge, optimists do not give up as easily as pessimists and they tend to excel in all areas of life, whether school, work, or relationships (Seligman, 2006; Srivastava, Richards, McGonigal, Butler, Gross, 2006). In the present study, I examined whether optimism levels would likewise affect whether one believed their expectations in marriage were being met or not.

Conceptualization of Relationship Self-Efficacy

The theory of self-efficacy, originally developed by Bandura (1977), is the third area of research that formed a part of the guiding foundation for my research. Self-efficacy describes a person's cognitions about whether he or she is capable of performing the behaviors necessary to produce a wanted outcome. Self-efficacy can also be thought of as a person's confidence in his or her ability within a certain domain. The more self-efficacy an individual has, the more effort and persistence he or she will put into reaching his or her goal, even in the face of adversity (Bandura, 1997).

Bandura (1997) also noted that people's self-efficacy varies significantly for different skills. For instance, an individual might have high self-efficacy for skiing, but have low self-efficacy when it comes to mathematics. Self-efficacy applied to marital relationships is a way to conceptualize an individual's confidence in his or her ability to perform relationship-affirming behaviors such as openly communicating with one's partner, providing support and nurturance, and/or controlling feelings of hurt and anger (Lopez, et al., 2007). In the present study I examined whether individuals' relationship self-efficacy affected whether they felt their expectations were met in marriage.

Conceptualizations Applied to the Present Study

Together, height of marital expectations, optimism, and relationship self-efficacy were conceptualized as personal characteristics that influenced a person's belief that his or her expectations were being fulfilled in marriage and therefore, contributed to one's marital satisfaction. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship that I hypothesized would exist between the variables. This figure hypothesizes that having high marital expectations will be positive for the marriage so long as the individual also has high levels of optimism

and/or relationship self-efficacy. Whether independently, or co-occurring, optimism and relationship self-efficacy would result in both behavioral and perceptual confirmation of marital expectations. For example, since optimists and people high in relationship self-efficacy tend to not give up easily, I hypothesized they would be more likely to work at their marriage until it resembled their expectations (behavioral confirmation).

Additionally, optimists' overall positive attitude and the specific self-directed positivity of those who are high in relationship self-efficacy would cause them to interpret ambiguous events in the relationship as being consistent with their expectations (perceptual confirmation). Subsequently, the perception that one's expectations are fulfilled would result in high marital satisfaction.

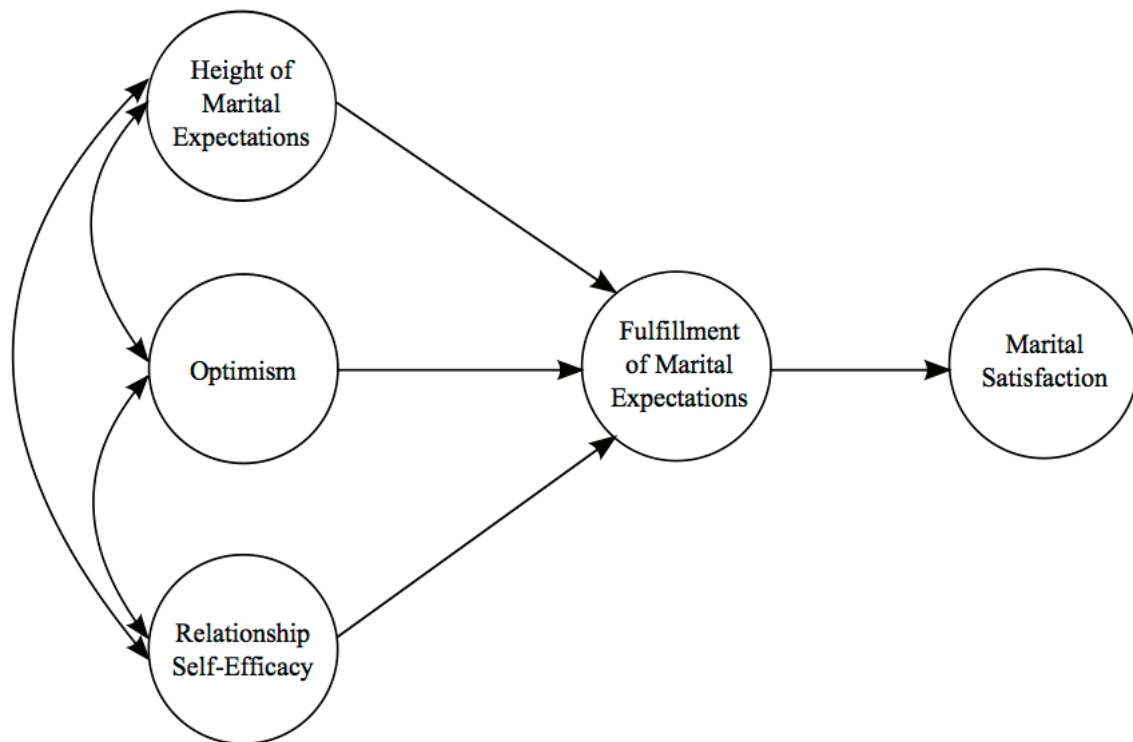


Figure 1. Hypothesized Relationship between Variables

Importance and Significance of Study

The present research contributes to the mental health field by helping marriage researchers, marriage educators, and mental health professionals better understand factors that possibly influence how people get their expectations met within marriage. Specifically, it studied personal characteristics that might affect whether an individual's high marital expectations are more versus less likely to be fulfilled.

Another important contribution this study makes is in the area of whether holding high expectations of one's marriage is beneficial or not for couples. Research on this topic is divided and shows conflicting results. Instead of conceptualizing high expectations as universally good or bad, the present study suggests that other variables also need to be assessed when looking at marital expectations and marital satisfaction. Identifying how height of expectations interacts with a person's individual tendencies toward optimism and relationship self-efficacy to predict expectation fulfillment was also looked at.

Limitations

The present study had limitations. Most notably, all variables were assessed using self-report measures. This may have resulted in participants responding in socially desirable ways that might not accurately reflect their true behavior. However, the nature of the variables make it necessary to utilize the self-report method. Optimism, relationship self-efficacy, height of marital expectations, fulfillment of marital expectations, and marital satisfaction are subjective constructs and therefore difficult to observe or quantify by an outside observer. Other limitations are discussed in Chapter 5, as they are best understood within the context of the study's results.

Delimitations

This study had two delimitations. Only individuals over the age of 18 were allowed to participate. Additionally, only currently married individuals who had been married for a minimum of two years were allowed to participate.

Definition of Terms

Fulfillment of Marital Expectations: Degree to which an individual self-reports that his or her marriage reflects his or her marital expectations (Vangelisti & Daly, 1997).

Height of Marital Expectations: The extent to which an individual believes certain marital expectations (e.g., spending a lot of time together or sharing values) are important for marital functioning (Vangelisti & Daly, 1997).

Marital Expectations: The beliefs an individual holds about what marital relationships should be like (Baucom, Epstein, Sayers, & Sher, 1989; Vangelisti & Daly, 1997).

Marital Satisfaction: An individual's perceived happiness and contentment with his or her marriage.

Optimism: Tendency to anticipate positive outcomes and believe that negative outcomes are only temporary (Seligman, 2006).

Relationship Self-Efficacy: An individual's perceived ability to engage in the behaviors necessary to meet marital goals (Lopez, et al., 2007).

Summary

In this chapter, the background of the problem was outlined and the present study was introduced. The present study was designed to expand our understanding of how

individuals get their marital expectations met in marriage. Specifically, the contributions of height of expectations, optimism, and relationship self-efficacy were examined to determine if they increase an individual's chance of getting his or her expectations met within marriage.

The research questions and hypotheses were defined in this chapter. The conceptual framework and assumptions were also presented. Specifically, the concepts of marital expectations, relationship self-efficacy, and optimism were discussed and the links between these concepts were identified. Limitations and delimitations were mentioned and key terms were defined.

This dissertation will include four more chapters. Chapter 2 will consist of a detailed literature review. Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology used to answer the research questions. Chapter 4 will present the results of the research. Chapter 5 will discuss the implications of the research results in light of the research questions and existing literature.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background of the Problem

There is some debate in the field about whether having high expectations of marriage is detrimental or protective to the marriage. One line of research suggests that couples are at increased risk for dissatisfaction and divorce when marital expectations are too high (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982; McNulty & Karney, 2004; Sharp & Ganong, 2000; Sullivan & Schwebel, 1995). Other research suggests that those who expect a great deal of their marriage are more likely to get a great deal from their marriage (Baucom, et al. 1996; McNulty & Karney, 2004; Vangelisti & Daly, 1997). In an attempt to explain why high expectations are positive in some marriages and negative in others, researchers have attempted to identify constructs that moderate the relationship between height of expectations and marital satisfaction. One consistent finding is that high expectations are positive in a marriage to the extent that they are fulfilled. Individuals who feel that their marital expectations are met appear to report higher levels of marital satisfaction and lower levels of relationship distress than those who feel their expectations are not met (Baucom, et al., 1996; Dixon, et al., 2012; Epstein, et al., 2005; Fletcher, et al., 2000; McNulty & Karney, 2004; Vangelisti & Daly, 1997).

Marital Satisfaction

Marital satisfaction refers to a “subjective global evaluation of one’s relationship” (Graham, Diebels, & Barnow, 2011, p. 39). Similar constructs include *marital* (or more broadly, *relationship*) *quality*, *adjustment*, or *happiness*. These terms are generally considered by researchers to be equivalent, since the instruments used to measure them (primarily self-report questionnaires) are highly correlated (Graham, et al., 2011). Being in a satisfying marriage has consistently been associated with better physical health, mental health, and overall life satisfaction (Fincham & Beach, 2010; Gove, et al., 1983; Wilcox, et al., 2005). Conversely, marital distress, separation, and divorce have been linked to increased stress, poor physical health, and emotional disorders (Gove, et al., 1983; Hansen, 1981).

Factors that Determine Marital Satisfaction

For decades, researchers have attempted to identify the determinants of satisfying marriage in the hope of being able to help distressed couples and also prepare the next generation to have better relationships. The extensive literature on marital satisfaction suggests that a myriad of factors interact to determine marital satisfaction. The study of these factors is further complicated by the fact that couples likely differ in the importance of each of these factors for their satisfaction.

One area of research is that of individual characteristics, or variables within each spouse that affect their own level of marital satisfaction. For example, in a 13-year longitudinal study of how personality affects individuals’ marital satisfaction, spouses with high levels of neuroticism tended to have lower marital satisfaction (Caughlin, Huston, & Houts, 2000). Researchers have also studied individual characteristics like

family of origin dynamics (Sabatelli & Bartle-Haring, 2003), premarital and post marital affect (Mattson, Frame, & Johnson, 2011), attachment style (Fitzpatrick & Sollie, 1999), attributional style (Markman, et al., 1994), perceptions of one's spouse and relationship (Busby & Gardner, 2008; Franiuk, Cohen, & Pomerantz, 2002; Weigel, Bennett, & Ballard-Reisch, 2006), and much more. The present study examined three individual characteristics: optimism, relationship self-efficacy, and height of marital expectations to determine how these variables relate to whether the individual feels his or her expectations are met in the marriage. I chose these variables because they seemed likely to be related to marital expectation fulfillment based on prior research and also because no other studies existed which examined their effects on marital expectation fulfillment.

Marital Expectations

Marital expectations refer to the beliefs an individual holds about what marriage *should* be like (Vangelisti & Daly, 1997). Marital expectations are preconceptions about what behaviors should or should not take place within the marriage. They include beliefs about the extent to which spouses should share values, how much time couples should spend together, how disagreements should be handled, and any number of other issues an individual believes are important in marriage (Alexander, 2008; Vangelisti & Daly, 1997). Barich and Bielby (1996) described expectations as images of marriage created within the context of the relationship, while Sager (1976) noted that expectations are also present before the relationship is formed.

A similar, if not identical, construct described in the literature is marital *standards*. The precise distinction between these two terms is unclear. Baucom, et al. (1989) differentiated between expectancies: predictions of what will happen in one's

relationship, and standards: what one believes should happen in relationships. Other researchers have used standards as an umbrella term to describe all the individual expectations a person has (Hall, 2012; Hall, Larson, & Watts, 2011). Still others have used these terms interchangeably. For instance, in a pilot test of their Relationship Standards Questionnaire, Vangelisti & Daly (1997) found that participants did not understand the term standards, but understood the term expectations. Thus, their questionnaire, which measures relationship standards, uses the term expectations (A. L. Vangelisti, personal communication, September 12, 2012). In keeping with Vangelisti and Daly's (1997) decision, the present study conceptualized marital expectations as synonymous with marital standards, with both referring to preconceptions about what should and should not occur in a marriage.

The Origin and Nature of Marital Expectations

Marital expectations are considered one of many cognitive phenomena that affect how people think, feel, and behave in relationships. These cognitions are influenced by a variety of factors including parental relationships, culture, (Juvva & Bhatti, 2006), exposure to romantic television (Segrin & Nabi, 2002), participation in marital enrichment seminars (Dixon, et al., 2012), the reality of what one experiences in his or her relationship (Murray, Griffin, Derrick, Harris, Aloni, & Leder, 2011), and more.

The literature on marriage education suggests that marital expectations are fairly engrained and resistant to change. For example, Sharp and Ganong (2000) conducted an experimental study with 165 undergraduate students enrolled in a course on relationships (mean age = 19.75; 131 female, 33 male). Students were randomly assigned to one of three sections of the course. The control group section taught general material about

relationships including gender dynamics and the transition to parenthood. For the other two sections, the researchers intended to incorporate interventions aimed at reducing both romantic beliefs and unrealistic expectations about relationships. By their own admission, however, most of the interventions were geared toward reducing romantic beliefs, not unrealistic expectations. For example, students viewed popular movies and magazines and then discussed the messages about relationships contained in them. The lecturer described the potential dangers of believing these messages.

Pre- and post-tests were given at the beginning and end of the course to determine if there were any changes in the beliefs of the students over the course of the semester. The Relationship Belief Inventory assessed participants' tendencies to hold extreme relationship beliefs in four areas: a) disagreement is destructive, b) mind reading is expected, c) partners cannot change, and d) sexual perfection is possible. Participants rated on a six-point scale the degree to which they agreed with statements like: "Partners should have difficulty accepting each other when they disagree" and "If one partner cannot perform well sexually when the other partner is in the mood he/she should think there is a problem." The Romantic Beliefs Scale assessed the degree to which participants believed things like: a) love finds a way (no barrier is too strong to get in the way of love), b) one and only (there is only one soul-mate out there), c) idealization, and d) love at first sight. Participants rated on a seven-point scale the degree to which they agreed with statements like: "There will only be one love for me" and "I expect that in my relationship, romantic love will really last; it won't fade with time."

Pre- and post-test results revealed that the experimental group had only slightly lower levels of romantic beliefs at the end of the semester, and there was no significant

change in participants' unrealistic relationship beliefs. The researchers attributed this result to the fact that most of the interventions were aimed at reducing romantic beliefs, not unrealistic beliefs, and suggested that if more time were spent addressing unrealistic beliefs, those scores would have lowered as well. No significant changes were found for the control group's beliefs.

