

## ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation:           **THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION, LIFE ROLE  
COMMITMENTS, AND SEXIST IDEOLOGIES IN  
DUAL-EARNER MARRIAGES**

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The dual earner family is now the norm among married couples of all races; yet research has shown that even dual-earner couples are not generally able to attain marital equality. This study investigated inequality in marital relationships as it related to wives' psychological distress and marital satisfaction by examining variables that appear to correspond with invisible power, namely the gendered ways men and women commit to various life roles, how they communicate in times of conflict, and the sexist ideologies that serve to shape these roles and behaviors. Participants were 287 married women who worked full-time outside the home and whose oldest child was under the age of six. The sample was predominantly White, highly educated and had a relatively high income. Participants completed a web-based survey, which included measures of relationship

satisfaction, psychological distress, life role commitments, ambivalent sexism, constructive communication, and social support. Participants responded to several measures twice – once from their own perspective and once based on their perceptions of their husband's perspective.

Results suggested that while the variables of interest, particularly constructive communication, predicted a large amount of variance in relationship satisfaction, they only predicted a small amount of variance in psychological distress. The three variables that were found to predict unique variance in wives' reported marital satisfaction were constructive communication, wives' perceptions of their husband's commitment to the parental role, and wives' own commitment to the marital role. Findings support the importance of these variables for predicting women's reported marital satisfaction and the importance of examining these variables together. Overall, it was found that wives' perceptions of their husbands' perspective were more strongly predictive of wives' marital satisfaction than wives' own ratings. Results suggest that constructive communication is a particularly important tool for women in dual-earner marriages, a way that they are empowered to make marriage more satisfying and possibly as a protective factor or way to cope with what would otherwise be distressing. These findings can be used to inform the development of interventions to help dual-earner couples with young children.

THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION, LIFE ROLE COMMITMENTS, AND SEXIST  
IDEOLOGIES IN DUAL-EARNER MARRIAGES

by

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## Dedication

I dedicate this manuscript to my fiancé, Nick, who has been extraordinarily patient and supportive throughout this process, has relieved me of numerous non-dissertation related responsibilities, and has sacrificed much quality time, fun, and relaxing weekends together in support of this project.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

Over the past several decades, male-female relationships have changed considerably. The women's liberation movement and the entrance of women into the labor market on a large scale have affected all aspects of modern life. No other social change has permeated society in recent years as deeply as the shift we have witnessed in gender roles. In recent decades, the sex role attitudes of men and women in the United States have become less traditional (Amato & Booth, 1995). Changes in gender relations are also evident as the economic lives of men and women increasingly converge. In 1996, Spain and Bianchi reported that women in the 1990s, similar to men, demonstrated commitment to employment over the life course and made important contributions to family economic resources. Additionally, men have become increasingly active in housework and childcare, albeit in a less dramatic fashion than women's entrance into the paid work force (Spain & Bianchi, 1996). Research has found the dual earner family to be now the norm among married couples of all races (White & Rogers, 2000).

Most contemporary Americans want to be able to develop mutually rewarding intimate relationships in which both partners have more or less equal power to shape the relationship (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1996). The current project used Knudson-Martin and Mahoney's (1998; 2005) definition of an equal relationship which is one in which partners hold equal status, accommodation in the relationship is mutual, attention to the other in the relationship is mutual, and there is a mutual sense of well-being of the partners. Research has shown that equal sharing of power contributes to relationship satisfaction and well-being for both women and men (Gottman & Silver, 1999; Steil, 1997).

In spite of the widespread goal of equality, numerous studies suggest that few couples actually achieve it (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Hochschild, 1989; Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1998; Rosenbluth, Steil, & Whitcomb, 1998; Steil, 1994; Zvonkovic, Greaves, Schmiede, & Hall, 1996). Despite women's increase in labor force participation, mothers continue to assume a disproportionate proportion of the childcare responsibilities and household labor (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000; Hoschild, 1989; Milkie, Bianchi, Mattingly, & Robinson, 2002; Ozer, 1995; Steil & Turetsky, 1987). Although there have been big changes in terms of attitudes and expectations regarding women's roles, men are still praised for "helping" their wives and "babysitting" regularly. Women continue to earn approximately 72 cents to a man's dollar (Enns, 2004). Several popular magazines, such as *Working Mother* and *Working Women*, are devoted to the topic of balancing family and work, yet no corresponding magazines are available for men. It is clear that gender equality has not yet been attained.

Given the growing evidence that equality enhances relationship quality, emotional well-being, and work/family balance, it is of concern that equality eludes so many. Blaisure and Allen's (1995) qualitative inquiry revealed that the practice of marital equality does not automatically flow from a stated feminist ideology of equality. Ideological commitment alone remains an unstable predictor of egalitarian behavior. There is considerable evidence that most couples fall into unequal relationship patterns without their conscious intention or awareness (e.g. Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1996, 1998; Zimmerman, Haddock, Ziembra, & Rust, 2003; Zvonkovic, et al, 1996). Hochschild's (1989) now classic work, *The Second Shift*, noted this incongruence when she considered "the second shift," which refers to the work related to household and child care responsibilities that remains after paid employment

is done. Longitudinal data revealed that while 18% of the men studied shared the work of the second shift equally with their wives, the majority did not. This seminal study demonstrated that couples who espoused gender equality often exhibit the interactional patterns of gender inequality through strategies of denial and rationalization.

Since many Americans value equality, the solution is not solely about changing attitudes and beliefs. Instead the task is to examine some of the more subtle aspects of marital inequality. As men's formal and institutional power decreases in western societies, more informal and subtle methods maintain the power inequality between women and men. One theory that informs the issue of marital inequality is feminist theory. Feminist theory can provide a useful lens from which to examine women's psychological distress and marital satisfaction. Consistent with feminist theory, the current study viewed the state of marriage as connected to the sociopolitical context. In other words, problems women experience in marriage are considered in the context of a sexist climate. The current study used a feminist lens of gender and power to examine the marriages of working mothers and investigate whether certain indices of relational equality are associated with marital satisfaction and psychological distress.

The feminist underpinning of the current study supported an examination of how hidden power in marriage could affect women's perceived marital satisfaction and psychological distress. The current study viewed gender ideology as a form of invisible power. Komter's (1989) conceptualization of invisible power refers to the implicit values, beliefs, or preconceptions that precede behavior. This type of power is the result of social or psychological mechanisms that do not necessarily surface in overt behavior, or in latent grievances, but instead stem from societal values that shape a person's view of the world in

such a way that one can neither see nor imagine an alternative to the status quo or see it as natural or unchangeable. Such established ways of thinking prevent other options from even being considered. The effects of invisible power generally escape awareness of those involved.

The way we 'do gender' plays an important role in the way power is distributed in heterosexual relationships and how inequality is maintained. Gender, defined as a socially constructed entity, constructed and reconstructed by everyday interactions of cultural expectations and standards, and legitimized through regulations and laws of the land (Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006), is a form of invisible power. Gender ideology shapes beliefs and preferences in such a way that people often do not notice its effects and rather see it as natural or unchangeable. Conventional norms and pressures around gender are so built into the institution of marriage that the power imbalance is often hidden and hard to identify (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1998). As a form of invisible power, gender expectations (e.g., men must provide for their family, women must tend to relationships) shape and define behavior and limit what is considered possible. Because of their taken-for-granted nature, these expectations are often not visible. Today, old gendered patterns are being challenged in many aspects of our society; yet family life, to a large extent, remains organized around and reproduces gender structures. The current study conceptualized gender expectations as a form of invisible power that undermines marital equality and is thus associated with women's psychological distress and marital satisfaction.

One way of investigating gendered power is to examine equality in male-female relationships. Given that equality is a primary principle of feminist theory, the literature on marital equality was consulted to identify variables related to the attainment of marital

equality. In qualitative investigations of the processes that facilitate equality, three factors repeatedly emerge: (1) both partners are aware of and critical of gender injustices and note when assumptions are made based on gender (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Knudson Martin & Mahoney, 2005); (2) there is mutual attention to relationship and family tasks as well as the careers of both partners and flexible allocation of household duties (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Knudson Martin & Mahoney, 2005; Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006); and (3) partners engage in open dialogue regarding conflict and active negotiation including communication of emotions and negative reactions rather than shutting down (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Knudson Martin & Mahoney, 1998, 2005; Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006). Identifying those factors that both facilitate and inhibit marital equality is important to a more complete understanding of the factors involved in relationship success and the ability of therapists to help couples attain it. Although qualitative studies have begun to identify the facilitators and barriers to marital equality, there has not yet been a systematic effort to quantitatively study these factors. The selection of variables to be studied in the current project was derived from this qualitative literature.

The goal of this study was to investigate variables that appear to correspond with invisible power, namely the gendered ways men and women commit to various life roles, the gendered ways women and men communicate in times of conflict, and sexist ideologies that serve to shape beliefs about women and the roles women adopt. Sex differences have been consistently found with the three primary variables of interest – life role salience, communication patterns, and sexist ideology (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Cinamon & Rich, 2002b; Glick, Fiske, Mladinic, Saiz, Abrams & Masser, 2000) - as such, these variables can be considered gendered.

A big part of 'doing gender' are the roles individuals adopt. The qualitative literature on marital equality suggests that the way roles are adopted is related to the attainment of equality. Although in recent decades men and women have become more likely to adopt similar life roles, it seems they continue to be differentially committed to these various roles. Research has found that, even when both members of a couple work full-time, overall men are more committed to the occupation role than women and, in general, women are more committed than men to family roles (Chi-Ching, 1995; Cinamon & Rich, 2002b; Rajadhvaksha & Bhatnagar, 2000). Even though both partners in a dual career family ideally share an understanding of the demands of home and work obligations, the distribution of resources between work and family roles seems to remain unbalanced between husband and wife. Instead of negotiating roles, it seems that gender continues to be a powerful factor in determining partners' commitment to various roles.

Another way individuals 'do gender' and maintain relational inequality is through communication patterns. Although the qualitative literature on marital equality suggests that open dialogue regarding conflict and active negotiation of difference can facilitate marital equality (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1998, 2005; Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006), research has found that in many relationships, one partner attempts to confront problems while the other withdraws, thus inhibiting mutual negotiation. Research has consistently found sex differences in demand/withdraw roles, such that women are typically in the demanding role, while men tend to withdraw during conflict (Christensen, 1987, 1988; Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Heavey, Layne, & Christensen, 1993; Klinetob & Smith, 1996). A group of researchers have examined the sex differences in demand/withdrawal patterns (Christensen & Heavey,

1990; Heavey et al., 1993; Klinetob & Smith, 1996) and the preponderance of evidence suggests that such roles are determined by the different levels of power maintained by women and men in relationships. The higher status and power typically accorded men leads them to avoid conflict because they have no interest in change, whereas women typically have less power and see conflict engagement as their primary means of obtaining what they want. In other words, the larger social structure, which affords men greater power, leads to specific conflict structures where women have more investment in change than men.

A third way we 'do gender' is the ways we view women and men and their relationships with one another. The qualitative literature suggests that the attainment of marital equality is facilitated by partners being aware of and critical of gender injustices and noting when assumptions are made based on gender (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 2005). It was thought that one who is more sexist is less likely to be critical of gender injustices and is more likely to accept sex differences as expected and natural, rather than noting when assumptions are made based only on gender. Like gender expectations, sexist ideology is a form of invisible power, which serves to maintain inequality in marital relationships. As with racial prejudice, sexism has become more subtle or disguised in recent years. Few Americans continue to purport a belief that women are inferior. Instead sexism has become more subtle and hidden. The conceptualization of sexism used in the current study encompassed not just hostile sexism (antipathy toward women) but also benevolent sexism (a set of interrelated attitudes toward women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles but are subjectively positive in feeling tone for the perceiver) (Glick & Fiske, 1996). While male privilege is so built into society that it often goes unnoticed, benevolent sexism is particularly subtle and can often manifest

in what may be perceived as protective or idealizing, yet patronizing guises. Benevolent sexism is disarming and many women accept or even appreciate being adored, put on a pedestal, and protected, not recognizing that these sexist attitudes imply women are the “weaker” sex and that the favorable communal traits ascribed to women (e.g., helpful, nurturing, and warm) are traits of deference that place women in a subordinate, less powerful position. This type of sexism reinforces patriarchy by portraying women as needing men to protect and provide for them. Relative to men, women are consistently offended by hostile sexism; yet, women often endorse benevolent sexism (Glick et al., 2000). Although both men and women display sexist attitudes, research has consistently shown that men have more sexist attitudes than women (Glick, Diebold, Bailey-Werner, and Zhu, 1997).

In an effort to provide additional context in the current study, the construct of social support was examined. Social support is not one of the variables identified in the qualitative literature as critical in the pursuit of marital equality; however, social support has been shown to have a significant relationship with psychological well-being in previous studies (Phillips & Murell, 1994). Social support refers to the “fulfillment by others of basic ongoing requirements for well-being... and the fulfillment of more specific time-limited needs that arise as the result of adverse life events or circumstances (Cutrona, 1996, p.3). Social support makes an individual feel cared for, loved, esteemed, and that he or she is a member of a network. Literature has shown social support to help with a variety of life stressors. In a broad review of the social support literature, Cobb (1976) showed social support to help in drinking cessation, protect against complications in pregnancy, and buffer against depression after severe events. The examination of social support in the current

study was hoped to situate other findings and provide a context to understand the relationships found with the variables identified in the qualitative literature.

In summary, gendered variables, such as sexist ideology, communication patterns, and commitment to work and family roles, appear to be vehicles for transmitting invisible power and confirming and justifying power inequality ideologically, unintentionally, and often unconsciously. The main purpose of this study was to examine whether these indices of relational equality are associated with marital satisfaction and psychological distress in contemporary multi-rolled women. It was hoped that this study would provide insight into the modern day marital challenges and the increasingly complex and subtle sources of marital power.

## Chapter Two

### Review of the Literature

The main purpose of this study was to examine whether certain indices of relational equality are associated with marital satisfaction and psychological distress in contemporary multi-rolled women. This study investigated relationships between sexist attitudes, life role salience, and communication patterns and the two outcome variables, relationship satisfaction and psychological distress. The following literature review provides an overview and critique of the literature for the variables included in this study – sexist attitudes, life role salience, communication patterns, social support, relationship satisfaction, and psychological distress. The review begins by examining the current state of marriage in the United States. Next feminist theory, which provides an underpinning for the study, is presented and hidden power in gender relationships is discussed as relevant to the constructs of interest in this study. Findings from studies on marital equality are reviewed to provide a rationale for investigating this combination of variables. The chapter then provides an overview of the literature concerning the three variables at the core of the study: sexism, life role salience, and communication patterns. The outcome variables of relationship satisfaction and psychological distress are discussed and relevant research presented and critiqued. Social support was examined in the current study in order to situate findings and for this reason this literature is briefly discussed. Lastly, the literature on partner perceptions is reviewed in order to provide an understanding and rationale for the methodology utilized in the current study.

## State of Marriage

Over the past several decades, male-female relationships have changed considerably. The women's liberation movement and the entrance of women into the labor market on a large scale have affected all aspects of modern life. No other social change has permeated society in recent years as deeply as the shift we have witnessed in gender roles.

Changes in gender relations are evident as the economic lives of men and women increasingly converge. In 1996, Spain and Bianchi reported that women in the 1990s, similar to men, demonstrated commitment to employment over the life course and made important contributions to family economic resources. Additionally, men were found to be increasingly active in housework and childcare, albeit in a less dramatic fashion than women's entrance into the paid work force (Spain & Bianchi, 1996). Women's participation in the workforce continues to increase with women now constituting 48% of the U.S. labor force (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2004). The labor force participation rate of married mothers with children under the age of 18 increased from 47 to 71 percent between 1975 and 2004. These statistics indicate that there has been a significant rise in dual earner families in the United States in recent decades. Research has found the dual earner family to be now the norm among married couples of all races (White & Rogers, 2000).

Despite women's increase in labor force participation, mothers continue to assume an inordinate proportion of the childcare responsibilities and household labor (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000; Hoschild, 1989; Milkie, Bianchi, Mattingly, & Robinson, 2002; Ozer, 1995, Steil & Turetsky, 1987). Although mothers in Ozer's

(1995) study contributed half of the family income and had professional status similar to their husbands, mothers reported being responsible for the majority of childcare.

Findings from another study indicated that mothers do nearly two-thirds of the housework and do twice as much of the childcare as men (Bianchi et al, 2000). Research indicates that these task imbalances are linked to women's psychological distress such as depression (Milkie et al., 2002; Ozer, 1995; Steil & Turetsky, 1987; VanFossen, 1981) and relationship satisfaction (Stevens, Kiger, & Riley, 2001; Wilkie et al., 1998; Zimmerman et al., 2003).

Changing gender role expectations, the increase of women's participation in the work force, and the rise in dual career marriages are important to consider when selecting variables to investigate marital satisfaction. The current study examined perceptions of marital satisfaction and psychological distress for a segment of contemporary women in the United States today that is increasing in size – married, employed outside the home, and with at least one child under the age of 6. The rationale for these criteria was that this is a time in which multiple roles may demand much from women simultaneously in terms of intimate relationships, parenting, and employment. A specific focus of this study was to utilize a feminist lens to examine factors that may be related to perceptions of marital inequality and to investigate relationships between these variables and levels of distress and marital satisfaction reported by working mothers.

### Feminist Theory

One theory that informs the issue of marital inequality is feminist theory. Feminist theory is thought to provide a useful lens from which to examine women's psychological distress and marital satisfaction. There is already some evidence

suggesting that incorporation of feminist constructs into the study of marriage may ultimately benefit marital relationships, especially for women. Research has found that feminist constructs such as equity (Donaghue & Fallon, 2003), equality (Michaels, Edwards, & Acock, 1984), shared parenting (Zimmerman et al., 2003), and perceptions regarding fairness of the division of labor (Stevens et al., 2001; Wilkie et al., 1998; Zimmerman et al., 2003) are related to women's psychological distress and marital satisfaction. Given that feminist theory underpins the current study, a brief review of feminist theory is presented. Feminist theorists hold several distinctive beliefs about women's problems. This section will highlight and discuss five primary principles of feminist theory and feminist therapy.

First, according to feminist theory, the personal is political. This reflects the belief that the personal problems women encounter are connected to the political and social climate in which they live (Enns, 2004). Feminism emphasizes how the external realities of women's lives influence women's problems (Enns, 2004).

Second, a feminist perspective views women's problems or symptoms as methods of coping with and surviving oppressive circumstances rather than as signs of dysfunction (Enns, 2004). Feminist therapists view clients as individuals coping with life events to the best of their ability. From this perspective, many symptoms represent "normal" reactions to a restrictive environment. Rather than viewing symptoms such as anxiety, depression, or passivity as problems to be eliminated, the feminist therapist views these patterns as indirect forms of expression.

Third, gender and power are seen as critical in understanding and analyzing human interactions (Brown, 1994). According to Laura Brown (1994), gender is a

primary category of analysis along which power dynamics operate. “Understanding the importance of gender in the development of human behavior, in people’s sense of self, and in their interaction with one another has been one of the most salient and powerful contributions made by feminist therapy to psychotherapy practice in general” (Brown, 1994, p.51).

Fourth, equality is a primary principle of feminism (Enns, 2004). Feminist philosophies tend to value relationships in which there is equality or at least egalitarianism, and in which power differences between and among people are avoided where possible and structures are developed to reduce the imbalances where power differences are unavoidable (Brown, 1994). Feminist therapists encourage clients to work toward establishing relationships that approach equality of personal power. To further this goal, feminist therapists help clients gain freedom from assigned gender roles and recognize roles that are confining, restrictive, and oppressive for both men and women. One of the reasons that feminists have often emphasized the importance of financial self-sufficiency is that economic power is regarded as one of the most powerful ways of establishing equality in relationships (Enns, 2004). In addition to encouraging financial self-sufficiency, feminist therapists encourage negotiation of greater equality in the distribution of household and childrearing tasks.

Lastly, empowerment is considered another primary principle of feminist therapy (Enns, 2004). Helping individuals to see themselves as active agents on their own behalf is a major goal of feminist therapy. A critical component of empowerment is developing awareness of the power dynamics at work in one’s life context. In addition to helping clients develop awareness of power dynamics, feminist therapists help clients discover

assertive and functional ways of expressing power and strong emotions such as anger. Furthermore, a feminist counselor supports competence in women and men as they fulfill traditional and nontraditional roles.

Consistent with feminist theory, the current study viewed the state of marriage for women as connected to the sociopolitical context. In other words, problems women experience in marriage are considered in the context of a sexist climate. Distress and dissatisfaction experienced in unequal marital relationships are viewed with a feminist lens as symptoms of oppressive circumstances and indirect forms of expression. The current study used a feminist lens of gender and power to examine the marriages of working mothers and to examine factors related to the inhibition of more equal or egalitarian marital relationships. In order to empower women, we need to understand the power dynamics involved in marital relationships and not only help women become aware of such power dynamics but also help them to develop assertive methods of expressing power.

### Hidden Power in Gender Relationships

The feminist underpinning of the current study supports an examination of how hidden power in marriage may affect women's perceived marital satisfaction and psychological distress. Komter (1989) offers a theoretical perspective to analyze this hidden power. Her conception of power includes a theoretical distinction among manifest power, latent power, and invisible power. Manifest power is the ability to enforce one's will, even against resistance. Latent power is more subtle than manifest power, and it occurs when issues of conflict are not addressed directly. Typically, latent power exists when one partner learns the parameters of acceptable behavior and functions

within them. Conflict never arises because the needs and wishes of the more powerful are anticipated and met.

Invisible power, the third type described by Komter, is less behavioral than either manifest or latent power. Invisible power refers to the implicit values, beliefs, or preconceptions that precede behavior. This type of power is the result of social or psychological mechanisms that do not necessarily surface in overt behavior, or in latent grievances, but instead stem from societal values that shape a person's view of the world in such a way that one can neither see nor imagine an alternative to the status quo or see it as natural or unchangeable. Such established ways of thinking prevent other options from even being considered. The effects of invisible power generally escape awareness of those involved.

The current study views gender ideology as a form of invisible power. Gender is defined as a socially constructed entity, constructed and reconstructed by everyday interactions of cultural expectations and standards, and legitimized through regulations and laws of the land (Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006). The way we 'do gender' plays an important role in the way power is distributed in heterosexual relationships and how inequality is maintained. Gender ideology shapes beliefs and preferences in such a way that people often do not notice its effects and rather see it as natural or unchangeable. Conventional norms and pressures around gender are so built into our lives that we hardly recognize the impact they have (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1998). As a form of invisible power, gender expectations (e.g., men must provide for their family, women must tend to relationships) shape and define behavior and limit what is considered possible. Today, old gendered patterns are being challenged in many aspects of our

society; yet family life, to a large extent, remains organized around and reproduces gender structures. The current study conceptualizes gender expectations as a form of invisible power that undermines marital equality and is thus associated with women's psychological distress and marital satisfaction.

### Marital Equality

Unfortunately traditional measures of power and equality do not capture invisible power, such as that associated with gender, which generally operates outside one's consciousness. One way of investigating gendered power is to examine equality in male-female relationships. Given that equality is a primary principle of feminist theory, the literature on marital equality was consulted to identify variables related to the attainment of marital equality.

With the rise of dual-earner families, marital equality has become a subject of scientific inquiry. Despite the women's liberation movement, entrance of women into the labor market on a large scale, and widespread goals of equality, research suggests that contemporary men and women find it difficult to construct equal relationships (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1998; Steil, 1994) and inequality persists as the norm in marital relationships (Rosenbluth et al., 1998). This discrepancy between ideology and reality has inspired many scholars to investigate heterosexual marriage and identify characteristics of marital equality.

In an attempt to understand the phenomenon of marital equality, a number of qualitative studies have been conducted with couples where both partners have an ideological commitment to marital equality (Blaisure and Allen, 1995; Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1998; 2005; Rosenbluth et al., 1998; Zimmerman et al., 2003). A qualitative

methodology allows factors to emerge from the data and therefore has the potential to identify variables most relevant for couples seeking marital equality. In one such study, Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (1998), two feminist sociologists, investigated ways in which couples allow or disallow inequalities in power, attention, or well-being. In-depth interviews were conducted with twelve White heterosexual couples.

Using a grounded theory approach, they delineated four characteristics of an equal relationship: partners hold equal status; accommodation in the relationship is mutual; attention to the other in the relationship is mutual; and there is concern for the 'mutual well-being' of partners. Although all couples talked about their relationships using a "language of equality," none of the couples fully met the criteria for equal marriages defined in the study. The researchers concluded that conscious confrontation of both gender and equality issues is a prerequisite for the possibility of marital equality. Yet most couples avoided these issues and developed a "myth of equality." Thus, what couples call fair may reflect equal relationships conditions or may instead reflect a "myth of equality." Nine of the twelve couples interviewed fell into the "myth of equality" category, meaning that they spoke as though their relationships were equal but described unequal relationship conditions.

The researchers suggested that achieving marital equality may require the willingness to "fight" for it and warned that couples who seek equality need to be able to tolerate conflict or spirited disagreement. Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (1998) note the consistency between the findings from this study and Gottman's work on what makes marriages successful. Gottman highlighted the importance of recognizing and dealing with conflict and found that a certain proportion of negative interactions in a marriage

was necessary for a successful marriage (Gottman, 1993, 1994). Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (1998) suggest that it is likely that fear and distrust of conflict contributed to the avoidance of gender equality issues and the development of relationship patterns in which women were more likely than men to accommodate their partner's needs, desires, and schedules. In sum, in order to construct equality, couples needed to identify inequalities in their relationships and consciously address them. Most couples in the reviewed study seemed almost completely unaware of ways they adopted traditional gender norms, such as expecting that wives accommodate and attend to husbands. The majority of relationships examined in this study were affected by deeply ingrained unconscious gender patterns giving males invisible and latent power to define the relationship. The study is limited by its small, homogeneous sample given that all 12 couples interviewed were young, urban, well-educated and White.

Given their earlier finding that most couples adopted a 'myth of equality' and were unaware of the ways they adopt traditional gender norms, these two researchers conducted a further study to examine the processes through which couples build mutual relationships that are not based on traditional gender roles (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 2005). These researchers shifted from the thinking of marital equality as an all-or-nothing phenomenon and instead focused on how couples move toward greater relationship quality. Participants were long-term couples with children who self-identified as egalitarian. The qualitative interviews utilized in this study were gathered from two separate couple cohorts: one from 2001 and the other from 1982. The 1982 sample included a predominantly White, middle-class, well-educated East-coast population. The sample in 2001 was racially and ethnically diverse, including participants

who were White, African American, Hispanic, Asian, and Eastern European women and men. Partners were interviewed together regarding how important equality was to them, how they made decisions about household and family responsibilities, whether they thought the relationship was fair, and how they communicated with each other.

The interview data suggested that those who sought out marital equality tended to have at least one of the following characteristics: they express awareness about gender issues, hold dual commitments to both work and family, or feel situational pressures that are not well-served by old gender patterns. When at least one partner expressed a desire to strive for marital equality, four patterns seem particularly salient to the change process. The four processes identified as facilitating equality are: (1) *active negotiation*, which includes facing conflict and working to resolve issues, rather than letting them fester; (2) *challenges to gender entitlement*, which refers to the need to note when assumptions are made based on gender; (3) *development of new competencies* for which one was not socialized which go beyond the qualities by which men and women have been evaluated in the past (i.e., man becomes more vulnerable or empathic); and (4) *mutual attention to relationship and family tasks* which requires both partners to consistently pay attention to their relationship, be sensitive to partner's physical and emotional states, and provide emotional and other supports. The processes identified in this study as facilitating equality suggest a set of variables that can now be studied quantitatively with larger and more diverse samples using instruments with known psychometric properties. A major limitation in this study is that the interviews were conducted jointly with both members of the couple and thus it is not known how results might differ were interviews conducted separately. It is possible partners may have censored their disclosures in their partners'

presence and presented an overly positive account of the marriage. Also because these findings are based on interviews, there is no way to know how the self-report data would relate with actual behavioral criteria.

### *Summary of findings on marital equality*

In sum, there appears to be a distinction between the ideology and practice of marital equality. While having egalitarian ideals assists in the establishment of marital equality, it is not sufficient. In order to achieve marital equality, couples need to be vigilant about assumptions based on gender expectations and be willing to consciously confront and fight for equality. Three factors repeated emerge in the literature as related to marital equality: (1) both partners are aware of and critical of gender injustices and note when assumptions are made based on gender (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Knudson Martin & Mahoney, 2005); (2) there is mutuality in terms of attention to relationship and family tasks, careers of both partners, and flexible allocation of household duties (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Knudson Martin & Mahoney, 2005; Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006), and (3) partners engage in open dialogue regarding conflict and active negotiation including communication of emotions and negative reactions (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Knudson Martin & Mahoney, 1998, 2005; Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006). The selection of variables studied in the current project (sexist attitudes, life role salience, communication patterns) was derived from this qualitative literature.

One limitation pertinent to research on marital equality is that the samples are predominantly comprised of White, middle class, highly educated individuals and couples. Such couples are likely to enjoy flexibility at work and the support of colleagues

in their efforts to balance family and work. Given the small sample sizes and lack of sample diversity, the findings cannot be generalized to all marital relationships.

### Sexism

The qualitative literature suggests that the attainment of marital equality is facilitated by partners being aware of and critical of gender injustices and noting when assumptions are made based on gender (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Knudson Martin & Mahoney, 2005). The variable sexism was investigated in this study to assess attitudes and beliefs about women and their relationships with men. It was thought that one who is more sexist is less likely to be critical of gender injustices and is more likely to accept sex differences as expected and natural, rather than noting when assumptions are made based only on gender.

Sexism is typically described as hostility toward women (e.g., Spence & Helmrich, 1972). Due to recent social and political change, sexist attitudes are now often expressed in more subtle ways (e.g., Tougas, Brown, Beaton, & Joly, 1995); yet, most conceptualizations of sexism continue to neglect a subset of sexist attitudes. Many attitudes toward women are sexist because they view women stereotypically and in restricted roles yet are subjectively positive in feeling tone by the person holding such beliefs. Most empirical researchers identify sexism with hostility toward women, ignoring the corresponding tendency to place women on a pedestal.

Across cultures, women, relative to men, are a disadvantaged group, as indicated by, for example, by differences in earnings, access to resources, and the low percentage of women in the most powerful roles in business and government (Glick et al., 2000). Nevertheless, Eagly and Mladinic (1993) found that women are actually stereotyped

more positively than men. Although women clearly occupy disadvantaged social positions in most societies (Glick et al., 2000), cultural images of women are not uniformly negative; women from ancient to modern times have been revered as well as reviled (Eagly & Mladinic, 1993). Therefore, Glick and Fiske (1996) proposed that sexism may not manifest itself as a unitary hostility toward women.

The idea that “prejudice is an antipathy” (Allport, 1954, p.9) is the bedrock on which virtually all prejudice theories are built. This assumption may have blinded many psychologists to the true nature of sexism, which encompasses not just hostile sexism but also benevolent sexism, a subjectively positive orientation directed toward women that, like hostile sexism, serve to justify women’s weaker and more subordinate status to men (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Prejudice can manifest itself not only in overt hostility but also in sweet, yet patronizing guises that may be particularly effective at maintaining inequalities. Low correlations between benevolent sexism and a variety of other measures of sexism based on an antipathy model (Attitudes toward Women Scale, Modern Sexism Scale) indicate that these two types of sexism represent separate constructs and that benevolent sexism does not appear to be addressed in other measures (McHugh & Frieze, 1997) which supports the claim that this component of sexism has been overlooked.

Glick and Fiske (1996) present a theory of sexism formulated as ambivalence toward women, with two complementary, yet evaluatively different forms of sexism: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. In their conceptualization of the multidimensional nature of sexism, hostile sexism may coexist with subjectively positive sexist attitudes toward women, that is, benevolent sexism. Hostile sexism can be described as the typical

antipathy that is commonly assumed to characterize sexual prejudices. It is an adversarial view of gender relations in which women are perceived as seeking to control men, whether through such means as sexuality or feminist ideology. People holding hostile sexist attitudes view women in an openly negative and disparaging manner. Such sexism may stem from a desire for a hierarchy in which males dominate females and from resentment of women who try to gain power relative to men. This type of sexism is objectionable to most women.