A primary weakness in this finding was that the content of the experimental course was blatantly aimed at reducing romantic beliefs, thus, the participant's lowered romantic belief scores could easily be attributed to a social desirability response bias. The students knew they were supposed to be changing their beliefs about romance, and could have responded to the post-test in a way that they knew would please their professor. Since the researchers admit that very little class time was spent on activities to reduce unrealistic beliefs, the students would be less likely to respond in a socially desirable way on the Relationship Belief Inventory, which could explain why their pre- and post-test scores remained the same.

Overall, the results of Sharp and Ganong's (2000) study suggest that people's beliefs about relationships are resistant to change. Even the change that did occur in relation to romantic beliefs was relatively small. Researchers have suggested that instead of trying to change these expectations for relationships, it is more effective to provide individuals with the skills they need to achieve their expectations (Hawkins, Carroll, Doherty, & Willoughby, 2004; Johnson, 2011). Johnson (2011) makes the following observation:

Researchers have offered several attempts at changing idealized relationship beliefs, to no avail. Perhaps it is time that we question how we can work with the sometimes inflated expectations about marriage and intimate relationships in

order to assist individuals and couples in fostering successful and healthy relationships without altering their belief systems (p. 28).

The Effects of Marital Expectations on Marital Satisfaction

It has often been assumed by marriage counselors, researchers, and educators that having high expectations of marriage is destructive to the marital relationship (Lederer & Jackson, 1968; Sharp & Ganong, 2000). They argue that individuals with high expectations set themselves up for disappointment when the reality of marriage does not live up to their ideal (Lederer & Jackson, 1968). Others have suggested just the opposite. Gottman (1999), for example, a renowned marriage researcher, believes this to be one of the biggest myths that exists about marriage. He suggests that high expectations can actually be protective to marriages. In the following sections, I will discuss the literature on the effects of marital expectations in an attempt to shed light on why this issue is so confusing.

Evidence that High Expectations are Protective to Marriage

Several researchers have attempted to confirm that high expectations are correlated with marital dissatisfaction, but have found the opposite (Baucom, et al., 1996; McNulty & Karney, 2004; Vangelisti & Daly, 1997). In a correlational study, Baucom, et al. (1996) studied the effects of holding certain relationship standards on spouses' marital functioning. Participants (mean age = 43.2; mean years of marriage = 16.9) were recruited through the mail. The researchers purchased a list of names in Washington, D.C. and Chapel Hill, NC which closely matched current census data for age, education, and ethnic status. Participants completed the Inventory of Specific Relationship Standards, which was developed for the purposes of this study. The inventory consists of

60 statements such as, “My partner and I should take part in leisure activities together” and “Only one of us should have final say on decisions we make about money.” For each item, participants rated how often the item should happen from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). They also responded “yes” or “no” to whether they felt satisfied with how the item was being met in their relationship and rated on a 5-point scale ranging from “not at all” to “very” how upsetting it was to them when the standard was unmet. Participants completed the Dyadic Adjustment Scale to assess their overall marital functioning. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale is the most frequently used self-report measure of marital adjustment and successfully differentiates between distressed and non-distressed couples.

Results indicated that individuals with higher relationship standards also reported greater marital adjustment. Holding extreme standards (i.e., responding *always* or *never* to items on the Inventory of Specific Relationship Standards) was positively correlated to marital adjustment. Additionally, holding these extreme standards was not significantly related to whether or not the individual felt his or her expectations were met. This suggests that holding high expectations does not necessarily make one less likely to get their expectations fulfilled. The researchers noted that this finding was important because of the frequent assumption among cognitive therapists that extreme standards must be altered in order for couples to experience marital satisfaction. Finally, the results of this study indicated that perceiving one’s standards as having been met affects marital satisfaction more than the height of one’s standards. “Regardless of what the standards are, when they are not being met in the relationship, the person demonstrates relationship distress in a variety of ways” (p. 85).

This study by Baucom, et al. (1996) was methodologically sound. The only shortcoming is that the data was gathered using self-report inventories and therefore the relationships between the variables could have been slightly inflated due to shared method variance in the measurement strategies. However, this is true of most of the literature on marital expectations and marital satisfaction because these constructs are highly subjective and difficult to measure other than by self-report.

Vangelisti and Daly (1997) also conducted a correlational study to examine the relationship between height of expectations, fulfillment of expectations, and relationship satisfaction. Participants consisted of 122 adults who were enrolled in continuing education courses (mean age = 34.52; mean years in current relationship = 11.94).

Vangelisti and Daly (1997) do not mention how many participants were married versus in dating relationships, but we can assume it was a mixture since the range of time in their current relationship was 1-40 years. The researchers sought to identify gender differences in standards for romantic relationships, particularly if women had higher expectations than men or if women were less likely to feel their expectations were met than men.

Participants completed the Locke-Wallace measure of marital adjustment, which has strong convergent validity with other measures of relational satisfaction. They also completed the Relationship Standards Questionnaire, which was developed for the purposes of this study. This measure required participants to read 30 relationship expectations such as, “The two people will spend much time together” and “The relationship will be fun and enjoyable.” Participants rated on a 9-point scale ranging from “*very little*” to “*very much*” how important they believed the item was for relationships in

general. They also used the same 9-point scale to rate the extent to which they felt their current relationship reflected the standard.

Results suggested a weak, but significant, positive correlation between high standards and high relationship satisfaction. Thus, this study suggests that expecting more of one's relationship is associated with greater satisfaction. A much stronger positive correlation was found between relationship satisfaction and perceiving one's expectations as having been met. This matches with the finding of Baucom, et al., (1996) that regardless of what the expectation is, if it is not being met in the relationship, individuals are likely to experience distress. No significant differences were found between the height of men and women's standards for relationships. Nor was there a significant difference between men and women's relationship satisfaction. Women were more likely to report that their standards were not being met, but not to the extent that their relationship satisfaction was significantly lower than their male counterparts. The authors concluded that dissatisfaction might not automatically follow unfulfilled standards. Instead, couples may adjust in some way, accepting the lack of standard fulfillment as a norm in their relationship.

The study by Vangelisti and Daly (1997) contributed to the literature by confirming the findings of Baucom, et al. (1996) that high expectations are associated with high relationship satisfaction and that the extent to which expectations are fulfilled is more important to relationship satisfaction than is height of expectations. Additionally, it contributed to the field by creating a measure of relationship expectations that was significantly shorter than the one created by Baucom, et al. (1996). While Baucom, et al.'s (1996) Inventory of Specific Relationship Standards has 60 items which must each

be responded to three times, Vangelisti and Daly's (1997) Relationship Standards Questionnaire has only 30 items, which must each be responded to twice. Vangelisti and Daly's scale also allows individuals to rate the extent to which each standard is being fulfilled, unlike Baucom, et al.'s (1996) scale which only allows participants to indicate a "yes" or "no" to whether the standard is being met. This allows Vangelisti and Daly's scale to capture greater subtlety in respondents' beliefs about their expectation fulfillment.

Evidence that High Expectations are Detrimental to Marriage

One area of research that suggests high expectations are detrimental to marriages is the literature on irrational relationship beliefs. Eidelson and Epstein (1982) developed the Relationship Belief Inventory (discussed in detail above) to differentiate between the belief systems of distressed and non-distressed couples by administering their scale to two groups of couples, one group who was attending marital therapy and one group who was not. First, the researchers sought to confirm that the clinical couples and non-clinical couples differed significantly from each other in terms of their marital satisfaction.

Participants were given the Locke-Wallace Measure of Marital Adjustment Scale. Clinical couples (mean age = 32.6; mean years of marriage = 7.3) had an average score of 86.2 (range from 48 to 120) on this scale while non-clinical couples (mean age = 31.9; mean years of marriage = 6.3) had an average score of 100. This demonstrated that the two groups differed from each other in terms of their marital satisfaction, with non-clinical couples reporting higher satisfaction than clinical couples. Thus, the researchers were able to confirm that the clinical group consisted of distressed couples and the non-clinical group consisted of non-distressed couples.

Next, the researchers examined the differences between both groups' responses on the Relationship Belief Inventory. Participants rated on a six-point scale the degree to which they agreed with statements like: "Partners should have difficulty accepting each other when they disagree" and "If one partner cannot perform well sexually when the other partner is in the mood he/she should think there is a problem." In the combined sample of clinical and non-clinical couples, the scores on all five scales of the Relationship Belief Inventory were negatively correlated with scores on the Marital Adjustment Scale. This suggests that holding these irrational beliefs is related to dissatisfaction in marriage. The correlations between the Relationship Belief Inventory and the Marital Adjustment Scale tended to be lower for non-clinical than clinical participants. This suggests that individuals with better marital adjustment may be able to hold these irrational beliefs without it affecting their satisfaction in the marriage. Another notable finding in this study is that scores on the Relationship Belief Inventory were not particularly high for any of the participants, even in the clinical sample. This suggests that people may not hold these dysfunctional beliefs to any significant degree.

In a correlational study, Sullivan & Schwebel (1995) studied irrational relationship beliefs in two groups of never-married undergraduates. In Study 1, participants (Mean age = 20.2) completed the Relationship Belief Inventory (described previously) imagining they had been married 5 years. Participants also completed the Relationship Satisfaction Index, which consists of 13 items that measure the presence of constructs like communication, love, joy, companionship, intimacy, etc. in a relationship. Higher scores indicate a greater presence of these attributes and therefore greater relationship satisfaction. Participants completed this measure eight times. First, they were

asked to imagine their future spouse and rate the level of satisfaction they expected to have while casually dating, engaged, married 5 years, and married 15 years. Then they estimated the level of satisfaction the average American would experience at the same four stages.

The results of study 1 indicated that individuals tend to have higher expectations for their own marital satisfaction than they did for others. Additionally, participants tended to believe that relationship satisfaction would increase with time, a pattern that does not reflect actual marital satisfaction trajectories, which tend to decrease with time (VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001). Thus, Study 1 suggested that individuals tend to have high expectations for relationships, particularly their own.

Contrary to the researchers' hypothesis, in Study 1, no correlation was discovered between participants' scores on the Relationship Belief Inventory and Relationship Satisfaction Index. In other words, individuals with more irrational beliefs were not more prone to expect their relationship satisfaction to increase with time than were individuals with less irrational beliefs.

In Study 2 of Sullivan and Schwebel's (1995) research, 474 never-married undergraduates in current dating relationships (mean age = 19.37) completed the Relationship Belief Inventory (described previously) to assess their irrational beliefs about relationships. They also completed the Relationship Satisfaction Index (described previously) twice, once indicating their present level of relationship satisfaction and again imagining what their marital satisfaction level would be when they had school age children. Finally, participants completed the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (described previously) for their current dating relationship.

The researchers split the data into high-irrational and low-irrational groups based on participants' responses to the Relationship Belief Inventory. Participants in the high-irrational group indicated poorer relationship adjustment on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale than those in the low-irrational group. This suggests that individuals with more irrational beliefs about relationships are prone to experience relationship dissatisfaction. Individuals in the high-irrational group also predicted that their satisfaction would increase between the present and the time they had school-age children more-so than those in the low-irrational group. The researchers concluded that expecting too much of one's marriage negatively affects relationship adjustment.

Interestingly, Sullivan and Schwebel (1995) did not completely write off the potential benefits of high marital expectations. They noted that "the precise boundary between cognitions that create unrealistically high expectations and lead to disappointment, and health promoting cognitions that create high, but realistic, achievable goals is hard to identify" (p. 299).

Evidence that Other Variables Influence the Effects of High Expectations

Some researchers have suggested that high expectations in and of themselves are not destructive to marriage. Rather, other variables interact with height of expectations to determine marital satisfaction. The study by Eidelson and Epstein (1982), which was just discussed in the previous section, suggests that this might be the case. In that study, the correlation between height of expectations and marital satisfaction was lower amongst a non-clinical sample of couples than amongst a clinical sample. Thus, the non-clinical sample was better able to hold irrational beliefs while still maintaining their marital

satisfaction. This suggests that other variables were most likely affecting the impact of high expectations on marital satisfaction.

McNulty and Karney (2004) found evidence that height of expectations does not directly affect marital satisfaction. Rather, other variables interact with height of marital expectations to determine marital satisfaction. They hypothesized that spouses who behaved positively toward each other when discussing an area of disagreement and who made positive attributions for their partner's behavior would have stable marital satisfaction even if their expectations were high because their positive skills would help them get their expectations fulfilled. To test this hypothesis, the researchers conducted a four-year longitudinal study with newlyweds who had been married less than six months when the study began.

At the beginning of the study, participants (mean age = 24.4) completed the Relationship Attributions Measure to determine their ability to assess marital events positively. This measure consists of 4 hypothetical situations that are likely to occur in marriage (e.g., "Your spouse criticizes something you say"). Participants rate the event using a 7-point scale for whether they believe their partner's behavior was caused by a stable characteristic in him or her or whether it was due to circumstances such as having a bad day. They also rated on a 7-point scale whether the partner's behavior was intentional, selfishly motivated, and blameworthy.

To measure participant's ability to interact positively with their spouse, couples engaged in two 10-minute videotaped discussions during which they had to "work toward some resolution or agreement" for two areas of conflict in their marriage. These interactions were later coded using the Verbal Tactics Coding Scheme, which assigns one

of four codes to each speaking turn of each spouse. This resulted in a total score for how much negativity was expressed by each spouse during the interaction.

The researchers also developed two measures of marital expectations, which were administered when the study first began. For the first, participants rated the extent to which they expected that their marital satisfaction would remain stable over time. There were three questions. The first two asked participants to choose one of five phrases (e.g., some ups and downs, very steady) that described how their feelings toward the marriage were likely to change over the next six months and over the next four years, respectively. For the third question, participants chose one of nine graphs that they felt best illustrated the trajectory of their satisfaction. The second measure of expectations required participants to rate their expectations for their partner's behavior. They rated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with nine statements about their partner (e.g., "My partner will rarely make mistakes," "My partner will agree with me about the important things").

To measure their marital satisfaction, couples completed the Semantic Differential and the Quality Marriage Index every six months for four years. The Semantic Differential requires individuals to rate their relationship using a 7-point scale between 15 pairs of adjectives (e.g. bad–good, unpleasant–pleasant). The Quality Marriage Index requires individuals to report the extent to which they agree with six general statements about their marriage.

For spouses with positive interaction behaviors and a positive attributional style, high expectations predicted stable satisfaction over time whereas low expectations predicted declines in satisfaction. Conversely, for spouses with less positive interaction

behaviors and a negative attributional style, high expectations predicted declines in marital satisfaction, whereas low expectations predicted stable satisfaction. Thus, this study suggested that having high expectations can be positive or negative for a relationship, depending on whether the spouses have positive or negative relationship skills. Interestingly, the participants in this study who had the potential of having their marital expectations exceeded—those with low expectations who had the skills necessary to have a highly satisfying marriage because of their positive interaction behaviors and attributional styles—were less likely to be satisfied with their relationships (McNulty & Karney, 2004). This is different than the findings of Vangelisti and Daly (1997). They found that individuals who had relatively lower standards, but reported that these standards were highly fulfilled, tended to also report higher satisfaction with their relationship.

The biggest flaw in McNulty and Karney's study is that they did not directly ask participants if their expectations were being fulfilled. Instead, they assumed that when participants reported stable marital satisfaction it must also mean that their expectations were being fulfilled. Certainly, the pattern found in their data suggest that spouses are most satisfied when they get what they expect from their relationship because participants who had the positive relationship skills to fulfill their high expectations were more satisfied than those who lacked these skills. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that participants could have experienced stable marital satisfaction without getting their expectations fulfilled, as was found in the study by Vangelisti and Daly (1997).