In contrast, benevolent sexism is a set of interrelated attitudes toward women that are sexist because they view women stereotypically and in restricted roles even though they are subjectively positive in feeling tone (for the perceiver). Although benevolent sexism may sound oxymoronic, this term recognizes that some forms of sexism are, for the perpetrator, subjectively benevolent, characterizing women as pure creatures who ought to be protected, supported, and adored and whose love is necessary to make a man complete. Yet such subjectively positive stereotypes are not necessarily benign and are not necessarily experienced as benevolent by the recipient. Even though benevolent sexism suggests a subjectively positive view of women, it shares common assumptions with hostile sexist beliefs; that women inhabit restricted domestic roles and are the “weaker” sex. According to Eagly and Mladinic (1993), ascribing favorable, communal traits to women (e.g. helpful, nurturing, and warm) is harmful, because it suggests they are best suited for domestic roles, whereas men are presumed to possess the traits associated with competence at high-status roles (e.g. ambitious, competitive, and independent). Furthermore, women’s stereotypically communal attributes are traits of deference that place a person in a subordinate, less powerful position. Benevolent sexism

suggests that women are pure creatures who ought to be adored and placed on a pedestal but are also weak and in need of protection. Men who place woman on a pedestal are likely to interpret this as cherishing, rather than restricting. Subjectively favorable attitudes toward women can be a form of prejudice in that they serve to justify and maintain women's subordinate position. Benevolent sexism reinforces patriarchy by portraying women as needing men to protect and provide for them. Indeed, both hostile and benevolent sexism serve to justify men's structural power.

Benevolent sexism plays an important role in maintaining sexism. Whereas hostile sexism becomes a lightning rod for criticism and is easier to identify, the more subtle, seemingly favorable views of women related to benevolent sexism are less likely to be questioned. Together, benevolent and hostile sexism are the ideological expression of a complementary system of rewards and punishments. Whereas hostile sexism serves to punish women who fail to conform to acceptable roles, benevolent sexism rewards women who embrace conventional gender roles and power relations (Glick, Diebold, Bailey-Werner & Zhu, 1997). Women who embrace conventional, sanctioned roles are protected and revered whereas feminists and career women are treated with hostility. This combination of rewards and punishment creates a particularly effective system of social control that elicits women's cooperation in their own subordination. As compared with men, women consistently reject hostile sexism; yet, women often endorse benevolent sexism (Glick et al., 2000). Benevolent paternalism is disarming and may reduce women's resistance to patriarchy. Not only is it subjectively favorable in its characterization of women, but it promises that men's power will be used to women's advantage, if only they can secure a high-status male protector.

Glick and Fiske's (1996) study supported their hypothesis that benevolent sexism contains three subfactors: protective paternalism (e.g. women ought to be rescued first in emergencies), complementary gender differentiation (e.g. women are purer than men), and heterosexual intimacy (e.g. every man ought to have a woman whom he adores). In contrast, the factor structure of the Hostile Sexism sub-scale has proved to be unidimensional in both the United States and elsewhere (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Glick et al., 2000). Despite the unidimensional nature of the Hostile Sexism scale, it represents a wide range of themes including: women use sexual relationships to manipulate and control men, women exaggerate the existence of sexism, male-female relationships are characterized by a power struggle, and women take advantage of men.

In Glick and Fiske's conceptualization, sexism is fundamentally ambivalent. They argue that ambivalent sexism results from the combination of male dominance (a social structure characteristic) and women's dyadic power (men's dependence on women for sexual, familial, and intimate satisfaction). Although men dominate culturally, they rely on women to produce and to nurture children, to fulfill sexual and intimacy needs, and for domestic labor. Glick and Fiske (1996) suggest that this dependence precipitates subjectively benevolent but paternalistic attitudes toward women, as men "can't live without them." Hostile and benevolent sexism consistently emerge as separate but positively correlated factors (Glick & Fiske, 2001); yet, despite this positive correlation, they have opposing evaluative implications fulfilling the literal meaning of ambivalence ("both valences").

Glick and Fiske (1996) suggested that ambivalent sexists reconcile hostile and benevolent feelings by classifying women into polarized subgroups (those they place in

the “gutter” versus those they put on a “pedestal”). They reasoned that this subtyping is what allows hostile and benevolent sexism to be complementary, rather than conflicting, belief systems, even though they predict attitudes of opposing valences. At the ideological level, the two types of sexism target different types of women. Hostile sexism is elicited by women who are viewed as directly challenging or stealing men’s power (e.g., career women, feminists) whereas benevolent sexism is directed toward women who reinforce conventional gender relations and serve men as wives, mothers, and romantic objects (e.g. homemakers). Since ambivalent sexist men love some types of women they may feel less compunction about hating other types.

Glick, Diebold, Bailey-Werner, and Zhu (1997) conducted two studies examining how hostile and benevolent sexism can be reconciled in the minds of ambivalent sexists without creating cognitive dissonance. They hypothesized that ambivalent sexist men would habitually classify women into polarized subgroups. Participants (40 male and 40 female undergraduates) were encouraged to think about how they themselves classify women and to generate at least eight subtypes of women. Participants were then asked to make a series of ratings of the subtypes of women they had generated. Overall, men who scored high on both hostile and benevolent sexism had more polarized ratings of the different types of women they generated. They rated some extremely positively and others extremely negatively. No significant relationships were found between the ASI and the women’s ratings of the subtypes they had generated.

In the second study, participants (50 female and 50 male undergraduates) were asked to evaluate two specific types of women, one traditional (homemakers) and the other nontraditional (career women). Results demonstrated that benevolent sexism, as

measured by a subscale of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996), was significantly related to the positive evaluations of women who conform to traditional gender roles (e.g., homemakers); whereas hostile sexism was significantly related to the negative evaluations of women that violate traditional gender roles (e.g. career women).

In both studies men scored more highly than women on the ASI and the hostile and benevolent sexism subscales. Although women did not report as much ambivalent sexism as men, there was a correlation between women's reported sexism and their feelings toward different types of women. Compared to non-sexist women, sexist women generally reported more positive affect toward homemakers and rated career women less favorably. The authors concluded that benevolent sexism may help to legitimate hostile sexism by allowing sexist men to perceive themselves as benefactors of women and to excuse their hostility as being directed only at women who allegedly deserve it.

Hostile and benevolent sexist ideologies are not only associated with actual inequalities between women and men but they are also associated with negative outcomes for women. Both types of sexism were found to be positively associated with scores on the Likelihood to Sexually Harass Scale (Pryor, Giedd, & Williams, 1995). In another study examining a related construct with both men and women (Abrams, Biki, Masser & Bohner, 2003) these two forms of sexism were found to differentially predict perceptions of rape and abuse victims. They found that benevolent sexists but not hostile sexists, tended to blame victims of acquaintance rape. However, hostile sexists but not benevolent sexists tended to indicate a proclivity to rape in an acquaintance situation. The data suggests that hostile sexism and benevolent sexism underpin different

assumptions about women and that reactions toward rape victims differ depending on the type of sexism.

Although it is not possible to conduct a study that would demonstrate a causal relationship between sexist ideologies and gender inequality, cross-national comparisons are one way to investigate the relationship between both hostile and benevolent sexism and the oppression of women. Two indices of cross-national gender inequality were published by the United Nations Development Programme (Glick et al., 2000). The Gender Empowerment Measure assesses women's (relative to men's) participation in a country's economy (percentage of administrators and managers, professional and technical workers who are women, and women's share of earned income) and political system (percentage of seats in parliament held by women). The Gender Development Index (GDI) focuses on longevity (life expectancy), knowledge (adult literacy rates and years of schooling), and standard of living (purchasing power). The correlations between national averages of hostile and benevolent sexism and the two United Nations indices were examined using a sample of 15,000 women and men in 19 countries (Glick et al., 2000).

Cross cultural comparisons revealed that national averages of hostile and benevolent sexism were related to actual gender inequality (measured in terms of women's life expectancy, education and literacy, and purchasing power as well as women's participation in a country's economy and political system). Specifically, as hostile and benevolent sexism increased, gender inequality increased. Relative to men, women were found to be more likely to reject hostile sexism than benevolent sexism, especially when overall levels of sexism in the culture were high. Using national means

as the unit of analysis, Glick et al (2000) found that across nations, men's averages on both hostile and benevolent sexism strongly predicted women's averages on these scales. Thus, when men in a nation were more sexist, women were more likely to accept sexist ideologies. Moreover, the more sexist the nation, the more women (relative to men) accepted benevolent sexism. In fact, in the four countries with the highest mean scores on ambivalent sexism (Cuba, South Africa, Nigeria, and Botswana), women endorsed benevolent sexism significantly more than men. The authors suggested that women may adopt benevolent sexism as a form of self-defense in highly sexist cultures. In other words, there may be incentives or benefits for women in highly sexist cultures to accept benevolent sexism in order to secure men's protection and avoid men's hostility. The positive relationship between men's and women's sexism is consistent with what has been called a system-justification perspective (Jost & Banaji, 1994).

Given that ambivalent sexism is related to maintaining inequality and keeping women in a subordinate position, it would seem that women are likely to be more distressed and less satisfied with husbands they perceive as highly sexist. Of course many women embrace conventional roles in order to ensure men's protection. For women who are willing to strike this bargain, it may be of little import that their husband is highly sexist.

#### *Summary of findings on sexism*

In summary, both hostile and benevolent sexism are related to inequalities between women and men and associated with various negative outcomes for women. Both forms of sexism serve to justify women's subordinate status to men. Sexist ideologies shape beliefs and preferences in such a way that people often do not notice its effects and rather

see it as natural or unchangeable. Benevolent sexism is not overtly hostile toward women yet it constricts what behavior and roles are considered appropriate for women. This type of sexism is particularly subtle and is thus an insidious form of invisible power. Given that women who endorse conventional roles are protected and revered by men, there is incentive for women to cooperate in their own subordination.

The majority of studies in this body of literature has examined ambivalent sexism at the societal level (national indices of gender equality) or as it relates to severe outcomes for women (likelihood to sexually harass, proclivity to rape). A limitation in this literature is the lack of attention paid to how ambivalent sexism affects intimate male-female relationships. Currently there has been no research examining ambivalent sexism in the context of marriage. The studies on ambivalent sexism, thus far, have focused on obvious and severe outcomes (such as rape and harassment); however, it makes intuitive sense that ambivalent sexism may have subtle deleterious effects that erode marital satisfaction and contribute to distress. The current study investigated ambivalent sexism in the context of marital relationships. Specifically, the study sought to understand how ambivalent sexism relates to women's marital satisfaction and psychological distress.

#### Life Role Salience

The qualitative literature on marital equality has identified a number of processes through which couples enact egalitarian ideals. Several of these processes are related to the adoption of life roles and include: flexible allocation of household duties (Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006), mutual attention to relationship and family tasks (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 2005), and development of new competencies (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 2005). According to Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (2005), equality is

facilitated by the development of new competencies for which individuals may not have been socialized and which go beyond the qualities by which men and women have been evaluated in the past. The development of new competencies can include new life roles or increased commitment to roles such as husbands becoming increasingly involved in parenting or wives developing the necessary skills to join the labor force.

Managing the demands of competing life roles has become a common experience for many American men and women (McCutcheon, 1998). No longer is the parental role assumed to be carried out primarily by women while men define themselves exclusively through work. Today men and women frequently have ambitions and commitments in both work and family arenas simultaneously. Given the striking changes in the nature of families and the workforce, such as the rising numbers of dual earner couples and working mothers with young children, the work-family interface has attracted much research interest.

Although in recent decades women and men have become more likely to adopt similar life roles, it seems they continue to be differentially committed to these various roles. The life roles one engages in and the degree to which one values and is committed to these various life roles appears to be deeply rooted in gender. By definition, sexist attitudes stereotype women and restrict which roles are deemed appropriate for them. It follows that sexist ideologies are likely related to the life roles women adopt and their level of commitment to such roles.

One way of investigating the multiple roles that contemporary couples balance is through an examination of life role salience. Life role salience refers to an individual's "internalized beliefs and attitudes about (a) the personal relevance of a role, (b) the

standards for performance of the role, and (c) the manner in which personal resources (i.e., time, money, and energy) are to be committed to performance of the role” (Amatea, Cross, Clark & Bobby, 1986, p.831). A large body of research examines work-family experiences (including focus on role strain, role balance, and role overload) but often overlooked is the extent to which one is commitment to a specific role or how much a role is valued by an individual. There is tremendous variability in how psychologically involved individuals are to specific life roles and the primacy which individuals attach to these roles. Such variability is reflected in the relative importance of roles in one’s self definition and willingness to commit personal resources in order to ensure success in these roles. While research that focuses on role occupancy simply counts the number of roles a person holds, an examination of life role salience reveals one’s interest in and willingness to commit to a given role (Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer & King, 2002).

Commitment reflects both the significance of the role to an individual and the fact that not everyone who occupies a role is equally invested in it (Greenberger & O’Neil, 1993).

People with the same role structure may be differentially committed to different roles.

Patterns of role commitment have a more consistent effect on well-being than role occupancy because commitment reflects variations in the significance of a role to an individual (Greenberger & O’Neil, 1993).

The construct of life role salience views the individual as a unified whole with a variety of coexisting needs and responsibilities and is thus a good lens to examine the multiple roles that contemporary couples balance. Much research has looked at individuals in the separate roles of worker, parent, or spouse. It has been suggested that an examination of the importance of one role without simultaneously considering

attribution of importance to other roles provides only partial understanding of the attributed importance (Cinamon & Rich, 2002a). Since these life roles tend to overlap and intersect and the experience in one sphere generally affects one's experiences in another, these roles are best examined in concert (Greenberger & O'Neil, 1993). The simultaneous analysis of the relative importance attributed to multiple life roles enables more precise understanding of work-family conflict (Cinamon & Rich, 2002a). Furthermore, the importance of simultaneously examining the relative importance of both work and family roles is supported by theory and research such as Super's life span, life-space theory (1990). Super articulated the significance of a multidimensional and concurrent examination of all social roles that an individual holds at a certain time, as well as the different meanings ascribed to each. Life role salience moves away from an all-or-nothing approach to multiple roles, where for example an individual is simply employed or not, and captures more of the complexity of life roles in terms of how much one values the role and is committed to it.

In general, the value and commitment that individuals attach to specific roles are strongly correlated with each other (Amatea et al., 1986; Campbell & Campbell, 1995; Rajadhvaksha & Bhatnagar, 2000). Although value and commitment are generally correlated, the value attached to a role is typically greater than commitment to the role. In other words, the beliefs and attitudes regarding the personal relevance of the marital, occupational, homemaker, and parental roles are typically greater than the personal resources that one is able and willing to commit to the performance of these roles.

The salience of life roles has been examined in a number of studies and sex differences have consistently been found (Chi-Ching, 1995; Cinamon & Rich, 2002b;

McCutcheon, 1998; Rajadhvaksha & Bhatnagar, 2000). With a sample of 429 Business Administration graduates in Singapore, Chi-Ching (1995) explored the effects of career salience and life-cycle variables (e.g., marriage, parenthood, and aging) on life-role salience. She investigated how variations in career salience affected perceptions of non-work life roles. High career salience was defined as being high in both valuing of and commitment to work, while low career salience amounted to being low on both measures. Using the median scores of the occupational value and commitment measures, the data was dichotomized into higher than the median and lower than or equal to the median score. The career-salience categories were then divided along gender into two groups, resulting in four categories: high-career men, low-career men, high-career women, and low-career women.

Chi-Ching (1995) found that career salience interacted with life-cycle variables such that the life-cycle variables affected the perceptions of non-work roles of women and men with different career orientations differently. A larger proportion of men belonged to the high-career category than their female counterparts. While marriage and parenthood had significant effects on the life-role orientations of the low-career women, they did not affect the high-career women's life role perceptions nor their commitment to the roles. In other words, marriage and parenthood did not restructure the role priorities of high-career women. Although the value placed on the parental and marital roles by both high and low career women were fairly compatible, their commitment to these roles were not. High-career women were significantly less committed to the two family roles, which means that, although they valued the marital and parental roles as much as low career women, they were less able or willing to invest personal resources to the

performance of these roles. In fact, their commitment to parenting was the lowest among the four respondent groups.

By design, the high-career men in this study scored significantly higher on the occupational role scales; however, what is surprising is that these men also scored higher (relative to low career men) on parental value and marital value. In other words, high career men also highly valued the rewards associated with family roles. Although the high and low-career men differed significantly in the values they attached to the marital and parental roles, they did not differ in their commitment to the two family roles.

These findings are based on examination of a specific sample of business administration graduates in Singapore and, as such, are not generalizable to women and men outside a narrow population. In order to understand these findings, it is important to understand the cultural context. Chi-Ching explained that 15 years prior to this study, Singapore had experienced labor shortages leading to an increase in women's participation in the labor force. By the mid-1980's the government was alarmed by a sharp decline in population growth and introduced various measures to entice women, particularly educated women, to produce more children while remaining in the work force. Given the dual emphasis on women's occupational and family roles, women in Singapore may have to compromise their family role, their occupational role, or both.

Cinamon and Rich (2002a) demonstrated the importance of examining the relative salience of both work and family roles to understanding work-family conflict. Using a sample of young, married, Israeli computer workers and lawyers, who were middle and upper-middle class, Cinamon and Rich examined respondents' simultaneous perceptions of the importance of work, parent, and spouse roles, as measured by role values and role

commitment. Cluster analyses were used to identify distinct groups according to members' assignment of importance to work and family roles. Three distinct groups of participants were identified: (a) persons who ascribed high importance to the work role and low importance to the family role (the "Work" profile), (b) participants who attributed high importance to the family role and low importance to the work role (the "Family" profile); and (c) participants who ascribed high importance to both the work role and the family role (the "Dual" profile).

Since gender differences have been an important theme in work-family research, a second study examined these three profiles to elucidate between- and within-gender differences in perceptions of work and family roles (Cinamon & Rich, 2002b). The distribution of men and women in the three profiles were examined and, as expected, significantly more women than men fit the Family profile, whereas significantly more men than women fit the Work profile. No meaningful differences emerged in the distribution of women and men to the Dual profile. Also consistent with expectations, the value women ascribed to parenting (as measured by the parenting valuing subscale of the Life Role Salience Scale (Amatea et al, 1986)) was found to be significantly higher than men's. It was surprising; however, to find that women also reported higher work values than men. Although women valued work more than men, on average, they were less committed to it. Cinamon and Rich (2002b) suggested that it may be that women who are employed in nontraditional occupations have especially high work values that enable them to compete with male colleagues while typically managing additional family obligations. Despite valuing work more than men, women were not any more committed to the occupational role, which may be reflective of difficulties encountered by women in

balancing work and family. Cinamon and Rich speculated that women's investment in childcare and household tasks may hinder occupational commitment commensurate with their high work values.

It must be noted that these two studies used a unique sample of professionals in the legal and computer fields which is not representative of all occupations or professions. In addition, this sample was from Israel and may reflect cultural values that differ from those of men and women in the United States. Additionally, Cinamon and Rich (2002b) raise the possibility of a selection bias, such that, people who attribute different levels of importance to family and work may select different occupations. Individuals may seek occupations that allow them to combine family and work roles in a way that matches the importance they attribute to these domains.

In a somewhat similar study, the salience attached to different life roles by women and men in India was examined (Rajadhvaksha & Bhatnagar, 2000). Data were collected from 92 dual-career couples, of which many were in the management and medical professions. While the homemaker and family roles were found to be equally important and rewarding to both wives and husbands, husbands were less committed to these roles than wives. Despite both partners being professionals, husbands were found to have attached significantly greater value and commitment to the occupational role than did their wives. This finding suggests that even in a dual career family where both members of the couple might be expected to have similar home and work obligations, the valuing of and commitment to various life roles differs by gender. In other words, this study of dual-career couples suggests that fairly traditional gender role stereotypes persisted despite a more egalitarian view of family and work roles. Unlike Cinamon and Rich

(2002b), Rajadhvaksha and Bhatnagar found that men value work significantly more than women. This is not surprising given the Indian context in which women are expected to “accept as her beholden duty the devotion and service to her husband and family” (Rajadhvaksha & Bhatnagar, 2000, p.495). Although many Indian women are now working in non-traditional professions such as engineering, medicine, and management, it may be that Indian women continue to expect to shoulder family responsibilities throughout the life span, thus affecting the value they ascribe to the occupational role.

It is likely that the gendering of life roles depends on the cultural context. The studies previously discussed (Chi-Ching, 1995; Cinamon & Rich, 2002a, 2002b; Rajadhvaksha & Bhatnagar, 2000) were conducted in Singapore, Israel, and India. It is not yet known how life role salience may be impacted by American gender norms. The current study examined whether American women perceive differences in how salient various life roles are for them and their husbands and whether this relates to women’s psychological distress and marital satisfaction.

#### *Summary of findings on life role salience*

Given the rising numbers of dual career couples and working mothers with young children, it is clear that managing the demands of competing life roles has become a common experience of American women and men. Although contemporary women and men adopt similar life roles, they are typically differentially committed to these various roles. Role salience reveals one’s interest in and willingness to commit to a given role. Rather than examining differences between groups (i.e., employed versus not) or merely counting roles, it examines within group differences and captures the variability in role salience for those who enact similar roles. Additionally, the construct of life role salience

views the individual as a unified whole with a variety of coexisting needs and responsibilities. This simultaneous analysis of life roles recognizes that roles overlap and intersect and enables more precise understanding.

The salience of life roles appears to be deeply rooted in gender and sexist ideologies. Sex differences have been consistently found in this body of research. With few exceptions, the sex differences are what one might expect. Overall, family roles appear to be more salient for women while the occupational roles appears to be more salient to men. It seems that, despite adoption of similar life roles, fairly traditional gender roles stereotypes persist.

There are several limitations in this body of literature. First, the studies on life role salience have primarily examined work-related outcomes and differences between the salience of roles when comparing men and women. What has not yet been examined is the impact of these sex differences on the marital relationship. No studies were found that examined how patterns of role commitment within a couple relate with marital satisfaction. Similarly, research has not yet looked at how these patterns of role commitment may relate to women's psychological distress. A second major limitation of this body of literature is the lack of diversity in sampling. Not only have most of these studies been conducted abroad, but the samples used have typically been comprised of highly educated and highly career oriented middle-class participants. Given that such samples may have unique values and resources (e.g., ability to hire help with childcare and the household, or colleagues that support attempts to balance work and family), it is imperative that this construct be examined with a sample of Americans with varying levels of education and income.

## Communication patterns

Another aspect of marital relationships that plays a significant role in marital satisfaction, and is likely related to marital equality, is communication style. The qualitative literature on marital equality identified open dialogue regarding conflict and active negotiation of differences as critical in the establishment of equality (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1998; 2005; Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006). In light of the problems contemporary families have in adapting to women's participation in the workforce and the resulting need to share the second shift, communication may be especially important in terms of negotiating roles and expectations. Given the sex differences found in communication patterns, it seems to be yet another variable where the invisible power of gender may play a role. When differences arise, the partner with the most power is most likely to determine the manner in which conflict surfaces (or doesn't surface) and is addressed.

Interest in marital communication has increased dramatically over the last 30 years, and studies have consistently shown that communication patterns play an important role in determining satisfaction in marriage (Fletcher, 2002). How one communicates with one's partner is important in setting the overall tone of the relationship and gives rise to predictable patterns of behavior, especially when attempting to solve the everyday problems and challenges that confront most couples (Christensen & Shenk, 1991). This relationship between couple's communication styles and marital adjustment is particularly strong in times of conflict (Christensen & Shenk, 1991). Conflict in life is inevitable. It results from the inescapable fact that people have different goals, needs, desires, responsibilities, perceptions, and ideas. The successful

resolution of conflict is widely regarded as one of the central tasks of any close relationship. A well-developed body of literature details differences in the effectiveness of problem-solving behavior of distressed and non-distressed couples (Heavey et al, 1993).

There is agreement that some conflict communication patterns reflect the active and constructive negotiation of differences, whereas others reflect a tendency to avoid conflict or to use other strategies that are less helpful to the overall health of the relationship (Fletcher, 2002). At least three patterns of communication have been identified as important: mutually constructive, demand-withdraw, and mutual avoidance and withholding (e.g., Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Heaven, Smith, Prabhakar, Abraham, & Mete, 2005). In mutually constructive communication, partners discuss the issues affecting them, express their feelings in a positive way, and work towards resolution of the problem. This conflict interaction pattern is positively related to relationship satisfaction. By contrast, in the demand-withdraw approach, one partner will attempt a discussion by complaining, criticizing, or suggesting a change, while the other partner attempts to end the discussion or avoid the issue by remaining silent or simply walking away. This interaction pattern is associated with lower levels of relationship satisfaction. Finally, both partners avoiding discussion of a problem characterizes the mutual avoidance-withholding pattern. This also tends to be associated with lower levels of relationship satisfaction (Heaven et al., 2005).

The demand/withdraw pattern of marital interaction, in which one partner exhibits demanding behavior (e.g., asking for changes in the relationship), while the other partner concurrently exhibits withdrawal behavior (e.g., attempting to avoid discussing the issue),

has been identified as particularly destructive (Vogel & Karney, 2002). Additionally, researchers have noted the tendency of spouses who engage in demand/withdrawal to grow more polarized over time, leading to further deterioration of marital relationships (Heavey et al., 1993). Christensen and his associates (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Heavey et al., 1993) focused on this pattern of interaction as one of the central, and most intractable, destructive patterns of marital interaction and undertook a pattern of research to study its causes and consequences. This line of research utilized observational methodology and the Communication Patterns Questionnaire (Christensen, 1987) to assess communication patterns with samples that were predominantly White married couples. Their research demonstrated that (a) members of couples, when responding independently, can agree on the presence of this pattern in their relationship and on the separate roles that each plays; (b) women tend to assume the demanding role, whereas men tend to assume the withdrawing role during conflictual interactions; and (c) the reported frequency of demand/withdraw interaction is strongly associated with marital dissatisfaction.

Whereas most specific behaviors that have been shown to have negative consequences for relationships (e.g., name-calling, blaming) are demonstrated to similar degrees by women and men (Cupach & Canary, 1995), a distinguishing feature of the demand/withdraw pattern are the sex differences in the extent to which partners demand or withdraw during problem solving discussions. Researchers have begun asking the question: when interacting about a marital issue, why is it that wives are more likely to make demands, whereas husbands are more likely to withdraw?

Initial attempts to explain this difference in communications styles between men and women hypothesized an individual-differences perspective based on gender. Christensen and Heavey (1990) explained that from this perspective, women and men have different psychological characteristics, due to physiology or socialization, that contribute to the development and maintenance of demand-withdraw communication patterns. Specifically, individual differences may be due to socialization processes that teach men to be autonomous and women to be affiliative (Gilligan, 1982). These differences may also be biological, such that men may become more physiologically aroused during conflict than women and experience conflict as more punishing. In contrast to this earlier research, however, more recent attempts to account for sex differences in demand/withdraw behaviors in men and women have focused less on personality traits and more on the effects of the social structure within which women and men are embedded (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Heavey et al., 1993; Klinetob & Smith, 1996). According to this social structural perspective, the demand/withdraw roles are based on the different levels of power that men and women have in relationships. The higher status and power typically accorded men leads them to have little investment in engaging in conflict because they have no interest in change, whereas women typically may view themselves as having less power and see conflict engagement as their primary means of obtaining what they want. Such inequalities lead to problem-solving discussions in which there is an asymmetrical dependence of one partner on the other for a successful outcome of the discussion (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Heavey et al., 1993). The social structure hypothesis suggests that differences in the communication styles of men and women reflect strategic responses to this unequal situation. In other

words, the larger social structure, which affords men greater power, leads to specific conflict structures where women have more investment in change than men.

This debate between whether gender differences in demand/withdrawal patterns are best explained through an individual differences perspective or social structural perspective was examined in three studies using observational methods. Christensen and Heavey (1990) first tested these two different causal explanations (the individual-differences view versus the social structural perspective) for gender differences in the demand/withdraw pattern of interaction. Thirty-one couples who had a son between age 7 and 12 participated in the study. The researchers listed five areas in which parents might desire change in their partner's parenting behavior. For each of five items, participants rated how much change they would like to see in their partner. Couples were then asked to engage in two problem-oriented discussions with one another. The first discussion focused on the change most desired by the man and the second focused on the change most desired by the woman. Before participating in the two discussions with one another, each spouse separately completed two CPQ-SF measures, one for the change she wanted in her husband and one for the change her husband wanted in her.

The individual differences perspective suggested that there would be no change in the demand/withdraw roles across the two discussions. In other words, women would tend to demand and men would tend to withdraw irrespective of the topic being addressed. The social structure perspective, however, predicted that the demand-withdraw roles would reverse across discussions, such that the partner seeking change would assume the demanding role and the other partner would assume the withdrawing role. Each hypothesis received partial support. Data from wives, husbands, and observers

consistently revealed a significant main effect of gender (wife-demand/husband-withdraw was significantly more likely than husband-demand/wife-withdraw interaction). In addition to a main effect, a significant interaction of gender and conflict structure was found, meaning that the interaction pattern depended on whose issue was being discussed. When discussing a change desired by the husband, wives and husbands were equally likely to demand or withdraw. In contrast, when discussing an issue identified by the wife, wife-demand/husband-withdraw interaction was significantly more likely to occur than husband-demand/wife-withdraw interaction.

On the basis of these results, Christensen and Heavey (1990) concluded that although gender influences the roles taken by spouses in this communication pattern, the structure of the conflict also plays a powerful role in determining communication interactions. Specifically, both husband and wife were more likely to be demanding when discussing a change they wanted and more likely to be withdrawing when discussing a change their partner wanted. A major limitation of this study was that couples were restricted to discussing issues related to parenting. This restriction may have contributed to wives being in the demanding communication role than the reverse because child care is typically perceived to be more of the wife's responsibility.

Heavey, Layne, and Christensen's (1993) study served as a replication of the previous study while allowing for several extensions and improvements. They used the same basic design yet employed a less restrictive method to identify discussion topics. Spouses were allowed to request changes of each other in a wide range of behaviors rather than being limited to parenting issues. Specifically, the researchers presented spouses with 20 behaviors relevant to couples' interactions (e.g., "leave me time to

myself” or “go out with me”) and asked them to rate on a likert scale the extent to which they wanted their partner to change each behavior. The researchers then chose one highly rated behavior from each spouse’s set of responses and instructed couples to discuss them in turn. Twenty nine married couples engaged in two video-taped discussions, one in which the wife requested change in the husband and one in which the husband requested change in the wife. Using the revised methodology, Heavey et al (1993) replicated the findings of their first study (Christensen & Heavey, 1990). During discussion of the issue that the husband wanted his wife to change, there was no difference in husbands’ and wives’ demand/withdraw behavior. In contrast, when discussing the issue identified by the woman that she wished her husband to address, wives were more demanding and husbands were more withdrawing in their communication pattern. This finding is particularly noteworthy given the consistency with which the pattern appears in both self-reports of husband and wife participants and in observer ratings of their interactions.

Across these two studies (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Heavey et al., 1993) there was a clear difference in communication style along gender lines when discussing wives’ issues. When couples were specifically requested to discuss a problem selected by the husband, the gender differences disappear. These results support the hypothesis that the demand/withdraw pattern is based on perceived gender-based power differences rather than on individual or gender-related characteristics.