In spite of this limitation, the study by McNulty and Karney (2004) suggests that there may not be one "realistic" set of marital expectations because whether or not an

expectation is realistic is dependent on whether or not the couple can attain it. What is unrealistic for one couple may be realistic for another. This finding supports the proposition of Johnson (2011) that it is not the expectations that need to be changed, but the couple's ability to fulfill their expectations.

The present study followed in the footsteps of McNulty and Karney (2004) by attempting to identify two personal characteristics that individuals might be able to foster in themselves to increase their ability to fulfill their own expectations in marriage. This study also aimed to improve upon McNulty and Karney's study by directly assessing whether participants feel their expectations were met.

Research Related to My Theoretical Framework of Expectations in Marriage

Theorists propose that expectations can serve two different functions for people as they evaluate their marriage. First, expectations can serve as a counterfactual, or idealized alternate reality, to which the marriage is compared. One group that has studied this are the proponents of Decision Affect Theory (DAT) (Mellers, et al., 1997), who suggest that how people evaluate an outcome is partially determined by their counterfactual thinking, or comparing what is with what could have been. According to DAT, a positive outcome feels less satisfying when compared to an even better alternative, but more satisfying when compared to a negative alternative. Applied to marriage, individuals would be satisfied only when the reality of their marriage was equivalent to or better than their imagined alternative. Consequently, individuals with low expectations (i.e., those who compare reality to a negative alternative) would be more likely to be satisfied than individuals with high expectations.

Second, research has found that expectations can serve as goal structures, or an end state that the individual actively works to achieve. When expectations function as goal structures, they trigger expectancy confirmation processes (Snyder, 1984). Expectancy confirmation occurs one of two ways: behaviorally and perceptually (McNulty & Karney, 2004). In behavioral confirmation, an individual's expectations lead him or her to act in a way that confirms the expectations (McNulty & Karney, 2004). For example, one study found evidence that women who expected to be rejected by their partner proceeded to engage in behaviors that evoked negative feelings from their partner (Downey, et al., 1998). In perceptual confirmation, an individual's expectations cause him or her to interpret events as being consistent with what was expected (McNulty & Karney, 2004). For instance, one study found evidence that spouses' expectations of how a problem-solving discussion would go later predicted their evaluation of the interaction, regardless of what behaviors had actually taken place (McNulty & Karney, 2002). These examples suggest that when expectations function as a goal structure, individuals will experience either a more positive marriage if they have high expectations or a more negative marriage if their expectations are found to be low.

McNulty and Karney (2004) suggest that the effects of high expectations on a relationship may depend largely on whether the expectations function as counterfactuals (i.e., idealized alternate reality, to which the marriage is compared) or as goal structures (i.e., an end state that the individual actively works to achieve). High expectations will be detrimental to a marriage if they function as counterfactuals because it is unlikely that reality will live up to the imagined alternative. Conversely, high expectations will be

healthy for a marriage if they function as goal structures because the expectations will be fulfilled via either behavioral or perceptual confirmation.

The real distinction between counterfactuals and goal structures is the likelihood that expectations will be fulfilled in the marriage. In the area of research dealing with marital satisfaction, one thing appears certain: there has been a consistent correlation found between the fulfillment of marital expectations and marital satisfaction (Baucom, et al., 1996; Dixon, et al., 2012; Epstein, et al., 2005; Fletcher, et al., 2000; McNulty & Karney, 2004; Vangelisti & Daly, 1997). Since high expectations are positive in a marriage to the extent that they are fulfilled, it is important to understand the conditions under which high expectations are more likely versus less likely to be fulfilled. Thus, in order to contribute to the knowledge of what makes healthier coupling in marriage, couples, clinicians and educators would do well to know more about when high expectations serve as goal structures in a marriage, and when they serve as counterfactuals.

Relationship Self-Efficacy

The Origin and Nature of Relationship Self-Efficacy

The theory of self-efficacy, originally developed by Bandura (1977), describes a person's cognitions about whether he or she is capable of performing the behaviors necessary to produce a wanted outcome. Self-efficacy can also be thought of as a person's confidence in his or her ability within a certain domain. Bandura (1997) noted that people's self-efficacy varies significantly for different skills. For instance, an individual might have high self-efficacy for skiing, but have feelings of low self-efficacy in mathematics. Self-efficacy is known to be predictive of engagement and persistence in

goal-oriented behaviors. The more self-efficacy an individual has, the more effort and persistence he or she will put into reaching his or her goal, even in the face of adversity (Bandura, 1997).

Self-efficacy applied to intimate relationships is a way to conceptualize an individual's confidence in his or her ability to perform relationship-affirming behaviors such as openly communicating with one's partner, providing support and nurturance, and controlling feelings of hurt and anger (Lopez, et al., 2007). Though there has been a call to conduct research in this area (Huston & Melz, 2004), to date, the present study is one of the few that has been done in this area.

Research on Relationship Self-Efficacy

In a correlational study, Lopez and Lent (1991) developed three scales of relationship efficacy using a sample of 61 college students. Participants were currently in romantic relationships which they described as "serious, emotionally attached, and physically affectionate" (p. 224). The average length of the relationships was 20 months (94% were dating relationships). Participants were predominantly Caucasian freshmen and sophomores (mean age = 20.4).

The three scales that the researchers developed were: relationship self-efficacy (SE), relationship other-efficacy (OE), and relationship-inferred self-efficacy (RISE). Each scale had 25 items, which closely mirrored each other in wording. For example, one item asked about efficacy related to being able to "share equally with your partner in planning activities together." For SE, participants rated their confidence in their own ability to do the item. For OE, participants rated their confidence in their partner's ability to do the item. For RISE, participants rated how confident they thought their partner was

in their (the participant's) ability to do the item. For each scale, items were rated on a scale ranging from 0 (*not at all sure*) to 9 (*completely sure*).

In addition to the efficacy scales, participants completed three other scales: the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (described previously), an unnamed scale of relationship satisfaction, and an unnamed scale of relationship persistence. The relationship satisfaction scale asked participants to rate the quality of communication, trust, emotional support, physical affection, and compatibility in their relationship using a scale ranging from 1 (*very dissatisfied*) to 5 (*very satisfied*). The expected persistence scale contained five items asking participants to rate their confidence that the relationship would persist for a certain period of time ranging from "at least two weeks" to "permanently." To do this, participants used a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all sure*) to 5 (*completely sure*).

Results of the study suggested that both SE and OE were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction, while RISE was a significant predictor of relationship persistence. Additionally, all three measures accounted for some degree of variance in dyadic adjustment, suggesting that relationship self-efficacy, relationship other-efficacy, and relationship-inferred self-efficacy all play a unique role in marital adjustment.

Lopez, et al., (2007) added 10 items to the SE scale developed by Lopez and Lent (1991) and then conducted factor analysis to determine whether the overall relationship self-efficacy score that the test produced could be further distilled into self-efficacy in specific domains of the relationship. They referred to this scale as the Relationship Self-Efficacy Scale (RSES). In their sample of 608 undergraduates who were currently in a romantic relationship (82.4% dating; 6.4% engaged; 11.2% married), three specific subscales of relationship self-efficacy were identified: mutuality, defined as the ability to

give and receive care; emotional control, defined as the ability to manage one's negative affect in the relationship; and differentiation, defined as the ability to assert personal needs.

All three subscales were positively correlated with relationship satisfaction. The researchers noticed gender differences in scores on the RSES such that females tended to score higher on the mutuality subscale and males tended to score higher on the emotional control subscale. They attributed this difference to socialization pressures which develop women's confidence in the domain of interpersonal care and support and men's confidence in managing and containing their distressing emotions. Another difference noted in this study was that participants in committed relationships scored higher on both mutuality and emotional control than participants in more casual relationships.

My study is the first to examine relationship self-efficacy using a sample of only married individuals. In the present study, relationship self-efficacy was studied as a possible individual characteristic that affects whether people feel their expectations are fulfilled in marriage. Intuitively, relationship self-efficacy is linked to marital satisfaction via expectation fulfillment in that individuals who have high relationship self-efficacy will be more likely to engage in behaviors that affirm the relationship (i.e., behavioral confirmation). Subsequently, the perception that one's expectations are fulfilled was hypothesized to result in high marital satisfaction.

Drawbacks of Relationship Self-Efficacy

Though self-efficacy is generally considered a positive attribute, some research has suggested that having high relationship self-efficacy is not always beneficial. Arias, Lyons, and Street (1997) administered the Relationship Efficacy Measure (REF) to a

group of 66 married women (mean age = 26.86, mean years married = 3.76) recruited via radio and flyer advertisements. The REF taps individuals' confidence in their ability to solve marital conflicts. Participants respond to seven items such as "When I put my mind to it, I can resolve just about any disagreement that comes up between my partner and me" using a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Participants also completed the Conflict Tactics Scale, which asked them to report the extent to which verbal and physical aggression was present in their relationship. Participants reported the frequency of occurrences such as "threatened to hit or throw something at the other one" and "beat up the other one." The researchers found that victimized women with high relationship self-efficacy experienced more depressive symptoms than victimized women with low relationship self-efficacy. They concluded that women who feel they can control the course of their relationship may become depressed when they are unable to control their spouse's verbal or physical aggression. Thus, there appear to be situations in which having high relationship self-efficacy is not beneficial.

Optimism

The Origin and Nature of Optimism

Optimism is the tendency, the natural push of one, to anticipate positive outcomes and believe that negative outcomes are only temporary. Optimism's counterpart, pessimism, is the tendency to believe bad events will continue for a long time and have permanent negative consequences (Seligman, 2006). Optimism and pessimism are generally thought of as broad characteristics that capture an individual's positivity or negativity about life in general rather than in specific situations (Scheier & Carver, 1993). However, some research has also been conducted on a construct called situational

optimism, the tendency to anticipate positive outcomes in a specific life domain (Neff & Geers, 2013).

Optimism and pessimism are often referred to as discrete categories, with people falling into either the optimist category or the pessimist category. In reality, optimism and pessimism is better thought of as a continuum with people falling somewhere in between the two (Carver, Scheier, & Segerstrom, 2010). Research suggests that most people are optimistic, with some more so than others (Segerstrom, 2006). Some studies suggest that optimism tends to remain stable over the lifetime, with test-retest correlations ranging from .58-.79 (Carver, et al., 2010). However, there is some disagreement on this. For example, one 10-year test-retest study found that optimism did not remain stable, with correlations between pretest and posttest falling at .35 (Segerstrom, 2007). Other research has indicated that pessimistic tendencies can be reduced through cognitive behavioral therapy (Carver, et al., 2010). Thus, research continues to debate whether one's level of optimism remains stable or not throughout one's lifetime.

Optimism is thought to originate from a mixture of nature and nurture. Twin/adoption studies suggest that heritability is approximately 25% (Plomin, Scheier, Bergeman, Pedersen, Nesselroade, & McClearn, 1992) and higher levels of optimism have been found in adults whose childhoods were marked by parental warmth and financial security (Heinonen, Räikkönen, & Keltikangas-Järvinen, 2005; Heinonen, Räikkönen, Matthews, Scheier, Raitakari, Pulkki, & Keltikangas-Järvinen, 2006).

Research on Optimism

Research has consistently found that optimism has a variety of benefits. When faced with a challenge, optimists do not give up as easily as pessimists and they tend to

excel in all areas of life, whether school, work, or relationships (Seligman, 2006; Srivastava, et al., 2006). In a review of the literature on optimism, Carver, et al. (2010) reported that differences between how optimists and pessimists approach the world has a significant impact on their lives. They noted that optimists and pessimists differ in how they confront problems and how they handle adversity. For example, when confronting difficulty, optimists expect good outcomes, which result in their experiencing positive feelings even when things are hard. Carver, et al. (2010) also noted that optimists tend to cope with problems by accepting the reality of what is happening and approaching problems instead of avoiding them. Pessimists, on the other hand, tend to avoid problems either through overt denial or by engaging in wishful thinking about how things ought to be (Carver, et al., 2010).

Some research has been conducted regarding the effects of optimism in romantic relationships. Srivastava, et al. (2006) studied this in a sample of 108 couples (mean age = 20.4) who had been exclusively dating each other for at least six months. As part of a larger study, participants completed the LOT-R to measure their optimism and the Couples Satisfaction Scale (CSS) to measure their relationship satisfaction. The later consisted of eight items such as “In general, how do you feel about the closeness and distance in your relationship with your partner now?” Participants rated these statements on a scale ranging from 1 (*very dissatisfied*) to 5 (*very satisfied*). Results indicated that both optimists and their partners were more satisfied in their relationships than couples that did not contain an optimist. This was true even when the researchers controlled for the possibility that optimists attract more supportive partners (Srivastava, et al., 2006).

Srivastava, et al. (2006) conducted two more phases of their study of optimism in romantic relationships. In the second phase, couples were asked to participate in a 10-minute discussion of an area of disagreement in the relationship. At the end of the discussion, participants completed questionnaires rating the conflict resolution behaviors of themselves and their partner. For example, they responded to the question “During the conversation, to what extent did you [your partner] try to understand your partner’s [your] point of view?” These items were rated on a scale of 0 (*none/not at all*) to 10 (*a great deal/extremely*). Results indicated that optimists and their partners described the disagreements as less intense than non-optimist couples. One week later, participants were asked to rate the extent to which they felt the conflict had reached resolution. Optimists and their partners tended to agree that their conflict had reached greater resolution, an effect that remained even when the researchers controlled for the intensity of each couple’s disagreement (Srivastava, et al., 2006). In the final phase of their study, Srivastava, et al. (2006) followed up with couples one year later to determine whether the relationship was still intact. Results indicated that greater male optimism predicted the continuation of the relationship. Female optimism did not affect relationship survival.

The study by Srivastava, et al. (2006) was conducted with the utmost attention to detail. The authors were particularly careful to control for potential external confounds. One limitation of this study is that the participants were only in dating relationships. Thus, it is unclear to what extent these findings shed light on the effects of optimism in marriage.

Assad, et al. (2007) conducted a study on optimism in romantic relationships with a sample of primarily married couples. The study was conducted in 2001 and 2003, and

resulted in a final sample 274 couples who completed both phases. Initially, couples completed questionnaires and interviews about their relationship and also engaged in a 25-minute videotaped discussion of the history of their relationship, enjoyable events they shared, areas of agreement and disagreement, and plans for the future. Trained observers rated the use of hostility and warmth during the conversation to obtain an overall measure of objective relationship quality.

Questionnaires included the LOT–R to measure optimism, Norton’s Quality of Marriage Index to measure relationship satisfaction, and a measure of cooperative problem solving. For this measure, participants rated seven items on a scale of 1 (*always*) to 7 (*never*) for how often they and how often their partner engaged in certain behaviors. Example items include: “Blamed your partner for the problem” and “Consider your partner’s ideas for solving the problem” (Assad, et al., 2007).

Results indicated that participants with high optimism scores also tended to be rated high in relationship quality by the external observers. Also, optimistic participants and their partners tended to rate their own relationship as more satisfying than participants who were less optimistic. Similarly, participants who were highly optimistic or in a relationship with an optimistic partner were more likely to report higher levels of cooperative problem solving. Finally, partners with higher levels of optimism were more likely to still be together in 2003 than were partners with lower levels of optimism (Assad, et al., 2007).

The study by Assad, et al. (2007) added to the literature by suggesting that optimism may affect partner’s behavior in relationships, particularly their ability to solve problems cooperatively. Unfortunately, since this study was correlational, it cannot be

concluded that people high in optimism solve relationship problems better than pessimists. Future research confirming the direction of the relationship between optimism and cooperative problem solving would greatly add to the literature. In light of the present study, however, the relationship between these variables is interesting because it suggests the possibility that optimism might create behavioral confirmation. Specifically, people who are optimistic might be more likely to engage in behaviors that promote the health of their relationships.

Summary

This chapter reviewed literature related to the constructs that were studied in the present research. Specifically, relevant research on marital satisfaction, marital expectations, optimism, and relationship self-efficacy were reviewed. Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology used to answer the research questions. Chapter 4 will present the results of the research. Chapter 5 will discuss the implications of the research results in light of the research questions and existing literature.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the research design that was used to examine factors related to marital satisfaction and the fulfillment of expectations in marriage. The present study employed a non-experimental, correlational research design using a survey research method. Participants completed surveys that measured their (a) marital satisfaction, (b) optimism, (c) relationship self-efficacy, (d) height of marital expectations, and (e) the extent to which participants felt their marital expectations were being met. Structural equation modeling was used to test a proposed model of the relationship between participants' height of marital expectations, optimism, relationship self-efficacy, belief that their marital expectations are being met, and their marital satisfaction (Figure 1).

Research Questions

The present study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Is fulfillment of expectations related to height of expectations?
2. Is fulfillment of expectations related to optimism?
3. Is fulfillment of expectations related to relationship self-efficacy?
4. Is height of expectations related to relationship self-efficacy?
5. Is height of expectations related to optimism?

6. Is relationship self-efficacy related to optimism?
7. Is marital satisfaction related to fulfillment of expectations?

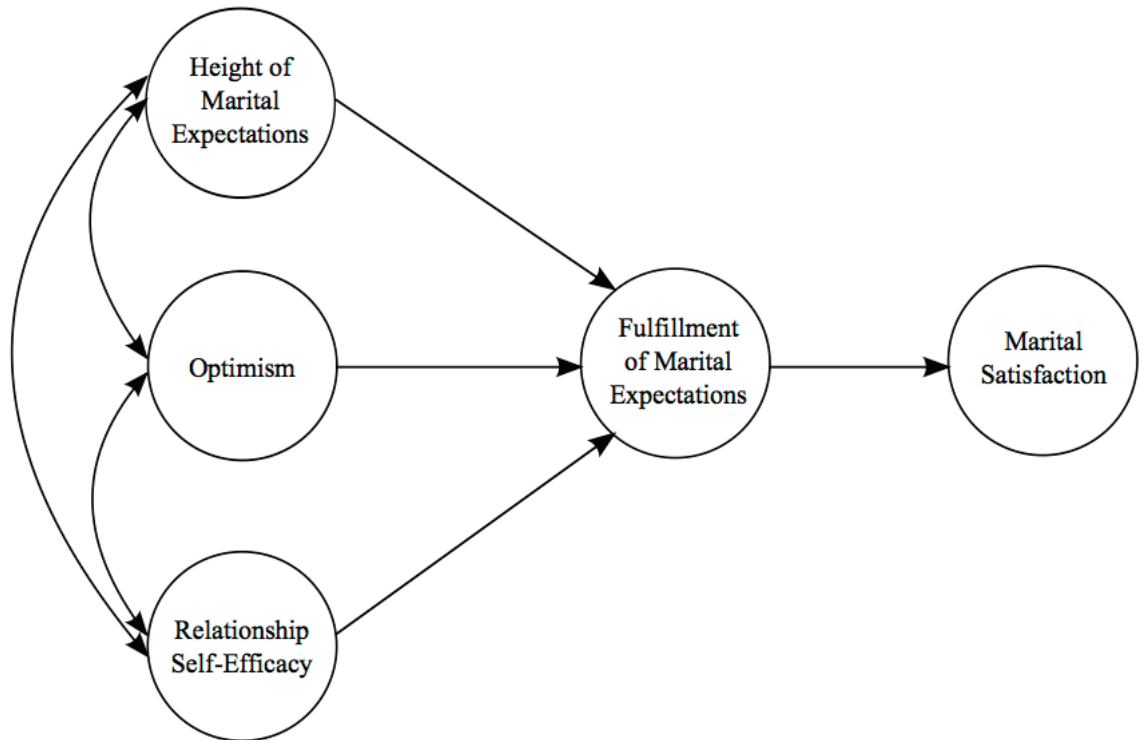


Figure 1. Hypothesized Relationship between Variables

Research Design

The present study employed a non-experimental, correlational research design. Variables were analyzed using structural equation modeling to determine the strength of the relationship between them. While most correlational research does not allow one to determine causation, structural equation modeling path analysis gives a good sense of the direction in which variables are related. Non-experimental, correlational research is a

commonly-used approach in the field of psychology. It allows for existing variables to be measured without being manipulated by an experimental environment. This allows for a good understanding of how phenomena are experienced in day-to-day life.

In this study, data was gathered using a survey research method. This approach was chosen because of the nature of the variables being studied. All the variables in this study were subjective, or not directly observable, and therefore could best be measured using a self-report format, such as a survey or interview. Surveys were chosen for this study because they are simple to administer and provide clear quantitative data to the researcher. Survey research has some limitations. Compared to interviews, surveys generally produce less detailed and nuanced data. Surveys also lack the controlled environment of experimental research, thus making it difficult to understand why participants responded the way they did.

Independent Variables

The present study measured three independent variables: height of marital expectations, optimism, and relationship self-efficacy. Height of marital expectations is defined as the extent to which an individual believes certain marital expectations (e.g., spending a lot of time together or sharing values) are important for marital functioning (Vangelisti and Daly, 1997). The Relationship Standards Questionnaire (RSQ) was used to measure this variable. Optimism is a tendency to anticipate positive outcomes and believe that negative outcomes are only temporary (Seligman, 2002). In the present study, this variable was measured using the Life Orientation Scale–Revised (LOT–R). Relationship self-efficacy is an individual’s confidence in his or her ability to perform relationship-maintaining behaviors such as openly communicating with his or her partner,

providing support and nurturance, and controlling feelings of hurt and anger (Lopez, et al., 2007). In the present study, this variable was measured using the Relationship Self-Efficacy Scale (RSES).

Dependent Variables

The present study measured two dependent variables: fulfillment of marital expectations and marital satisfaction. Fulfillment of marital expectations is defined as an individual's subjective report of the extent to which his or her marriage reflects certain marital expectations (e.g., spending a lot of time together) (Vangelisti and Daly, 1997). The Relationship Standards Questionnaire (RSQ) was used to measure this variable. Marital satisfaction is an individual's perceived happiness and contentment with his/her marriage. The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS) was used to measure this variable.

Population and Sample

The present study aimed to understand factors that relate to whether currently-married adults feel that their expectations are met in marriage and whether they are satisfied with their marriage. For the present study, adults were defined as individuals over the age of 18. Participants had to have been married for a minimum of two years to be included in the research. The sample was collected using convenience sampling. Participants were recruited via QuestionPro, an online service that helps researchers create and distribute surveys to target populations.

QuestionPro maintains a database of millions of people who have signed up to take surveys for them. In exchange for each completed survey, QuestionPro gives

participants points that can later be redeemed for gift cards to popular retail establishments. Anyone can sign up to do this through QuestionPro. To sign up, individuals must provide thorough demographic information so that researchers can choose the demographic makeup of their sample.

In the case of my survey, QuestionPro recruited a sample of both men and women who listed their marital status as “married.” Potential participants received an email from QuestionPro with an invitation to complete my survey. Participation was strictly voluntary. In order to ensure that the data had enough power to detect an effect of a statistically significant size, over 300 responses were attained through QuestionPro.

Instrumentation

Relationship Standards Questionnaire

The RSQ consists of 30 items that are each answered twice. First, participants rate how important they think each item is for relationships in general from 1 (*very little*) to 9 (*very much*). Second, participants rate the extent to which they feel the item is occurring in their own marriage from 1 (*very little*) to 9 (*very much*). Examples of items include: “the two will spend much time together,” “the two people will acquire possessions together and will presume to jointly share and own them,” and “both people will believe their relationship to be different from other relationships. It is a unique and special relationship – not like others.” Scores from the answers regarding the importance of the expectations are summed into a total score that reflects the overall height of the individual’s marital expectations. Higher scores indicate that the individual expects more out of marriage. A fulfillment score is attained by summing the answers given regarding the extent to which the individual’s expectations are being fulfilled. Higher scores

indicate that the individual feels more expectation fulfillment in his or her marriage. The RSQ has a readability level of grade 5 and takes about 15 minutes to complete.

The original authors of the survey (Vangelisti & Daly, 1997) conducted factor analysis on the RSQ and identified seven subscales that reflect different dimensions of marital expectations. These seven subscales exist for both the RSQ Height of Expectations and RSQ Fulfillment of Expectations scales. The factors include: (a) *relational identity*, (b) *integration*, (c) *affective accessibility*, (d) *trust*, (e) *future orientation*, (f) *role fulfillment*, and (g) *flexibility*. Unfortunately, the authors did not describe these subscales in detail. Because of the vagueness of these subscales, I chose not to focus on them in my study. They were included in the SEM to lend detail to the analysis, but the main focus of the study was on the overarching constructs height of expectations and fulfillment of expectations.

Vangelisti and Daly (1997) found evidence of high reliability in a sample of adults (mean age = 34.52) in long-term romantic relationships (mean duration = 11.94 years). Alpha reliabilities were .91 and .95 for the RSQ Height of Expectations and RSQ Fulfillment of Expectations scales, respectively. No research has been conducted to test this scale's validity. The scale was constructed after gathering information from the literature and from qualitative interviews. Through this information-gathering process, the researchers identified thirty standards that were consistently evident in either the literature, the interviews, or both.

Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale

The KMSS consists of 3 items that assess marital satisfaction on a Likert scale, with answers ranging from 1 (*extremely dissatisfied*) to 6 (*extremely satisfied*). The items are: “how satisfied are you with your marriage,” “how satisfied are you with your husband/wife as a spouse,” and “how satisfied are you with your relationship with your spouse.” A global score of marital satisfaction is attained, with higher scores indicating greater marital satisfaction (Crane, Middleton, & Bean, 2000). The KMSS has a readability level of grade 10 and takes less than 1 minute to complete.

The KMSS has undergone extensive testing (see Crane et al., 2000) and is widely recognized as a valid and reliable measure. The KMSS was designed to be an alternative to longer measures of marital satisfaction and has been found to correlate highly with measures such as the Quality Marriage Index (.91) and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (.83) (Schumm, Paff-Bergen, Hatch, Obiorah, Copeland, Meens, & Bugaihia, 1986). Research indicates that reliability is quite high with Cronbach’s alpha ranging between .84 and .98 (Schumm, Jurich, and Boliman, 1990).

Life Orientation Scale–Revised

The LOT–R consists of 10 items that assess optimism on a Likert scale. Individuals rate their agreement with the 10 statements from 1 (*I agree a lot*) to 5 (*I disagree a lot*). Three items are positively worded, three items are negatively worded, and four items are filler. Example items include: “in uncertain times, I usually expect the best,” “if something can go wrong for me, it will,” and “I’m always optimistic about my future.” A global score of optimism is attained by reverse-scoring the negatively worded items and summing them with the positively worded items. Higher scores indicate a

greater tendency toward optimism. The LOT-R has a readability level of grade 4 and takes about two minutes to complete.

Scheier, Carver, and Bridges (1994) assessed the psychometric properties of the LOT-R using a sample of 2,055 undergraduate students at Carnegie Mellon University and found it to have adequate reliability and validity. The researchers used principle components factor analysis to determine that the LOT-R assesses a single optimism factor (mean factor loading = .69). The researchers also assessed the internal consistency and test-retest reliability of the LOT-R. Item-scale correlations ranged from .43 to .63 suggesting that the items measure the same construct but not to the point where they are redundant. Chronbach's alpha for the set of six items was .78, indicating that the scale has adequate internal consistency. Test-retest reliability indicated that scores on the LOT-R remain fairly stable over time (Scheier, et al., 1994).

To test the convergent and discriminant validity of the LOT-R, the researchers compared students' scores on the LOT-R to scores on the original Life Orientation Test (LOT) and to scores from several instruments that measure psychological constructs thought to be related to optimism (self-mastery, trait anxiety, neuroticism, and self-esteem). The correlation between scores on the LOT-R and LOT were high (.95), suggesting that both assessments measure the same construct. Correlations between all other measures were moderate (-.36 to .54), suggesting that the LOT-R measures a unique construct (Scheier, et al., 1994).

Relationship Self-Efficacy Scale

The RSES consists of 35 items that assess relationship self-efficacy on a 9 point Likert scale. Participants are asked to rate how confident they feel in their ability to do things like: “deal with important disagreements openly and honestly,” “express openly to your partner your hopes for the future of the relationship,” and “tell your partner when you would prefer to be alone.” A global relationship self-efficacy score is achieved by summing all items. The RSES has a readability level of grade 6 and takes about 4 minutes to complete.

The RSES has three subscales: (a) *mutuality*, (b) *emotional control*, and (c) *differentiation*. Mutuality consists of “skills associated with both providing care and receiving care and support from one’s partner” (Lopez et al., 2007, p. 86). Emotional control captures “skills related to appropriately regulating negative feelings of frustration, anger, or disappointment with one’s partner” (Lopez et al., 2007, p. 86). Differentiation includes “skills associated with expressing needs for separateness and assertively maintaining clear interpersonal boundaries with one’s partner” (Lopez et al., 2007, p. 86). Table 1 depicts the items that are included on each subscale.

Research has indicated that the RSES has adequate reliability and validity. Internal consistency scores range from .87 to .94 (Lopez, et al., 2007; Lopez & Lent, 1991) among college students in current romantic relationships. Item-scale correlations range from .51 to .73, suggesting that the items measure the same construct but not to the point where they are redundant (Lopez, et al., 2007). The scale demonstrates adequate concurrent validity because it correlates moderately with scales of dyadic adjustment and relationship satisfaction (Lopez & Lent, 1991).

Table 1 explains the conceptual definitions of the scales included in my study. It also depicts the associated survey items for each scale. This will give the reader a general idea of what each subscale represents.