Klinetob and Smith (1996) were concerned that methodological features of the two previously discussed studies (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Heavey et al., 1993) limited the validity of the findings. They pointed out that the list of 20 issues used by

Heavey et al (1993), while an improvement over the earlier study, may still have been overly restrictive. If husbands' issues were not well-represented on the list of 20 concerns, husbands might have been less motivated for change (which would have affected their communication patterns) than if they were allowed to create their own topics. Therefore, Klinetob and Smith (1996) examined communication patterns utilizing topic selection procedures that were not restricted in any way. Two problem-solving discussions by each of the 50 married couples were evaluated using self-report and observational methods. Data showed that the wife demand/husband withdraw pattern was significantly more likely during discussions of her selected issue, whereas the husband demand/wife withdraw pattern was significantly more likely during discussions of his issue. The results of this study provided support for the social structural model versus the individual differences model in explaining the demand-withdraw marital interaction pattern. This reversal in demand-withdraw roles depending on whose issue was being discussed differs in part from previous research (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Heavey et al., 1993). In the Christensen and Heavey (1990) and Heavey et al. (1993) studies, the wife demand/husband withdraw pattern disappeared during discussions of the husbands' desired change. Klinetob and Smith explain these different findings as being a result of previous research using restricted discussion topics. Since couples in their study listed their own topics of conflict, it is more likely that they were equally invested in change regarding their chosen topics. When a topic is salient, one is more likely to be invested and demanding in attempts to persuade the other. The fact that topics were likely more salient to participants in Klinetob and Smith's study allowed for more thorough examination of the conflict structure.

Klinetob and Smith (1996) suggested that the finding that overall women are more demanding than men in marital interactions is not linked to individual differences, such as socialization or biology, but rather is due to the power dynamics in marital relationships. In other words, the spouse with the most to gain by maintaining the status quo is likely to withdraw, and the discontented spouse is likely to demand change. Insofar as the status quo in marriage generally tends to favor men, men will appear to more frequently withdraw.

#### *Summary of findings on communication patterns*

In summary, evidence suggests that communication patterns play an important role in determining marital satisfaction. The demand/withdraw pattern of communication appears to be a particularly destructive pattern of marital interaction. The more frequently couples engage in demand/withdraw, the less satisfied they are. Sex differences have been consistently found in studies of demand/withdrawal, such that, women tend to be in the demanding role while men are in the withdrawing role. Research has examined whether such sex differences are linked to individual differences (e.g., biology, socialization) or the effect of social structure (e.g., the person with relatively less power is more motivated to seek change). Although results have been mixed, more evidence has accumulated in support of the social structure hypothesis. From this perspective, the spouse with most to gain by maintaining the status quo is likely to withdraw, and the discontented spouse is likely to demand change.

One limitation in the literature on communication patterns is the use of observational methodology. One concern with this type of research is the possibility of reactivity to observation when adults communicate in a public setting about problems that

they normally discuss in private (Hawlweg & Kaiser, 2000). Often, discussion topics are contrived, provided by the researcher, or based on researcher bias. Another major limitation of observational studies of couple conflict is that they have typically utilized very small, non-representative samples. The samples in the studies just discussed (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Heavey et al., 1993; Klinetob & Smith, 1996) were quite small (consisting of 19, 31, and 50 couples) and were predominantly White and middle class. The current study used a self-report measure to examine communication patterns in order to increase the size and diversity of the sample and thus increase generalizability and utility of findings. The ease of administering the self-report measure of communication patterns facilitates examination of relationships between communication patterns and other variables, as this study was designed to do.

#### Relationship satisfaction as related to variables of interest

Intimate relationships are an important and complex part of many people's lives and a source of much of the happiness and distress that people experience. Given the importance of satisfying intimate relationships to life satisfaction, there is a need to understand which factors contribute to relationship satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction is perhaps the most widely studied relationship outcome (Donaghue & Fallon, 2003; Gottman & Silver, 1999; Hendrick, 1988; Michaels et al, 1984; Steil, 1997; Stevens et al., 2001; Wilkie et al., 1998; Zimmerman et al., 2003). One can view relationship satisfaction as a barometer of the relationship or a lens with which to examine relationships. Past research has shown relationship satisfaction to be correlated with constructive communication (Fletcher, 2002), equality between couples (Michaels, Edwards, & Acock, 1984), perceptions of fairness regarding the division of labor

(Stevens et al., 2001; Wilkie et al., 1998; Zimmerman et al., 2003), shared parenting (Zimmerman et al., 2003), equal sharing of power (Gottman & Silver, 1999; Steil, 1997), equity (Donaghue & Fallon, 2003), self-disclosure (Hendrick, 1988), and investment in the relationship (Hendrick, 1988). Numerous measures have been developed to assess relationship satisfaction through measuring feelings, thoughts or behaviors within the marital relationship (Hendrick, 1988).

Relationship satisfaction is an outcome variable in this study and is expected to correlate with a number of the variables of interest. Research has consistently found that communication patterns play an important role in predicting satisfaction in marriage (Fletcher, 2002). The relationship between couples' communication styles and marital adjustment has been found to be especially salient in times of conflict (Christensen & Shenk, 1991). Of particular interest to the present study is the research linking relationship satisfaction to various indices of relationship power and equality. Zimmerman et al. (2003) examined how couples successfully balance work and family and achieve marital satisfaction. Data from a larger study (Haddock, Zimmerman, Ziemba, & Current, 2001) were used to examine strategies that couples use to create work-family balance. Conjoint interviews were conducted with 47 primarily Caucasian couples, who identified as working full-time and raising children and who perceived themselves as successful in balancing work and family. The majority of couples stated that striving for marital partnership or equality is an integral strategy to their success. In other words, it seemed to be a conscious decision on both partner's part to strive for equality in key familial and couple roles. Couples expressed that sharing responsibility for household labor and a sense of shared parenting led to happiness and success in

balancing work and family. Six general partnership themes were identified: mutual and active involvement in child care, shared housework, equal access to and influence over finances, joint decision making, shared emotion work, and value placed on both partners' work and life goals. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses revealed that successful couples equally share emotion work and housework. Wives tended to perform slightly more childcare-related tasks and to be primarily responsible for "organizing" family life. Wives perceive that husbands' careers are somewhat more highly prioritized than their own careers. Although couples in this study believed that equality was a high priority, sex differences were found suggesting equality was viewed through a gendered lens. Zimmerman et al (2003) note that a limitation of their study is the lack of diversity in the sample. Couples were predominantly highly educated, middle-class, and had at least one child under the age of 12. Due to their education and income levels, most couples enjoyed flexibility at work and support in their efforts to balance work and family than might not be typical of couples in general.

A few studies have focused specifically on the relationship between household labor and marital satisfaction. Stevens et al (2001) studied the effects of household labor on marital satisfaction with 156 dual-earner couples. They found that marital satisfaction was positively related to perceptions that household work was shared between partners. In a similar study, Wilkie et al. (1998) assessed how couples' perception of fairness of division of labor affects marital satisfaction. They found, similar to Stevens et al (2001), that division of household labor was directly related to marital satisfaction. In addition, they found that division of labor was typically quite gendered. The gendering of labor occurred in three ways. First, the division of household labor was often based on gender.

Second, the division was gendered in that couples' actual labor arrangements were more consistent with husbands' preferences than with wives.' Third, both women and men were influenced by traditional gender-based perceptions as to what was fair and equitable. Wilkie et al. (1998) concluded that "men and women view marital satisfaction through a gendered lens" (p.592).

These studies suggest that relationship satisfaction is linked to equality, specifically the sharing of responsibility for household labor and parenting. These studies also point to gender as an important factor in couple's division of labor and perceptions of equity and fairness. This is true even for members of couples who both strive for equality in family and work roles.

### Psychological Distress

Relationship equality has also been linked to various indices of distress and psychological well-being. Of specific interest to the present study, depressive or dysphoric symptomatology (e.g., feeling blue, feeling worthless, tiring easily, losing interest in sex) has been examined by a number of researchers. In her 1972 book, *The Future of Marriage*, Bernard declared that there are really two marriages in every marital union, "his" and "hers," and that "his" marriage is usually better than "hers." She examined the relationship between sex (female or male), marital status (never married, married, divorced, or widowed), and a number of measures of well-being and psychological symptomatology. On the basis of this data, she concluded that the future viability of marriage depends upon "upgrading" marriage for women.

Bernard wrote that, statistically speaking, marriage is good for men. Married men were found to be less likely to show serious symptoms of psychological distress than men

who were never married. Overall, married men also lived longer and experienced greater career success than those who were never married. Among men, the married clearly fared far better than the never-married. On the other hand, marriage is not as good for women. According to Bernard, for every category of the unmarried (i.e. never married, divorced, and widowed), the majority of studies show higher rates of mental illness for males than for females. Only among the married did women show more symptomatology than men. Although marriage is good for both women and men, Bernard (1972) noted that married women did not fare as well as married men.

Bernard proposed that the sex differences in well-being among the married were attributable to differences in men's and women's social roles. She specifically focused on the psychological costs of "housewifery" and the lack of outside sources of gratification when women are unemployed. In the 35 years since her book was first published, women have joined the work force in record numbers and women now regularly balance multiple roles. Data from the literature on the psychological well-being of adult women suggests that the combination of work and family roles is psychologically beneficial (Greenberger & O'Neil, 1993; Ruderman et al., 2002). According to the role enhancement perspective, having both work and personal roles provides multiple opportunities for satisfaction and pleasure, more opportunities for women to feel good about themselves, their activities, and accomplishments, as well as greater resources for social support.

Despite the benefits attached to multiple roles, women continue to experience psychological distress in marriage and much research has been devoted to honing in on what factors might make marriage stressful. In contrast to Bernard, Steil and Turetsky

(1987) hypothesized that the differences in husbands' and wives' well-being might best be understood as a reflection of the differences in husbands' and wives' marital power. Their study examined the extent to which perceptions of marital equality were associated with positive psychological outcomes. Specifically, the study examined whether differences in marital power (as measured by say in decision making and responsibility for domestic work) could predict the extent of psychological symptomatology among a group of couples reporting relatively equal relationships. The sample consisted of 815 primarily White dual-career couples. In comparison to national norms, the sample was younger, more highly educated, and more highly paid than average two-paycheck couples.

They divided the sample into four groups: employed husbands without children, employed wives without children, employed mothers, and employed fathers. As predicted in the literature, Steil and Turetsky found that the group consisting of employed wives with children reported significantly less equality in their marital relationship than did any of the other three groups (employed wives without children or husbands with, or without, children). According to Steil and Turetsky, the increased symptomatology among wives with children was not due to the presence of children, per se, but rather that the arrival of children seemed to undermine marital equality by reactivating traditional gender roles, and it was this inequality that was associated with the increases in symptomatology.

In addition to examining group differences the researchers examined specific characteristics of the marriage, for example decision making, that might be predictive of distress. They found that for employed mothers, unequal say in decision making and

disproportionate responsibility for the children were strongly related to higher levels of psychological distress as measured as by 26 symptoms taken from the SCL-90. Those employed mothers who had equal responsibility for decision making reported less symptomatology than did mothers who had either more or less say than their partners. In other words, the more equal a mother's say in decision making and the more her husband shared in the responsibilities of child care, the less dysphoria she reported. She was less likely to report feeling irritable, worried, worthless, lonely, sad, tense, weepy, fearful, and disinterested in sex.

For mothers, perceived job importance was found to be related to equality. The more important mothers perceived their own jobs to be, relative to their spouses' jobs, the greater their say in decision making and the less responsibility they had for household tasks. For all four groups, the more satisfied they were with their marriages and their careers, the less dysphoria they reported.

A link between an unequal division of labor and women's levels of depressive symptoms has been consistently found (Hoschild, 1989; Kessler & McRae, 1982; Kranaue, Gree, & Valencia-Weber, 1982; Krause & Markides, 1985; Milkie et al., 2002; Ozer, 1995, Steil & Turetsky, 1987; VanFossen, 1981). Other research has concentrated on the effects of perceived partner support on well-being. VanFossen (1981) studied the extent to which differences in partners' access to affirmation, intimacy, and perceptions of reciprocity were associated with dysphoric symptomatology. Neither involvement in housework nor childcare was assessed in this study but rather the extent to which wives felt they "could rely" on their husbands for "help" with family problems. For employed wives, perceptions of inequity (e.g., "my husband usually expects more from me than he

is willing to give back”) was one of the strongest predictors of symptomatology of distress. Among employed wives, the highest levels of dysphoric symptomatology were found among those who reported that they had too much to do, that they could not rely on their husbands for help, and that they and their husbands argued about who should do the work. In other words, those employed wives who described their relationships as “reciprocal” were less likely to be depressed than those whose relationships were perceived as unreciprocal.

Ozer’s (1995) study also examined perceived partner involvement. She examined the relationships between childcare responsibilities, a woman’s belief that she could rely on the help of her spouse, and psychological well-being. Telephone interviews were conducted with 42 professional women, and self-efficacy scales and psychological health measures were administered through the mail. Although the mothers in this study had professional status similar to their husbands and were contributing half of the family income, mothers still reported being responsible for the majority of childcare. Findings indicated that for this sample of employed mothers, more childcare responsibility was related to greater distress. However, levels of distress could be mediated by perceived partner involvement. The analyses suggested that when a working mother believed that she could not get her husband to assist with childcare, the result was poor psychological health. In fact, a woman’s belief in her ability to get her partner to assist with childcare was found to be the most consistent predictor of distress. Women, who perceived that they had the majority of responsibility for childcare and could not enlist their husbands for help, expressed feeling overwhelmed and dissatisfied. However, when women felt they could expect support from their partner, the level of distress decreased and well-

being increased. A major limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size of primarily White, professional women. The findings cannot assume to be generalized to employed mothers of different socioeconomic and racial ethnic groups. These two studies suggest that perceived partner support is a critical factor related to distress for employed wives.

Most of this line of research has used samples that were exclusively or predominantly White. There are no studies that systematically compare the relationship between well-being and involvement in parenting and domestic work across ethnic groups and no studies of these relationships among African Americans (Steil, 1997). Several studies conducted with Hispanic women in the 1980's found similar results. Although the more husbands helped at home, the less mental distress Hispanic wives reported (Kranau et al., 1982), it was more important to these women that their husbands help with housework than with child care (Krause & Markides, 1985).

#### *Summary of findings on psychological distress*

In 1972, Bernard wrote that "his" marriage is usually better than "hers" and highlighted the psychological costs of "housewifery." Since then women have joined the labor force in record numbers and evidence suggests that the combination of work and family roles is psychologically beneficial for women. Others have hypothesized that differences in well-being of married women and men reflect differences in marital power. Research has found the psychological distress experienced by married women to be related with unequal say in decision making, disproportionate responsibility for childcare, unequal division of labor, and perceived partner support. Clearly, employed women feel greater stress and dissatisfaction when they are expected to cover the "second shift," the

work related to household and child care responsibilities that remains after paid employment is done (Hoschild, 1989). Research indicates that levels of distress can be mediated by perceived partner involvement. A woman's belief that her partner will assist with childcare and household chores is a robust predictor of well-being (Ozer, 1995).

Of married wives who work, those with children experience less marital equality than those without children. It has been suggested that the increased symptomatology among wives with children is not due to the presence of children, *per se*, but rather that the arrival of children undermines marital equality by reactivating traditional gender roles, and it is this inequality that is associated with the increase in symptomatology. Although multiple roles typically improve well-being for married women, the persistence of gendered roles and expectations seems to inhibit the marital upgrade that Bernard first called for in 1972.

Unfortunately, this body of literature, like the others previously discussed, has most often utilized samples that are primarily White, and more highly educated and more highly paid than the average two-paycheck couple. It is not known whether these findings can apply beyond this narrow sample. It is possible that American women of different cultural backgrounds may have different values and respond differently to the imbalance in responsibility for childcare and household tasks. It may be that different subgroups of women may not experience distress in relation to such imbalances.

#### Social support

In an effort to provide context for findings in the current study, the construct of social support was examined. Social support is not one of the variables identified in the qualitative literature as critical in the pursuit of marital equality; however, social support

has been shown to have a significant relationship with psychological well-being in previous studies (Phillips & Murell, 1994). Social support refers to the “fulfillment by others of basic ongoing requirements for well-being... and the fulfillment of more specific time-limited needs that arise as the result of adverse life events or circumstances (Cutrona, 1996, p.3). Social support makes an individual feel cared for, loved, esteemed, and that he or she is a member of a network. Literature has shown social support to help with a variety of life stressors. In a broad review of the social support literature, Cobb (1976) showed social support to help in drinking cessation, protect against complications in pregnancy, and buffer against depression after severe events.

A dominant theory of how social support works is the buffering hypothesis, in which social support functions as a moderator of stress (Cohen & Willis, 1985). This theory is in contrast to the main effect hypothesis of social support, which suggests that those with high social support have consistently higher well-being. Social support can buffer stress in one of two ways. First, it can prevent or lessen the perception of stress in the first place. When an individual makes a primary appraisal of an event, he or she may realize that others are available to help with the stressful situation and perceive a lower level of stress. The other possibility is that social support may prevent or lessen a change in well-being after the stress has occurred. One may perceive a situation, such as balancing full-time work and family, as stressful but the knowledge of a social network available may prevent negative psychological outcomes.

The mental health implications of social support have received much scholarly attention, particularly in conjunction with the role of negative life events in mental health (Cohen & Willis, 1985). In the literature, perceived social support is linked more

consistently to mental health indicators than is enacted (i.e., received) social support (Lahey & Cassidy, 1990). Research points to perceived social support as an important mental health promoting factor (Weber, 1998) that has simultaneous unique links to positive self-appraisal (an indicator of well-being) and symptomatology (an aspect of distress) when negative life events are considered. Yet in one of the few studies that have examined the relationship of social support to sexism, Moradi and Funderburk (2006) failed to find a moderating role of perceived social support in the relation between perceived sexist events and any of the three mental health indicators examined. Other studies examining social support, negative life events, and mental health have also failed to yield support for perceived social support as a moderator (e.g., Cohen & Willis, 1985; Koeske & Koeske, 1991). Since there has been more consistent support for direct links between perceived social support and mental health than for a posited moderating role of social support in the link between negative events and mental health (Cohen & Willis, 1985; Koeske & Koeske, 1991), direct relationships between social support and the variables of interest were examined in the current study of women balancing multiple life roles.

One way women manage stress is to obtain emotional support from their spouses. In fact, an essential feature of mutual communal relationships is the belief that one's partner cares about one's welfare and will attend and respond to one's desires, needs, and goal strivings. Perceived partner responsiveness is a cardinal marker of relationship health and well-being (Lemay et al., 2007). Increasing empirical evidence has shown that both higher levels of marital discord and lower levels of enacted and perceived marital support are associated with poorer mental and physical health. Cutrona (1996)

speculated that in times of stress, marital support prevents emotional isolation from one's partner and the onset of depression that could lead to deterioration of the relationship. Thus, marital support would influence partners' mental and physical health, in part indirectly, through its enhancement of relationship quality. In addition to spousal support, other types of support are likely to be related to women's level of distress. In the current study of women with young children working outside the home at least 30 hours per week, support from one's family and friends may also be critical. For example, family members may provide important help in terms of childcare or friends could assist with carpool or preparing treats for a child's birthday party. Support from one's significant other, family, and friends are all likely to be essential for contemporary multi- roled women.

Social support is not only complicated due to uncertainty about how it functions, it is also complicated because it can be defined and measured in many different ways. The simplest way to define and measure social support is the size of one's network, or how many people an individual can get support from. Unfortunately, while this is easy to measure, it seems to be insignificant for predicting outcomes (Cohen & Willis, 1985). Another option is to look at social support by type. Various theorists have outlined a variety of types and categories such as esteem, informational, companionship and instrumental; however, while these types are distinguishable they are not entirely separate (Cohen & Willis, 1985). The final way to measure social support is to look at who provides the support. For example, one could look at spousal, familial, friendship and community support to see which has the largest effect on well being during stress. This method was employed in the current study.

## Partner perceptions

The current study uses a phenomenological approach in seeking information about wives' husbands in that it assumes that relationship satisfaction and psychological distress may be influenced not only by objective indices of partners' behaviors, traits, or attitudes but also by perceptions of partner's behaviors, traits, and attitudes. Since perceptions of one's partner are a critical component of the methodology involved in the current study, the literature on interpersonal perception (also referred to as person perception or social perception) is briefly reviewed. Overall, social perception is thought to contain a mix of bias and accuracy (Kenny & Acitelli, 2001). The literature on interpersonal perception suggests that what is being perceived in part determines the ratio of bias to accuracy. Bias is expected to increase with the extent to which the perceptual referent is central to the perceiver's intimate relationship (Kenny & Acitelli, 2001). Because the current study examines intimate relationships, the following review focuses on interpersonal perception in such relationships.

Many aspects of a partner's qualities cannot be directly perceived. Instead, behavior must be interpreted and given meaning, motives for that behavior must be inferred, and impressions of a partner's personal characteristics must be constructed. Research has identified several factors which influence constructions about one's partner, these include: (1) reality, (2) projection of one's own virtues and feelings onto one's partner or assumed similarity, (3) an idealistic view of one's partner or positive relationship illusions, and (4) a cognitive perspective (Boyes & Fletcher, 2007; Button, Grant, Hannah, & Ross, 1993; Davis & Oathout, 1987; Kenny & Acitelli, 2001; Murray, Holmes & Griffin, 1996).

It is thought that if intimates are evenly reasonably accurate social perceivers, their representations should at least partially reflect their partners' actual virtues and faults. Research has established a link between one's self-reported behavior and partners' perceptions of the behavior (Davis & Oathout, 1987; Lemay et al., 2007) Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996). Wives' impressions of their partners have been found to converge moderately with their partners' self-perceptions ( $r = .35$ ,  $p < .01$ ), suggesting that some degree of mutual understanding characterizes intimate relationships (Murray et al, 1996). Despite this connection between intimates' global representations of their partners and partners' own self-perceptions, there is considerable variance left to be explained once the "reality" of partners' self-perceived attributes has been accounted for.

Other research suggests that intimates project their own attitudes, virtues and feelings onto their partners. There exists considerable evidence for the operation of projection in relationships. People overestimate the degree to which their own attributes are shared by others. People have been found to project feelings of closeness (Kenny & Acitelli, 2001), interpersonal traits (Murray, Holmes, Griffin, 1996), and responsiveness (Lemay et al., 2007) onto their partners. The social projection model of perceived partner responsiveness posits that, in addition to modestly accurate detection, people project their own behavioral supportiveness and motivations to care for a partner's needs onto the supportiveness and motivations they perceive in their partner. According to Lemay et al (2007), partner perceptions are largely derived through the process of social projection or, in other words, the attribution of one's own characteristics to others. Evidence suggests that these projection effects are stronger than the accuracy effects (Kenny & Acitelli, 2001; Lemay et al., 2007). In two dyadic marriage studies, participants' self-reported

responsiveness to the needs of a spouse predicted perceptions of the spouse's responsiveness to the self more strongly than did the spouse's self-reported responsiveness. This model suggests that those who care for their partners assume (sometimes incorrectly) that their partners care in return.

Motivation likely contributes to projection. People desire a sense of security in their close relationships. They want to trust that their relationships are stable, that their partners are committed, and that these partners care for them. They appear to make a variety of cognitive distortions to maintain these perceptions. For example, one may be motivated to see oneself in one's partner so as to reduce feelings of vulnerability and foster a sense of predictability and security (Murray et al, 1996). Kenny and Acitelli (2001) refer to this phenomenon as assumed similarity. Their research suggests that when partners are uncertain how to rate their partner, they use their own feelings to infer their partners' feelings. They found that material, which has the potential to threaten the relationship, is likely to become distorted. People perceive their relationships and their relationship partners in ways that maintain and promote the relationships and often avoid cognitions that may threaten relationships.

Perceptions of one's partner may also be influenced by one's ideals. An example of motivated interpersonal cognition is provided by research on positive relationship illusions, which suggests that positive self-views and positive ideals for close relationships bias perceptions of a partner's traits (Murray et al, 1996). Such ideals represent individuals' working models of the attributes one hopes and perhaps needs to find in an intimate partner in order to feel secure in the commitment (Murray et al, 1996). People presumably project their interpersonal traits of their ideal partners, seeing their

partners as possessing more desirable qualities than their partners claim to possess. In turn, people who idealize partners tend to report greater relationship satisfaction (Murray et al., 1996). Positive biases are endemic in partner and relationship perceptions.

Research has consistently found that, on average, intimates see their partners in a more positive light than their partners see themselves (Boyes & Fletcher, 2007; Murray et al., 1996).

A fundamental question concerning person perception is how perceivers build up complex impressions based on incomplete and isolated bits of information (Buttton et al., 1993). One's cognitive perspective is thought to play a role in perceptions of one's partner. Individuals have idiosyncratic theories about which traits cluster together which guide their constructions of their partners. Buttton et al (1993)'s study of how attitude perceptions are structured looked at how people expect certain attitudes to "go together" or coexist in the same individual in an attempt to identify and label the dimensions people use in judging others' attitudes. Participants in this study viewed pairs of attitude statements (such as 'All women should be feminists.' 'Religion is mostly superstition.') and were asked to judge whether or not a person who agreed with one statement in the pair would be likely to agree with the other. The results were consistent with the authors' hypotheses that there is a common structure to people's perceptions of others' attitudes. The authors described the structure of perceived attitudes in terms of two dimensions, one related to liberalism and the other, to a concern with traditional values. The authors explained their results using an example of a group discussion. In a group discussion of sexual harassment, a new member may make sense of what is being said by locating the views, as well as the individuals expressing them, in the conservative-traditional region

of the perceptual space. When the topic of conversation turns to homosexuality, the new member may anticipate that members will be similarly conservative and traditional on this topic. In the context of intimate relationships, intimates are likely to use isolated pieces of knowledge about their partners' attitudes to evaluate them in terms of liberalism and traditionality and thus form perceptions of what their partners believes and values. In general, expectations may bias attention, encoding, and retrieval so as to fulfill expectations.

In sum, an intimate's perceptions of one's partner is likely to be based in part in reality, in part on projections of one's own self onto the partner, based in part on one's ideals, and in part on one's ideas of which traits and attitudes cluster together in a person. The amount and type of bias involved in perceptions of one's partner is likely to be influenced by the perceiver, the relationship, and content area of focus.

Partner perceptions have been linked with outcomes such as relationship functioning. Perceptions of partner behavior have been found to be significant influences on one's satisfaction with the relationship, especially for women and those in longer-term relationships (Davis & Oathout, 1987). The importance of partner perceptions in predicting relationship functioning has also been shown in such areas as interpersonal traits and attachment (Saffrey et al, 2003). Partner-perceptions of interpersonal problems have been found to predict relationship functioning more strongly and consistently than self-perceptions (Saffrey et al, 2003). Numerous studies have shown that when partners view their partners positively, relationship satisfaction is higher (Cobb et al, 2001; Murray et al, 1996). These associations are often stronger, and more consistent, than for self-perceptions. Individuals have been found to be happier in their relationships when

they idealized their partners. The more they idealized the construction, the greater the satisfaction (Murray et al, 1996).

In conclusion, although perceptions of one's partners seem to represent a mixture of reality plus construction, such perceptions are linked to relationship functioning and satisfaction and are thus considered critical in the current study.

## Chapter Three

### Statement of the Problem

Most contemporary Americans want to be able to develop mutually rewarding intimate relationships in which both partners have more or less equal power to shape the relationship (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1996). Without patriarchal laws and legally permitted gender discrimination, many expect equality between the sexes. In fact, many marriages have begun to look more equal, with both members of the couple employed and participating in household work on some level (Milkie et al., 2002; Spain & Bianchi, 1996). The current project used Knudson-Martin and Mahoney's (1998; 2005) definition of an equal relationship which is one in which partners hold equal status, accommodation in the relationship is mutual, attention to the other in the relationship is mutual, and there is a mutual sense of well-being of the partners. Unfortunately, despite widespread egalitarian ideals and some movement toward relational equality, it is clear that couples, even dual-earning couples, are not generally able to attain equality in their marriages (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1996; 1998; 2005; Milkie et al., 2002; Steil, 1994; Zimmerman et al., 2003; Zvonkovic et al., 1996). In other words, couples want equal relationships, expect equality in their marriages, and yet seem to find it difficult to attain equality. The question must be asked – what factors prevent or facilitate couples' attainment of marital equality?

The thesis of the current study was that marital inequality is maintained by what has been referred to in the literature as invisible power (Komter, 1989). Invisible power refers to the implicit values, beliefs, or preconceptions stemming from societal values that shape a person's view of the world in such a way that one can neither see nor imagine an

alternative to the status quo or see it as natural or unchangeable. Particularly relevant to the study of marital inequality are two related forms of invisible power: sexism and gender role expectations. Both sexist attitudes and gender norms serve to maintain marital inequality.

As men's formal and institutionalized power decreases in the United States, marital inequality is maintained and reproduced in other, less formal, ways. Sexism, like racial prejudice, has become more subtle and disguised in recent years (Tougas et al., 1995). Few Americans continue to purport a belief that women are inferior and instead sexism has become more subtle and more difficult to identify. The conceptualization of sexism used in the current study, ambivalent sexism, encompasses not just hostile sexism (antipathy toward women) but also benevolent sexism (a set of interrelated attitudes toward women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles but are subjectively positive in feeling tone for the perceiver) (Glick & Fiske, 1996). While both hostile and benevolent sexism serve to keep women in a subordinate position, benevolent sexism can be particularly subtle and disarming as it typically manifests in what may be perceived as protective or idealizing, yet patronizing guises. Hostile and benevolent sexism are both critical components of sexism, and although they were not examined separately in the current study, the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory used encompasses both components.

Gender is another way researchers have conceptualized invisible power. Gender is defined as a socially constructed entity, constructed and reconstructed by everyday interactions of cultural expectations and standards, and legitimized through regulations and laws of the land (Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006). Several researchers (e.g.,

Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1996; Risman & Johnson-Summerford, 1998) have hypothesized that assumptions and expectations about gender are what maintain marital inequality. Gender ideology is a form of power that is generally invisible to most couples, yet seems to have an effect on families. According to Risman & Johnson-Summerford (1998), marital inequality is maintained because of the tension between an individual's ideological position and a social system still imbued with gender expectations and assumptions. In other words, couples may enter into relationships with egalitarian ideals and with expectations that both wives and husbands will work inside and outside the home and contribute in equitable ways. At the same time, men and women continue to enter relationships with traditional gender expectations and with unequal resources and power, thus making actual achievement of equality difficult. Conventional norms and pressures around gender are so built into the institution of marriage that the power imbalance is often hidden and hard to identify (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1998). From this perspective, couples seem to get stuck between their egalitarian ideals and traditional expectations about gender roles.

One way of investigating gendered power is to examine equality in male-female relationships. Given that equality is a primary principle of feminist theory, the literature on marital equality was consulted to identify variables related to the attainment of marital equality. Three factors repeatedly emerge in the literature as related to marital equality: (1) both partners are aware of and critical of gender injustices and note when assumptions are made based on gender (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Knudson Martin & Mahoney, 2005); (2) there is mutuality in terms of attention to relationship and family tasks, careers of both partners, and flexible allocation of household duties (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Knudson

Martin & Mahoney, 2005; Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006), and (3) partners engage in open dialogue regarding conflict and active negotiation including communication of emotions and negative reactions (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Knudson Martin & Mahoney, 1998, 2005; Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006). The selection of variables studied in the current study (sexist attitudes, life role salience, communication patterns) was derived from this qualitative literature.

The goal of this study was to investigate variables that appear to correspond with invisible power, namely the gendered ways men and women commit to various life roles, the gendered ways women and men communicate in times of conflict, and sexist ideologies that serve to shape beliefs about women and the roles women adopt. Sex differences have been consistently found with the three primary variables of interest – life role salience, communication patterns, and sexist ideology (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Cinamon & Rich, 2002b; Glick et al., 2000). These variables appear to be vehicles for transmitting invisible power and confirming and justifying power inequality ideologically, unintentionally, and often unconsciously.

Overall, there seems to be a dearth of studies looking at how the variables of interest relate to wives' marital satisfaction and psychological distress. No study has been located that has studied this combination of variables. In fact the bodies of literature of the three primary variables are quite distinct. Studies that have examined life role salience are most often career research using work-related outcomes (e.g., performance as a manager) (e.g., Graves, Ohlott & Ruderman, 2007). Although sex differences have been consistently found in how committed women and men are to various life roles (e.g., Cinamon & Rich, 2002b), studies have not yet examined the impact of such role

commitments on the family. Additionally, many of the studies on life role salience have been conducted internationally (e.g., Israel, Singapore, and India); therefore it is not known how role salience would behave in the cultural context of the United States, with its own set of norms and expectations. The current study was conducted in an American context and examined the relationships between commitment to life roles and outcome variables pertaining to the family domain, as opposed to the work domain.