Table 1

Conceptual Definitions of Scales and Associated Survey Items

Scale name & Instrument	Conceptual definition	Subscales & Items
Height of marital expectations (measured by <i>RSQ</i> column 1)	The extent to which an individual believes certain marital expectations (e.g., spending a lot of time together or sharing values) are important for marital functioning (Vangelisti & Daly, 1997)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Relational identity</i> (3, 5, 9, 15, 21, 26, 27, 28) 2. <i>Integration</i> (10, 11, 12, 22, 30) 3. <i>Affective accessibility</i> (7, 13, 19) 4. <i>Trust</i> (2, 6, 24, 25) 5. <i>Future orientation</i> (8, 14, 23) 6. <i>Role fulfillment</i> (16, 17, 18, 20) 7. <i>Flexibility</i> (1, 4, 29)
Fulfillment of marital expectations (measured by <i>RSQ</i> column 2)	Degree to which an individual self-reports that his or her marriage reflects his or her marital expectations (Vangelisti & Daly, 1997)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Relational identity</i> (3, 5, 9, 15, 21, 26, 27, 28) 2. <i>Integration</i> (10, 11, 12, 22, 30) 3. <i>Affective accessibility</i> (7, 13, 19) 4. <i>Trust</i> (2, 6, 24, 25) 5. <i>Future orientation</i> (8, 14, 23) 6. <i>Role fulfillment</i> (16, 17, 18, 20) 7. <i>Flexibility</i> (1, 4, 29)
Optimism (measured by <i>LOT-R</i>)	Tendency to anticipate positive outcomes and believe that negative outcomes are only temporary (Seligman, 2006)	None
Relationship self-efficacy (measured by <i>RSES</i>)	An individual's perceived ability to engage in the behaviors necessary to meet marital goals (Lopez, et al., 2007)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Mutuality</i> (2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25) 2. <i>Emotional control</i> (12, 17, 23, 24) 3. <i>Differentiation</i> (1, 5, 7, 11, 13)
Marital satisfaction (measured by <i>KMSS</i>)	An individual's perceived happiness and contentment with his/her marriage.	None

Reliability of Instruments in Present Study

The reliability of each survey was assessed by looking at the Cronbach's Alpha, where scores closer to 1 indicate higher reliability. All of the surveys used in this study demonstrated adequate reliability. The RSQ had a Cronbach's Alpha of .964 for the Height of Expectations scale and .981 for the Fulfillment of Expectations scale. The Relationship Self-Efficacy Scale (RSES) had a Cronbach's Alpha of .963. The Orientation Toward Life - Revised (LOT-R) measure was .740. The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS) was .966.

Table 2

Reliability of Surveys

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's alpha
Relationship Standards Questionnaire (RSQ)	30	.964
Height of Expectations		
Subscale 1 <i>relational identity</i>	8	.880
Subscale 2 <i>integration</i>	5	.875
Subscale 3 <i>affective accessibility</i>	3	.744
Subscale 4 <i>trust</i>	4	.719
Subscale 5 <i>future orientation</i>	3	.787
Subscale 6 <i>role fulfillment</i>	4	.723
Subscale 7 <i>flexibility</i>	3	.772
Relationship Standards Questionnaire (RSQ)	30	.981
Fulfillment of Expectations		
Subscale 1 <i>relational identity</i>	8	.934
Subscale 2 <i>integration</i>	5	.924
Subscale 3 <i>affective accessibility</i>	3	.826
Subscale 4 <i>trust</i>	4	.872
Subscale 5 <i>future orientation</i>	3	.852
Subscale 6 <i>role fulfillment</i>	4	.866
Subscale 7 <i>flexibility</i>	3	.829
Life Orientation Test - Revised (LOT-R)	10	.740

Table 2—*Continued*

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's alpha
Relationship Self-Efficacy Scale (RSES)	25	.963
Subscale 1 <i>mutuality</i>	16	.954
Subscale 2 <i>emotional control</i>	4	.868
Subscale 3 <i>differentiation</i>	5	.833
Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS)	3	.966

Procedure

To the best of my knowledge, no harm came to the research participants in the process of this study. The surveys were anonymous and the subject matter being studied was not particularly sensitive nature. Participants were informed of the nature of the surveys before they elected to take them and they were free to discontinue at any point in time. My contact information and the contact information of my dissertation chair were provided to participants in case they had questions or concerns. We were not contacted by any participants.

The sample consisted of currently married adults, over the age of 18. Participants were recruited via QuestionPro. It took less than 24 hours for over 300 responses to be collected through QuestionPro. QuestionPro was chosen because it allowed for long surveys (in my case over 100 questions), ensured the anonymity of participants, and offered a discount to me for being a graduate student researcher.

The first page of the survey introduced the study, identified potential risks and benefits, informed participants that they could discontinue the survey at any time, and supplied contact information for myself (the principle investigator) and my dissertation chair. Participants had to click a button to acknowledge that they read and understood the

introductory information and that by answering the survey questions, they were giving their consent to participate in the study. Next, basic demographic information was gathered including: marital status, length of marriage, age, gender, ethnicity, ethnicity of spouse, presence of children in the home, and annual income. Participants responded to the RSQ, followed by the LOT-R, the RSES, and the KMSS. Throughout the duration of the surveys, a button was available to discontinue the survey at any time. After participants completed the surveys, a final screen appeared thanking them for their participation and letting them know QuestionPro had added points to their account.

Treatment of Data

No identifying information linked participants to their survey responses. I used QuestionPro's Respondent Anonymity Assurance (RAA) feature to ensure that this was the case. RAA assigns each participant a code and removes all identifying information that QuestionPro has about their participants (e.g., contact information, points earned). QuestionPro collected IP address information to ensure that the same person did not take my survey twice, but I immediately deleted this information from the SPSS file that they gave me.

Because of the complexity of the surveys (e.g., on the RSQ participants must rate 30 items twice), when participants missed an item, an alert asked that they fill it in before moving on to the next survey. This resulted in no missing data for the participants who completed the entire study. Participants who discontinued the surveys early were excluded from the final data set because it was assumed that they changed their mind about participating.

Once downloaded, survey data was stored in a password-protected document on a private computer and a backup was kept on an external hard drive. Only myself and committee members had access to the data. Once the data was downloaded and backed up, the surveys and all responses were deleted from QuestionPro.

Summary

In this chapter, the research methodology for the present study was described. The study used structural equation modeling to examine factors related to marital satisfaction and the fulfillment of expectations in marriage. The research design was defined in this chapter. The population and sample were identified. Research questions and hypotheses were proposed and the research variables were defined. Specifically, the following variables were defined: height of marital expectations, fulfillment of marital expectations, optimism, relationship self-efficacy and marital satisfaction. The instruments that were used to measure these variables were identified. The data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures were described. Finally, the budget for the study was presented. Chapter 4 will present the results of the research. Chapter 5 will discuss the implications of the results in light of the research questions and existing literature.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to test a conceptual model of marital expectation fulfillment and marital satisfaction. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to determine whether the relationships between the variables proposed by the model were confirmed by empirical data. This chapter will present descriptive statistics regarding the characteristics of this study's sample, information regarding the reliability of the surveys used, and the results of the SEM analysis.

Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

A total of 399 individuals attempted to complete the surveys. However, some of these cases were excluded from the data analysis because they did not meet the study's criteria or chose to quit the surveys partway through. Sixty-two individuals quit the surveys without completing all the questions. This was interpreted as the individuals revoking their consent to participate in the study, so their responses were deleted from the data set. Three cases were deleted because they reported being married less than 2 years, which was an exclusionary criteria set up at the onset of the study. Additionally, the surveys automatically discontinued individuals who reported that they were under 18 or not married. After these cases were removed from the data set, 310 participants remained

who could be included in the analysis. Demographic information about the sample is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

Demographic	N	%
Gender		
Female	191	61.6
Male	118	38.1
Transgender	1	.3
Ethnicity		
African American from the Caribbean	2	.6
African American from the USA	14	4.5
American Indian	8	2.6
Asian American	9	2.9
Caucasian American	255	82.3
Latino/a	13	4.2
Multiracial	5	1.6
Other	4	1.3
Age		
Mean = 53.2, Range = 20-84		
Frequency by groups		
20-29	25	8.1
30-39	50	16.1
40-49	34	11.0
50-59	68	21.9
60-69	102	32.9
70+	31	10.0
Years married		
Mean = 24.72, Range = 2-60		
Frequency by groups		
2-9	74	23.9
10-19	58	18.7
20-29	50	16.1
30-39	56	18.1

Table 3—*Continued*

Demographic	N	%
Number of Children		
None	30	9.7
1	63	20.3
2	106	34.2
3	51	16.5
4	38	12.3
5+	22	7.1
Income Range		
\$0-\$9,999	8	2.6
\$10,000-\$24,999	32	10.3
\$25,000-\$49,999	88	28.4
\$50,000-\$74,999	75	24.2
\$75,000-\$99,999	55	17.7
\$100,000-\$124,000	23	7.4
\$125,000-\$149,999	20	6.5
\$150,000+	9	2.9

Descriptive Statistics

Variable means and standard deviations are presented in table 4. Overall, participants tended to report high marital expectations. The mean response was 8.06 on a scale of 1-9. The most frequently chosen answer (mode) was 9, suggesting that participants tended to believe that the items on the Relationship Standards Questionnaire (RSQ) are very important in marriage. Participants also tended to report that their expectations were fulfilled in their marriages. The mean response was 7.53 on a scale of 1-9 and the mode was 9. Relationship self-efficacy also tended to be high among participants. The mean response was 4.17 on a scale of 1-5 and the mode was 5. Optimism amongst participants tended to be moderate with the mean response of 2.44 on a scale of 0-4 and a mode of 2. Marital satisfaction was high amongst participants with a mean response of 4.99 on a scale of 1-6 and a mode of 6.

Table 5 presents zero order correlations. All of the variables were significantly positively correlated with each other, with correlations ranging from low (.191) to moderate (.662). None of the variables were highly correlated, which suggests that each variable measured a distinct construct. The positive direction of the correlations suggest that participants who scored high on one variable tended to score high on the other variables as well.

Table 4

Variable Means and Standard Deviations

Variable	Scale Range	Mean	SD
Height of Expectations	1-9	8.06	.947
Fulfillment of Expectations	1-9	7.53	1.515
Optimism	0-4	2.44	.737
Relationship Self-Efficacy	1-5	4.17	.689
Marital Satisfaction	1-6	4.99	1.217

Table 5

Zero Order Correlations

	Height of Expect.	Fulfillment of Expect.	Optimism	Relationship Self-Efficacy	Marital Satisfaction
Height of Expectations		.499**	.191**	.440**	.244**
Fulfillment of Expectations			.271**	.655**	.662**
Optimism				.254**	.303**
Relationship Self-Efficacy					.644**

** . Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Research Questions

The present study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Is fulfillment of expectations related to height of expectations?
2. Is fulfillment of expectations related to optimism?
3. Is fulfillment of expectations related to relationship self-efficacy?
4. Is height of expectations related to relationship self-efficacy?
5. Is height of expectations related to optimism?
6. Is relationship self-efficacy related to optimism?
7. Is marital satisfaction related to fulfillment of expectations?

Normality

Significant skewness was evident for each of the surveys used. This means the data does not fit a normal bell curve. As was mentioned earlier, participants tended to report high expectations, with the most common response being a 9 on a scale of 1-9. This resulted in a negatively skewed statistic (-1.56). Similarly, participants' belief that their expectations were fulfilled was negatively skewed (-1.53), as was their relationship self-efficacy (-.925) and marital satisfaction (-1.363). Participants' optimism score was slightly positively skewed (.079). These skewness statistics do not invalidate the data, but can prevent Chi-square from reaching statistical non-significance. Skewness also tells us something about the people who completed the surveys. The participants tended to have high expectations of their marriage accompanied by a tendency to believe these expectations were met. They also tended to have high relationship self-efficacy and marital satisfaction and a moderate amount of optimism.

Model Fit

Given that the combined surveys included nearly 100 items, the measurement model proved too difficult to assess in its entirety using AMOS. Instead, I chose to focus my analysis on the structural model including the subscales of each survey, as illustrated in Figure 1. This model was a poor fit for the data. Chi-square for the original model was 883.076 ($df = 147$) with a probability level of .000. This was not surprising given the large sample size of the study. Large sample size makes it unlikely that Chi-square will reach non-significance at the .05 level (Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008). Additionally, skewness of the data can prevent Chi-square from reaching non-significance.

The criteria used to determine acceptable model fit was: Goodness of Fit Index ($GFI \geq .90$), Normed Fit Index ($NFI \geq .95$), Comparative Fit Index ($CFI \geq .95$), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation ($RMSEA < .08$). The Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), an absolute fit index which is sometimes substituted for Chi-square (Hooper, et al., 2008) was .783. “By looking at the variances and covariances accounted for by the model it [GFI] shows how closely the model comes to replicating the observed covariance matrix” (Hooper, et al., 2008). It is recommended that GFI reach .90 or larger to indicate goodness of model fit.

Two incremental fit indices were examined. Normed Fit Index (NFI), which “assesses the model by comparing the Chi-square value of the model to the Chi-square of the null model” (Hooper, et al., 2008) was .879. Comparative Fit Index (CFI), which “is a revised form of the NFI which takes into account sample size” (Hooper, et al., 2008) was

.897. Both NFI and CFI must reach .95 before a model is considered a good fit (Hooper, et al., 2008).

Finally, another absolute fit index was examined. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), which “tells us how well the model, with unknown but optimally chosen parameter estimates would fit the populations covariance matrix” (Hooper, et al., 2008) was .127. This measure should be .08 or below in order to indicate good fit (Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2006).

Revised Model

Because the original model was a poor fit for the data, modification indices were examined to determine how the model could be revised to be more accurate. The final model is depicted in Figure 2. First, it was noticed that there was large covariance between the errors of the subscales on the RSQ Height of Expectations scale and the RSQ Fulfillment of Expectations scale. For example, the *relational identity* subscale of the RSQ Height of Expectations scale was highly correlated with the *relational identity* subscale on the RSQ Fulfillment of Expectations scale (M.I. = 45.896). This is not surprising, given that the items on these scales are worded identically, requiring participants to respond to them twice, once indicating how important they believe the item to be for marriages in general and once indicating whether the item is occurring in their own marriage. The model was updated with bidirectional arrows between the errors of these subscales. A strong covariance was also observed between the errors of the RSQ Height of Expectations Subscale 1 (*relational identity*) and Subscale 4 (*trust*), indicating that there is some overlap between the constructs measured by these scales. A bidirectional arrow was added to the model to account for this relationship.