Another goal in this study was to examine the relationship between couple communication patterns and wives' marital satisfaction and psychological distress. One limitation in the literature on communication patterns is the use of observational methodology. A concern with this type of research is the possibility of reactivity to observation when adults communicate in a public setting about problems that they normally discuss in private (Hawlweg et al., 2000). Discussion topics may be contrived or based on researcher bias. Another major limitation of observational studies of couple conflict is that they have typically utilized very small, non-representative samples. The current study used a self-report measure to examine communication patterns in order to increase the size and diversity of the sample and thus increase generalizability and utility of findings. Additionally, although spouses may be biased observers, their reports may be more informed (in contrast to observers, they know the history of the marriage and the idiosyncrasies of their communication). Thus they potentially could provide the most representative account of what goes on between them (Hawlweg et al., 2000). The ease of administering the self-report measure of communication patterns facilitates examination of relationships between communication patterns and other variables, as this study was designed to do.

Although ambivalent sexism had not previously been studied with the outcome variables of relationship satisfaction and psychological distress, studies have found ambivalent sexism linked with other negative outcomes for women. Studies have found relationships between ambivalent sexism and rape myth acceptance (Glick & Fiske, 1996), likelihood to sexually harass (Pryor, Giedd, & Williams, 1995), proclivity to rape in an acquaintance situation (Abrams et al., 2003), negative evaluations of women who violate traditional gender roles (Glick, et al., 1997) and attitudes toward wife abuse (Glick, Sakalli-Uruglu, Ferreira, & Aguiar de Souza, 2002). Although these studies have focused on more obvious and severe outcomes, it makes intuitive sense that ambivalent sexism may have more subtle deleterious effects that erode marital satisfaction and contribute to distress. The current study investigated ambivalent sexism in the context of marital relationships. Specifically, the study sought to understand how ambivalent sexism relates to women's marital satisfaction and psychological distress.

In an effort to provide additional context in the current study, the construct of social support was also examined. Social support is not one of the variables identified in the qualitative literature as critical in the pursuit of marital equality; however, social support has been shown to have a significant relationship with psychological well-being in previous studies (Phillips & Murell, 1994). Social support refers to the "fulfillment by others of basic ongoing requirements for well-being... and the fulfillment of more specific time-limited needs that arise as the result of adverse life events or circumstances (Cutrona, 1996, p.3). Social support makes an individual feel cared for, loved, esteemed, and that he or she is a member of a network. Literature has shown social support to help with a variety of life stressors (Cobb, 1976). The examination of social support in the

current study was hoped to situate other findings and provide a context to understand the relationships found with the variables identified in the qualitative literature.

In sum, the goal of this study was to examine variables that are hypothesized to correspond to the invisible power of gender expectations and sexism and to see how they relate to the outcome variables of wives' marital satisfaction and psychological distress. The following hypotheses were based on research in the areas of role commitment, communication patterns, ambivalent sexism, social support, relationship satisfaction, and psychological distress.

*Hypothesis 1: There will be a positive relationship between constructive communication and wives' reported marital satisfaction, such that the more constructive wives perceive communication with their husbands to be, the more marital satisfaction wives will report.*

If couples are able to communicate effectively, share thought and feelings, communicate disappointments, hurt feelings, and negative reactions with each other, rather than avoiding conflict and keeping feelings inside, they will be more likely able to negotiate differences and have satisfying marriages. Studies have consistently shown that communication plays an important role in determining satisfaction in marriage (Christensen, 1988; Fletcher, 2002; Heaven et al., 2005; Heavey, Larson, Zumtobel & Christensen, 1996; Rusbult, Johnson & Morrow, 1986). Evidence has been found that constructive forms of communication are associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction (Christensen, 1988; Heaven et al., 2005; Heavey, Larson, Zumtobel & Christensen, 1996).

*Hypothesis 2: There will be significant relationships between wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to important life roles and wives' reported psychological distress.*

*Hypothesis 2a: There will be a negative relationship between psychological distress and wives' perceptions of husbands' parental commitment. Specifically, the more committed wives perceive their husbands to be to the parental role, the less distressed wives will report being.*

*Hypothesis 2b: There will be a negative relationship between psychological distress and wives' perceptions of husbands' marital commitment. Specifically, the more committed wives perceive their husbands to be to the marital role, the less distressed wives will report being.*

Parental commitment is an indicator of how much personal time and energy one intends to enact in the role of parent. It follows then that one who is highly committed to the parental role, is more likely to share responsibility for childcare than a parent who has low commitment to the parental role.

Research has consistently found a link between disproportionate responsibility for childcare and women's level of depressive symptoms (Kessler & McRae, 1982; Ozer, 1995; Steil & Turetsky, 1987; Van Fossen, 1981). For employed mothers in Steil and Turetsky's (1987) study, disproportionate responsibility for the children was strongly related with higher levels of psychological distress. In other words, the more the husband shared in the responsibilities of child care, the less dysphoria the wife reported. She was less likely to report feeling irritable, worried, worthless, lonely, sad, tense, weepy, fearful, and disinterested in sex. Ozer (1995) also found more childcare responsibility to be

related to greater distress for employed mothers. Additionally, evidence from this study suggests that levels of distress can be mediated by perceived partner involvement. Ozer explained that when a working mother believed that she could not get her husband to assist with childcare, she was more distressed. In fact, a woman's belief in her ability to get her husband to assist with childcare was found to be the most consistent predictor of distress.

Wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to the marital role is also expected to relate to wives' reported psychological distress. One of the four processes identified by Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (2005) as facilitating equality is mutual attention to relationship and family tasks. They describe this mutual attention as requiring both partners to consistently pay attention to their relationship, be sensitive to partner's physical and emotional states, and provide emotional and other supports. Marital role commitment, as measured by the Life Role Salience subscale, appears to capture much of the process that Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (2005) described in that it assesses a partner's willingness to put time and effort into maintaining the relationship and making one's partner feel loved, supported, and cared for, despite needing to make sacrifices in other areas.

It follows then that a husband who is highly committed to the marital role, is more likely to put effort into the relationship and do the emotion work necessary to move toward marital equality than a husband who has low commitment to the marital role. For this reason, it seems likely that a woman who perceives her husband as willing to commit energy and resources into building a good marriage will be less distressed. Lastly, this

hypothesis is consistent with a previous finding that husbands' "emotion work" had a positive effect on women's sense of well-being (Erickson, 1993).

*Hypothesis 3: There will be significant relationships between wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to important life roles and wives' reported marital satisfaction.*

*Hypothesis 3a: There will be a positive relationship between wives' perceptions of husbands' parental commitment and wives' reported marital satisfaction. Specifically, the more wives perceive their husbands to be committed to the parental role, the more satisfied wives will report being in their marriages.*

*Hypothesis 3b: There will be a positive relationship between wives' perceptions of husbands' marital commitment and wives' reported marital satisfaction. Specifically, the more wives perceive their husbands to be committed to the marital role, the more satisfied wives will report being in their marriages.*

Perceptions of husband's parental commitment were not only hypothesized to be related to an individual outcome (psychological distress) but also to a relational outcome (marital satisfaction). Couples in Zimmerman et al. (2003) expressed that a shared sense of parenting and responsibility for household labor led to marital satisfaction and success in balancing work and family. In their study, wives were found to do more childcare and organizing of family life, while husbands were found to prioritize their career more.

It was hypothesized that women become less satisfied in their marriages and more distressed when they perceive their husbands as not committed to parenting. Research indicates that responsibilities for childcare and household labor continue to fall disproportionately to women (Bianchi et al., 2000; Ozer, 1995). When women perceive

that husbands are involved in, or at least willing to be involved in childcare, there are more positive personal and relational outcomes.

Marital satisfaction was expected to relate not only to wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to the parental role but also to wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to the marital role. One of the six general partnership themes identified in interviews with couples who perceived themselves to be successful in balancing work and family, was shared emotion work (Zimmerman et al., 2003). All of the 47 couples interviewed described the importance of their marital relationship to each of them, and detailed ways that they maintain the high quality of their relationships. Virtually all participants described a deep sense of friendship with their spouses and many couples described the importance of having time together as a couple. Couples often discussed the importance of a commitment to working through relationship challenges. Commitment to spending time together and working on the relationship appears to be related to couples' perceiving themselves as successful in balancing work and family.

Additionally, quantitative studies on life role salience have found parental role commitment and marital role commitment to be correlated with spousal support (Cinamon & Rich, 2002a) and life satisfaction (Graves et al., 2007). Given these findings, it seemed likely that women would be more satisfied in their marriages when husbands were highly committed to their marital role.

*Hypothesis 4: The relationship between wives' marital satisfaction and perceptions of their husbands' parental commitment will be moderated by wives' reported sexist attitudes. For women who report less sexist views (lower scores), perceptions of husband's parental commitment will be positively related to marital*

*satisfaction. For women who report more sexist attitudes (higher scores), perceptions of husband's parental commitment will not be related to marital satisfaction.*

Women, particularly working mothers who are seeking an egalitarian marriage, are likely to resent husbands who they perceive as not being committed to parenting. Feelings of resentment and/or feelings of being overburdened are likely to influence how satisfied wives are in marriage. This hypothesis is consistent with results from Zimmerman et al. (2003) that a shared sense of parenting was found to be related to marital satisfaction.

For women with more sexist attitudes, the relationship between marital satisfaction and perceptions of husbands' parental commitment is likely to differ. Since women who embrace conventional roles are protected and revered by men, there is incentive for women to cooperate in their own subordination. Therefore, for women who have chosen to cooperate and enact conventional roles, it may not be of bother to her if her husband lacks commitment to parenting. She may have already accepted that parenting is her responsibility and thus, his lack of parental commitment may not influence her marital satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 5: There will be a positive relationship between wives' reported psychological distress and their perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes. Specifically, the more sexist wives perceive their husbands to be, the more distress they will report.*

Given that ambivalent sexism has been found to be related with rape myth acceptance (Glick & Fiske, 1996), likelihood to sexually harass (Pryor, Giedd, & Williams, 1995), proclivity to rape in an acquaintance situation (Abrams et al., 2003), negative evaluations of women who violate traditional gender roles (Glick, et al., 1997) and attitudes toward

wife abuse (Glick, Sakalli-Uruglu, Ferreira, & Aguiar de Souza, 2002) it seemed likely that being married to a highly sexist man would be distressing for a wife.

Additionally there is a well-established link between perceived sexist events and distress. Perceived sexist events have been recognized as stressors that are linked to psychological distress for those who experience such events (Klonoff & Landrine, 1995; Swim, 2001). The findings from Moradi and Funderburk's (2006) study on the role of sexist events in women's mental health replicated previously observed links between frequency of perceived sexist events and psychological distress. In other words, the more often sexist events are perceived, the more distress one is likely to experience. It must be noted that the sexist events studied in this body of literature refer to things such as being treated unfairly at work due to being a woman or receiving inappropriate sexual advances due to being a woman. The type of sexism occurring in marital relationships is likely to be a bit different. Ambivalent sexism includes items about women being too easily offended or exaggerating problems they have at work, as well as more 'benevolent' forms of sexism that suggest women should be cherished and protected by men, women have a purity few men possess, and every man needs a woman he adores. Given the correlations between ambivalent sexism and negative outcomes for women, it was considered likely that ambivalent sexism would be linked to women's psychological distress.

*Hypothesis 6: The relationship between wives' perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes and wives' reported marital satisfaction will be moderated by wives' reported sexist attitudes. For women who report less sexist views (lower scores), perceptions of husband's sexist attitudes will be related to marital satisfaction, such that the more sexist wives perceive husbands to be, the less satisfied women are in their marriage. For those*

*who report more sexist attitudes (higher scores), perceptions of husband's sexist attitudes will not be related to marital satisfaction.*

Given that ambivalent sexism is related to maintaining inequality and keeping women in a subordinate position, it would seem that women would be less satisfied with husbands they perceive to be sexist. What complicates this is that some women are also sexist. Whereas hostile sexism serves to punish women who fail to conform to acceptable roles, benevolent sexism rewards women who embrace conventional gender roles and power relations (Glick et al., 1997). Women who embrace conventional roles are protected and revered by men, which can often elicit women's cooperation in their own subordination. Therefore, for women who are willing to strike this bargain, it may be of little import that their husband is highly sexist.

*Hypothesis 7: There will be a negative relationship between wives' reported social support and their reported level of psychological distress. Specifically, the more social support wives report, the less distress they will report.*

The mental health implications of social support have received much scholarly attention, particularly in conjunction with the role of negative life events in mental health (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Research points to perceived social support as an important mental health promoting factor (Weber, 1998) that has simultaneous unique links to positive self-appraisal (an indicator of well-being) and symptomatology (an aspect of distress) when negative life events are considered. Prior research on social support, negative life events, and mental health has failed to yield consistent support for perceived social support as a moderator (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Koeske & Koeske, 1991). There has been more consistent support for direct links between perceived social support and

mental health than for a posited moderating role of social support in the link between negative events and mental health (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Koeske & Koeske, 1991).

Data was also used to address the following exploratory research questions:

*Research question 1: How will the following variables contribute to marital satisfaction: wives' reported life role salience (commitment to marital, parental, and occupational roles), wives' perceptions of husbands' life role salience (commitment to marital, parental, and occupational roles), wives' sexist attitudes, and wives' perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes, constructive communication, and social support?*

*Research question 2: How will the following variables contribute to psychological distress: wives' reported life role salience (commitment to marital, parental, and occupational roles), wives' perceptions of husbands' life role salience (commitment to marital, parental, and occupational roles), wives' sexist attitudes, and wives' perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes, communication patterns, and social support?*

*Research question 3: How will participants respond to the open-ended question, "Given the following definition of an equal relationship, please describe factors that facilitate or hinder equality in your marriage. An equal relationship can be defined as one in which partners hold equal status, accommodation in the relationship is mutual, attention to the other in the relationship is mutual, and there is a mutual sense of well-being of the partners (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1998)."*

## Chapter Four

### Method

#### *Design*

A non-experimental, correlational survey design using quantitative and qualitative methods was used to investigate the questions of interest.

#### *Participants*

Two hundred and eighty seven women completed the survey and fit the criteria required for participation. Eligible participants were women who were (1) married to a man; (2) a mother whose oldest child was age five or under and living with her full-time; and (3) both she and her husband were employed in paid work at least 30 hours/week. Women meeting these criteria are engaged in multiple roles and are likely confronted with competing and simultaneous demands at work and home. For this reason, the goal was to recruit married women where role management and negotiation have inevitably been encountered in their attempts to balance multiple roles. In addition, the literature indicates that the division of household labor and childcare is most intense and complicated when young children are present in the home. Therefore, participating mothers had to have children five years old or younger living with them full-time in the home. In an attempt to identify a subgroup of working mothers sharing a common experience, married mothers were selected as the sample. Finally, in order to be eligible for the study, participating mothers and their partners needed to be employed outside the home a minimum of 30 hours per week. Since the literature indicates that housewives generally have the least power in their

relationships, the decision was made to not include wives who were not employed. The aim was to examine correlates of marital satisfaction and psychological distress among a group of mothers who would be balancing the multiple roles of work, parenting, and marriage and who would be expected to have the most equal relationships with their spouses.

Data from 141 women were eliminated because they did not complete the survey. Possible explanations for these women not completing the survey will be addressed in the discussion chapter. Data from 43 other participants were eliminated due to not meeting sample criteria. Three participants were not married, two participants did not have children, fifteen participants had children over the age of five, four participants were working less than 30 hours per week, fourteen participants reported their husbands working less than 30 hours per week, and five participants did not provide demographic information, making it impossible to determine whether they fit the criteria for the sample. All participants accessed the study website by following a link embedded within an email request to participate in the study (see Appendix K) or an invitation to participate posted on a website (see Appendix L). In terms of recruitment method, 56.4% of participants were recruited through the snowball technique, 20.2% were invited to participate through the UMD listserv, 15.7% of participants responded to a website posting, and 7.7% responded to the invitation distributed on other listservs.

### *Description of sample*

The ages of the 287 participants ranged from 23 to 49 years, with a mean age of 34.54 (SD = 4.02). The length of participants' marriage ranged from five months to 19 years, with an average length of 6.35 years (SD = 3.28). The number of children in each family ranged from one to three, with a mean of 1.45 (SD = .56). The sample consisted of 83.3% Caucasian/White/European American, 6.6% African-American/African/Black, 3.1% Hispanic/Latino(a), 3.1% Asian-American/Asian/Pacific Islander, 2.1% Multiracial, .7% Asian-Indian/Pakistani, .3% Middle-Eastern/Arab, .3% Native American/Native Alaskan and .3% not reported. In terms of religious affiliation, 20.5% of the sample reported being agnostic or atheist, 63.6% were Christian, 8% were Jewish, and the remaining 7.9% were either Buddhist, or Hindu, or didn't report an affiliation.

*Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants and Their Husbands*

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Percent of wives</i>	<i>Percent of husbands</i>
<b><i>Race/Ethnicity</i></b>		
<i>African-American / African / Black</i>	6.6	8.5
<i>Asian-American / Asian / Pacific Islander</i>	3.1	3.1
<i>Asian-Indian / Pakistani</i>	.7	.3
<i>Caucasian / White / European American</i>	83.3	80.6
<i>Hispanic / Latino (a)</i>	3.1	3.8
<i>Middle Eastern / Arab</i>	.3	1.4
<i>Multiracial</i>	2.1	.7
<i>Native American / Native Alaskan</i>	.3	.7
<i>Not Reported</i>	.3	.7
<b><i>Annual Income</i></b>		
<i>\$0-\$49,999</i>	22.9	18.7
<i>\$50,000-\$99,999</i>	52.4	49.6
<i>\$100,000-\$199,999</i>	19.1	25.7
<i>\$200,000+</i>	3.4	4.2
<i>Not reported</i>	1.4	1.7

It was a well-educated sample; all participants graduated from high school, the highest level of education completed for 28.8% of participants was a bachelor's degree, and 67.7% of participants had completed graduate degrees. In this sample, mothers participated in paid employment an average of 39.83 hours per week (SD = 5.32). In contrast, participants reported their husbands as working 42.5 hours per week on average (SD=6.87). In terms of annual income, 22.9% of women reported earning less than \$50,000 per year, 52.4% of women reported earning between \$50,000 and \$99,999 per year, and 23.9% of women reported earning more than \$100,000 per year. These women reported that 18.7% of their husbands earned less than \$50,000 per year, 49.6% earned between \$50,000 and \$99,000, and 31.6% earned more than \$100,000 per year.

In terms of childcare, 87.5% of the sample utilized daycare/pre-school services and 5% employed a nanny to care for the child(ren) beyond working hours. In the sample, 47.2% of the participants employed household services and 15.6% employed landscaping services. When asked what motivated these women to participate in paid employment, 26.7% of women reported that they were motivated primarily by income needs, 16.7% were motivated primarily by career goals/interests, and 55.9% of women responded that their motivation was equally due to needs for income and career goals/interests.

*Response Rate.* An invitation to participate was sent via email to all female faculty and staff members at the University of Maryland between the ages of 18 and 48 (2029 women). In an effort to determine a response rate for this subset of the sample, the invitation asked those who did not fit the criteria for

participation to respond indicating that they did not qualify. In response to the 2029 emails sent, 109 women responded that they did not qualify, and 55 women who participated indicated that they had been recruited through the University of Maryland list serve. Based on the number of women who responded that they did not qualify, it is likely that more women who did not fit the criteria for participation were solicited than those who did.

Due to the nature of the recruitment, it is impossible to know how many people may have received the recruitment email or seen an invitation to participate in the study. However, information was collected about the number of times the study website was visited. Based on these numbers, 495 visits were made to the website during the time of data collection, 141 individuals began the survey but did not complete it, and 331 individuals completed the survey. An estimate of the response rate of those who visited the website and completed the survey can be calculated at 66.87% based on this information. Unfortunately we received a few reports that the website was not working and had shut down in the midst of a participant completing a survey. It is impossible to know for how many participants this occurred as it required additional time and effort for participants to report this.

An additional consideration is the nature of the sample. Mothers of young children may begin the survey and be unable to complete it due to a baby waking from a nap or two children getting into a fight. It is quite likely that some participants were unable to complete the survey due to their need to care for their child(ren). Lastly, an unknown number of visitors to the site were friends and

colleagues of the researcher who were interested in gathering information to send to additional contacts for the study. Although these were not actual participants, this unknown number of individuals is included in the above numbers.

Of 122 women who completed at least the first two instruments of the survey before eventually dropping out, 26 stopped upon seeing the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory for the first time. Another 11 women stopped upon seeing the Ambivalent Sexism later in the administration when participants were asked to respond from their own perspective rather than their husbands'. Theories about why some women began the survey but stopped before completing it will be addressed in the discussion chapter.

#### *Rationale for investigating women only*

Some studies on women's marital satisfaction and psychological distress use samples of only women, others collect data from both women and men, while others use samples of couples. In the current study, the decision was made to only collect data from women. In studying predictors of relationship stability, Attridge, Berschied, and Simpson (1995) found that the accuracy of predictions was significantly improved by basing predictions on data obtained from both partners yet noted that this improvement in predictive accuracy (6%) was less than impressive. Given that they investigated relationship stability and it only takes one person to end a relationship, it is not surprising that having data from both members of a couple (either of whom could terminate the relationship) increased predictive accuracy of relationship stability. However, the outcome variables investigated in the current study, women's marital satisfaction and

psychological distress, can be considered internal states. One's internal state is quite subjective and data collected from husbands would not directly augment this type of data from wives as would be the case in a study examining relationship stability. The next section will provide a rationale as to why women's perceptions, rather than data collected from husbands, was used to investigate these internal states.

*Rationale for using participants' perceptions of their partner's perspective*

The current study examined the experience of marriage for mothers' of young children who worked outside the home. It was thought that wives' distress and marital satisfaction are more likely to be related to their perceptions of their husbands' beliefs and values than to their husband's self-reported perspective. For example, if a wife perceived that her husband was neglecting her, she would be likely to suffer regardless of whether other observers of her relationship, including her husband, would agree that she was being neglected. In this sense, perceptions are critical in understanding a woman's experience of her marital relationship and her husband's actual behavior and/or perspective may be less relevant. Some previous research has shown that marital distress is a function not so much of what partners feel or intend to convey, but is more a function of how their actions and behaviors are experienced by their partner (Gottman, 1979; Gottman et al., 1976; Markman, 1979, 1981). As such, a number of studies have been conducted using partner perceptions in their research methodology (Ozer, 1995; Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986, VanFossen, 1981).

Social perception ordinarily contains a mix of bias and accuracy. Positive biases are endemic in partner and relationship perceptions (Boyes & Fletcher, 2007). Overall, judgments of one's partner are significantly more positive than ratings of one's self, perhaps as a way to maintain positive feelings toward one's partner. Boyes and Fletcher found that positive bias toward partners was highest on global traits and lower on specific traits. Given that women in the current study were asked to report their perceptions of fairly specific traits (husbands' sexist attitudes and life role commitments), it was thought that some of that bias may be attenuated.

Based on this rationale, participants in the current study were asked to complete two measures not only from their own perspective but also based on their perceptions of their husbands' perspective (see Appendix A). The scales that were administered twice were the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory and the Life Role Salience Scales (which contains the following subscales: Parental Role Commitment, Occupational Role Commitment, and Marital Role Commitment). First, participants were asked to complete each instrument based on perceptions of their husbands' perspective. Additional instructions were added to these instruments saying, "Please consider what you think your husband believes and how he would feel about the following statements." Later in the administration, participants were asked to complete the instrument from their own perspective.

The Communication Patterns Questionnaire, which was administered, is designed to assess couple interaction patterns at the level of the dyad and thus already has a dyadic perspective. More of a dyadic perspective is gained by

having participants complete the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory and Life Role Saliency Scales from both perspectives. For the outcome variables (women's reported psychological distress and marital satisfaction), it does not make sense to get a dyadic perspective. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support was administered to situate the variables under investigation in the context of the well-researched variable of social support. Since the focus of the study was on factors related to women's marital satisfaction and psychological distress, it was determined that perceptions regarding social support need only be collected from the women's perspective.

### *Measures*

An online survey was developed that included a demographic questionnaire and measures of relationship satisfaction, psychological distress, ambivalent sexism, commitment to the roles of spouse, parent, and worker, communication, and social support. Participants were also given the opportunity to respond to an open-ended question. After being given a definition of an equal relationship, women were asked to identify factors that facilitate or hinder equality in their marriage.

*Demographic questionnaire* (see Appendix J). Participants were asked for information regarding the race/ethnicity of both wife and husband, annual income of both wife and husband, as well as the woman's age, religion, education level, length of time married, number of children, age of children, whether custody of children is shared, motivation for employment, and whether they have hired help to assist with household tasks and/or childcare. Each participant was also asked

to rate her level of satisfaction with work/career, parenting, and marriage. Table 1 displays a comprehensive description of the sample based on responses to these questions.

*Ambivalent Sexism Inventory* (ASI; Glick & Fiske, 1996; see Appendix B & C). Sexist attitudes were measured using the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory. The 22-item ASI assesses hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes toward women and men, respectively, within the context of male/female relationships. The 11 items of the Benevolent Sexism Subscale cover the three domains concerning power differentials (paternalism, gender differentiation, and heterosexuality). The Hostile Sexism Subscale is unidimensional and does not contain subfactors (Glick & Fiske, 2001). Participants respond using a six-point scale labeled 0 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The ASI can be used as an overall measure of sexism with scores ranging from 0 to 110, with higher scores indicating more sexism. Alternatively, the two subscales, hostile sexism and benevolent sexism, can be calculated separately. In the current study, the overall score of Ambivalent Sexism was used.

The ASI has undergone extensive psychometric testing and its construct validity and reliability have been demonstrated. Cronbach alphas reported by Abrams et al. (2003) were .89 for the hostile sexism scale (HS), .88 for the benevolent sexism scale (BS), and .91 for the full ASI. Glick and Fiske (1997) compared the ASI with several other measures of gender-role attitudes. The predicted pattern of correlations between Hostile Sexism and other instruments based on an antipathy model (Attitudes toward Women Scale, Modern Sexism

Scale, Old-fashioned Sexism) were obtained showing construct validity. The generally moderate correlations indicate that Hostile Sexism is similar to but not redundant with these measures. Low correlations between benevolent sexism and these other measures of sexism indicate that benevolent sexism represents a separate construct that does not appear to be addressed in other measures (McHugh & Frieze, 1997). The coefficient alpha for the ASI in the current study was .91 when women were responding to the questions based on their perceptions of their husband's perspective, and .93 when responding to questions from their own perspective.

The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory was administered twice. First, participants were asked to complete the instrument based on their perceptions of their husbands (see Appendix C). Additional instructions were added to the ASI instrument saying, "Please consider what you think your husband believes and how he would feel about the following statements." Additionally, the statement "\*Reminder: Be sure that you are responding to these statements from your HUSBAND'S perspective" was included between items at three different points in the instrument to remind participants to focus on how their husband would think of feel. Later in the administration, participants were asked to complete the instrument from their own perspective (see Appendix B).

*Life Role Salience Scales* (LRSS; Amatea, Cross, Clark, & Bobby, 1986; see Appendix D & E). Attributions of importance to work and family were measured using the Life Role Salience Scale. The instrument has eight clearly defined subscales assessing men's and women's personal expectations concerning

occupational, marital, parental, and homecare roles. For each of the four roles (occupational, marital, parental, and homecare), there are two subscales, one measures the value one ascribes to the role while the other measures one's commitment to the role. The scales are equally applicable to men and women, as well as to individuals at various stages of role anticipation and/or implementation. One advantage of this measure over other related measures is that it distinguishes between various personal life roles, rather than grouping them all into one "family" role.

As has been done in several other studies (Chi-Ching, 1995; Cinamon & Rich, 2002a), the current study eliminated administration of the two subscales concerning the homecare role. Other researchers have eliminated the homecare role due to its lack of salience because many participants of higher socioeconomic status hire household help. Also, many of the items regarding the housework role capture expectations about having an attractive home rather than expectations regarding division of labor. Additionally, in the current study, the subscales concerning how much one values the different life roles were not administered. Evidence suggests that people value roles more than they are actually willing to commit to them (Chi-Ching, 1995; Cinamon & Rich, 2002a). The focus in the current study was on how willing and able couples are to commit energy and resources to these roles, rather than how much they value them on an ideological level.

The three subscales utilized in the present study (commitment to parental role, commitment to marital role, commitment to occupational role) are reliable,

well-validated and extensively used. Cronbach alphas for the commitment subscales of the three roles ranged from: .74-.83 (occupation), .72-.80 (parental), and .68-.81 (marital) (Amatea et al, 1986; Chi-Ching, 1995; Cinamon & Rich, 2002a). In the current study, the coefficient alpha for the three commitment subscales were .83 (occupation), .71 (parental), and .83 (marital) when women responded to items based on their perceptions of their husband's perspective and .76 (occupation), .79 (parental), and .70 (marital) when women responded to items from their own perspective.

Initially, the alpha for women's ratings of their own commitment to the parenting role was unsatisfactorily low (.45). For this reason, each item comprising the subscale was examined and two items were omitted from the subscale in order to increase the internal consistency of the measure. The first omitted item said, "It is important to me to have some time to myself and my own development rather than have children and be responsible for their care." This item was likely confusing and/or irrelevant for this sample since all women already had children. The other omitted item said, "Becoming involved in the day-to-day details of rearing children involves costs in other areas of my life which I am unwilling to make." Given that women in this sample all worked a minimum of 30 hours per week, one can see how this item would be difficult to answer. These items may have been particularly confusing for women who are equally committed to parenting and personal self-care. Such women may decide that using child-care in order to take care of their own needs and mental health is ultimately in the best interest of their children. When the coefficient alpha was re-

calculated for the subscale excluding these two items, the remaining four items in the subscale demonstrated adequate internal consistency (.79).

Each of these three subscales contained five items rated on a 5 point likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)*. Scores on each subscale can range between 5 and 25, with higher scores indicating more commitment to the role. The LRSS has been tested with undergraduates, faculty women, non-professional women, and married couples and has been used in work-family research (e.g. Campbell & Campbell, 1995; Cinamon & Rich, 2002; McCutcheon, 1998).

Validity evidence for the LRSS is reported in Amatea et al (1986). Campbell and Campbell (1995) and McCutcheon (1998) provide additional construct validity. McCutcheon (1998) conducted two studies to validate the Life Role Saliency Scales. In the first study, 1,215 employed adults filled out the scales and a measure of job happiness. Scores on job happiness did not correlate with those on the Occupational subscale of the Life Role Saliency Scales. As hypothesized, married participants scored higher on the Parental and Marital subscales and lower on the Occupational subscale than single ones. In the second study, 81 married couples completed the Life Role Saliency Scales and the Purpose-in-Life scale. As hypothesized, scores on the two measures were significantly correlated.

In the current study, the Life Role Saliency Scale was administered twice. First, participants were asked to complete the instrument based on their perceptions of their husbands (see Appendix E). Additional instructions were

added to the LRSS instrument saying, “Please consider what you think your husband believes and how he would feel about the following statements.”

Additionally, the statement “respond from husband’s perspective” was included before items for each of the three life roles to remind participants to focus on how their husband would think or feel. Later in the administration, participants were asked to complete the instrument from their own perspective (see Appendix D).

*Communication Patterns Questionnaire* (CPQ; Christensen, 1987; see Appendix F). This measure assesses interaction patterns of couples during periods of disagreement. All behaviors are assessed at the level of the dyad (e.g. mutual blame) rather than at the level of the individual (e.g. woman blames). The CPQ is a 23-item likert-scale instrument utilizing a 9-point response format. Possible responses range from “very unlikely” to “very likely”. Communication items are classified under three sequential periods: (1) “When some problem in the relationship arises” (three items ask about discussion or avoidance of the issue); (2) “During a discussion of a relationship problem” (eleven items ask about behaviors such as blaming, negotiating, criticizing, defending, demanding, and withdrawing); and (3) “After a discussion of a relationship problem” (nine items ask about behaviors such as withholding and reconciliation, and reactions such as guilt and misunderstanding). Some items assess symmetrical patterns, such as where both members of the couple blame, accuse, and criticize each other. Other items assess asymmetrical patterns, such as where one member of the couple criticizes while the other defends him- or herself.

The instrument contains seven theoretically derived subscales: (1) mutual constructive communication, (2) total amount of demand-withdraw communication, (3) man demand/woman withdraw communication, (4) woman demand/man withdraw communication, (5) roles in demand-withdraw communication, (6) mutual avoidance and withholding, and (7) constructive communication. Rather than generating an overall score for the instrument, researchers use scores from one or more of the aforementioned subscales (Hahlweg & Kaiser, 2000; Heaven et al., 2005). Christensen (1987) examined the agreement between partners' independent accounts of their relationship patterns. Intraclass correlations were high, ranging from .73 to .80 for three subscales of the measure: demand/withdrawal interaction, demand/withdrawal roles, and mutually constructive communication. All had alphas above .70. Discriminate validity of the CPQ was demonstrated in that most items discriminated clearly between spouses' high, moderate, and low in marital adjustment (Noller & White, 1990).

Although the full 23-item CPQ was administered in the current study, only scores from the 7-item constructive communication subscale of the Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ-CC) were used in analyses. The coefficient alpha for the current study was .79. This subscale was designed to capture the overall constructiveness of spouses' conflict behavior, which is of interest in the current study. The mutual constructive communication subscale (CPQ-MCC) also yields an overall rating of communication; however, the CPQ-MCC assesses only positive behaviors and outcomes, while the CPQ-CC assess

both positive and negative behaviors. Since researchers believe the overall quality of a couple's communication can be most accurately characterized by considering both positive and negative behaviors, the decision was made to use the CPQ-CC in the current study. Scores on the CPQ-CC range from 7 to 63 with higher levels indicating more constructive communication.

In research on the CPQ-CC, high internal consistency (cronbach alpha = .90), high levels of interspouse agreement, and a strong association in the expected direction with marital adjustment has been found (Heavey, Larson, Zumtobel & Christensen, 1996). The CPQ-CC was also strongly associated with observer ratings of spouses' constructiveness during videotaped problem-solving discussions. Correlations ranged from .62 to .72. Such correlations between self-report and observational measures support the validity of the CPQ Constructive Communication subscale (Heavey et al., 1996). Additional evidence supporting the validity of the CPQ Constructive Communication Subscale can be found in Rankin-Esquer et al (1998) who showed that this subscale discriminates community couples from clinic couples from divorcing couples.

*Relationship Assessment Scale* (RAS: Hendrick, 1988; see Appendix G).

Relationship satisfaction was measured using the Relationship Assessment Scale. The RAS is a 7-item self-report instrument designed to measure global satisfaction in one's current romantic relationship. Participants responded to each item on a 5-point scale with 1 meaning unsatisfied and 5 meaning extremely satisfied and with higher scores representing greater relationship satisfaction (two items are reverse-scored). A total satisfaction score was calculated by summing

responses to the seven items after reverse scoring the two negatively worded items. Total scores range from 7 to 35 with higher scores indicating greater relationship satisfaction. Scale anchors differ depending on the questions. For example, sample items include the following: “In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?” (1 = unsatisfied, 3 = average, 5 = extremely satisfied) and “How much do you love your partner?” (1 = not much, 3 = average, 5 = very much). In two studies using 239 participants, Hendrick (1988) found strong evidence for a single-factor structure for the RAS.

Hendrick (1988) also reported good psychometric properties for the RAS. Hendrick reported an internal consistency reliability alpha of .86 for the brief scale. The coefficient alpha for the current study was .90. Scores on the RAS were strongly correlated ( $r = .80$ ) with scores on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, a psychometrically sound 32-item marital adjustment measure. The RAS actually outperformed the DAS in predicting whether couples would be together or apart at a future date. The RAS has shown construct validity by correctly identifying 91% of the couples who remained together and 86% of the couples who terminated their relationships.

*The Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D-8;* Melchior, Huba, Brown, & Reback, 1993; see Appendix H). The CES-D was developed for use in studies of depressive symptoms in general population samples. The original CES-D was developed by Radloff (1977) and consists of 20 items that assess the presence of depressive symptoms during the past 7 days.

The 20 item CES-D demonstrated an internal consistency of .85 in the general population, and .90 in clinical populations.

The CES-D has been widely used with diverse populations of varying socioeconomic characteristics. Several studies have reported a relationship between the CES-D and clinical diagnoses of depression as well as with other diagnoses, such as anxiety disorder (Breslau, 1985).

Using data from a heterogeneous community sample of 411 women, Melchior et al. (1993) created a shortened version, which contains only eight items. The shortened version was found to correlate .93 with the full 20-item CES-D. Coefficient alpha for the CES-D-8 was .86. In the current study the coefficient alpha for the CES-D-8 was .78. In a second sample of 83 women in a residential drug abuse program, the 8-item CES-D correlated .54 with the depression Scale, .42 with the anxiety scale, and .43 with the hypochondriasis scale of the Basic Personality Inventory (Melchior et al., 1993). Designed to be brief and easy to administer, the CES-D-8 can be completed in several minutes.

Although the CES-D is labeled as a depression scale, it has been considered by researchers to be a general measure of psychological distress. Items such as “I feel fearful” and “My sleep was restless” capture the feeling of anxiety and several studies have reported a relationship between the CES-D and measures of anxiety (Breslau, 1985; Melchoir et al., 1993). Although the CES-D measures some feelings of anxiety, it is not a measure of stress. Life stressors such as financial difficulties or health difficulties are not specifically examined using the CES-D.

In the current study this brief 8-item version of the CES-D was used. Participants were asked to use a 4-point Likert scale to report on the ways that they have felt or behaved during the past week, ranging from 0 = rarely or none of the time (less than 1 day), to 3 = all of the time (5-7 days). A total scale score was obtained by summing the numeric values for each item. Scores can range from 0 to 24, with higher scores indicating more depression. The highest score reported by a woman in the current study was 16 and the mean score for this sample was 3. A CES-D score of seven or higher on the brief scale is the recommended indicator or "threshold" of depressive symptomatology. In the current sample, 35 women (12% of the sample) had CES-D scores of seven or higher.

*The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support* (MSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988). The MSPSS was used to measure the perceived adequacy of support from family, friends, and significant others (See Appendix I). It has 12 items with a 7-point Likert-type scale (agree-disagree) with a range of scores from 12-84 with higher scores indicating more social support. A sample item is "I can count on my friends when things go wrong". The original scale was developed on undergraduate students who had an overall mean of 69.6 (SD= 10.32). The scale demonstrates good reliability with an overall Cronbach's alpha of .88 and individual subscale alpha's of .91 (significant other), .87 (family) and .85 (friends). For this sample, the overall alpha was .96 with individual subscale alpha's of .98 (significant other), .95 (family) and .97 (friends) although only the overall score was used in analyses. Test-retest reliability after a two to three month interval was also strong. For the overall scale alpha was .85, for the

significant other subscale it was .72, for the family subscale it was .85, and for the friends subscale it was .75. In addition, validity was established through correlations with both depression and anxiety. The scale showed a significant correlation with the depression subscale of the HSCL ( $r = -.25, p < .01$ ). In addition, the family subscale was significantly correlated with the anxiety subscale of the HSCL ( $r = -.18, p < .01$ ).

#### *Ordering of instruments*

Although it is not possible to counterbalance the instruments on the Survey Monkey website, this was not considered a problem when planning the study due to the rationale described below regarding the specific ordering of instruments to be administered. The administration began by assessing relationship satisfaction, an instrument which has good face validity. The other outcome variable, psychological distress, was also assessed early in the administration before participants were asked to think about constructs such as sexism or life role commitment. Next, the two measures participants were asked to complete from their husbands' perspective - Ambivalent Sexism Inventory and Life Role Salience scales (occupational role commitment, parental role commitment, and marital role commitment) - were administered together, in an attempt to minimize the switching between the different perspectives which could confuse participants. The dyadic communication questionnaire was administered next as a sort of transition for participants from answering questions based on their husband's perspective back to their own perspective. Participants were then asked to complete the two instruments, previously answered from their husbands'

perspective (Ambivalent Sexism Inventory and Life Role Salience scales), from their own perspective. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support was the last instrument that participants were asked to complete because social support is not a variable of primary interest in this study but rather is used to contextualize the remainder of the results. Lastly, participants were asked to complete the demographic form.

### *Procedures*

Participants were recruited via three methods: (1) the registrar at the University of Maryland provided email addresses for all female faculty and staff between the ages of 18 and 48 and an invitation to participate (see Appendix K) was sent electronically on one occasion to these women; (2) advertisements were posted on several parenting websites which allowed research recruitment (i.e., Parenthood.com, Southernmomsonline.com, Thebabycorner.com, and Babycenter.com); and (3) a snowball sampling technique was employed in which participants were recruited by creating a chain of referrals based on an extended network of relationships and contacts. In snowball sampling, emails are sent to potential participants requesting that they pass the message to acquaintances who they think might qualify to participate in the study. In order to increase the racial, religious, economic, and attitudinal diversity of the sample, I identified ten people with access to people of different race, religion, SES, and education level and asked them to forward the email to 10 individuals from these diverse populations. Individuals interested in participating clicked a hyperlink to arrive at the online version of the study or could contact this experimenter to request a paper version

be mailed to them. The website had a built-in counting device to track how many unique people visited the website and thus provided information about how many of those actually participated.

Participants were assured that participation was voluntary and confidential and were asked to read all instructions and items carefully before responding. No compensation was offered in return for participation in the study; however, participants were informed that this research may eventually help researchers better understand marriages of dual-earner couples. Informed consent for this study (see Appendix M) included the provision that confidentiality could not be completely guaranteed if participants chose to complete the survey online. In electronic submissions, there is always a small chance that a transmitted message could be intercepted and read by a third party. Given that the current study was not advertised widely, and, because of the limited value of the data to a third party, it seemed unlikely that the data would be a target for interception.

Participants could take as much time as they need to complete the survey. Most should have been able to complete the survey within 20 to 25 minutes. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire privately and not to discuss it with their partner until they had completed it. After completing the measures, participants were presented with debriefing information, which briefly described the goal of the study (see Appendix N). Included in the debriefing form was the student researcher's name and contact information which participants could refer to if they had any questions or concerns following participation. Also provided was contact information for the student researcher's faculty advisor and the

University of Maryland Institutional Review Board. Respondents were asked on the survey to indicate where they had learned about the study. Of those who completed the survey, 56.4% of participants were recruited through the snowball technique, 20.2% were invited to participate through the UMD listserv, 15.7% of participants responded to a website posting, and 7.7% responded to the invitation distributed on other listservs.

## Chapter Five

### Results

#### *Preliminary analyses*

This chapter is divided into preliminary analyses, analyses of hypotheses and research questions, and additional analyses.

Questionnaire data, descriptive data (e.g. demographic data), as well as qualitative data based on responses to an open-ended question were collected for this study. Descriptive data for the sample were compiled and are presented in Table 1 in the previous chapter. Means, standard deviations, and reliabilities were computed for each of the variables of interest and presented in Table 2. All measures had adequate internal consistency ( $\alpha > .70$ ). Because of the large number of correlations that were conducted, alpha was set at ( $p \leq .01$ ) was used to control for family wise error. Effect sizes are included to provide more robust support for the findings, as called for by recent guidelines (e.g. Frazier, Tix & Barron, 2004). Effect sizes will be reported throughout the results using the following conventions. When  $r$  is used as the effect size indicator for correlations, a small effect size is  $r = 0.1$ , a medium effect size is  $r = 0.3$ , and a large effect size is  $r = 0.5$ . When  $f^2$  is used as the effect size, convention indicates that a small effect size corresponds to  $f^2 = 0.02$ , a medium effect size is  $f^2 = 0.15$ , and a large effect size is  $f^2 = 0.35$ . These guidelines were established by Cohen (1988).

Next, correlations were calculated to explore the relationships between the variables of interest as well as to examine the relationship between the demographic variables including age, length of marriage, number of children, number of hours wives worked per week, and wives' income level. Table 3 presents these bivariate correlations. Prior to

*Table 2*  
*Means of Total Scores, Standard Deviations, and Reliabilities of Relationship Satisfaction, Depression, Ambivalent Sexism, Role Commitments, Constructive communication, Social Support and three items from demographic form (work satisfaction, parenting satisfaction, marital satisfaction)*

<i>Scale</i>	<i>Number of Items &amp; Possible Range of Scores</i>	<i>Range of Scores Actually Used</i>	<i>Scoring</i>	<i>Mean of Total Score (SD)</i>	<i>Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha)</i>
<i>Relationship Adjustment Scale</i>	7 (7-35)	11-35	<i>Likert range 1-5 (higher=more satisfaction)</i>	29.69 (4.63)	.86
<i>Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale</i>	8 (0-24)	0-16	<i>Likert range 0-3 (higher=more depressed)</i>	3.11 (3.08)	.78
<i>Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (husband version)*</i>	22 (0-110)	2-91	<i>Likert range 0-5 (higher=more sexist)</i>	44.16 (18.66)	.91
<i>Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (wife version)</i>	22 (0-110)	0-85	<i>Likert range 0-5 (higher=more sexist)</i>	34.36 (20.21)	.93
<i>Occupational Role Commitment (husband version)*</i>	5 (5-25)	6-25	<i>Likert range 1-5 (higher = more commitment to role)</i>	17.35 (4.73)	.83
<i>Occupational Role Commitment (wife version)</i>	5 (5-25)	6-25	<i>Likert range 1-5 (higher = more commitment to role)</i>	15.77(4.01)	.76
<i>Parental Role Commitment (husband version)*</i>	5 (5-25)	7-25	<i>Likert range 1-5 (higher = more commitment to role)</i>	21.94 (3.25)	.71
<i>Parental Role Commitment (wife version)</i>	3 (3-15)	3-15	<i>Likert range 1-5 (higher = more commitment to role)</i>	14.74 (1.07)	.79
<i>Marital Role Commitment (husband version) *</i>	5 (5-25)	9-25	<i>Likert range 1-5 (higher = more commitment to role)</i>	21.34 (3.6)	.83
<i>Marital Role Commitment (wife version)</i>	5 (5-25)	5-25	<i>Likert range 1-5 (higher = more commitment to role)</i>	22.25 (3.19)	.70
<i>Constructive Communication Scale</i>	7 (7-63)	9-63	<i>Likert range 1-9 (higher-more constructive communication)</i>	49.74 (9.11)	.79
<i>Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support</i>	12 (12-84)	12-84	<i>Likert range 1-7 (higher = more social support)</i>	71.11 (14.82)	.96
<i>Work satisfaction</i>	1 (0-5)	0-5	<i>Likert range 0-5 (higher = more satisfying)</i>	3.98	<i>N/a</i>
<i>Parenting satisfaction</i>	1 (0-5)	0-5	<i>Likert range 0-5 (higher = more satisfying)</i>	4.76	<i>N/a</i>
<i>Marital satisfaction</i>	1 (0-5)	0-5	<i>Likert range 0-5 (higher = more satisfying)</i>	4.47	<i>N/a</i>

\* Scales were used to measure wives' perceptions of their husbands' attitudes and values.

conducting analyses for the hypotheses and research questions below, the bivariate correlations were examined to determine whether the age of mother, age of child, number of children, length of marriage, number of hours wives worked, or wives' income level were related with any of the variables of interest. Although there were a few small correlations between demographic factors (e.g., age of woman, wife's income) and variables of interest, these demographic variables were included in the study to provide a description of the sample and there was not a theoretical reason for these factors to be related in a meaningful way to the hypotheses and research questions of interest. For this reason, the correlations for these variables are presented below but were not used as covariates in the analyses.

*Analysis of hypotheses and research questions*

The following are the results of the analyses based on the hypotheses and research questions.

*Hypothesis 1: There will be a positive relationship between constructive communication and wives' reported marital satisfaction, such that the more constructive wives perceive communication with their husbands to be, the more marital satisfaction wives will report.*

This hypothesis was supported by the data. The Pearson's correlation between constructive communication and marital satisfaction was .62 ( $p \leq .01$ ) which is a large effect size.

*Hypothesis 2: There will be significant relationships between wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to important life roles and wives' reported psychological distress.*

Table 3: Bivariate Correlation of Variables of Interest

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Age of woman	1.00																
2. Wife's income	.31**	1.00															
3. Number of hours wife works per week	-.04	.20**	1.00														
4. Length of marriage	.41**	.24**	.01	1.00													
5. Number of children	.15*	.22**	-.01	.25**	1.00												
6. Relationship satisfaction	.05	.09	-.01	.04	-.08	1.00											
7. Psychological Distress	.14*	-.01	.04	.06	.00	-.33**	1.00										
8. Husband sexist attitudes (ASI) +	-.18**	-.14*	-.02	-.09	.02	-.26**	-.03	1.00									
9. Wife sexist attitudes (ASI)	-.26**	-.08	-.06	-.12*	.06	-.09	-.05	.79**	1.00								
10. Husband comm.- occupation+	.05	.05	-.06	.05	.14*	-.03	.01	.04	-.00	1.00							
11. Wife comm. - occupation	-.05	.21**	.12*	.12*	.03	.05	-.08	-.13*	-.21**	.15*	1.00						
12. Husband comm. - parenting +	-.04	.09	.04	-.01	-.05	.45**	-.13*	-.21**	-.11	-.09	.11	1.00					
13. Wife comm.- parenting	.02	.07	.01	.04	.01	.14*	-.05	-.11	-.04	-.01	-.01	.20**	1.00				
14. Husband comm. - marriage +	-.03	.09	-.05	.04	-.07	.53**	-.19**	-.13*	-.07	-.04	.08	.50**	.12*	1.00			
15. Wife comm.- marriage	.00	.19**	-.05	.01	-.07	.46**	-.20**	-.12	-.05	.05	.05	.29**	.22**	.51**	1.00		
16. Social support	.05	-.06	-.07	.19*	-.08	.18**	-.16**	-.15*	-.12*	.02	.13*	.17**	.08	.29**	.20**	1.00	
17. Communication	.06	.02	-.02	.06	-.12*	.62**	-.31**	-.36**	-.27**	-.06	.01	.31**	.22**	.49**	.31**	.26**	1.00

\* Indicates correlations significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level. \*\* Indicates correlations significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level. + Indicates variable is from wife's perspective.

*Hypothesis 2a: There will be a negative relationship between psychological distress and wives' perceptions of husbands' parental commitment. Specifically, the more committed wives perceive their husbands to be to the parental role, the less distressed wives will report being.*

This hypothesis was not supported by the data. The Pearson's correlation between psychological distress and wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to parenting was  $-.13$  ( $p=.03$ ). Although this represents a small effect size, this finding did not meet the stated alpha level ( $p \leq .01$ ).

*Hypothesis 2b: There will be a negative relationship between psychological distress and wives' perceptions of husbands' marital commitment. Specifically, the more committed wives perceive their husbands to be to the marital role, the less distressed wives will report being.*

This hypothesis was supported by the data. The Pearson's correlation between psychological distress and wives' perceptions of husbands' marital commitment was  $-.19$  ( $p \leq .01$ ), which is a small effect size.

*Hypothesis 3: There will be significant relationships between wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to important life roles and wives' reported marital satisfaction.*

*Hypothesis 3a: There will be a positive relationship between wives' perceptions of husbands' parental commitment and wives' reported marital satisfaction. Specifically, the more wives perceive their husbands to be committed to the parental role, the more satisfied wives will report being in their marriages.*

This hypothesis was supported by the data. The Pearson's correlation between wives' perceptions of husbands' parental commitment and marital satisfaction was .45 ( $p \leq .01$ ) which is a medium effect size.

*Hypothesis 3b: There will be a positive relationship between wives' perceptions of husbands' marital commitment and wives' reported marital satisfaction. Specifically, the more wives perceive their husbands to be committed to the marital role, the more satisfied wives will report being in their marriages.*

This hypothesis was supported by the data. The Pearson's correlation between wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to the marital role and marital satisfaction was .52 ( $p \leq .01$ ) which is a large effect size.

*Hypothesis 4: The relationship between wives' marital satisfaction and perceptions of their husbands' parental commitment will be moderated by wives' reported sexist attitudes. For women who report less sexist views (lower scores), perceptions of husband's parental commitment will be positively related to marital satisfaction. For those who report more sexist attitudes (higher scores), perceptions of husband's parental commitment will not be related to marital satisfaction.*

A hierarchical regression was computed to examine the prediction that the interaction term would explain unique variance above and beyond the main effects (Frazier, Tix, & Barron, 2004). Before entering variables into the regression analyses, the variables (wives' perceptions of husbands' parental commitment and wives' reported sexist attitudes) were centered due to concerns about multicollinearity. Variables were centered by subtracting the mean of each variable in order to compute a new variable such that the mean of the new variable was zero.

Tolerance and variation inflation factor (VIF) were both examined. Tolerance is an indication of the percent of variance in the predictor that cannot be accounted for by the other predictors, hence very small values indicate that a predictor is redundant. The VIF, which stands for *variance inflation factor*, is (1 / tolerance) and as a rule of thumb, a variable whose VIF values is greater than 10 may merit further investigation. Examination of tolerance values and the VIF indicated that multicollinearity was not an issue for this group of variables.

Results of the regression analysis are summarized in Table 4. Wives' perceptions of husbands' parental commitment were entered in the first step. This step was statistically significant. The second step consisted of adding wives' reported sexist attitudes. Addition of this predictor did not significantly increase the fit of the model to the data. The third and final step consisted of adding an interaction term (wives' perceptions of husbands' parental commitment X wives' reported sexist attitudes). Addition of the interaction term did not significantly increase the model. The model explained 20% of the total variance in the dependent variable, relationship satisfaction and had a medium effect size ( $f^2=0.25$ ). Perceptions of husbands' commitment to the parental role predicted significant amounts of relationship satisfaction; however, neither wives' reported sexist attitudes nor the interaction term made a significant unique contribution.

*Table 4*  
*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for wives' reported sexist attitudes and perceptions of husbands' parental commitment and the interaction on relationship satisfaction*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>R<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>R<sup>2</sup> Change</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>F Change</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Relationship satisfaction</i>						
<i>Step 1</i>	.20	.20	72.30			.00**
<i>Perceptions of husbands' parental commitment</i>					.45	.00**
<i>Step 2</i>	.20	.00	36.33	.48		.00**
<i>Perceptions of husbands' parental commitment</i>					.44	.00**
<i>Wives' sexist attitudes</i>					-.04	.49
<i>Step 3</i>	.20	.00	24.17	.08		.00**
<i>Perceptions of husbands' parental commitment</i>					.45	.00**
<i>Wives' sexist attitudes</i>					-.04	.50
<i>Interaction term (wives' sexist attitudes x perceptions of husbands' parental commitment)</i>					-.02	.77

\* p<.05, \*\*p<.01

*Hypothesis 5: There will be a positive relationship between wives' reported psychological distress and their perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes. Specifically, the more sexist wives perceive their husbands to be, the more distress they will report.*

This hypothesis was not supported by the data. The Pearson's correlation between wives' reported psychological distress and their perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes was -.03 (p=.32).

*Hypothesis 6: The relationship between wives' perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes and wives' reported marital satisfaction will be moderated by wives' reported sexist attitudes. For women who report less sexist views (lower scores), perceptions of husband's sexist attitudes will be related to marital satisfaction, such that the more sexist wives perceive husbands to be, the less satisfied women are in their marriage. For those who report more sexist attitudes (higher scores), perceptions of husband's sexist attitudes will not be related to marital satisfaction.*

A hierarchical regression was computed to examine the prediction that the interaction term would explain unique variance above and beyond the main effects (Frazier, Tix, & Barron, 2004). Before entering variables into the regression analyses, the variables (wives' reported sexist attitudes and perceptions of husbands' reported sexist attitudes) were centered due to concerns about multicollinearity. Variables were centered by subtracting the mean of each variable in order to compute a new variable such that the mean of the new variable was zero. Tolerance and variation inflation factor (VIF) were both examined and it was determined that multicollinearity was not an issue for this group of variables.

This hypothesis was not supported. Results of the regression analysis are summarized in Table 5. Wives' perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes were entered in the first step. This model was statistically significant. The second step consisted of adding wives' reported sexist attitudes. Addition of this predictor significantly increased the fit of the model to the data. The third and final step consisted of adding an interaction term (wives' perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes x wives' reported sexist attitudes). Addition of the interaction term did not significantly increase the fit of the model. The model explained 10% of the total variance on the dependent variable, relationship satisfaction and had a small effect size ( $f^2=.11$ ). Wives' reported sexist attitudes and perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes both predicted significant amounts of relationship satisfaction; however, the interaction term was not significant.

*Table 5*  
*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for wives' reported sexist attitudes and perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes and the interaction on relationship satisfaction*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>R<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>R<sup>2</sup> Change</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>F Change</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Relationship satisfaction</i>						
<i>Step 1</i>	.07	.07	19.86			
<i>Perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes</i>					-.26	.00**
<i>Step 2</i>	.10	.04	15.73	10.90		
<i>Perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes</i>					-.49	.00**
<i>Wives' sexist attitudes</i>					.30	.00**
<i>Step 3</i>	.10	.00	10.49	.11		
<i>Perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes</i>					-.49	.00**
<i>Wives' sexist attitudes</i>					.30	.00**
<i>Interaction term (wives' sexist attitudes x perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes)</i>					.02	.74

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

*Hypothesis 7: There will be a negative relationship between wives' reported social support and their reported level of psychological distress. Specifically, the more social support wives report, the less distress they will report.*

This hypothesis was supported by the data. The Pearson's correlation between wives' reported social support and psychological distress was  $-.16$  ( $p \leq .01$ ) which is a small effect size.

*Research question 1: How will the following variables contribute to marital satisfaction: wives' reported life role salience (commitment to marital, parental, and occupational roles), wives' perceptions of husbands' life role salience (commitment to marital, parental, and occupational roles), wives' sexist attitudes, and wives' perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes, constructive communication, and social support?*

Simultaneous regression analysis was used to examine this research question. Before determining which of these ten variables would go into this regression analysis, the variables were first examined for multicollinearity. Tolerance and variation inflation

factor (VIF) were both examined and it was determined that multicollinearity was not an issue for this group of variables. Variables that had a .25 correlation or higher with the dependent variable, but did not correlate above .70 with one another, were selected for this analysis. The five variables that met these criteria were constructive communication, wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to marital role, wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to parental role, wives' commitment to marital role, and wives' perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes. Results of the regression analyses are summarized in Table 6. The model accounted for 52% of the total variance in relationship satisfaction, and had a large effect size ( $f^2=1.08$ ). The variables that predicted a significant amount of unique variance were constructive communication, wives' commitment to marital role, and wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to parenting role. Wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to the marital role and their perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes did not contribute unique variance in this model.

*Table 6*

*Summary of Simultaneous Regression Analysis for wives' perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes, constructive communication, wives' commitment to marriage, perceptions of husbands' commitment to marriage, perceptions of husbands' commitment to parenting and wives' relationship satisfaction*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>R<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>R<sup>2</sup> Change</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>F Change</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Relationship satisfaction</i>						
<i>Step 1</i>	.52	.52	59.90	59.90		.00**
<i>Perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes</i>					-.03	.57
<i>Constructive communication</i>					.43	.00**
<i>Wives' commitment to marriage</i>					.22	.00**
<i>Perceptions of husbands' commitment to marriage</i>					.12	.07
<i>Perceptions of husbands' commitment to parenting</i>					.20	.00**

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01

*Research question 2: How will the following variables contribute to psychological distress: wives' reported life role salience (commitment to marital, parental, and*

*occupational roles), wives' perceptions of husbands' life role salience (commitment to marital, parental, and occupational roles), wives' sexist attitudes, and wives' perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes, communication patterns, and social support?*

Simultaneous regression analysis was used to examine this research question. Before determining which of the ten variables would go into this regression analysis, the variables were first examined for multicollinearity. Tolerance and variation inflation factor (VIF) were both examined and it was determined that multicollinearity was not an issue for this group of variables.

Since only one variable correlated at .25 or higher with psychological distress, the decision was made to include in the analysis variables that had a .13 correlation or higher with the dependent variable, but did not correlate above .70 with one another. The five variables that met these criteria were constructive communication, wives' commitment to marital role, perceptions of husbands' commitment to marital role, social support, and perceptions of husbands' commitment to the parenting role. Results of the regression analyses are summarized in Table 7. The model accounted for 11.4% of the total variance in psychological distress and had a small effect size ( $f^2=0.13$ ). The only variable that predicted significant unique variance was constructive communication.

*Table 7*  
*Summary of Simultaneous Regression Analysis for constructive communication, wives' commitment to marriage, perceptions of husbands' commitment to marriage, social support, and perceptions of husbands' commitment to parenting and psychological distress.*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>R<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>R<sup>2</sup> Change</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>F Change</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Psychological Distress</i>						
<i>Step 1</i>	.11	.11	7.19	7.19		.00**
<i>Constructive communication</i>					-.26	.00**
<i>Wives' commitment to marriage</i>					-.11	.08
<i>Perceptions of husbands' commitment to marriage</i>					.03	.72
<i>Social support</i>					-.08	.21
<i>Perceptions of husbands' commitment to parenting</i>					-.02	.77
* p<.05, **p<.01						

*Research question 3: How will participants respond to the open-ended question, "Given the following definition of an equal relationship, please describe factors that facilitate or hinder equality in your marriage. An equal relationship can be defined as one in which partners hold equal status, accommodation in the relationship is mutual, attention to the other in the relationship is mutual, and there is a mutual sense of well-being of the partners (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1998)."*

After reading the answers to this open-ended question, the student researcher and her faculty advisor independently evaluated the qualitative responses and came up with possible categories. They discussed their categories and agreed on four factors that appeared to capture the participants' responses as to what facilitates or hinders equality in their marriage. The student researcher, faculty advisor, and another counseling psychologist who was not acquainted with the study's hypotheses, then coded the data independently. Each respondent's response was coded into only one of the four categories. When more than one category applied to a response, the response was coded as the category that best captured the essence of what the response discussed. Inter-rater

reliability was calculated using the kappa statistic, which takes into account expected agreement by chance. Inter-rater agreement for the pairs formed by the three raters was acceptable with kappa statistic values of .90,  $p \leq .00$ , .92,  $p \leq .00$ , and .93,  $p \leq .00$ .

Additionally, the student researcher and faculty advisor designed a five point rating system to code how satisfied participants seemed to be with the level of equality in their marriage, based on their responses to this question. The three raters then rated each participant's response using the following scale (1=extremely satisfied; 2=somewhat satisfied; 3=unclear from response; 4=somewhat dissatisfied; 5=extremely dissatisfied). Satisfaction ratings had a mean of 1.67 and a standard deviation of 1.71. Inter-rater agreement for the pairs formed by the three raters was acceptable with intraclass correlation coefficients of .97,  $p \leq .00$ , .98,  $p \leq .00$ , and .99,  $p \leq .00$ .

The four relationship categories and five levels of satisfaction are listed in Table 8 along with the percentage of participant responses. Of the 287 possible responses, 91 were missing since these women did not provide any response to this question, and 17 were omitted by the raters due to lack of clarity or not fitting any of the coding categories. An example of an un-coded response is: "All of these factors facilitate equality in our marriage." From this response, it is not clear how satisfied the woman is with the level of equality in her marriage and does not identify specific factors that facilitate or hinder equality. Qualitative responses from 179 women were analyzed. The factors that participants pointed to most in terms of what facilitated or hindered equality in their marriage were: participants and their spouses having a mutual commitment to equality and sharing equal status in the relationship, sharing household/work/childcare tasks, an emotional connection between spouses, and societal and cultural factors

influencing expectations regarding equality. Responses from 55% of the participants who responded to this question suggested these women were either extremely satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the level of equality in their marriage. Another 35% of those who responded seemed to be extremely dissatisfied or somewhat dissatisfied with the level of equality in their marriage. The coded responses to the open-ended question will be examined in greater depth in the discussion section and, when appropriate, findings will be contrasted with the results of related research.