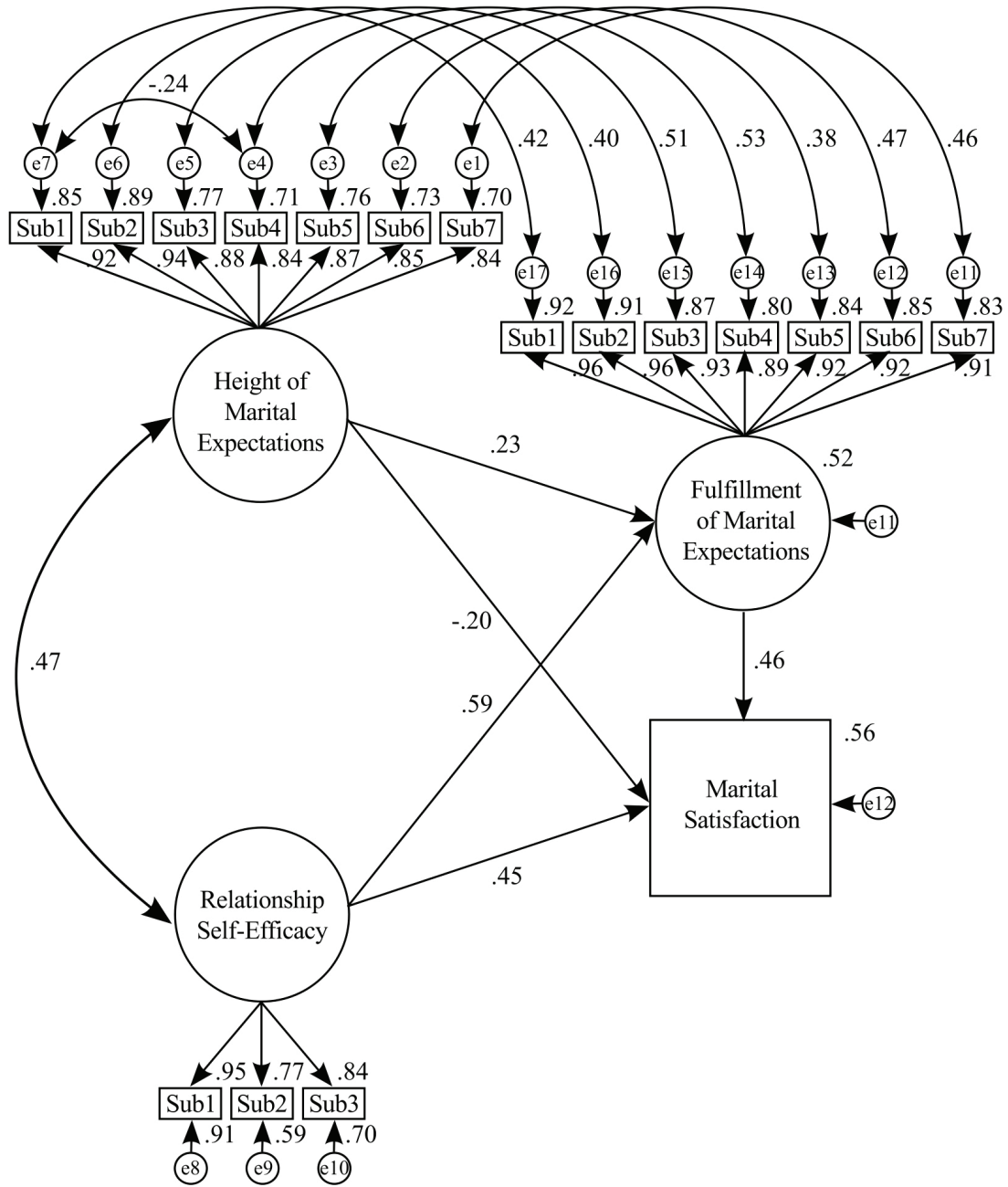


Figure 2. Revised Model of Relationship between Variables with Standardized Coefficients

Modification indices also revealed strong variance between height of expectations and marital satisfaction, optimism and marital satisfaction, and relationship self-efficacy and marital satisfaction. Thus, it appears that height of expectations, optimism, and relationship self-efficacy all directly relate to marital satisfaction. Finally, it was observed that optimism accounted for only 1% of the variance in fulfillment of marital expectations and only 1% of the variance in marital satisfaction, so it was removed from the model. These changes resulted in a greatly improved model (GFI = .892, NFI = .953, CFI = .969, RMSEA = .076).

Modification indices were again examined but no further variances or covariances stood out. Thus, it was determined that the best fit model was complete. The final model is depicted in Figure 2. As was suspected, Chi-square still failed to reach non-significance (Chi-square = 340.459, df = 122, $p < 0.001$) because of the large sample size and skewness of the data. Because GFI was so close to the suggested .90, it was considered acceptable at .892. Both NFI (.953) and CFI (.969) fell well within the range of adequate model fit. RMSEA was acceptable at .076.

Intercorrelations Among Variables

Table 6 shows the standardized coefficients in the revised model. In the revised model, the combination of height of expectations and relationship self-efficacy accounted for 52% of the variance in fulfillment of expectations. Relationship self-efficacy was the strongest predictor of expectation fulfillment ($\beta = .59$). Overall, the model accounted for 56% of the variance in marital satisfaction. Fulfillment of marital expectations ($\beta = .46$) and Relationship Self-Efficacy ($\beta = .45$) were the strongest predictors of marital satisfaction. Height of expectations and relationship self-efficacy related to marital

satisfaction both directly and indirectly through fulfillment of expectations. Table 7 shows the causal effects of the revised model. Height of expectation's direct effect was $\beta = -.20$ and its indirect effect was $\beta = .10$. Thus, height of expectations was negatively correlated with marital satisfaction, except when the expectations were fulfilled, in which case it was positively correlated to marital satisfaction. Relationship self-efficacy's direct effect on marital satisfaction was $\beta = .45$ and its indirect effect was $\beta = .27$. Thus, relationship self-efficacy was positively correlated with both fulfillment of expectations and marital satisfaction and played an important role in both processes.

Table 6

Raw and Standardized Coefficients for the Revised Full Model

Paths	b	SE	β	p
Height of exp. \rightarrow Fulfillment of exp.	.347	.074	.228	<.001
Rel. self-efficacy \rightarrow Fulfillment of exp.	1.350	.123	.589	<.001
Fulfillment of exp. \rightarrow Marital satisfaction	.383	.050	.455	<.001
Height of exp. \rightarrow Marital satisfaction	-.252	.060	-.196	<.001
Rel. self-efficacy \rightarrow Marital satisfaction	.867	.119	.449	<.001

Table 7

Causal Effects of the Revised Model

Outcome	Determinant	Causal Effects		Total
		Direct	Indirect	
Fulfillment of exp. ($R^2 = .52$)	Height of exp.	.23	--	.23
	Rel. self-efficacy	.59	--	.59
Marital satisfaction ($R^2 = .56$)	Height of exp.	-.20	.10	-.10
	Rel. self-efficacy	.45	.27	.72
	Fulfillment of exp.	.46	--	.46

Summary

In this chapter, results of the present research were presented. First, characteristics of the sample were described. Then information regarding the reliability of the surveys was presented. Finally, the results of the SEM analysis were shown, including the steps taken to revise the model. Chapter 5 will discuss the implications of the results in light of the research questions and existing literature.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This chapter will begin by summarizing the information contained in the previous four chapters. The purpose of the study will be presented, along with an abbreviated literature review. Next the methodology and findings of the present study will be described. The bulk of this chapter will be devoted to a discussion of the findings in light of the literature. Limitations will be identified. Implications for practice and for future research will be explored.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to better understand how expectations are met in a marriage. This study sought to determine whether the height of an individual's marital expectations interacts with his or her optimism and relationship self-efficacy to predict expectation fulfillment and therefore marital satisfaction. The data from this study contributes to the literature on marital satisfaction by examining the complex relationship between height of marital expectations and marital satisfaction.

Literature Review

Marital Expectations and Marital Satisfaction

For decades, researchers have attempted to identify the determinants of satisfying marriage in the hope of being able to help distressed couples and also prepare the next generation to have better relationships. One area of research is that of marital expectations. Marital expectations refer to the beliefs an individual holds about what marriage *should* be like (Vangelisti & Daly, 1997). A similar, if not identical, construct described in the literature is marital standards. Marital expectations or standards include beliefs about the extent to which spouses should share values, how much time couples should spend together, how disagreements should be handled, and any number of other issues an individual believes are important in marriage (Alexander, 2008; Vangelisti & Daly, 1997).

The literature on marriage education suggests that marital expectations are fairly engrained and resistant to change. For example, Sharp and Ganong (2000) found that after a semester-long college course intended to reduce romantic beliefs and unrealistic relationship beliefs, students demonstrated no significant changes in unrealistic relationship beliefs and only slightly lower levels of romantic beliefs. Researchers have suggested that instead of trying to change these expectations for relationships, it is more effective to provide individuals with the skills they need to achieve their expectations (Hawkins, et al., 2004; Johnson, 2011).

It has often been assumed by marriage counselors, researchers, and educators that having high expectations of marriage is destructive to the marital relationship (Lederer & Jackson, 1968; Sharp & Ganong, 2000). They argue that individuals with high

expectations set themselves up for disappointment when the reality of marriage does not live up to their ideal (Lederer & Jackson, 1968). Others have suggested just the opposite. Gottman (1999), for example, a renowned marriage researcher, believes this to be one of the biggest myths that exists about marriage. He suggests that high expectations can actually be protective to marriages.

Researchers have attempted to confirm both sides of this debate. In a correlational study, Baucom, et al. (1996) studied the effects of holding certain relationship standards on spouses' marital functioning. Results indicated that individuals with higher relationship standards also reported greater marital adjustment. Holding extreme standards was positively correlated to marital adjustment. Additionally, holding these extreme standards was not significantly related to whether or not the individual felt his or her expectations were met. This suggests that holding high expectations does not necessarily make one less likely to get their expectations fulfilled. The results of this study also indicated that perceiving one's standards as having been met affects marital satisfaction more than the height of one's standards. "Regardless of what the standards are, when they are not being met in the relationship, the person demonstrates relationship distress in a variety of ways" (p. 85).

Vangelisti and Daly (1997) also conducted a correlational study to examine the relationship between height of expectations, fulfillment of expectations, and relationship satisfaction. Results suggested a weak, but significant, positive correlation between high standards and high relationship satisfaction. Thus, this study suggests that expecting more of one's relationship is associated with greater satisfaction. A much stronger positive correlation was found between relationship satisfaction and perceiving one's expectations

as having been met. This matches with the finding of Baucom, et al., (1996) that regardless of what the expectation is, if it is not being met in the relationship, individuals are likely to experience distress.

Eidelson and Epstein (1982) attempted to differentiate between the belief systems of distressed and non-distressed couples by creating the Relationship Belief Inventory. They administered their scale to two groups of couples, one group who was attending marital therapy and one group who was not. Interestingly, the correlations between the Relationship Belief Inventory and the Marital Adjustment Scale tended to be lower for non-clinical than clinical participants. This suggests that individuals with better marital adjustment may be able to hold these irrational beliefs without it affecting their satisfaction in the marriage. Another notable finding in this study is that scores on the Relationship Belief Inventory were not particularly high for any of the participants, even in the clinical sample. This suggests that people may not hold these dysfunctional beliefs to any significant degree.

In a correlational study, Sullivan & Schwebel (1995) studied irrational relationship beliefs in two groups of never-married undergraduates. Based on participants' responses to the Relationship Belief Inventory, the researchers split the data into high-irrational and low-irrational groups. Participants in the high-irrational group indicated poorer relationship adjustment on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale than those in the low-irrational group. This suggests that individuals with more irrational beliefs about relationships are prone to relationship dissatisfaction. Individuals in the high-irrational group also predicted that their satisfaction would increase between the present and the time they had school-age children more-so than those in the low-irrational group. The

researchers concluded that expecting too much of one's marriage negatively affects relationship adjustment.

Some researchers have suggested that high expectations in and of themselves are not destructive to marriage. Rather, other variables interact with height of expectations to determine marital satisfaction. The study by Eidelson and Epstein (1982), which was discussed earlier, suggests that this might be the case. In that study, the correlation between height of expectations and marital satisfaction was lower amongst a non-clinical sample of couples than amongst a clinical sample. Thus, the non-clinical sample was better able to hold irrational beliefs while still maintaining their marital satisfaction. This suggests that other variables were affecting the impact of high expectations on marital satisfaction.

McNulty and Karney (2004) found evidence that height of expectations does not directly affect marital satisfaction. Rather, other variables interact with height of marital expectations to determine marital satisfaction. They hypothesized that spouses who behaved positively toward each other when discussing an area of disagreement and who made positive attributions for their partner's behavior would have stable marital satisfaction even if their expectations were high because their positive skills would help them get their expectations fulfilled. Results indicated that for spouses with positive interaction behaviors and a positive attributional style, high expectations predicted stable satisfaction over time whereas low expectations predicted declines in satisfaction. Conversely, for spouses with less positive interaction behaviors and a negative attributional style, high expectations predicted declines in marital satisfaction, whereas low expectations predicted stable satisfaction. Thus, this study suggested that having high

expectations can be positive or negative for a relationship, depending on whether the spouses have positive or negative relationship skills (McNulty & Karney, 2004). The present study followed in the footsteps of McNulty and Karney (2004) by attempting to identify two personal characteristics (optimism and relationship self-efficacy) that individuals might be able to foster in themselves to increase their ability to fulfill their own expectations in marriage.

Relationship Self-Efficacy

Relationship self-efficacy is a way to conceptualize an individual's confidence in his or her ability to perform relationship-affirming behaviors such as openly communicating with one's partner, providing support and nurturance, and controlling feelings of hurt and anger (Lopez, et al., 2007). In a correlational study, Lopez and Lent (1991) developed three scales of relationship efficacy: relationship self-efficacy (SE), relationship other-efficacy (OE), and relationship-inferred self-efficacy (RISE). Results of the study suggested that both SE and OE were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction, while RISE was a significant predictor of relationship persistence.

Lopez, et al., (2007) added 10 items to the SE scale developed by Lopez and Lent (1991) and then conducted factor analysis to determine whether the overall relationship self-efficacy score that the test produced could be further distilled into self-efficacy in specific domains of the relationship. Three specific subscales of relationship self-efficacy were identified: mutuality, defined as the ability to give and receive care; emotional control, defined as the ability to manage one's negative affect in the relationship; and differentiation, defined as the ability to assert personal needs. All three subscales were positively correlated with relationship satisfaction.

My study is the first to examine relationship self-efficacy using a sample of only married individuals. In the present study, relationship self-efficacy was studied as a possible individual characteristic that affects whether people feel their expectations are fulfilled in marriage. Intuitively, relationship self-efficacy is linked to marital satisfaction via expectation fulfillment in that individuals who have high relationship self-efficacy will be more likely to engage in behaviors that affirm the relationship (i.e., behavioral confirmation). Subsequently, the perception that one's expectations are fulfilled was hypothesized to result in high marital satisfaction.

Optimism

Optimism is the tendency, the natural push of one, to anticipate positive outcomes and believe that negative outcomes are only temporary. Research has consistently found that optimism has a variety of benefits. When faced with a challenge, optimists do not give up as easily as pessimists and they tend to excel in all areas of life, whether school, work, or relationships (Seligman, 2006; Srivastava, et al., 2006). When faced with a problem, optimists tend to cope by accepting the reality of what is happening and approaching problems instead of avoiding them (Carver, et al., 2010).

Some research has been conducted regarding the effects of optimism in romantic relationships. Srivastava, et al. (2006) found evidence that both optimists and their partners were more satisfied in their relationships than couples which did not contain an optimist. Additionally, one week after a disagreement, optimists and their partners tended to agree that their conflict had reached greater resolution, an effect that remained even when the researchers controlled for the intensity of each couple's disagreement (Srivastava, et al., 2006).

Assad, et al. (2007) found evidence that participants with high optimism scores also tended to be rated high in relationship quality by external observers who observed them interacting with their partner. Also, optimistic participants and their partners tended to rate their own relationship as more satisfying than participants who were less optimistic. Similarly, participants who were highly optimistic or in a relationship with an optimistic partner were more likely to report higher levels of cooperative problem solving (Assad, et al., 2007). This finding suggests that optimism may affect partner's behavior in relationships, particularly their ability to solve problems cooperatively. In light of the present study, the relationship between these variables is interesting because it suggests people who are optimistic might be more likely to engage in behaviors that promote the health of their relationships.