Since the qualitative data was coded in terms of how satisfied the respondent seemed regarding the level of equality in her marriage, the satisfaction codings were included in correlational analyses. The level of satisfaction with marital equality was found to relate with wives' perceptions of how committed husbands were to the parenting role ( $r=.24, p\leq.01$ ) and the marital role ( $r=.20, p\leq.01$ ), which are both small effect sizes.

*Table 8*  
*Categories of Qualitative Data for Research Question 3: Describe factors that facilitate or hinder equality in your marriage (N=179\*)*

	<i>N</i>	<i>Percent of Total N</i>
<i>Factors that facilitate/hinder marital equality</i>		
<i>1. Spouses have equal status and mutual commitment to equality</i>	70	39
<i>2. Sharing of household, work, and childcare tasks</i>	54	30
<i>3. Emotional connection between spouses</i>	33	18
<i>4. Societal and cultural influences on expectations about equality</i>	22	12
<i>Satisfaction with level of marital equality</i>		
<i>1. Extremely satisfied</i>	46	26
<i>2. Somewhat satisfied</i>	53	30
<i>3. Unclear from response</i>	17	10
<i>4. Somewhat dissatisfied</i>	39	22
<i>5. Extremely dissatisfied</i>	24	13

Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

\* 62% of sample is represented in this analysis. 91 participants did not respond to this question.

### *Additional analyses*

In order to more fully explicate the relationships between the variables of study, additional analyses were conducted. Given that constructive communication was the strongest predictor of both wives' relationship satisfaction and psychological distress and since it is a skill that can be taught and developed, the first four additional analyses were conducted to evaluate whether constructive communication was a mediator of the relationship between these four variables and relationship satisfaction.

*Additional analysis 1: Does constructive communication mediate the relationship between perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes and wives' reported relationship satisfaction?*

Using the methods suggested by Frazier, Tix, and Barron (2004), the mediating effect of constructive communication was tested. Frazier et al, (2004) explicate a checklist for evaluating mediation analyses. The answers to these questions are shown in Table 9.

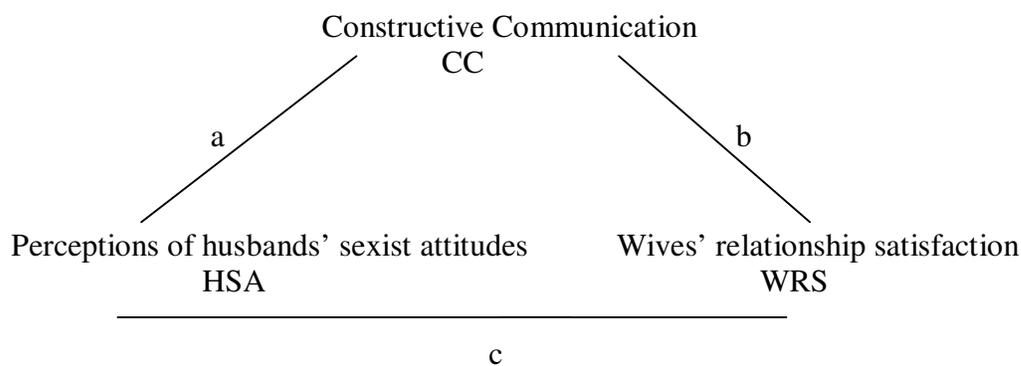


Table 9: An evaluation of the criteria necessary for mediation in the current study (From Frazier, Tix, &amp; Barron, 2004)

Question from Frazier, Tix, and Barron (2004)	Constructive communication as a mediator (Additional analysis 1)	Constructive communication as a mediator (Additional analysis 2)	Constructive communication as a mediator (Additional analysis 3)	Constructive communication as a mediator (Additional analysis 4)
Was the predictor significantly related to the outcome?	Yes, perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes correlated with wives' reported relationship satisfaction $r = -.26^{**}$	Yes, perceptions of husbands' marital commitment correlated with wives' reported relationship satisfaction $r = .54^{**}$	Yes, wives' marital commitment correlated with wives' reported relationship satisfaction $r = .51^{**}$	Yes, perceptions of husbands' parental commitment correlated with wives' reported relationship satisfaction $r = .45^{**}$
Was there a theoretical rationale for the hypothesis that the predictor causes the mediator? Was the mediator something that can be changed?	Yes, Yes.	Yes, Yes.	Yes, Yes.	Yes, Yes.
What is the "effective sample size" given the correlation between the predictor & mediator?	182	142	185	196
Was the relation between the mediator and the outcome greater than or equal to relation between the predictor & mediator?	Yes, .61 is greater than .36.	No. .47 is not greater than .50. (but comparable in size and thus will be considered)	Yes, .50 is greater than .35.	Yes, .53 is greater than .31.
Were the mediators adequately reliable (above $\alpha = .90$ )	No. $\alpha = .79$ for constructive communication *	No. $\alpha = .79$ for constructive communication*	No. $\alpha = .79$ for constructive communication*	No. $\alpha = .79$ for constructive communication*

\* Note: other widely used guidelines for mediation (Barron & Kenny (1986), Kraemer, Stice, Kazdin, & Kupfer (2001)) do not discuss the need for a specific alpha level and utilize mediators with alpha levels similar to that used in the current study

For this equation

HSA → CC = path a

CC → WRS= path b

HSA → WRS= path c

HSA → CC → WRS = path c'

*Table 10: Testing Mediator Effects of Constructive Communication Using Multiple Regression*

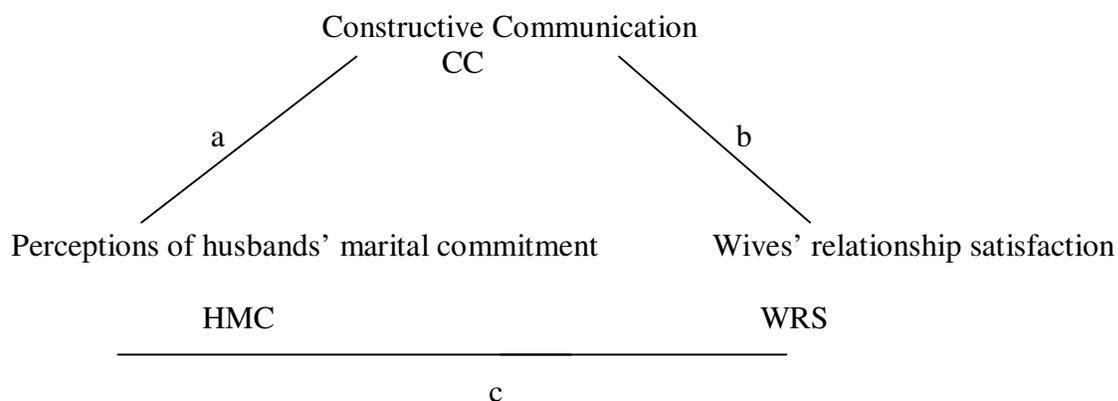
Testing steps in mediation	B	SE B	95% CI	Beta	R <sup>2</sup> , f <sup>2</sup>
Step 1 (path c) Regressed WRS on HSA	-.26.	.06	.37 to -.14	-.26	.07, .08
Step 2 (path a) Regressed CC on HSA	-.36	.06	-.47 to -.25	-.36	.13, .15
Regressed WRS on both HSA and CC	-.04 .61	.05 .05	-.14 to .06 .51 to .70	.04 .05	.39, .64
HSA (path c')					
CC (path b)					

Constructive communication (CC) is a significant mediator of the relationship between perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes (HSA) and wives' relationship satisfaction (WRS). According to Frazier et al. (2004), one can calculate the significance of the effect by multiplying the unstandardized coefficients (a and b) and dividing that by the standard error term (calculated using the procedures explained by Baron and Kenny, (1986)). To test for significance, Frazier et al. (2004, p.131) suggest multiplying a (-.36) times b (.61) and dividing that by the standard error term. That produces a z-score of the mediated effect. If that number is greater than 1.96, the effect is significant at the 0.05 level. In this mediation equation, that z-score is -5.38. Thus, the mediating effect of

constructive communication is significant. In this equation  $c = -.26$  and  $c' = -.04$ , suggesting that the relationship between the predictor (perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes) and the outcome is weaker when constructive communication is considered as a mediator. In other words, the effect of sexist attitudes is lessened when constructive communication is considered as a mediator.

*Additional analysis 2: Does constructive communication mediate the relationship between wives' perceptions of husbands' marital commitment and wives' reported relationship satisfaction?*

Using the methods suggested by Frazier, Tix, and Barron (2004), the mediating effect of constructive communication was tested. The answers to the questions to Frazier et al (2004) checklist for evaluating mediation analyses. are shown in Table 9 above.



For this equation

HMC  $\rightarrow$  CC = path a

CC  $\rightarrow$  WRS = path b

HMC  $\rightarrow$  WRS = path c

HMC  $\rightarrow$  CC  $\rightarrow$  WRS = path c'

Table 11: Testing Mediator Effects of Constructive Communication Using Multiple Regression

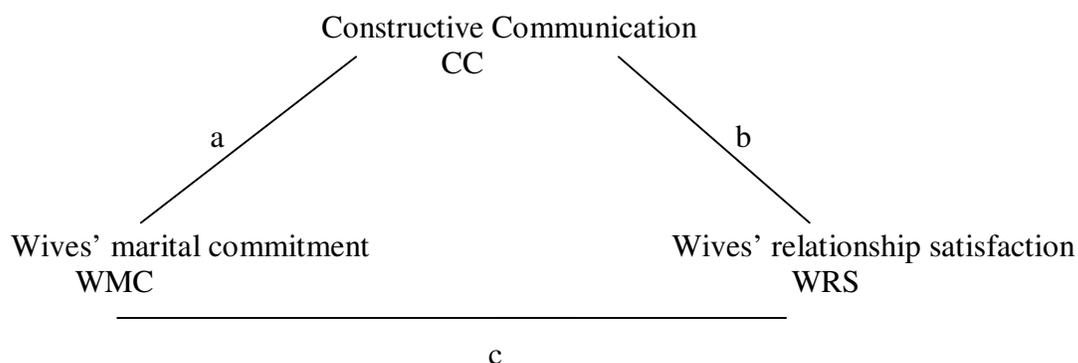
Testing steps in mediation	B	SE B	95% CI	Beta	R <sup>2</sup> , f <sup>2</sup>
Step 1 (path c) Regressed WRS on HMC	.54	.05	.44 to .64	.54	.29, .41
Step 2 (path a) Regressed CC on HMC	.50	.05	.40 to .60	.50	.25, .33
Regressed WRS on both HMC and CC	.30	.05	.20 to .40	.30	.45, .82
HMC (path c')	.47	.05	.37 to .57	.47	
CC (path b)					

Constructive communication (CC) is a significant mediator of the relationship between perceptions of husbands' marital commitment (HMC) and wives' relationship satisfaction (WRS). According to Frazier et al. (2004), one can calculate the significance of the effect by multiplying the unstandardized coefficients (a and b) and dividing that by the standard error term (calculated using the procedures explained by Baron and Kenny, (1986). To test for significance, Frazier et al. (2004, p.131) suggest multiplying a (.50) times b (.47) and dividing that by the standard error term. That produces a z-score of the mediated effect. If that number is greater than 1.96, the effect is significant at the 0.05 level. In this mediation equation, that z-score is 6.85. Thus, the mediating effect of constructive communication is significant. In this equation  $c = .54$  and  $c' = .30$ , suggesting that the relationship between the predictor (perceptions of husbands' marital commitment) and the outcome (wives' relationship satisfaction) is weaker when constructive communication is considered as a mediator. In other words, the effect of wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to the marital role is lessened when

constructive communication is considered as a mediator.

*Additional analysis 3: Does constructive communication mediate the relationship between wives' marital commitment and wives' reported relationship satisfaction?*

Using the methods suggested by Frazier, et al (2004), the mediating effect of constructive communication was tested. Frazier et al (2004) explicate a checklist for evaluating mediation analyses. The answers to these questions are shown in Table 9 above.



For this equation

WMC → CC = path a

CC → WRS = path b

WMC → WRS = path c

WMC → CC → WRS = path c'

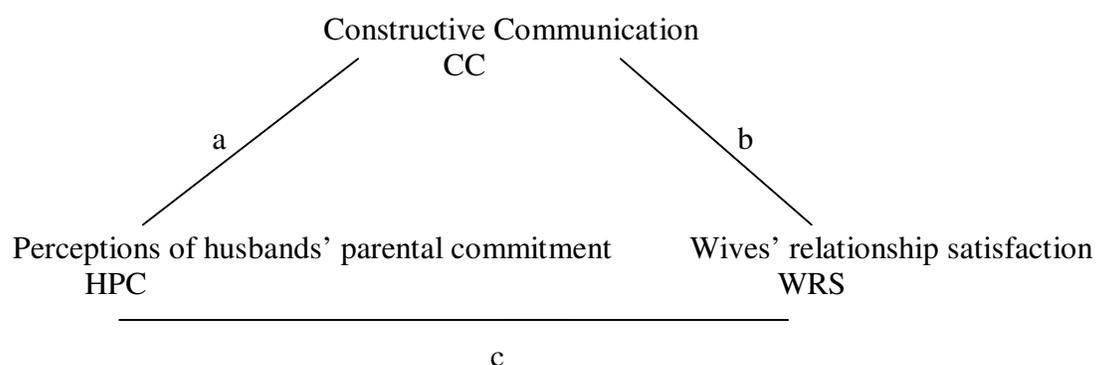
Table 12: Testing Mediator Effects of Constructive Communication Using Multiple Regression

Testing steps in mediation	B	SE B	95% CI	Beta	R <sup>2</sup> , f <sup>2</sup>
Step 1 (path c)	.51	.05	.41 to .61	.51	.26,
Regressed WRS on WMC					.35
Step 2 (path a)	.35	.06	.24 to .46	.35	.12,
Regressed CC on WMC					.14
Regressed WRS on both	.33	.05	.24 to .42	.33	.48,
WMC and CC	.50	.05	.41 to .60	.50	.92
WMC (path c')					
CC (path b)					

Constructive communication (CC) is a significant mediator of the relationship between wives' marital commitment (WMC) and wives' relationship satisfaction (WRS). According to Frazier et al. (2004), one can calculate the significance of the effect by multiplying the unstandardized coefficients (a and b) and dividing that by the standard error term (calculated using the procedures explained by Baron and Kenny, (1986). To test for significance, Frazier et al. (2004, p.131) suggest multiplying a (.35) times b (.50) and dividing that by the standard error term. That produces a z-score of the mediated effect. If that number is greater than 1.96, the effect is significant at the 0.05 level. In this mediation equation, that z-score is 5.04. Thus, the mediating effect of constructive communication is significant. In this equation  $c = .51$  and  $c' = .33$ , suggesting that the relationship between the predictor (wives' marital commitment) and the outcome (wives' relationship satisfaction) is weaker when constructive communication is considered as a mediator. In other words, the effect of wives' commitment to the marital role is lessened when constructive communication is considered as a mediator.

*Additional analysis 4: Does constructive communication mediate the relationship between wives' perceptions of husbands' parental commitment and wives' reported relationship satisfaction?*

Using the methods suggested by Frazier et al (2004), the mediating effect of constructive communication was tested. Frazier et al (2004) explicate a checklist for evaluating mediation analyses. The answers to these questions are shown in Table 9 above.



For this equation

HPC → CC = path a

CC → WRS = path b

HPC → WRS = path c

HPC → CC → WRS = path c'

Table 13: Testing Mediator Effects of Constructive Communication Using Multiple Regression

Testing steps in mediation	B	SE B	95% CI	Beta	R <sup>2</sup> , f <sup>2</sup>
Step 1 (path c)	.45	.05	.35 to .56	.45	.20,
Regressed WRS on HPC					.25
Step 2 (path a)	.31	.06	.20 to .42	.31	.09,
Regressed CC on HPC					.10
Regressed WRS on both	.29	.05	.20 to .38	.29	.46,
HPC and CC	.53	.05	.44 to .62	.53	.85
HPC (path c')					
CC (path b)					

Constructive communication (CC) is a significant mediator of the relationship between perceptions of husbands' parental commitment (HPC) and wives' relationship satisfaction (WRS). According to Frazier et al. (2004), one can calculate the significance of the effect by multiplying the unstandardized coefficients (a and b) and dividing that by the standard error term (calculated using the procedures explained by Baron and Kenny, (1986). To test for significance, Frazier et al. (2004, p.131) suggest multiplying a (.31) times b (.53) and dividing that by the standard error term. That produces a z-score of the mediated effect. If that number is greater than 1.96, the effect is significant at the 0.05 level. In this mediation equation, that z-score is -4.64. Thus, the mediating effect of constructive communication is significant. In this equation  $c = .45$  and  $c' = .29$ , suggesting that the relationship between the predictor (perceptions of husbands' parental commitment) and the outcome (wives' relationship satisfaction) is weaker when constructive communication is considered as a mediator. In other words, the effect of wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to the parenting role is lessened when

constructive communication is considered as a mediator.

Due to the methodology employed of measuring constructs from both the woman's perspective and her perception of her husband's perspective, it was of interest to examine whether this additional lens added significantly to our understanding of women's marital satisfaction. An analysis was conducted to test this question of whether wives' own ratings would have predicted outcomes equally well without the addition of their perceptions of their husbands' perspective.

*Additional analysis 5: Will wives' perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes, commitment to the marital role, and commitment to the parenting role predict wives' reported relationship satisfaction, over and above, wives' own reported sexist attitudes, commitment to the marital role, and commitment to the parenting role?*

Hierarchical regression analysis was used to examine this question. Before entering variables into the regression analysis, the variables were centered due to concerns about multicollinearity. Tolerance and variation inflation factor (VIF) were both examined and it was determined that multicollinearity was not an issue for this group of variables. Results of the regression analyses are summarized in Table 14. The full model explained 44% of the variance of relationship satisfaction and had a large effect size ( $f^2=0.79$ ). Perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes, wives' reported commitment to the marital role, perceptions of husbands' commitment to the marital role, wives' reported sexist attitudes, and perceptions of husbands' commitment to the parenting role all predicted significant unique variance in wives' reported relationship satisfaction. Adding wives' perceptions of husbands' ratings on these variables to wives' own ratings significantly improved the fit of the model. Wives' perceptions of their

husbands' ratings on these variables contributed unique variance over and above the variance explained by their own ratings.

*Table 14*

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for wives' perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes, commitment to the marital role, and commitment to the parenting role and wives' own reported sexist attitudes, commitment to the marital role, and commitment to the parenting role*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>R<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>R<sup>2</sup> Change</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>F Change</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Relationship satisfaction</i>	.26		33.09			.00**
<i>Step 1</i>						
<i>Wives' commitment to the marital role</i>					.50	.00**
<i>Wives' sexist attitudes</i>					-.07	.20
<i>Wives' commitment to the parenting role</i>					.02	.66
<i>Step 2</i>	.44	.18	36.41	29.59		.00**
<i>Wives' commitment to the marital role</i>					.29	.00**
<i>Wives' sexist attitudes</i>					.22	.00**
<i>Wives' commitment to the parenting role</i>					-.03	.57
<i>Perceptions of husbands' commitment to the marital role</i>					.27	.00**
<i>Perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes</i>					.32	.00*
<i>Perceptions of husbands' commitment to the parental role</i>					.20	.00**

\* p<.05, \*\*p<.01

### *Bivariate Correlations*

A review of the correlation matrix (see Table 3) reveals a number of significant correlations consistent with both theory and previous research. Many of the significant relationships found were not hypothesized and have not previously been discussed and are therefore reviewed below. Notable correlations will also be discussed in the following chapter.

Women completed four of the measures from both their own perspective and their perceptions of their husbands' perspective. Interestingly, there were significant correlations between participants' ratings on all four instruments and their perceptions of

their husbands' perspectives to these questions. There was a strong correlation between wives' reported sexist attitudes and their perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes ( $r=.79$ ,  $p\leq.01$ ) representing a large effect size. The correlation between wives' reported sexist attitudes and their perceptions of their husbands' sexist attitudes was higher than the correlations between wives' views and their perceptions of husbands in terms of role commitment. How committed wives reported being to the marital role was significantly related with how committed they perceived their husbands to be to the marital role ( $r=.51$ ,  $p\leq.01$ ; large effect size). Significant relationships were also found for the parental roles ( $r=.20$ ,  $p\leq.01$ ) and occupational roles ( $r=.15$ ,  $p\leq.01$ ) both of which represented small effect sizes.

Constructive communication was found to be positively correlated with several variables: perceptions of husbands' marital commitment ( $r=.49$ ,  $p\leq.01$ ), perceptions of husbands' parental commitment ( $r=.31$ ,  $p\leq.01$ ), and wives' reported marital commitment ( $r=.31$ ,  $p\leq.01$ ); all representing medium effect sizes. These findings indicate that higher commitment to family roles was related to higher reported constructive communication. Constructive communication was found to have a negative relationship with perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes ( $r=-.36$ ,  $p\leq.01$ ; medium effect size). In other words, when wives reported higher sexist attitudes for their husbands, the less constructive they reported their marital communication.

## Chapter Six

### Discussion

This chapter presents an overview and discussion of the major findings from the present study. First, this section will present descriptive information about the sample, followed by a discussion of the use of partner perceptions in the current study. Next, the chapter presents the results of the hypotheses and research questions and discusses the qualitative data from the participants' responses to an open-ended question. Additional analyses conducted will also be discussed. The limitations of the current study are then addressed, followed by the implications of the present study's findings, with particular attention to the implications for future research and practice.

#### *Sample*

The participants in the present study were predominantly White-European American (83.3%), highly educated (67.7% had graduate degrees), with relatively high income (23.9% earned over \$100,000 per year). The mothers in this sample had an average age of 34.5, had been married an average of 6.4 years, and had an average of 1.5 children. According to the US Census Bureau, in 2005 the median income for women working full time in the United States is \$31,858. In contrast, 94% of the women who participated in the current study earned more than this. Further, all of the participants had husbands who also worked full-time outside the home and 80% of husbands reportedly earned more than \$50,000 per year. It must be noted that the experience of working full-time while having young children is likely to be somewhat different for single mothers who make up 40.4% of mothers in the United States. The experience of single mothers was not addressed in the present study because its focus was on wives' perceptions of

dyadic spousal interaction as it related to their reported levels of psychological distress and marital satisfaction.

Observations of differences between the present sample and the general U.S. population indicate that the mothers in the sample are not representative of the typical mother in the United States. The apparent bias in sampling is most likely due to the recruitment method, which included utilizing the contacts of the primary researcher and the subsequent contacts of those contacts as well as an invitation sent out on a University of Maryland faculty and staff listserv and posting on several websites. Efforts were made to move beyond this extended network of the researcher. Although personal contacts who belong to more conservative church communities were specifically asked to help recruit for the study, on the whole the study was not successful in collecting data from women with more sexist attitudes. The strict criteria for participation (women employed outside the home at least 30 hours per week and the oldest child being age five or younger) makes it difficult to compare this sample with women in general in the United States or even a sample of working women in the United States. Additionally, an invitation to participate was posted on various and diverse websites developed for parents; however, it is apparent that this did not increase the diversity of the sample along all of the desired dimensions (e.g., race, socioeconomic status, education) as much as expected. The method of data collection also poses a potential bias and limits generalizability but these issues will be discussed in the limitations portion of the chapter.

#### *Partner Perceptions*

The current study used a phenomenological approach in that it assumes that relationship satisfaction and psychological distress are directly influenced not by

partners' behaviors, traits, or attitudes but rather by perceptions of partners' behaviors, traits, and attitudes. Since many of the analyses and findings center around wives' perceptions of their husbands' attitudes and commitments, partner perceptions will first be discussed.

Participants completed four scales from both their own perspective and their perceptions of their husbands' perspective. Interestingly, on all four instruments, there were significant correlations between scores from women's own perspective and scores from their perceptions of their husbands' perspectives. The correlation between wives' reported sexist attitudes and their perceptions of their husbands' sexist attitudes was much higher than the correlations between wives' views and their perceptions of husbands' specific role commitments. At first glance, it appeared that the two administrations of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory were relatively unsuccessful at capturing the two different perspectives. Yet despite the high correlation ( $r=.79$ ,  $p\leq.01$ ; large effect size), 40% of the variance in scores was not shared between the two perspectives, which suggests that there were additional factors being taken into account. There are several possible explanations for this high correlation.

First, this large effect may simply indicate that, in reality, how sexist one's attitudes are is quite similar between spouses. Prior research has established a link between one's self-reported behavior and partners' perceptions of the behavior (Davis & Oathout, 1987; Lemay et al., 2007; Murray et al 1996). Wives' impressions of their partners have been found to converge moderately with their partners' self-perceptions, suggesting that some degree of mutual understanding characterizes intimate relationships (Murray et al, 1996).

Alternatively, this high correlation may be due to a need for women to see their husbands as similar to themselves in this domain. When completing instruments from their husbands' perspective, women in this study may have projected their own thoughts and feelings onto their husbands and overestimated the degree to which these attitudes were shared in terms of certain constructs. Prior research suggests that these projection effects are stronger than the accuracy effects (Kenny & Acitelli, 2001; Lemay et al., 2007). Individuals typically desire a sense of security in their close relationship and want to trust their relationships are stable, that their partners are committed, and that their partners care for them. Evidence from prior research suggests that individuals make a variety of cognitive distortions to maintain these perceptions. Differences between how sexist one's attitudes are may be particularly threatening to women. For example, women in this study may have been motivated to see their husbands as less sexist so as to reduce feelings of hurt and foster feelings of security.

It is also possible that wives' perceptions of their husbands were influenced by their ideals. Research has consistently found that, on average, intimates see their partners in a more positive light than their partners see themselves (Boyes & Fletcher, 2007; Murray et al, 1996). Such ideals represent individuals' working models of the attributes one hopes and perhaps needs to find in an intimate partner in order to feel secure in the commitment (Murray et al, 1996). Women in the current study may have idealized their husbands and assumed that their husbands' values and attitudes were similar to their own.

Lastly, it may be that women used isolated pieces of knowledge to form perceptions of how their husbands view males and females and their relationships. Expectations about

their husbands' level of traditionalism versus liberalism may have biased attention, encoding, and retrieval so as to fulfill expectations.

In terms of commitment to specific life roles, the scores from the two different perspectives were also positively related. There was a moderate correlation between how committed wives reported being to the marital role and how committed they perceived their husbands to be to the marital role. The correlations were smaller, although still significant, between the two perspectives for commitment to the parental role and commitment to the occupational role. It is clear that wives perceived their life role commitments and their husbands' commitment to life roles differently. Similar to sexist attitudes, women's constructions about their husbands are likely influenced by a number of factors including: (1) reality, (2) projection of a woman's own virtues, feelings, and attributes onto her husband (3) positive relationship illusions, and (4) idiosyncratic theories about which attitudes and traits "go together" or coexist in the same individual (Boyes & Fletcher, 2007; Button, Grant, Hannah, & Ross, 1993; Davis & Oathout, 1987; Kenny & Acitelli, 2001; Murray, Holmes & Griffin, 1996).

In order to gather data about participants' perceptions of their husband's perspective, a few of the measures (the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory and Life Role Salience Scales) were modified. Since these instruments were used in a way that they had not been used before, it is unclear exactly what was being measured. Participants were instructed to "Please consider what you think your husband believes and how he would feel about the following statements." The aim was to have participants answer questions based on their estimations of how they believe their husband feels or thinks deep down. It is possible that these instructions were not sufficiently clear and participants may have responded to

items based on how they believed their husband would answer. There is likely a difference between how wives' predict their husbands would answer and how wives' truly believe their husband feels and/or thinks about these items. Variations in the wording of these instructions may yield different results.

### *Hypothesis 1*

It was hypothesized that there would be a positive relationship between constructive communication and wives' reported marital satisfaction. As predicted, those who reported more constructive communication in their marriage, were more satisfied and this finding represented a large effect. This is consistent with prior research that has found that constructive forms of communication are associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction (Christiansen, 1988; Heaven et al., 2005; Heavey et al., 1996). Couples who are able to communicate effectively, share thoughts and feelings, communicate disappointments, hurt feelings, and negative reactions with each other, rather than avoiding conflict and keeping feelings inside, are more likely to be able to negotiate differences and have satisfying marriages. Because constructive communication correlated with several other key variables, in addition to marital satisfaction, this variable was examined further in some additional analyses that will be presented at the end of this section of the discussion.

### *Hypothesis 2*

The second hypothesis predicted that there would be significant relationships between wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to important life roles and wives' reported psychological distress. Specifically, it was hypothesized that there would be a negative relationship between psychological distress and wives' perceptions of husbands' parental

commitment. Contrary to the hypothesis, although there was a small effect, this relationship was not significant at the required level ( $p \leq .01$ ).

There are several possible explanations for the lack of a significant relationship. First, women may have low expectations for how committed they expect their husbands to be to the parenting role. If women expect husbands to have little commitment to the parenting role, the perception of a moderate amount of parental commitment may meet women's expectations, or even surpass them. In this case, wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to the parenting role are not likely to be related to wives' psychological distress.

Second, it may be that women are able to prevent psychological distress by getting supplemental help from a nanny or family member when husbands are less committed to the parenting role than women desire. Getting help from outside the marriage may provide the parental support women need and thus prevent distress.

Third, the relationship between wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to the parenting role and psychological distress may not have been detected because this relationship may depend on factors such as the woman's self-esteem.

Lastly, the lack of a significant relationship may be explained by looking at the sample. The women who participated in the current study did not report much depressive symptomatology. There was likely not sufficient variability in psychological distress in the current sample to detect this relationship. Out of a possible 24 points on the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale, the highest score reported by a woman was 16 and the mean score for this sample was 3. A CES-D score of seven or higher on the brief scale is the recommended indicator or "threshold" of depressive

symptomatology. In the current sample, 35 women (12% of the sample) had CES-D scores of seven or higher.

According to the National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH) one in five women can expect to develop clinical depression at some time in her life and married women have higher rates of depression than single women, with depression most likely during childbearing years. Depression in women occurs most frequently between the ages of 25 and 44 (<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>). It is likely that one reason for the higher rate of depression for women in this age group is due to balancing multiple roles. The depression rate of 12% in the current study is consistent with that found in numerous other studies. Yet it is clear that the majority of the women reached in this study did not report many symptoms of distress and that the range of scores is skewed toward the lower end. A measure of depression may not have been the best way to measure distress in this population.

It was also hypothesized that there would be a negative relationship between psychological distress and wives' perceptions of husbands' marital commitment. As predicted, wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to the marital role was related to wives' reported psychological distress, which represented a small effect. Women reported less distress when they perceived their husband was willing to put time and effort into maintaining the relationship and making her feel loved, supported, and cared for, despite needing to make sacrifices in other areas. This finding is consistent with prior research, which identified mutual attention to relationship and family tasks as one of four processes to facilitate marital equality (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 2005). In that study, mutual attention was described as requiring both partners to consistently pay

attention to their relationship, be sensitive to partner's physical and emotional states, and provide emotional and other supports. The current finding is also consistent with a previous finding that husbands "emotion work" had a positive effect on women's sense of well-being (Erickson, 1993).

It is noteworthy that an effect was found between psychological distress and wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to the marital role but not between psychological distress and wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to the parental role. There seems to be something particularly distressing about perceiving that one's husband is not committed to the marriage. It may be that the marital role is primary to women and that wives have fewer expectations about husbands' commitment to the parenting role. Perhaps women take it personally if their husband isn't committed to making them feeling loved and supported, yet justify their perceptions of husbands' lack of commitment to parenting as "normal" for men, and consistent with their observations of other men's commitment to parenting. Again, it is important to note that the relationship between distress and wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to the marital role represented a small effect size which may be due in part to the skewed responses on the distress measure.

### *Hypothesis 3*

The third hypothesis predicted that there would be significant relationships between wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to important life roles and wives' reported marital satisfaction. Specifically, it was hypothesized that there would be a positive relationship between wives' perceptions of husbands' parental commitment and wives' reported marital satisfaction.

As expected, there was a positive relationship between wives' perceptions of husbands' parental commitment and wives' reported marital satisfaction, which represented a medium effect. This is consistent with findings from Zimmerman et al's (2003) study, in which couples expressed that a shared sense of parenting led to marital satisfaction and success in balancing work and family. It is interesting that perceptions of husbands' commitment to the parenting role is linked to wives' marital satisfaction but not to wives' reported psychological distress. It may be that women can use additional resources and supports to help with childcare and are thus less distressed by the lower commitment to the parenting role they perceive in their husbands. On the other hand, in terms of determining wives' satisfaction with the marriage, how committed they perceive their husbands to be to the parenting role may be critical. When women perceive that husbands are involved in, or at least willing to be involved in childcare, there are more positive relational outcomes. It is noteworthy that wives' own commitment to parenting was not related to either marital satisfaction or reported psychological distress. Perhaps wives' commitment to the parenting role is a given in marriage and thus does not relate significantly with the other variables of study.

Also hypothesized was a positive relationship between wives' perceptions of husbands' marital commitment and wives' reported marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction was found to be not only related to wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to the parental role but also to wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to the marital role. The more wives perceived their husbands were committed to the marital role, the more satisfied they reported being in their marriage. This finding represents a large effect size and is consistent with results from Zimmerman et al's

(2003) interviews with couples that perceived themselves to be successful in balancing work and family. In that study, shared emotion work was one of six general partnership themes identified and participants spoke about having a deep sense of friendship with their spouse and the importance of having time together as a couple. Wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to the marital role were significantly related with both her reported psychological distress and marital satisfaction. It appears critical that women perceive their husbands as willing to put time and effort into maintaining the relationship. As mentioned earlier in this discussion, wives' marital satisfaction was also linked to their perceptions of husbands' commitment to the parental role.

Additionally, quantitative studies on life role salience have found parental commitment and marital role commitment to be correlated with spousal support (Cinamon & Rich, 2002a) and life satisfaction (Graves et al., 2007). Given this previous research, it is not surprising that wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to marital and parenting roles were linked with marital satisfaction.

#### *Hypothesis 4*

The fourth hypothesis predicted that wives' reported sexist attitudes would moderate the relationship between wives' marital satisfaction and perceptions of their husbands' parental commitment. Contrary to the hypothesis, wives' reported sexist attitudes were not found to moderate the relationship between wives' marital satisfaction and perceptions of their husbands' parental commitment.

This hypothesis was based on the idea that working mothers who are lower on sexism would report lower marital satisfaction when they perceived their husbands as not committed to the parenting role. Feelings of resentment and/or feelings of being

overburdened were thought to influence how satisfied wives would be in their marriage. Further, it was thought that for women who chose to enact conventional roles, it may not have been as distressing to her if she perceived her husband to have lower commitment to parenting. If she accepted that parenting is her responsibility, his lower commitment to the parental role may not influence her marital satisfaction. In fact, a husband could be committed to being a parent (e.g., providing financially, involved in PTA, passing on faith); yet work long hours and not be involved in daily childcare. The following sample item illustrates this point, “I expect to be very involved in the day-to-day matters of rearing children of my own.” A wife whose husband travels for work would not likely endorse this item strongly on his behalf, yet she could be quite content with her husbands’ prioritization of parenting. The items in this subscale focus on a commitment to the parental role in terms of day-to-day activities, rather than measuring how much one values or prioritizes the parenting role.

Although wives’ perceptions of husbands’ commitment to parenting was a significant predictor of wives’ marital satisfaction, a relationship was not detected between wives’ reported sexist attitudes and marital satisfaction. In the present study, there was likely not sufficient variance in women’s scores on the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory to detect an interaction effect. Out of a possible 110 points on the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (with higher numbers representing more sexist attitudes), the mean score for this sample was 34. Although scores could range from 0 to 110, the highest score reported was 85. In sum, the population reached in this study did not have very sexist attitudes. This lack of variance is likely due to a recruitment bias. Additionally, the criteria for participation (women had to be employed at least 30 hours per week

outside the home) are likely to have limited the participation of women with more sexist attitudes. These issues will be discussed in greater detail under the limitations section of the chapter.

#### *Hypothesis 5*

A positive relationship was hypothesized between wives' reported psychological distress and their perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes. Contrary to this hypothesis, a relationship was not found between wives' reported psychological distress and their perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes.

There is a well-established link between perceived sexist events and psychological distress (Klonoff & Landrine, 1995; Moradi & Funderburk, 2006; Swim, 2001); however, the sexist events studied in this body of literature refer to things such as being treated unfairly at work due to being a woman or receiving inappropriate sexual advances. The type of sexism occurring in marital relationships is likely to be a bit different. Sexism in marriage may be a chronic but subtle experience rather than a noteworthy event. It may be that this type of sexism only leads to psychological distress for certain women, such as those who tend to internalize.

As previously discussed, the limited variance on the CES-D and the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory made it difficult to detect relationships with these variables. In fact, the only variables found to significantly relate to psychological distress were: perceptions of husbands' commitment to the marital role, wives' reported commitment to the marital role, constructive communication, and social support. These effect sizes were all small, with the exception of the relationship between psychological distress and constructive communication, which represented a medium effect size.

*Hypothesis 6*

The sixth hypothesis predicted that wives' reported sexist attitudes would moderate the relationship between wives' perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes and wives' reported marital satisfaction. Contrary to this hypothesis, the relationship between wives' perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes and wives' reported marital satisfaction was not moderated by wives' reported sexist attitudes.

As discussed with regards to hypothesis four, a relationship was not detected between wives' reported sexist attitudes and their marital satisfaction. In the present study, there was likely not sufficient variance in this sample's scores on the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory to show significant results. Additionally, the criteria for participation (women had to be employed at least 30 hours per week outside the home and have a young child) may have limited the participation of women with more sexist attitudes.

*Hypothesis 7*

A negative relationship was hypothesized between wives' reported social support and their reported level of psychological distress. As expected, those women who reported lower levels of social support expressed higher levels of psychological distress. Although significant, this relationship had a small effect size. The lack of variability and low levels of psychological distress reported by this sample may have limited the ability to detect a stronger effect. This finding helps to contextualize other findings. Although social support is negatively related to women's psychological distress, other factors such as constructive communication, which are based on the dyadic relationship between the husband and wife versus all types of support, were found to be more strongly linked to women's psychological distress.

*Research question 1*

The first research question asked how the key variables included in the study contributed to marital satisfaction. Five variables were selected for inclusion in this analysis. These variables are: (1) constructive communication, (2) wives' reported commitment to the marital role, (3) wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to the parental role, (4) wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to the marital role, and (5) wives' perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes. Constructive communication, wives' commitment to the marital role, and wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to the parenting role all predicted unique variance in relationship satisfaction.

A goal of the current study was to investigate gendered power by examining equality in male-female relationships. Three factors that had repeatedly emerged in the literature as related to the attainment of marital equality were: (1) partners engage in open dialogue regarding conflict and active negotiation including communication of emotions and negative reactions (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Knudson Martin & Mahoney, 1998, 2005; Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006); (2) there is mutuality in terms of attention to relationship and family tasks, careers of both partners, and flexible allocation of household duties (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Knudson Martin & Mahoney, 2005; Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006), and (3) both partners are aware of and critical of gender injustices and note when assumptions are made based on gender (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Knudson Martin & Mahoney, 2005). The selection of variables studied in the current project (sexist attitudes, life role commitments, communication patterns) was derived from this qualitative literature. Although these variables had previously been examined

in studies of intimate relationships, no study had been located that examined this combination of variables.

Although significant relationships were found in the current study between wives' marital satisfaction and these three sets of variables (sexist attitudes, life role commitments, communication patterns), due to likely overlap among the independent variables, wives' perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes and wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to the marital role did not predict unique variance in relationship satisfaction. The three variables that predicted unique variance in wives' marital satisfaction were constructive communication, wives' perceptions of their husbands' commitment to the parenting role, and wives' commitment to the marital role.

The relationships between marital satisfaction and two of these three variables have already been discussed under specific hypotheses. Although the relationship between wives' commitment to the marital role and marital satisfaction had not been hypothesized, it is not surprising that women who were more committed to their marriage were also more satisfied with it. Wives' commitment to the marital role represents how willing they are to put time and effort into maintaining the relationship and making her husband feel loved, supported, and cared for, despite needing to making sacrifices in other areas. In sum, the results of this analysis suggest that a woman's marital satisfaction is best predicted by how much 'emotion work' she is willing to put into the relationship, how well they are able to negotiate differences, and how much personal time and energy she perceives her husband is willing to enact in the role of parent.

Despite the fact that, in the current study, both wives and husbands were employed full-time outside the home, it appears that assumptions and expectations about

gender played a role in maintaining marital inequality. Although wives' perceptions of how committed their husbands were to the parenting role was a strong predictor of wives' marital satisfaction, wives' own commitment to the parenting role did not relate significantly with their marital satisfaction. In the current study, wives' commitment to the parenting role seemed to be a given. It was wives' perceptions of how committed their husbands were to the parenting role, rather than their own commitment, that was predictive of marital satisfaction.

Conventional norms and pressures around gender are so built into the institution of marriage that the power imbalance is often hidden and hard to identify (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1998). While women have traditionally prioritized their roles as spouse and mother, men, on the other hand, have traditionally been more committed to the occupational role than to family roles, such as partner and father. The current findings indicate that wives' commitment to parenting is a given and that it is wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to the parental role that is most linked to wives' marital satisfaction.

Interestingly, the three variables that predicted unique variance represent three different perspectives. Constructive communication is a dyadic variable that attempts to capture the perspective of the couple. Wives' marital commitment is reported from the wife's perspective but husbands' commitment to the parenting role is based on wives' perceptions of their husbands' perspective. This combination of variables suggests that wives' relationship satisfaction may best be predicted by considering the perspectives of the wife, her perceptions of her husband's perspective, and the perspective of the couple. Although wives' perceptions of their husbands' perspective were more predictive than

wives' own perspective, the ability to predict wives' marital satisfaction is enhanced by including wives' own perspective, as well as a dyadic perspective.

### *Research question 2*

The second research question asked how the key variables included in the study contributed to wives' psychological distress. Five variables were selected for inclusion in this analysis. These variables are: (1) constructive communication, (2) wives' reported commitment to the marital role, (3) wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to the parental role, (4) wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to the marital role, and (5) social support. Four of the five variables that were found to be most predictive of wives' reported psychological distress were also predicted of wives' marital satisfaction; however, constructive communication was the only variable to predict unique variance in wives' psychological distress. Perhaps women feel more empowered, and thus less distressed, when they are able to communicate constructively with their spouse. In fact, constructive communication may be a protective factor for women in marriage, a way to cope with or manage what would otherwise be distressing.

The fact that the other variables did not predict unique variance in psychological distress suggests that these variables may not be as critical to women's distress as to their satisfaction with their marriage. It may be that other variables, such as self-esteem, community resources, or career salience, may have stronger relationships with psychological distress and may be important variables to consider in future research.

Four of the key variables in the current study were not significantly related with either marital satisfaction or psychological distress. These variables were: perceptions of husbands' commitment to the occupational role, wives commitment to the occupational

role, wives' commitment to the parenting role, and wives' reported sexist attitudes.

Although there were significant relationships between these variables and others, they all represented small effect sizes. It is noteworthy that three of these four variables that did not relate with the outcome measures, were from the wives' own perspective. Only one of the measures completed based on perceptions of their husbands' perspective did not relate significantly with outcome variables.

It should be noted that the lack of findings related to occupational commitment may be unique to dual-earner couples with young children. It may be that during this period, couples need to prioritize family roles more than at other points in their lives.

### *Research question 3*

The third research question asked how participants would respond to the open-ended question, "Given the following definition of an equal relationship, please describe factors that facilitate or hinder equality in your marriage. An equal relationship can be defined as one in which partners hold equal status, accommodation in the relationship is mutual, attention to the other in the relationship is mutual, and there is a mutual sense of well-being of the partners (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1998)."

This open-ended question was included in order to gain a clearer understanding of the factors that influence a wife's perception of marital equality while allowing the participants to elaborate on their experiences. Participants provided information that was coded into categories of factors that affect equality with their spouse. In terms of what affected equality, the most common variable that participants pointed to was a mutual commitment to equality and sharing equal status with their spouse. Responses placed in this category comprised 39% of the responses to this question. One participant said,

The main factor that facilitates equality is my wonderful husband. He is committed to an equal marriage and believes women are just as competent as men. He supports my decision to have a career and is enthusiastic about picking up childcare slack when needed. He's also a great communicator, willing to admit when he's wrong and doesn't hold grudges. We respect each other on a deep level, and we don't lose sight of that during disagreements.

In contrast, another wife commented, "My husband has a strong, dominant personality and I feel that he views me as not on his level in regards to accomplishments, drive, or talent. I have low self-esteem and do not believe in myself when I should." Responses in this category focused on the shared attitudes, values, or priorities related to equality in the marriage rather than the logistics of how specifically they achieved equality or the influence of societal expectations. Responses could be coded into the 'equal status and mutual commitment to equality' even when the participant did not indicate the presence of equality in her marriage. A number of responses were coded into this category due to the noted absence of 'equal status and mutual commitment to equality.'

Second only to the mutual valuing and commitment to equality, participants reported that marital equality depended on how well they and their spouses shared household, work, and childcare tasks with 30% of responses being coded into this category. One participant said,

Although he thinks he contributes equally to raising our daughter and maintaining our home – I still do the lion's share of the housework, shopping, cleaning and errand-running. Nine times out of ten, I'm the one who takes time off from work when my daughter is sick or needs to go to the doctor. I'm the one who does the 'daycare dash' at the end of the day and gets dinner on the table every night.

Another woman who appears more satisfied with how tasks are divided shared,

I can't think of any factors that hinder equality in our relationship, because I think we both feel things are equal. To facilitate: that I work, that we split child duties (rotate bath nights), because I work part-time I do more household chores to balance the overall work load, we take turns getting up with the baby, we both

make close to the same amount of money, both came into the relationship with about the same amount of money.

Responses in this category focused on the practicalities or logistics of who does what in the marriage rather than an underlying egalitarian philosophy or the influence of societal expectations.

The next most frequent category (18%) were responses that described equality as being impacted by the emotional connection between the couple. One woman remarked, "Equality is fostered in our relationship by mutual respect and love. We care for each other and show attention and concern when the other is unhappy or discontent. We never let something fester, instead working together to solve the problem quickly." Another wife shared, "Hindrances to equality in my marriage: lack of effective modes of communication. Lack of mutual respect. Maintaining and working on our marriage is not husband's priority and slowly is not mine either." These responses focused on the attention and time given to the marriage and the desire to make the other happy. Responses in this category included being sensitive to the other's needs, listening, and understanding as well as sex and intimacy.

Lastly, the final subset of responses focused on the influence of expectations about equality stemming from one's culture, family history, and society. These responses, which comprised 12% of responses to this question, highlighted the impact of socialization and sex role attitudes. One participant shared, "Societal expectations pressure me to do more of the 'mom' stuff rather than letting my husband get more involved in our children's school and activities." A woman more satisfied with the level of equality in her marriage said,

My spouse is a devoted husband and father (in that order). I subscribe his devotion to the example set by his father, who was clearly a devoted and engaged

father – an unusual trait for a WW/baby boomer generation. While my husband's professional career is important, I've never doubted for once that his family comes first or doubted that he views my professional career as important.

A global assessment of satisfaction was assessed by the raters using a five point rating system to code how satisfied participants seemed to be with the level of equality in their marriage, based on their responses to this question. Of those who responded to this open ended question, 35% appeared to be at least somewhat dissatisfied with the level of equality in their marriage. Although 55% of the respondents appeared to be at least somewhat satisfied with the level of equality in their marriage, there was a sizeable number who seemed to be dissatisfied and are thus deserving of attention. In correlational analyses, these satisfaction ratings were found to be related with wives' perceptions of how committed husbands were to the parenting role and the marital role. This finding is consistent with the quantitative data which suggests that what is important to women are their perceptions of their husbands' commitments to family roles, rather than wives' own life role commitments.

*Additional findings: Mediating effects of constructive communication*

The results of the current study revealed five variables that were most predictive of wives' reported relationship satisfaction. These variables were: (1) constructive communication, (2) wives' reported commitment to the marital role, (3) wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to the parental role, (4) wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to the marital role, and (5) wives' perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes. Four of these five variables were also among the five variables most predictive of wives' reported psychological distress.

Given that constructive communication was the strongest predictor of both wives' relationship satisfaction and psychological distress and since it is a skill that can be taught

and developed, this seemed like an important variable to further investigate in terms of how it might be related to other variables. In examining the literature on this variable, a decision was made to examine it as a mediator so analyses were conducted to evaluate whether constructive communication was a mediator of the relationship between these four variables and relationship satisfaction.

Since mediation and moderation are increasingly viewed as necessary to develop detailed explanations of how variables work, scholarly attention has been paid to how to do these analyses. A recent review on this topic suggests that appropriate mediators are variables that can be viewed as following in time the variable that they are mediating (Kramer, Kiernan, Essex & Kupfer, 2008). With regards to this recommendation for temporal precedence, constructive communication can be considered an appropriate mediator. Variables such as sexist attitudes or one's commitment to marital and parental roles are likely to be based primarily on an individual's history and may even precede marriage or having a child. In contrast, a dyadic variable such as constructive communication is likely to develop later within the context of the couple's evolving relationship as a way to negotiate differences and manage situations that arise in a family.

Results showed that constructive communication was a significant mediator of the relationship between each of the four variables and relationship satisfaction. Frazier et al (2004) state that mediator variables help explain "how or why one variable predicts or causes an outcome variable...a mediator is the mechanism through which a predictor influences an outcome variable (116)." Given that definition, constructive communication can be interpreted as one mechanism through which these variables (wives' perceptions of their husbands commitment to the marital and parenting roles,

perceptions of husbands' sexist attitudes, and wives' own commitment to the marital role) influence relationship satisfaction. In other words, constructive communication may influence how or why these variables predict relationship satisfaction. From the wife's perspective, when she perceives her husband to be more committed to the parenting role, they communicate better (perhaps negotiating daily tasks such as carpool and bathing children) and she in turn is more satisfied with the marriage. Similarly, from the wife's perspective, when she perceives her husband to be less sexist, they communicate better (perhaps because he values her as an equal part of decision making), and she in turn is more satisfied with the marriage. A similar process occurs when wives report that they and/or their husbands are committed to the marriage. Or, it could be that through constructive communication couples learn to negotiate differences in role commitments, values, and attitudes. Constructive communication seems to be a mechanism used by couples to manage things such as sexist attitudes or different commitment to life roles.

Constructive communication may be particularly salient in the marriages of women with young children who work full-time. It may be that when men are committed to both work and family roles, communication becomes critical because tasks and responsibilities are not likely to be completely separate or neatly divided. For example, when a husband is highly committed to the parenting role, it is likely that the couple is constantly negotiating who does what (i.e., who picks up child from childcare, who gives the child a bath). In order to negotiate these roles, constructive communication becomes essential.

*Additional findings: Role of partner perceptions*

Due to the methodology employed of measuring constructs from both the woman's perspective and her perception of her husband's perspective, it was of interest to examine whether this additional lens added significantly to our understanding of women's marital satisfaction. An analysis was conducted to test this question of whether wives' own ratings would have predicted outcomes equally well without the addition of their perceptions of their husbands' perspective. It was found that adding wives' perceptions of husbands' perspectives significantly improved the fit of the model predicting wives' marital satisfaction. Wives' perceptions of husbands' perspectives were more strongly predictive of marital satisfaction than wives' own ratings. In other words, wives' perceptions of their husbands' perspectives (sexist attitudes, commitment to the parenting role, and commitment to the marital role) predicted more of the variance in wives' relationship satisfaction than their own ratings.

This finding is consistent with previous research. Perceptions of partner behavior have been found to be significant influences on one's satisfaction with the relationship, especially for women and those in longer-term relationships (Davis & Oathout, 1987). The importance of partner perceptions in predicting relationship functioning has also been shown in such areas as interpersonal traits and attachment (Saffrey et al, 2003). Partner-perceptions of interpersonal problems have been found to predict relationship functioning more strongly and consistently than self-perceptions (Saffrey et al, 2003). Numerous studies have shown that when partners view their partners positively, relationship satisfaction is higher (Cobb et al, 2001; Murray et al, 1996). These associations are often stronger, and more consistent, than for self-perceptions.

Individuals have been found to be happier in their relationships when they idealized their partners. The more they idealized the construction, the greater the satisfaction (Murray et al, 1996) as this may help individuals maintain a positive view of their relationship and of their partner.

#### *Limitations of the current study*

Several limitations to the present study must be acknowledged in the areas of design, sampling, and measurement.

One limitation of the present study is that the correlational design cannot address issues of causality. This was not an experimental design, since there was no manipulation of an independent variable. Although significant relationships among the variables were present, it was not possible to conclude definitively which variables actually caused the effect detected. For example, despite the presence of a high correlation between constructive communication and relationship satisfaction, no conclusions can be made about the effect of either in terms of causality; however, the mediation analyses that were conducted were able to further explicate relationships between variables in this study. The external validity of this field study is gained at the expense of internal validity.

Another limitation of the current research relates to the sample of participants and how these participants were recruited. The present study used the internet to collect data with the goal of increasing diversity in the sample and subsequently, the generalizability of the findings. The external validity of the information obtained is subject to limitations given the nature of participant selection. First, the method of data collection may be biased against individuals of lower socioeconomic status or lower levels of education

who many not have the access to technological resources such as computers or who may be unconnected with the academic environment. In fact, limited research on internet studies has shown that people who participate in online surveys are different than the general population in terms of ethnicity and income (Andrews, Nonnecke, & Preece, 2003) and are more likely to be white and young (Kraut, Olson, Banaji, Bruckman, Cohen, & Couper, 2003).

Second, an email snowballing technique was used, which likely introduced bias in the demographic characteristics of participants. Of the participants who were recruited, 56% were recruited through the snowball recruiting method. Due to the demographic characteristics of social and academic contacts of the researcher, certain subgroups of the population were more likely to be represented in the final sample. While a large range of ages was represented in the present sample (23 to 49), examination of the group characteristics suggested that the expected bias was present. The pool of participants reflected higher levels of education and income and less racial/ethnic diversity than are represented in the country as a whole (Overturf Johnson & Downs, 2005). In addition to a selection bias, another explanation for the high education level represented in this sample is that it may be that many of those married women who have continued to work with young children are those who have invested a lot in their career and/or may need to work for financial reasons, such as repayment of student loans. Career may be particularly salient for those who are highly educated and thus explain their overrepresentation in this sample. Regardless of the reason for this bias in the sample, the results of this study should be considered only with respect to the population

represented in the sample, and not applied to the population of married, working women with young children as a whole.

Recruitment method is likely to have also introduced bias in this sample in terms of level of sexism reported. The women in this sample did not report highly sexist attitudes. In order to understand this, one must consider the method of recruitment. The snowball recruiting method, which recruited 56% of those who completed the survey, reached contacts of the researcher and contacts of these contacts. For the most part, this extended network does not have very sexist attitudes. Although efforts were made to reach out to more conservative mothers through asking contacts who belong to more conservative church communities to help recruit for the study, on the whole the study was not successful in collecting data from women with more sexist attitudes. It is also likely that the criteria for participation (women had to be employed outside the home at least 30 hours per week while having young children) may have excluded the majority of women who hold more sexist attitudes from participation.

In spite of the many advantages of internet research, including larger samples, lower costs, security features, design options, confidentiality or even anonymity in responding, and ease of administration, the use of internet technology introduces some limitations. One limitation of internet research includes problems in obtaining accurate response rates, as unknown numbers of individuals may have seen postings about the study on message boards or received emails that linked them to the study. In hopes of increasing the network of people who were aware of the study, emails were circulated among people who did not qualify for the study. The researcher has no way to determine

the actual number of emails delivered, and of these, how many were actually opened and read.

An invitation to participate was sent via email to all female faculty and staff members at the University of Maryland between the ages of 18 and 48 (2029 women). In an effort to determine a response rate for this subset of the sample, the invitation asked those who did not fit the criteria for participation to respond indicating that they did not qualify. In response to the 2029 emails sent, 109 women responded that they did not qualify, and 55 women who participated indicated that they had been recruited through the University of Maryland list serve. Based on the number of women who responded that they did not qualify, it is likely that more women who did not fit the criteria for participation were solicited than those who did. However, an accurate response rate could not be computed based on who did respond.

While some mothers did not respond to the invitation or visit the website at all, other mothers began to participate but did not complete the survey. It is possible that some of these mothers visited the website but did not decide to participate because they viewed the survey as too long or were not interested in the topic. Other mothers began to participate but did not complete the survey. They too may have found the time involved too lengthy. Alternatively, they may have terminated their participation in order to respond to a crying baby or may have been one of those who reportedly had the site freeze up in the midst of participation. Although two women contacted the researchers about this problem, it is impossible to know for how many participants this occurred as it required additional time and effort for participants to report this.

Since Survey Monkey does not allow for counterbalancing measures, it is difficult to determine if people did not complete the survey because of time or if a particular measure may have been a factor. There is some evidence that the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory was a factor in women not completing the survey. When given the opportunity to make general comments at the end of the survey, many mothers commented that they did not like the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory because they felt it had a heterosexist bias. Several women said that they would have rated items differently if the response had not specified the sex of the person. For example, several women said that they believe people are better off in a relationship; however, they did not endorse this item because it did not allow for the possibility that the other person in the relationship could be of the same sex. Although this instrument was intended to capture sexist attitudes, in the process it seems to have offended several participants. Several others objected to this instrument without specific explanation. Of the 122 women who completed at least the first two instruments of the survey before eventually dropping out, 26 stopped upon seeing the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory for the first time. Another 11 women stopped upon seeing the Ambivalent Sexism later in the administration when participants were asked to respond from their own perspective rather than their husbands.' This level of dropout was not found with the other measures included in the survey. The completion rate was likely affected by reactions to this instrument.

Another limitation of this study was that it was not possible to determine whether there were significant differences between those who participated and those who were

eligible to participate but did not. It may be that those who did not respond are the most overwhelmed with role overload and thus did not feel they had sufficient time or energy to complete the survey. On the other hand, those who feel most conflicted about negotiating roles or upset about gendered divisions in the home may be motivated to participate in research investigating such issues. Several women responded to the recruitment invitation saying that they were too busy balancing work and family to participate in the study. One noted the irony that women who are extremely busy and stretched for time were the ones asked to volunteer their time for this study. Unfortunately many of these limitations would occur in multiple research designs. This will be addressed further in the discussion on recommendations for future research.

Despite the aforementioned limitations of online research, there are a number of advantages to internet-based research. First, participating in a study over the internet may make it easier for some women to express their views. It allows women to participate at a time and place that is convenient for them and may feel more anonymous. Second, it provides access to large and diverse samples. A wide range of women was able to participate; participation was not restricted by geographic location, university affiliation, or a specific setting (in other words, these women were not all from the same church or work place) and adequate diversity was achieved in several domains. The sample had diversity in terms of the women's age, number of children, age of children, income, and reported amounts of marital satisfaction, commitment to various life roles, and constructive communication in their marriages. The sample reached is more diverse than would have been possible without the internet, when recruitment and data collection may have been limited to several workplaces. Although this sample is not as diverse as

the U.S. population, it is more diverse than previous studies of women in studies on equality and/or role negotiation. Samples from studies examining marital equality include a 90% Caucasian sample from Greenberger & O'Neil (1993), 92% Caucasian sample from Ruderman et al (2002), and 100% Caucasian sample from Marks et al (2001). Additionally, the level of clinical depression reported by the sample in the current study was similar to statistics reported by the National Institutes of Mental Health for married women in this age group, which suggests that this sample was similar to the general population of married women with children in this age group in terms of level of distress (<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>).

Another limitation is that this research relies on self-report measures. Although there is a threat of mono-method bias, the subjective states on which this study focuses (reported marital satisfaction, psychological distress, commitment to various life roles, sexist attitudes, constructive communication, social support, and perceptions of their husband's subjective feelings and attitudes) are best captured through a self-report method and previous research has relied primarily on self-report for these reasons. There are however several concerns regarding use of self-report. It is possible that social desirability could have altered participants' responses. Positive biases are endemic in partner and relationship perceptions (Boyes & Fletcher, 2007). People generally desire a sense of security in their close relationships and want to trust their relationships are stable, that their partners are committed, and that these partners care for them. This desire may motivate participants to view and describe themselves and their relationships in a more positive light and have led to a positive bias response pattern. Further, participants need a certain level of awareness in order to respond accurately. Those who

do not have much self-awareness are likely to be less accurate self reporters. Alternate ways of testing this theory, such as behavioral or observational measures, should be considered in future studies

#### *Recommendations for future research*

A few directions for future research seem particularly promising. First, research on those in dual-earner marriages with young children needs to be conducted with additional populations. Specifically, more research needs to be done with fathers. It is clear that a woman's marital satisfaction (and distress) is related to how she perceives her husband's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors but it is not enough to focus solely on the women's experience. Also in need of examination are the relationships of parents who are not married and parents in same-sex relationships. The different gender structure involved in same-sex relationships may reveal that different factors become important in promoting relationship adjustment for these couples. Lastly, efforts should be made to examine these constructs with populations in lower income brackets, with less education, and with populations with more racial diversity. Future studies should conduct replications of the present study with these populations to develop a greater understanding of how these factors may influence the results that were found.

In terms of getting more diverse samples in future research, a number of recommendations can be made. In order to reach working mothers with young children who are working full-time and hold relatively sexist attitudes, it may help to target women who work in traditionally female fields. Reaching out to women in more traditionally female occupations may help to increase diversity in future research in terms of sexist attitudes, education, income and possibly race/ethnicity. Lastly, future

researchers may want to partner with community centers in low-income neighborhoods. Perhaps researchers could provide a service for the community, such as a workshop for women balancing multiple roles, in exchange for the privilege of collecting data at the center. Efforts such as these are likely to increase diversity in future samples. This line of research could also be expanded by reaching out to women of other religions or different aged cohorts, who may have very different experiences regarding the variables of study. Longitudinal research should also be conducted with these variables to examine whether or not things change over time. These findings may be unique to this particular circumstance (both partners working full-time with the oldest child under the age of six).

The invitation to participate elicited emotional reactions from some women who did not fit the criteria (e.g., single mothers, same-sex parents, stay-at-home mothers, and mothers with children over the age of five). Specifically, eleven women who were recruited through the University of Maryland responded to the invitation, critiqued the criteria for participation, and commented on issues such as the importance of studying the role of fathers or the experience of divorced mothers. The participation criteria appeared to hit a nerve as many of these respondents seemed hurt that were not included in the study. Some interpreted it as a judgment against them while others felt overlooked. Future researchers may consider including a brief explanation in the invitation to participation about why a specific subgroup has been selected to study so that those who do not qualify are not personally offended. Additionally, future researchers who use the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory may want to include a brief explanation of its use in the debriefing form so that participants are not left feeling upset about the presumed heterosexist bias of the instrument or even a general comment at the beginning of the

study explaining that the measures represent different constructs of interest to the researcher but were not designed by the researcher and may not represent the views of the researcher.

Since 141 women who began the study did not complete it, it seems that many of them likely experienced study fatigue. Given the findings from the current study, future researchers may want to exclude variables such as occupational commitment, social support, and wives' reported commitment to the parental role. These variables did not seem critical to the marriages of this sample and a shorter survey would likely have a better completion rate. Additionally, future researchers may want to research other sites to collect data that would allow for counterbalancing of measures. Without the ability to counterbalance instruments, it is impossible to determine the effects of individual measures. Future researchers may also consider using a different measure of sexism. While the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory appears to capture some of the more subtle nuances of sexism, some participants seemed to find it off-putting, which may account for drop off in the survey.