Methodology

The present study employed a non-experimental, correlational research design using a survey research method. Participants completed surveys that measured their (a) marital satisfaction, (b) optimism, (c) relationship self-efficacy, (d) height of marital expectations, and (e) the extent to which participants felt their marital expectations were being met. Structural equation modeling was used to test a proposed model of the relationship between participants' height of marital expectations, optimism, relationship self-efficacy, belief that their marital expectations are being met, and their marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction was measured with the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS). Optimism was measured with the Life Orientation Scale – Revised (LOT – R). Relationship self-efficacy was measured with the Relationship Self-Efficacy Scale (RSES). Height of expectations and fulfillment of expectations were measured with the

Relationship Standards Questionnaire (RSQ). The sample was collected using convenience sampling. Participants were recruited via QuestionPro, an online service that helps researchers create and distribute surveys to target populations.

Findings and Discussion

Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

A total of 399 individuals attempted to complete the surveys. However, 89 cases were excluded from the data analysis because they did not meet the study's criteria or chose to quit the surveys partway through. The final sample consisted of 310 adults who met the criteria of being over the age of 18 and currently in a marriage lasting 2 or more years. Sixty-two percent of participants were female and the vast majority (82%) identified as Caucasian American. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 84, with a mean of 53.2. Average years married was 24.72 (range = 2-60). The average age of participants and length of their marriages made my study unique because most research done in this area to date has used samples of college students or newlyweds. Thus, my study contributes to the literature both in the content that was studied and also in the population that was studied.

Descriptive Statistics and Normality

The participants in my study reported being quite happy in their marriages with high marital expectations (mean = 8.06 on a scale of 1-9), high fulfillment of expectations (mean = 7.53 on a scale of 1-9), high relationship self-efficacy (mean = 4.17 on a scale of 1-5), and high marital satisfaction (mean = 4.99 on a scale of 1-6). Optimism amongst participants tended to be moderate (mean = 2.44 on a scale of 0-4). These results

produced a skewed sample. This skewness affected the results of this study and will be discussed in more detail in the Limitations section of this chapter.

Model Fit

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to determine whether the relationships between the variables proposed by the model were confirmed by empirical data. SEM indicated that the original model was a poor fit for the data. Additional analysis using modification indices indicated that optimism contributed very little to the model, so it was removed entirely. Modification indices also reveals that the model I hypothesized did not adequately account for all the relationships between the variables. Given that there has been very little research in this area previously, it was difficult to predict all the ways the variables might be related. However, my desire to propose a simple model may have gotten in the way of my taking into account some of the relationships that I was aware might exist before hand. I could have predicted the correlation between the two scales in the RSQ because the items are so similarly worded. This is a relationship that I should have accounted for in my original model. I should have also predicted that there would be a direct relationship between marital satisfaction and height of expectations and the direct relationship between marital satisfaction and relationship self-efficacy since previous research has been done in those areas. Future researchers would do well to spend more time reflecting on these sorts of possible relationships before proposing a model. Because I did not take this into account, the model had to be modified to reflect additional relationships between variables. This was done by examining modification indices (discussed in detail in Chapter 4) and adding lines to represent significant correlations between the variables that had not previously

been accounted for. It is recommended that future research in this area consider adding additional variables to the model to further improve it, as will be discussed in the Limitations section of this chapter.

Revised Model

The revised model fit the data adequately, as was indicated by the following criteria: Goodness of Fit Index ($GFI \geq .90$), Normed Fit Index ($NFI \geq .95$), Comparative Fit Index ($CFI \geq .95$), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation ($RMSEA < .08$). Overall, the model accounted for 56% of the variance in marital satisfaction, suggesting that the combination of height of expectations, relationship self-efficacy and fulfillment of expectations predicts marital satisfaction.

The revised model confirmed my hypotheses, but also clarified the relationships between the variables. Hypotheses 2, 5, and 6 were technically supported, as optimism was related to the other variables as hypothesized. However, optimism's contribution to the model was so small that it was removed from the model altogether. This suggests that optimism does not play an important role in the fulfillment of marital expectations and marital satisfaction.

As proposed by hypotheses 4 and 6, height of expectations and relationship self-efficacy were positively related to each other. Thus, people who scored high in one of these areas tended to score high in the other as well. As proposed by hypotheses 1 and 3, both of these variables were positively related to fulfillment of expectations and accounted for 52% of fulfillment of expectations. Thus, as I hypothesized, having high expectations, but also high relationship self-efficacy is associated with feeling that one's expectations are met. Relationship self-efficacy was the most important predictor of

expectation fulfillment ($\beta = .59$). This suggests that having high relationship self-efficacy predicts that one's expectations will be fulfilled in marriage.

The revised model also suggested that, as proposed by hypothesis 7, fulfillment of expectations accounted for a significant amount of the variation in marital satisfaction ($\beta = .46$). This means that, as I hypothesized, having one's expectations fulfilled significantly increases the chances that the individual will experience marital satisfaction. This finding supported previous research that has established a consistent correlation between the fulfillment of marital expectations and marital satisfaction (Dixon, et al., 2012; Epstein, et al., 2005; Fletcher, et al., 2000; McNulty & Karney, 2004; Vangelisti & Daly, 1997). Thus, it appears that height of expectations and relationship self-efficacy play a role in the fulfillment of marital expectations, which in turn, predicts marital satisfaction.

The relationship is not as simple as it sounds, however. In the revised model, it became clear that height of expectations and relationship self-efficacy also directly affect marital satisfaction in other ways than just through their contribution to fulfillment of expectations. Interestingly enough, relationship self-efficacy was positively correlated with marital satisfaction while height of expectations was negatively correlated with marital satisfaction, meaning that lower expectations result in higher marital satisfaction and vice versa. Thus, the findings of this study partially support the research that suggests high expectations are detrimental to marital satisfaction (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982; Sullivan & Schwebel, 1995).

So what is one to make of the fact that this study found a positive relationship between height of expectations and fulfillment of expectations and a negative relationship

between height of expectations and marital satisfaction? This finding speaks to the complexity of the way high expectations affect marriage. It perhaps suggests that high expectations are not negative in and of themselves. In fact, high expectations may be protective to a marriage as long as they are fulfilled. If high expectations are not fulfilled then couples are less likely to experience marital satisfaction, as indicated by the negative relationship between height of expectations and marital satisfaction in my study.

This model also suggests that a variable that relates to whether or not expectations are fulfilled is relationship self-efficacy. I hypothesized that optimism would also play an important role, but SEM revealed that it did not. Thus, high expectations combined with high relationship self-efficacy tends to predict the fulfillment of marital expectations, and the combination of these variables predict higher marital satisfaction. What is it about relationship self-efficacy that might explain its relationship to marital expectation fulfillment?

The theory of self-efficacy, originally developed by Bandura (1977), offers a good explanation as to why relationship self-efficacy might be related to getting one's expectations met in marriage. The more self-efficacy an individual has, the more effort and persistence he or she will put into reaching his or her goal, even in the face of adversity (Bandura, 1997). Thus, it is likely that a person with high relationship self-efficacy would put a great deal of effort into his or her marriage, even when the marriage is difficult. It might be that individuals with high relationship self-efficacy would be more likely to be successful in any marriage because of this characteristic.

It is interesting to note that most of the participants in my study had high relationship self-efficacy. This may say a lot about the type of people who were

interested in completing my survey. Perhaps people who are have high relationship self-efficacy may be more open to sharing information about their marriages. This openness may have a lot to do with the personal characteristic of relationship self-efficacy. People with high relationship self-efficacy may be more open to sharing about their marriages because they perhaps believe they have valuable skills in relationships that are worth sharing.

Several other modifications were made to the model, which captured some of the more subtle relationships between the variables. These can best be understood by referring to Figure 2. There were significant correlations between the error terms of the RSQ Height of Expectations scale and the RSQ Fulfillment of Expectations scale. This is not surprising, given that the items on these scales are worded identically, requiring participants to respond to them twice, once indicating how important they believe the item to be for marriages in general and once indicating whether the item is occurring in their own marriage. By adding bidirectional arrows between the error terms of these subscales (see Figure 2), the model was able to capture the inevitable relationship between similar items.

There was one significant correlation between subscales within the RSQ Height of Expectations scale. Subscale 1 (*relational identity*) and Subscale 4 (*trust*) were significantly correlated. This suggests some overlap in the constructs measured by these subscales. Unfortunately, the authors of the RSQ (Vangelisti & Daly, 1997) did not go into much detail describing the constructs captured by the RSQ subscales, thus making it a challenge to interpret why there was overlap between these subscales on the RSQ Height of Expectations scale. By adding a bidirectional arrow between the error terms of

these subscales (see Figure 2), the model was able to better account for some of the overlap between the constructs captured by Subscales 1 and 4 on the RSQ Height of Expectations scale.

Importance and Significance of Study

After the revisions, my model fits the data adequately, meaning that my model accurately depicts one way that an individual's expectations are met in marriage. This is very exciting, as no previous research has attempted to capture this process. My model suggests that having high expectations is related to high marital satisfaction as long as the expectations are fulfilled. It also identified a personal characteristic that plays a key role in whether or not an individual with high expectations feels his or her expectations are met in marriage. It suggests that individuals who possess a combination of high expectations and high relationship self-efficacy are more likely to get their marital expectations met. Relationship self-efficacy was the largest predictor of expectation fulfillment, an important finding because so little research has been done on relationship self-efficacy to date.

Certainly, relationship self-efficacy is not the only variable that interacts with height of expectations to play a role in the process of marital expectation fulfillment. As will be discussed in the next few sections, future research would do well to identify other variables that affect the likelihood of an individual getting his or her high expectations met in marriage. My research, however, makes a foundational contribution to the literature by illustrating that high expectations are not universally positive or negative. High expectations are positive for a marriage when they are fulfilled, which can occur when the high expectations are coupled with high relationship self-efficacy. On the other

hand, high expectations are negative for a marriage when they are not fulfilled. In short, my research is important because it lays to rest the long-standing disagreement in the literature about whether high marital expectations are good or bad. In doing so, it expands the conversation on high marital expectations and suggests the need for additional research to identify other variables that play a role in whether high expectations are more versus less likely to be fulfilled.

My research suggests a need to put more emphasis on whether an individual perceives his or her expectations as fulfilled than on how high his or her expectations are. This has radical implications for marriage researchers, marriage educators, and mental health professionals who work with couples. It suggests the need to shift focus from modifying the expectations of the couples we work with and instead focus on how the couple can get their expectations met. My research suggests that one way to do this is to increase each partners' relationship self-efficacy. In other words, helping individuals see their marriage in a positive light and trust in their ability to work through their problems could be more effective than trying to change their marital expectations. Previous research has certainly suggested that marital expectations are difficult, if not impossible, to modify (Sharp & Ganong, 2000). Relationship self-efficacy, on the other hand, seems to be more mutable, as is indicated by research (Bandura, 1977). This suggests that increasing relationship self-efficacy might be a fruitful activity in work with couples, but further research is recommended.

My research also makes important contributions to the literature because its participants ranged in age from 20 to 84 and the average age of participants was 53.2. This is quite unique, as most studies done in the area of marital expectations have been

conducted with college-aged individuals. Mine is also the first study to include people who have been married for a long time (average years = 24.72, range = 2-60). Previous research has focused on newlyweds or dating couples. This is important because it means my research sheds light on the role marital expectations play in long-term marriages and provides information on marital expectations from a previously unrepresented part of the population.

Limitations

The present study had limitations. Most notably, all variables were assessed using self-report measures. This may have resulted in participants responding in socially desirable ways that might not accurately reflect their true behavior. However, the nature of the variables made it necessary to utilize the self-report method. Optimism, relationship self-efficacy, height of marital expectations, fulfillment of marital expectations, and marital satisfaction are subjective constructs and therefore difficult to observe or quantify by an outside observer.

Another limitation is the racial and ethnic homogeneity of participants. Most participants identified as Caucasian American and all participants were residing in the United States at the time of the survey. It is unclear how these results would generalize to racial and ethnic minorities or to populations outside the United States. One important thing to consider is the nature of the variables studied. Relationship self-efficacy, for example, is a construct that reflects individualistic values. Thus, this may not be a personal characteristic that is useful in collectivist cultures. Similarly, the concept of getting one's own expectations fulfilled might not generalize well to work with non-Western populations.

Another limitation is that I did not assess for sexual orientation or whether my participants were involved in same-gender, mixed-gender, or mixed-orientation marriages. Given recent legislation that legalized same-gender marriage across the United States, it is unfortunate that my study did not assess for this. I have no way of knowing what percentage of my participants were LGBT or whether my participants were involved in same-gender, mixed-gender, or mixed-orientation marriages. Future research in this area would do well to assess for sexual orientation and marriage type.

The skewness of the data is another limitation of this research. Most participants had high marital expectations, high fulfillment of expectations, high relationship self-efficacy, and high marital satisfaction. Thus, the sample did not adequately represent people who score low on these variables. Were I to conduct further research on this topic, I would want to gain a more representative sample, perhaps by intentionally recruiting some subjects who are highly dissatisfied in their marriages and others who are highly satisfied. Comparing these two groups' scores on the other variables (height of expectations, optimism, relationship self-efficacy, and fulfillment of expectations) might reveal more information on how these variables interact to predict marital satisfaction.

It is also important to consider the way sample size affects power. Since power increases along with sample size, the relatively large sample size in this study could have resulted in statistically significant results that were not substantially significant. If I were to do this study over, I would likely choose a smaller sample size that more adequately represented both happily and unhappily married individuals.

Another limitation is the fact that the model had to be modified to be a good fit for the data. Although the model was easily modified to fit the data, the additional

relationships between variables depicted in the revised model suggests that the variables were not as clearly defined as would be ideal. There was overlap in the constructs measured by the variables. Some variable overlap is nearly unavoidable in SEM research. As long as the overlap is minimal (as is the case in all of the relationships in this study), it is acceptable. However, it must be accounted for, which I accomplished by revising the model to reflect the overlap.

Another limitation is that, though the revised model met minimums for Normed Fit Index (NFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), it was just shy of meeting the minimum for Goodness of Fit Index (GFI). Given that it was so close (GFI = .892 instead of $\geq .90$), it was considered acceptable, but not ideal. It is important to note that SEM cannot determine whether the “correct” structural model has been created. It is always possible that another model would be a better fit for the data. For example, additional variables or a different configuration of the present variables could have improved the model fit. Thus, we cannot state that this model is “right” or “wrong.” We can only speak of the degree of fit between this particular model and the data collected. This model is certainly a good start to examining this topic and can provide future researchers with a solid foundation to hypothesize additional, perhaps more complex, models.

Implications

As marriage researchers, marriage educators, and mental health professionals better understand factors that influence whether people get their expectations met within marriage, they will be better able to serve the people they come in contact with. My

research has important implications for professional practice and for future research. The following sections will highlight these implications.

For Practice

Despite decades of research, the literature continues to be divided over whether holding high expectations of one's marriage is positive or negative. As a mental health practitioner, I can understand the allure of wanting a cut and dry answer to this question. It would be convenient to hand clients a list of things that are universally realistic to expect out of marriage, or to be able to tell clients, "just expect less" or "just expect more." But this is a very reductionist way to look at marriage. In reality, each marriage is unique and what is realistic for one couple is unrealistic for another. My research extends the conversation beyond the dichotomy of expectations being positive or negative. Instead of conceptualizing high expectations as universally good or bad, it reveals that height of expectations interacts with other variables to determine marital happiness.

These results suggest a need to reassess how expectations are dealt with in marriage counseling and marriage education. Rather than promoting a one-size-fits-all marriage by teaching individuals to adopt a certain set of "realistic" expectations about marriage, the efforts of marriage educators and therapists might be better directed at helping couples learn how to fulfill their unique expectations. Specifically, this research teaches that marriage counseling and marriage education should not focus on changing how high an individual's expectations are, but rather help them identify ways to get their expectations met, possibly by increasing their relationship self-efficacy. Some things that mental health professionals might consider in light of this research include:

1. Take the time to understand the marital expectations of each couple you work with, without judging the expectations as attainable or unattainable until you fully understand each partner's personal characteristics and relational skills.
2. Initiate dialogue with couples about their unique expectations and the skills they have to fulfill them. The RSQ might be a good tool to structure such conversations.
3. Help the couples you work with identify their personal and relational strengths and formulate their own plan for getting their expectations fulfilled.
4. Use the RSES to assess clients' relationship self-efficacy. Discuss openly how relationship self-efficacy might impact the relationship. Identify ways the couple can increase each partner's sense of relationship self-efficacy.
5. Consider how other personal characteristics or couple dynamics are impacting each partner's ability to get their expectations fulfilled in the marriage.

For Future Research

The present study has implications for future research. First, the literature review revealed gaps in the knowledge that we have about marital expectation fulfillment. There is disagreement about whether having one's expectations exceeded results in higher marital satisfaction. Vangelisti and Daly (1997) found a positive correlation between marital satisfaction and reporting that one's standards were exceeded. McNulty and Karney (2004) found that participants who had the potential of having their marital expectations exceeded—those with low expectations and positive interaction behaviors and attributional styles—were less likely to be satisfied with their relationships. This is an interesting discrepancy, which could contribute to our understanding of the role of

expectations in marriage. In particular, it has implications for whether lowering one's expectations is ever a positive thing to do.

Huston and Melz (2004) called for more research to be done in the area of relationship self-efficacy. The results of my study confirm that this is a fertile area of research. In the present study, relationship self-efficacy was the best predictor of marital expectation fulfillment and also a strong predictor of marital satisfaction. Since very little research has been conducted on relationship self-efficacy, there are essentially countless directions to go. Understanding the role of relationship self-efficacy in failing marriages would likely be a useful area of study. Also, understanding the variability and impact of relationship self-efficacy over the duration of a marriage would be an interesting topic.

Another area where more research is needed is understanding the specific ways relationship self-efficacy shows up in marriage. Are there specific behaviors that those high in relationship self-efficacy engage in in their marriage? One way to study this would be to determine if people high in relationship self-efficacy engage in the behaviors that Gottman's research (1999) recommends. For example, do those high in relationship self-efficacy engage in "repair attempts," "turning toward," and do they have "positive sentiment override" (Gottman, 1999)?

Research is needed to determine how relationship self-efficacy can be increased via therapeutic interventions. In particular, I wonder if a strengths-based approach, whereby couples are encouraged to reflect on what they are already doing right in their marriage and times they have been successful in the relationship, could be useful. Helping couples see their strengths and find proof of their skills in their past behavior might increase their relationship self-efficacy.

The present model was an adequate fit for the data, but not ideal. There might be other models that better account for the way height of expectations and fulfillment of expectations affect marital satisfaction. For example, other personal characteristics might have a stronger interaction with height of expectations to predict expectation fulfillment than relationship self-efficacy. Future research could explore other possible variables and contribute even more to our knowledge of marital satisfaction.

Finally, it will also be important to replicate my study with different ethnic and cultural groups. Most of the participants in my study identified as Caucasian American and all participants were residing in the United States at the time of the survey. Because of this, it is unclear how my model would generalize to racial and ethnic minorities or to populations outside the United States. Future research should be intentional about recruiting individuals from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds to see how these results generalize or do not generalize. Additionally, in the demographic information, I did not assess for sexual orientation or marriage type. Future research would do well to intentionally study marital expectations in both same-gender and opposite-gender couples. It would also be interesting to understand how expectations come into play in mixed orientation marriages, where one spouse identifies as heterosexual and the other identifies as LGBT.

APPENDIX A
APPROVAL LETTERS

April 2, 2014

Kristina Johnson
Tel: (269) 815-8083
Email: kristinj@andrews.edu

RE: APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS
IRB Protocol #: 14-050 Application Type: Original Dept.: Graduate Psychology & Counseling
Review Category: Exempt Action Taken: Approved Advisor: Nancy Carbonell
Title: A Structural Equation Model of Marital Expectation Fulfillment and its Relationship to Height of Marital Expectations, Optimism and Relationship Self-Efficacy

Your IRB application for approval of research involving human subjects entitled: "*A Structural Equation Model of Marital Expectation Fulfillment and its Relationship to Height of Marital Expectations, Optimism and Relationship Self-Efficacy*" IRB protocol # 14-050 has been evaluated and determined Exempt from IRB review. You may now proceed with your research.

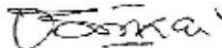
Please note that any future changes made to the study design and/or informed consent form require prior approval from the IRB before such changes can be implemented. In case you need to make changes please use the attached report form.

While there appears to be no more than minimum risks with your study, should an incidence occur that results in a research-related adverse reaction and/or physical injury, this must be reported immediately in writing to the IRB. Any research-related physical injury must also be reported immediately to the University Physician, Dr. Reichert, by calling (269) 473-2222.

We ask that you reference the protocol number in any future correspondence regarding this study for easy retrieval of information.

Best wishes in your research.

Sincerely,



Mordekai Ongo
Research Integrity & Compliance Officer

February 20, 2014

Re: Permission to Conduct Research Using QuestionPro

To whom it may concern:

This letter is being produced in response to a request by a student at your institution who wishes to conduct a survey using QuestionPro in order to support their research. The student has indicated that they require a letter from QuestionPro granting them permission to do this. Please accept this letter as evidence of such permission. Students are permitted to conduct research via the QuestionPro platform provided that they abide by our Terms of Use, a copy of which is available on our website at:

<http://www.questionpro.com/help/2.html>

QuestionPro is a self-serve survey platform on which our users can, by themselves, create, deploy and analyze surveys through an online interface. We have users in many different industries that use surveys for many different purposes. One of our most common use cases is students and other types of researchers using our online tools to conduct academic research.

If you have any questions about this letter, please contact us at the email address below.

Sincerely,

QuestionPro Inc.

Contact us with questions:

academic@questionpro.com | www.questionpro.com

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APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

Purpose

You are invited to participate in a research project titled A Structural Equation Model of Marital Expectation Fulfillment and It's Relationship to Height of Marital Expectations, Optimism, and Relationship Self-Efficacy. The purpose of this research is to determine if certain personal characteristics are related to getting one's expectations met in marriage.

Researchers

This research is being conducted by Kristina Johnson, a PhD student in the department of Graduate Psychology and Counseling at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. The research is being supervised by Dr. Nancy Carbonell, PhD, LP. Results from this research will be used in Kristina Johnson's dissertation and may be published in professional journals or presented at conferences.

Procedure

If you choose to participate in this research, you will be asked to complete a survey that asks questions about your marriage and yourself. It will take approximately 25 minutes to complete the survey.

Participation

In order to participate, you must be over 18 years of age and be currently married. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate or not. You may quit the survey at any time.

Risks, Benefits, and Compensation

There are no foreseeable risks or benefits associated with participating in this project. As with all surveys taken through this company, if you choose to complete this survey you will be awarded points, which are later redeemable for prizes.

Confidentiality

Your survey responses will be strictly confidential and data from this research will be reported only in the aggregate. Your information will be coded and will remain confidential.

Contact Information

If you have questions at any time about the survey, your participation in this research, or your rights as a participant, you may contact the principle investigator, Kristina Johnson at (269) 815-8083 or kristinj@andrews.edu. You may also contact her research advisor, Dr. Nancy Carbonell at (269) 471-3472 or carbonel@andrews.edu.

Consent

Thank you very much for your time and support. Please start the survey by clicking on the Continue button below. By clicking this button, you are giving your consent to participate in the research described above.

APPENDIX C
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

What is your age?

Are you currently married?

- Yes
- No

How many years have you been married to your current spouse?

How many children do you have?

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Other _____

Which of the following ethnic groups do you most identify with?

- African American (USA)
- African American (Caribbean)
- Latino/a American
- American Indian
- Asian American
- Caucasian American
- Multiracial
- Other _____

How much total combined money did your household make last year?

- \$0 to \$9,999
- \$10,000 to \$24,999
- \$25,000 to \$49,999
- \$50,000 to \$74,999
- \$75,000 to \$99,999
- \$100,000 to \$124,999
- \$125,000 to \$149,999
- \$150,000 to \$174,999
- \$175,000 to \$199,999
- \$200,000 and up

APPENDIX D
SURVEYS

Relationship Standards Questionnaire

Read and rate the following relationship expectations. You will rate each relationship expectation TWICE. First rate how important you believe each expectation is for the overall success of relationships in general. Then rate how well your current relationship is meeting the expectation.

	Very Little 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	Very Much
Importance for relationships in general		How well my current relationship is meeting the expectation
1. _____	Both people will be willing and able to adapt to the changing needs, demands, and desires of the other.	1. _____
2. _____	Neither person will reveal personal data about the other to people not involved in the relationship.	2. _____
3. _____	The two people will acquire possessions together and will presume to jointly share and own them.	3. _____
4. _____	Each person will respect the other's rights; neither will presume upon the other. Each will allow the other his/her "own space" when desired.	4. _____
5. _____	For both people, the relationship will be more important than jobs, friends, others, etc. The relationship will be a central part of their lives.	5. _____
6. _____	The two people will be emotionally and physically faithful to each other.	6. _____
7. _____	Each person in the relationship will significantly affect the other.	7. _____
8. _____	Both people will abide by the various explicit and implicit contracts, rules, agreements, and arrangements the two have made with each other.	8. _____
9. _____	The two will spend much time together.	9. _____
10. _____	Both people will feel comfortable and at ease with the other. There will be no need for pretensions or image consciousness. Both will be comfortable "letting their hair down" in the other's presence.	10. _____

11. _____	Both people will know and accept the other's faults and strengths; neither will take advantage of the other's weaknesses.	11. _____
12. _____	Both people will respect each other, provide credit where due, not be condescending or demeaning toward each other, not "put each other down."	12. _____
13. _____	Both people will show one another that they like and love each other.	13. _____
14. _____	The two people will share similar plans, goals, and aspirations for the relationship.	14. _____
15. _____	Both people will believe their relationship to be different from other relationships. It is a unique and special relationship – not like others.	15. _____
16. _____	Both people will be able to rely on the other; each will offer security and dependability for the other.	16. _____
17. _____	Both people in the relationship will fill certain roles. He will do X; she will do Y. The roles will complement each other.	17. _____
18. _____	The two people will be physically intimate with each other.	18. _____
19. _____	Both people will be willing to talk and are comfortable talking with the other about wants and needs and things that are bothering them; each will be willing to self-disclose feelings and emotions.	19. _____
20. _____	The two people will go and be together; neither will leave the other alone or behind.	20. _____
21. _____	Others will recognize and know the two people as a couple.	21. _____
22. _____	Both people will be able to cope with problems, arguments, fights, discord, and disasters associated with the other and the relationship without sacrificing the relationship.	22. _____
23. _____	Both people will know the other well enough to comfortably predict the other's likes, dislikes, and actions.	23. _____
24. _____	Both people will be honest with the other. Neither person will lie to the other on important matters; each will be trustworthy.	24. _____

25. _____	Both people will be committed to each other and their shared relationship.	25. _____
26. _____	Each person will attempt to please and satisfy the other, make the other feel good, be helpful and unselfish.	26. _____
27. _____	The two people will be emotionally tied to each other. Each will feel love for the other.	27. _____
28. _____	Each person will help the other become accepted in his or her circle of friends and relatives and each will accept the other's friends and relatives.	28. _____
29. _____	The relationship will be fun and enjoyable.	29. _____
30. _____	The two people will mesh; they won't strongly disagree on major values and issues and they'll complement each other's tastes and needs.	30. _____

Relationship Self-Efficacy Scale

Instructions: Carefully read the question below and then respond to each item using the rating scale on the right side of this page. Circle only one number per item.

Question: “Within your present relationship, how confident are YOU in YOUR ability to do each of the following?”

How confident are YOU that YOU can...	I'm not sure at all	2	Somewhat sure	4	I'm completely sure
1. Deal with important disagreements openly and directly	1	2	3	4	5
2. Share equally with your partner in planning activities together	1	2	3	4	5
3. Express openly to your partner your hopes for the future of the relationship	1	2	3	4	5
4. Let your partner take care of you when you are ill	1	2	3	4	5
5. Deal with your partner when he or she is angry or upset with you	1	2	3	4	5
6. Comfort your partner when he or she is angry or upset with someone else	1	2	3	4	5
7. Tell your partner when you would prefer to be alone	1	2	3	4	5
8. Express affection to your partner freely and comfortably	1	2	3	4	5
9. Accept your partner's affection freely and comfortably	1	2	3	4	5
10. Express your views and preferences regarding sex to your partner	1	2	3	4	5
11. Offer criticism to your partner without hurting his or her feelings	1	2	3	4	5
12. Accept criticism from your partner without attacking/challenging him or her	1	2	3	4	5

13. Tell your partner when you would prefer to spend time with other friends	1	2	3	4	5
14. Comfort your partner when he or she is “down” or depressed	1	2	3	4	5
15. Put time into developing shared interests with your partner	1	2	3	4	5
16. Be available to your partner when he or she needs you	1	2	3	4	5
17. Control your temper when angry or frustrated with your partner	1	2	3	4	5
18. Find ways to work out “everyday” problems with your partner	1	2	3	4	5
19. Anticipate when your partner needs your support	1	2	3	4	5
20. Accept your partner’s support when you are “down” or depressed	1	2	3	4	5
21. Allow your partner to “take charge” of things when you are feeling upset or confused	1	2	3	4	5
22. Tell your partner when you feel you are unable to solve a personal problem	1	2	3	4	5
23. Stay calm when you and your partner are having a serious argument	1	2	3	4	5
24. Show respect to your partner when you disagree with his or her opinions	1	2	3	4	5
25. Allow your partner to calm you down when you feel stressed	1	2	3	4	5

Life Orientation Scale

Please be as honest and accurate as you can throughout. Try not to let your response to one statement influence your responses to other statements. There are no "correct" or "incorrect" answers. Answer according to your own feelings, rather than how you think "most people" would answer.

- 1 = I agree a lot
2 = I agree a little
3 = I neither agree nor disagree
4 = I disagree a little
5 = I disagree a lot

1. In uncertain times, I usually expect the best.	1	2	3	4	5
2. It's easy for me to relax.	1	2	3	4	5
3. If something can go wrong for me, it will.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I'm always optimistic about my future.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I enjoy my friends a lot.	1	2	3	4	5
6. It's important for me to keep busy.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I hardly ever expect things to go my way.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I don't get upset too easily.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I rarely count on good things happening to me.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad	1	2	3	4	5

Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale

- 1 = Extremely Dissatisfied
- 2 = Very Dissatisfied
- 3 = Somewhat Dissatisfied
- 4 = Somewhat Satisfied
- 5 = Very Satisfied
- 6 = Extremely Satisfied

How satisfied are you in your marriage?	1	2	3	4	5	6
How satisfied are you with your husband/wife as a spouse?	1	2	3	4	5	6
How satisfied are you with your relationship with your spouse?	1	2	3	4	5	6

REFERENCE LIST

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