Although prior research (Amatea et al., 1986) suggested that the life role salience scales are equally applicable to individuals at various stages of role anticipation and/or implementation, in the current study some of the items were likely confusing and/or irrelevant for this sample of women who work-full time and have young children. For example, one item that was later omitted said, "It is important to me to have some time to myself and my own development rather than have children and be responsible for their care." This item was likely confusing for this sample of women who already had children. Future research may want to investigate additional measures of life role

commitment that may be better suited for this population. Researchers who use the Life Role Salience Scales in the future may consider administering both the commitment and valuing subscales. The commitment subscales administered in the current study focused on active involvement in the day-to-day demands of parenting. The valuing subscales would provide information about how much one values a specific role and the personal relevance of the role. This perspective is especially important for parents who cannot be involved in daily activities due to circumstances such as being in the military or other travel-related employment.

Given that the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory and Life Role Salience Scales were modified in order to gather data about participants' perceptions of their husband's perspective and used in a way that they have not previously been used, it is unclear exactly what is being measured. Although previous research has explored partners' perceptions of how they believe their partners would respond, both the manner in which instructions were stated and how they were understood the instructions likely affected responses. It is hoped that future research will examine the modification of these measures to determine what exactly is being measured and validate the use of this measure in this way.

Future research on dual-earner marriages would also benefit from the inclusion of a measure of stress to capture the presence of additional life stressors, such as health problems, financial difficulties, death of a loved one, or a recent move and everyday stressors such as missing work to care for a sick child or managing daily tasks. An examination of women in dual-earner marriages would be enhanced with data regarding the presence of such stressors. The level of relationship satisfaction and psychological

distress reported would be better understood with information regarding additional stressors in participants' lives.

In the current study, constructive communication was consistently related to the variables of interest. An increased focus on the marriages of dual-earner couples and how communication moderates and mediates other variables should be important for future research. It seems that communication can help women manage situations such as perceptions that one's husband has highly sexist attitudes or has low commitment to the parental role. Communication is something that can be taught and developed and be used to help couples negotiate differences. Additional research needs to be done to better understand the role that constructive communication plays. Further, the observational methodology utilized by previous communication researchers should be used to examine the variables of interest with dual-earner couples in efforts to further explicate these relationships.

#### *Implications for practice*

This study revealed how critical it is for women in dual-earner couples to perceive that their husbands are involved in, or at least willing to be involved in childcare. Although wives' own commitment to the parenting role seemed to be a given, their perceptions of how committed their husbands were to the parenting role were predictive of wives' marital satisfaction. In the future, interventions could be designed to help men look at their role as father. Research findings could be presented to remind men of the changes in society, suggesting that changes in the involvement of women in the workforce likely necessitate changes in men's involvement with children and family. Although men may feel very committed to their parenting role and devote some time and energy toward

raising their children, their wives may not perceive these efforts or may perceive that their husbands are “helping them” rather than being fully engaged and active in the role. It is not enough to be committed, one’s partner needs to recognize that these efforts are being made. Couples can be encouraged to have conversations about how they each enact their role as parent and what effect this has on both their children and their partner. Wives’ may benefit from hearing the ways husbands already live their commitment. While some couples may respond to such an intervention by changing their behaviors, others may benefit from simply being able to recognize the other’s commitment to parenting.

Findings from the current study indicate that commitment to the marital role is particularly critical in women’s reported distress and satisfaction with the marriage. While a woman may be able to enlist help with childcare duties, it is much more complicated to replace the feelings of love and support one expects from one’s spouse. Not only were women less distressed and more satisfied in their marriages when they perceived their husband as putting time and effort into the relationship, but women’s own commitment to caring for and emotionally supporting their husband was related to these positive outcomes. Again, couples can be reminded that being committed to the marriage is not enough, one’s spouse needs to perceive this commitment. Couples can be encouraged to discuss with each other what makes them feel cared for and loved.

This study most highlights the importance of constructive communication in heterosexual marriage. Women reported more satisfying marriages and less psychological distress when they felt that they and their husbands were able to respond to problems by expressing their feelings to each other, discussing problems and negotiating

possible solutions and compromises rather than blaming, threatening, or attacking one another. It may be that when both spouses are committed to both work and family roles, communication becomes particularly critical because tasks and responsibilities are not likely to be completely separate or neatly divided. In this case, it is likely that couples are constantly negotiating who does what (i.e., who picks up child from childcare, who gives the child a bath) and constructive communication becomes essential. It should be noted that this finding may be especially salient to dual-earner couples with young children. It could be that during this period, couples need to prioritize family roles more than at other points in their lives and communication is particularly important. Of course, some women are content to do more of some of the tasks associated with childcare and housework if it is acknowledged and appreciated rather than these tasks simply being expected of her or going unrecognized. Even in a more stereotypically traditional arrangement, communication about home and family responsibilities can facilitate marital satisfaction and/or help lessen distress.

Findings from the current study suggest that differences (in areas such as sexist attitudes or life role commitments) may not be as important as having the tools to bring out, examine, and negotiate such differences. Constructive communication seems to be a mechanism used by couples to manage things such as sexist attitudes or life role commitments. In the current study, when wives perceived their husband to be more committed to the parenting role, they reported communicating better (perhaps negotiating daily tasks such as carpool and bathing children) and they reported higher levels of satisfaction with the marriage. Similarly, when wives perceived their husband to be less sexist, they reported communicating better (perhaps because he values her as an equal

part of decision making), and reported higher levels of satisfaction with the marriage. Although causality could not be determined given the design of this study, the mediation analyses showed that constructive communication affected the manner in which sexist perceptions and commitment to various roles affected marital satisfaction. Thus, constructive communication appears to be essential in helping women navigate differences with their spouse.

Efforts to help dual-earner couples with young children could begin by distributing pamphlets at day care centers, for example, highlighting research findings and encouraging couples to communicate about their perceptions of each other's commitment to the marital and parenting roles. For those in dual-earner marriages who have young children, knowledge about this period can help.

Communication is something that can be taught and developed to help couples negotiate differences. A group could be designed for dual-earner couples with young children. Couples could see other couples who struggle and observe their dynamics. Husbands, for example, may be better able to recognize the impact of a husband's low commitment to the parenting role in another couple, which is likely to be a lot less threatening. Good communication skills could be taught to couples in the group. Communication techniques could even be practiced with non-spouses in the group before being used with one's own spouse. Such interventions could dislodge couples from entrenched patterns of interaction.

Couples therapy is another mode of helping couples communicate. Dual-earner couples with young children could be encouraged in therapy to make explicit their expectations about free time, division of household tasks and childcare, and how they

would like to negotiate conflict. Some couples may benefit from scheduling bimonthly meetings to discuss issues that arise as well as feelings that have not been expressed. Couples may need help communicating their needs during this challenging period. A counselor could help couples make agreements such as ‘you prioritize work and I’ll prioritize family’ to help them negotiate competing demands. One participant in the study shared that she and her husband struck a deal that worked for them such that each spouse could take a wedding morning off for him or herself. Other couples may benefit from scheduling a weekly date night to ensure that their emotional connection is maintained.

Counselors need to be aware of the complex psychological issues that arise in dual-earner marriages when there are young children including the higher rate of depression in women in this group compared to women who are single or in other age groups. Although counseling interventions need to be tailored to individual clients based on their needs, it is hoped that the current study will shed some light on variables that may affect women’s marital satisfaction and level of distress.

### *Conclusions*

The dual earner family is now the norm among married couples of all races (White & Rogers, 2000). Given that most contemporary Americans want intimate relationships in which both partners have more or less equal power to shape the relationship (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1996) and that equal sharing of power contributes to relationship satisfaction and well-being for both women and men (Gottman & Silver, 1999; Steil, 1997), it is of concern that even dual-earner couples are not generally able to attain equality in their marriages (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1996,

1998, 2005; Milkie et al., 2002; Zimmerman et al., 2003). Several researchers (e.g., Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1996; Risman & Johnson-Summerford, 1988) have hypothesized that assumptions and expectations about gender are what maintain marital inequality. Given that conventional norms and pressures around gender are so built into the institution of marriage, the power imbalance is often hidden and hard to identify (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1998). This form of power is generally invisible to most couples, yet seems to have an effect on families.

Although the constructs of gender and power were not studied directly, indices of relational equality were selected to indirectly examine these constructs. The current study investigated inequality in marital relationships as it related to wives' psychological distress and marital satisfaction by examining variables that appear to correspond with invisible power, namely, the gendered ways men and women commit to marital and family roles, communicate in times of conflict, and the sexist ideologies that serve to shape these roles and behaviors.

A big part of 'doing gender' are the roles individuals adopt. The current study sought to examine the relationships of those with the highest likelihood of similarity in life role commitments, where both parents work outside the home and where there are young children. Given that multiple roles are essential to functioning in such families, it is not surprising that wives' perceptions of husbands' commitment to these roles were found to be related to wives' marital satisfaction and in some cases psychological distress. It is possible that underlying these commitments, particularly to the parenting role, are issues of gender and power. For example, although wives' perceptions of how committed their husbands were to the parenting role was a strong predictor of wives'

marital satisfaction, wives' own commitment to the parenting role did not relate significantly with wives' marital satisfaction. Women have traditionally prioritized their roles as spouse and mother, while men, on the other hand, have traditionally been more committed to the occupational role than to family roles, such as partner and father. In the current study, wives' commitment to the parenting role seemed to be a given. It was wives' perceptions of how committed their husbands were to the parenting role, rather than their own commitment, that was most linked to wives' marital satisfaction. This suggests that even a dual earner marriage where both members of the couple might be expected to have similar home and work obligations, the commitment to various life roles differs by gender. In other words, this study of dual-earner couples suggests that for many of the women fairly traditional gender role stereotypes persist.

Also consistent with previous research on marital equality, constructive communication was found to be significantly related with wives' marital satisfaction and psychological distress. Constructive communication seems to be a tool for women, and a way that they are empowered in their relationships, to make their marriages more satisfying and possibly prevent or lessen feelings of distress. Constructive communication may be more important than perceived role commitment as it allows couples to negotiate differences in role commitments, values, and attitudes and is a skill that can be taught and developed.

As predicted by prior research on marital equality, sexist attitudes were related with marital satisfaction; however, this variable was less predictive than the other two indices of relational equality examined. Furthermore, although 12% of women who responded to the open-ended question about facilitators and barriers to marital equality

noted the influence of social and cultural factors, many more women noted the influence of other factors such as division of labor and a mutual commitment to equality. Blaisure and Allens' (1995) finding that the practice of marital equality does not automatically flow from a stated feminist ideology of equality, facilitates an understanding of the small effect size of sexist attitudes found in the current study. Blaisure and Allen noted that ideological commitment alone remains an unstable predictor of egalitarian behavior and that most couples fall into unequal relationship patterns without their conscious intention or awareness (e.g. Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1996, 1998; Zimmerman et al., 1996). These findings suggest that, although sexist attitudes may not be the strongest predictor of women's personal and relational outcomes and may be difficult to measure due in part to lack of awareness, this variable is related to the attainment of marital equality.

The main purpose of the current study was to examine the marriages of working mothers and investigate whether certain indices of relational equality, specifically role commitment, sexist attitudes, and constructive communication, were associated with marital satisfaction and psychological distress in contemporary multi-rolled women. Findings support the importance of these variables for predicting wives' marital satisfaction and in some instances, overall level of distress. In addition, mediation effects suggest that constructive communication is the mechanism through which several of these variables (e.g., husband's marital and parental role commitment and sexist views) influence marital satisfaction. By identifying key relationships and potential mechanisms of change, the findings of the present study may influence both future research and interventions to assist dual-career couples.

## Appendix A

### General instructions to participants

In the following survey, you will be answering most of the questions in terms of your own perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. There will be two sets of questions that you will be asked to complete twice: once from your own perspective and once from your husband's perspective - in other words, what you think your husband believes or how he would feel about various statements.

## Appendix B

Below is a series of statements concerning men and women and their relationships in contemporary society. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement using the following scale.

- 0 = Disagree strongly
- 1 = Disagree somewhat
- 2 = Disagree slightly
- 3 = Agree slightly
- 4 = Agree somewhat
- 5 = Agree strongly

1. No matter how accomplished he is, a man is not truly complete as a person unless he has the love of a woman.
2. Many women are actually seeking special favors, such as hiring policies that favor them over men, under the guise of asking for "equality"
3. In a disaster, women ought not necessarily to be rescued before men.
4. Most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist.
5. Women are too easily offended
6. People are often truly happy in life without being romantically involved with a member of the other sex.
7. Feminists are not seeking for women to have more power than men.
8. Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess.
9. Women should be cherished and protected by men.
10. Most women fail to appreciate fully all that men do for them.
11. Women seek to gain power by getting control over men.
12. Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores.
13. Men are complete without women.
14. Women exaggerate problems they have at work.
15. Once a woman gets a man to commit to her, she usually tries to put him on a tight leash.
16. When women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against.
17. A good woman should be on a pedestal by her man.
18. There are actually very few women who get a kick out of teasing men by seeming sexually available and then refusing male advances.
19. Women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility.
20. Men should be willing to sacrifice their own well being in order to provide financially for women in their lives.
21. Feminists are making entirely unreasonable demands of men.
22. Women, as compared to men, tend to have a more refined sense of culture and taste.

## Appendix C

Please consider what you think your husband believes and how he would feel about the following statements.

Below is a series of statements concerning men and women and their relationships in contemporary society. Please indicate the degree to which you think your husband agrees or disagrees with each statement using the following scale.

- 0 = Disagree strongly
- 1 = Disagree somewhat
- 2 = Disagree slightly
- 3 = Agree slightly
- 4 = Agree somewhat
- 5 = Agree strongly

1. No matter how accomplished he is, a man is not truly complete as a person unless he has the love of a woman.

\*Reminder: Be sure that you are responding to these statements from your HUSBAND'S perspective.

2. Many women are actually seeking special favors, such as hiring policies that favor them over men, under the guise of asking for "equality"
3. In a disaster, women ought not necessarily to be rescued before men.
4. Most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist.
5. Women are too easily offended
6. People are often truly happy in life without being romantically involved with a member of the other sex.
7. Feminists are not seeking for women to have more power than men.
8. Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess.
9. Women should be cherished and protected by men.
10. Most women fail to appreciate fully all that men do for them.
11. Women seek to gain power by getting control over men.

\*Reminder: Be sure that you are responding to these statements from your HUSBAND'S perspective.

12. Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores.
13. Men are complete without women.
14. Women exaggerate problems they have at work.
15. Once a woman gets a man to commit to her, she usually tries to put him on a tight leash.
16. When women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against.

\*Reminder: Be sure that you are responding to these statements from your HUSBAND'S perspective.

17. A good woman should be on a pedestal by her man.
18. There are actually very few women who get a kick out of teasing men by seeming sexually available and then refusing male advances.
19. Women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility.
20. Men should be willing to sacrifice their own well being in order to provide financially for women in their lives.
21. Feminists are making entirely unreasonable demands of men.
22. Women, as compared to men, tend to have a more refined sense of culture and taste.

## Appendix D

Below is a series of statements concerning your commitment to a number of life roles. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement using the following scale:

- 1 = Disagree strongly
- 2 = Disagree slightly
- 3 = Neutral or mixed
- 4 = Agree slightly
- 5 = Agree strongly

1. Occupational Role Commitment
  - a. I want to work, but I do not want to have a demanding career.
  - b. I expect to make as many sacrifices as are necessary in order to advance in my work/career.
  - c. I value being involved in a career and expect to devote the time and effort needed to develop it.
  - d. I expect to devote a significant amount of my time to building my career and developing the skills necessary to advance in my career.
  - e. I expect to devote whatever time and energy it takes to move up in my job/career field.
  
2. Parental Role Commitment
  - a. It is important to me to have some time for myself and my own development rather than have children and be responsible for their care.
  - b. I expect to devote a significant amount of my time and energy to the rearing of children of my own.
  - c. I expect to be very involved in the day-to-day matters of rearing children of my own.
  - d. Becoming involved in the day-to-day details of rearing children involves costs in other areas of my life which I am unwilling to make.
  - e. I do not expect to be very involved in childrearing.
  
3. Marital Role Commitment
  - a. I expect to commit whatever time is necessary to making my marriage partner feel loved, supported, and cared for.
  - b. Devoting a significant amount of my time to being with or doing things with a marriage partner is not something I expect to do.
  - c. I expect to put a lot of time and effort into building and maintaining a marital relationship.
  - d. Really involving myself in a marriage relationship involves costs in other areas of my life which I am unwilling to accept.
  - e. I expect to work hard to build a good marriage relationship even if it means limiting my opportunities to pursue other personal goals.

## Appendix E

Please consider what you think your husband believes and how he would feel about the following statements.

Below is a series of statements concerning commitment to a number of life roles. Please indicate the degree to which you think your husband agrees or disagrees with each statement using the following scale:

- 1 = Disagree strongly
- 2 = Disagree slightly
- 3 = Neutral or mixed
- 4 = Agree slightly
- 5 = Agree strongly

1. Occupational Role Commitment (respond from husband's perspective)
  - a. I want to work, but I do not want to have a demanding career.
  - b. I expect to make as many sacrifices as are necessary in order to advance in my work/career.
  - c. I value being involved in a career and expect to devote the time and effort needed to develop it.
  - d. I expect to devote a significant amount of my time to building my career and developing the skills necessary to advance in my career.
  - e. I expect to devote whatever time and energy it takes to move up in my job/career field.
2. Parental Role Commitment (respond from husband's perspective)
  - a. It is important to me to have some time for myself and my own development rather than have children and be responsible for their care.
  - b. I expect to devote a significant amount of my time and energy to the rearing of children of my own.
  - c. I expect to be very involved in the day-to-day matters of rearing children of my own.
  - d. Becoming involved in the day-to-day details of rearing children involves costs in other areas of my life which I am unwilling to make.
  - e. I do not expect to be very involved in childrearing.
3. Marital Role Commitment (respond from husband's perspective)
  - a. I expect to commit whatever time is necessary to making my marriage partner feel loved, supported, and cared for.
  - b. Devoting a significant amount of my time to being with or doing things with a marriage partner is not something I expect to do.
  - c. I expect to put a lot of time and effort into building and maintaining a marital relationship.
  - d. Really involving myself in a marriage relationship involves costs in other areas of my life which I am unwilling to accept.
  - e. I expect to work hard to build a good marriage relationship even if it means limiting my opportunities to pursue other personal goals.

## Appendix F

Directions: We are interested in how you and your partner typically deal with problems in your relationship. Please rate each item on a scale of 1 (= very unlikely) to 9 (= very likely).

**A. WHEN SOME PROBLEM IN THE RELATIONSHIP ARISES,**

- |   | Very<br>Unlikely |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | Very<br>Likely |
|---|------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----------------|
|   | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |                |
| 1. <u>Mutual Avoidance</u> . Both members avoid discussing the problem.   | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |                |
| 2. <u>Mutual Discussion</u> . Both members try to discuss the problem.  | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |                |
| 3. <u>Discussion/Avoidance</u> .<br>Man tries to start a discussion while<br>Woman tries to avoid a discussion. | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |                |
| Woman tries to start a discussion<br>while Man tries to avoid a discussion.                                     | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |                |

**B. DURING A DISCUSSION OF A RELATIONSHIP PROBLEM,**

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| 1. <u>Mutual Blame</u> . Both members blame, accuse, and criticize each other.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |  |
| 2. <u>Mutual Expression</u> . Both members express their feelings to each other.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |  |
| 3. <u>Mutual Threat</u> . Both members threaten each other with negative consequences.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |  |
| 4. <u>Mutual Negotiation</u> . Both members suggest possible solutions and compromises.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |  |
| 5. <u>Demand/Withdraw</u> .<br>Man nags and demands while Woman<br>withdraws, becomes silent, or refuses<br>to discuss the matter further. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |  |
| Woman nags and demands while Man<br>withdraws, becomes silent, or refuses<br>to discuss the matter further.                                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |  |

	Very Unlikely								Very Likely
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
6. <u>Criticize/Defend.</u>									
Man criticizes while Woman defends herself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Woman criticizes while Man defends himself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
7. <u>Pressure/Resist.</u>									
Man pressures Woman to take some action or stop some action, while Woman resists.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Woman pressures Man to take some action or stop some action, while Man resists.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
8. <u>Emotional/Logical.</u>									
Man expresses feelings while Woman offers reasons and solutions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Woman expresses feelings while Man offers reasons and solutions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
9. <u>Threat/Back down.</u>									
Man threatens negative consequences and Woman gives in or backs down.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Woman threatens negative consequences and Man gives in or backs down.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10. <u>Verbal Aggression.</u>									
Man calls Woman names, swears at her, or attacks her character.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Woman calls Man names, swears at him, or attack his character.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
11. <u>Physical Aggression.</u>									
Man pushes, shoves, slaps, hits, or kicks Woman.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Woman pushes, shoves, slaps, hits, or kicks Man.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

**C. AFTER A DISCUSSION OF A RELATIONSHIP PROBLEM,**

	Very Unlikely								Very Likely
1. <u>Mutual Understanding</u> . Both feel each other has understood his/her position.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2. <u>Mutual Withdrawal</u> . Both withdraw from each other after the discussion.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
3. <u>Mutual Resolution</u> . Both feel that the problem has been solved.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
4. <u>Mutual Withholding</u> . Neither partner is giving to the other after the discussion.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
5. <u>Mutual Reconciliation</u> . After the discussion, both try to be especially nice to each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
6. <u>Guilt/Hurt</u> . Man feels guilty for what he said or did while Woman feels hurt.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Woman feels guilty for what she said or did while Man feels hurt.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
7. <u>Reconcile/Withdraw</u> . Man tries to be especially nice, acts as if things are back to normal, while Woman acts distant.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Woman tries to be especially nice, acts as if things are back to normal, while Man acts distant.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
8. <u>Pressure/Resist</u> . Man pressures Woman to apologize or promise to do better, while Woman resists.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Woman pressures Man to apologize or promise to do better, while Man resists	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Very  
UnlikelyVery  
Likely9. Support Seeking.Man seeks support from others  
(parent, friend, children)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Woman seeks support from others  
(parent, friend, children)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

## Appendix G

*Please mark the letter for each item which best answers that item for you.*

1. How well does your partner meet your needs?

A	B	C	D	E
Poorly		Average		Extremely well

2. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

A	B	C	D	E
Unsatisfied		Average		Extremely satisfied

3. How good is your relationship compared to most?

A	B	C	D	E
Poor		Average		Excellent

4. How often do you wish you hadn't gotten in this relationship?

A	B	C	D	E
Never		Average		Very often

5. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?

A	B	C	D	E
Hardly at all		Average		Completely

6. How much do you love your partner?

A	B	C	D	E
Not much		Average		Very much

7. How many problems are there in your relationship?

A	B	C	D	E
Very few		Average		Very many

## Appendix H

Below is a list of some of the ways you may have felt or behaved. Please indicate how often you have felt this way during the past week by checking the appropriate box for each question.

1. I felt that I could not shake off the blues even with help from my family or friends.
  - Rarely or none of the time (less than a day)
  - Some of little of the time (1-2 days)
  - Occasionally or a moderate amount of the time (3-4 days)
  - All of the time (5-7 days)
  
2. I felt depressed.
  - Rarely or none of the time (less than a day)
  - Some of little of the time (1-2 days)
  - Occasionally or a moderate amount of the time (3-4 days)
  - All of the time (5-7 days)
  
3. I thought my life had been a failure.
  - Rarely or none of the time (less than a day)
  - Some of little of the time (1-2 days)
  - Occasionally or a moderate amount of the time (3-4 days)
  - All of the time (5-7 days)
  
4. I felt fearful.
  - Rarely or none of the time (less than a day)
  - Some of little of the time (1-2 days)
  - Occasionally or a moderate amount of the time (3-4 days)
  - All of the time (5-7 days)
  
5. My sleep was restless.
  - Rarely or none of the time (less than a day)
  - Some of little of the time (1-2 days)
  - Occasionally or a moderate amount of the time (3-4 days)
  - All of the time (5-7 days)
  
6. I felt lonely.
  - Rarely or none of the time (less than a day)
  - Some of little of the time (1-2 days)
  - Occasionally or a moderate amount of the time (3-4 days)
  - All of the time (5-7 days)

7. I had crying spells.

- Rarely or none of the time (less than a day)
- Some of little of the time (1-2 days)
- Occasionally or a moderate amount of the time (3-4 days)
- All of the time (5-7 days)

8. I felt sad.

- Rarely or none of the time (less than a day)
- Some of little of the time (1-2 days)
- Occasionally or a moderate amount of the time (3-4 days)
- All of the time (5-7 days)

## Appendix I

Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements, on a scale of 1 to 7:

- 1 = very strongly agree
- 2 = strongly agree
- 3 = agree
- 4 = neutral
- 5 = disagree
- 6 = strongly disagree
- 7 = very strongly disagree

	Very Disagree strongly disagree agree disagree	Strongly Strongly agree strongly	Agree Very	Neutral			
1) There is a special person who is around when I am in need.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2) There is a special person with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3) My family really tries to help me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4) I get the emotional help and support I need from my family.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5) I have a special person who is a real source of comfort to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6) My friends really try to help me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7) I can count on my friends when things go wrong.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8) I can talk about my problems with my family.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9) I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10) There is a special person in my life who cares about my feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11) My family is willing to help me make decisions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12) I can talk about my problems with my friends.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

## Appendix J

## Demographic Form

Instructions: Please provide the following information about yourself.

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Your Race/Ethnicity

- \_\_\_\_\_ African-American/Black  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Asian-American/Pacific Islander  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Asian-Indian/Pakistani  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic/Latino(a)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Middle Eastern/Arab  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Multiracial  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Native American/Native Alaskan  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Caucasian/European American  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Foreign National (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

3. Your husband's Race/Ethnicity

- \_\_\_\_\_ African-American/Black  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Asian-American/Pacific Islander  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Asian-Indian/Pakistani  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic/Latino(a)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Middle Eastern/Arab  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Multiracial  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Native American/Native Alaskan  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Caucasian/European American  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Foreign National (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

4. Your religious affiliation:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Agnostic  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Atheist  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Buddhist  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Catholic  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Christian – other  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Hindu  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Jewish  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Mormon  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Muslim  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Taoist  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

5. Highest level of education you have completed:

- 8<sup>th</sup> grade or less  
 High school  
 Some college  
 College/bachelor's degree  
 Graduate school – master's level  
 Graduate school – doctoral level

6. Your yearly income (select category):

- Under \$5,000  
 \$5,000 to \$9,999  
 \$10,000 to \$14,999  
 \$15,000 to \$24,999  
 \$25,000 to \$34,999  
 \$35,000 to \$49,000  
 \$50,000 to \$74,999  
 \$75,000 to \$99,999  
 \$100,000 - \$199,999  
 \$200,000 - \$499,999  
 \$500,001 +

7. Your husband's yearly income (select category):

- Under \$5,000  
 \$5,000 to \$9,999  
 \$10,000 to \$14,999  
 \$15,000 to \$24,999  
 \$25,000 to \$34,999  
 \$35,000 to \$49,000  
 \$50,000 to \$74,999  
 \$75,000 to \$99,999  
 \$100,000 - \$199,999  
 \$200,000 - \$499,999  
 \$500,001 +

8. How many hours per week are you employed in paid work? \_\_\_\_\_

9. How many hours per week is your husband employed in paid work? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Your current profession and job title (in order to maintain privacy do not include specific employer or any other identifiable descriptors): \_\_\_\_\_

11. Your husband's current profession and job title (in order to maintain privacy do not include specific employer or any other identifiable descriptors): \_\_\_\_\_

12. What motivates your participation in paid employment? (choose one)  
 Primarily for income  
 Primarily due to career goals/interests  
 Equally due to needs for income and career goals/interests
13. Please indicate the number of years and months that you have been married to your husband:  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Years \_\_\_\_\_ Months
14. Please indicate the number of years and months that you were in a relationship with your current husband **prior to your marriage**:  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Years \_\_\_\_\_ Months
15. How many children live with you full-time? \_\_\_\_\_
16. What are the ages of the children who live with you full-time? \_\_\_\_\_
17. Do you share custody of your children with anyone outside the home?  
 Yes  No
18. Do you pay anyone to help with the children?  Yes  No
- If yes, please indicate the type(s) of help you employ:  
 Childcare utilized while you and your husband are working  
 Nanny is present to care for the children (not just while you are working)  
 Periodically use babysitter  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_
19. Do you pay anyone to help with household tasks?  Yes  No
- If yes, please indicate the type(s) of help you employ  
 Housekeeping services  
 Landscaping services  
 Cooking / meal preparation services
20. Overall, my work/career is satisfying:  
 0 = Disagree strongly  
 1 = Disagree somewhat  
 2 = Disagree slightly  
 3 = Agree slightly  
 4 = Agree somewhat  
 5 = Agree strongly

21. Overall, being a parent is satisfying:

- 0 = Disagree strongly
- 1 = Disagree somewhat
- 2 = Disagree slightly
- 3 = Agree slightly
- 4 = Agree somewhat
- 5 = Agree strongly

22. Overall, being married is satisfying:

- 0 = Disagree strongly
- 1 = Disagree somewhat
- 2 = Disagree slightly
- 3 = Agree slightly
- 4 = Agree somewhat
- 5 = Agree strongly

23. Given the following definition of an equal relationship, please describe factors that facilitate or hinder equality in your marriage.

An equal relationship can be defined as one in which partners hold equal status, accommodation in the relationship is mutual, attention to the other in the relationship is mutual, and there is a mutual sense of well-being of the partners (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1998).

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Appendix K  
Introductory email

Dear all:

Are you a working mother?

Researchers at the University of Maryland are conducting a study on working mothers and their family, work, and marital relationships. If you are (1) married to a man; (2) a mother whose oldest child is age five or under and lives with you full-time; and (3) both you and your husband are employed in paid work at least 30 hours/week, PLEASE consider participating in the study.

Your participation will assist researchers interested in learning more about how women today balance the challenges of marriage, motherhood, and work. We are interested in women's perceptions about male/female roles, work/family roles, and marital relationships. Your participation may also prove interesting for you as you reflect on some of your answers to the questions!

The questionnaire should take you 20-25 minutes to complete and can be accessed by visiting the following web site:

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=XfDiGra8gIeofFs2kFv0tQ\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=XfDiGra8gIeofFs2kFv0tQ_3d_3d)

Your participation will be greatly appreciated. Thank you so much for your time.

If you do not qualify for the study, we would appreciate you letting us know (email [cms13@umd.edu](mailto:cms13@umd.edu)) so that we can track how many mothers who qualify for the study choose to participate.

Whether or not you qualify for this study or choose to participate, please consider passing this email along to others who might qualify.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Catherine Sullivan

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Catherine Sullivan, M.A.  
Doctoral Candidate, Counseling Psychology  
University of Maryland, College Park  
[cms13@umd.edu](mailto:cms13@umd.edu)

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Mary Ann Hoffman, Ph.D.  
Counseling Psychology Program  
Counseling and Personnel Services  
University of Maryland, College Park  
[hoffmanm@umd.edu](mailto:hoffmanm@umd.edu)

Appendix L  
Study Flier

## **Are you a working mother?**

PLEASE consider participating in the study if you:

- ❖ are married to a man
- ❖ both you and your husband are employed in paid work at least 30 hours/week
- ❖ are a mother whose oldest child is age five or under and lives with you full-time

**Researchers at the University of Maryland are conducting a study to learn more about how women today balance the challenges of marriage, motherhood, and work.**

The survey takes 20-25 minutes to complete.  
If you are interested in helping with this research,  
please visit our website:

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=XfDiGra8gIeofFs2kFv0tQ\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=XfDiGra8gIeofFs2kFv0tQ_3d_3d)

Appendix M  
Informed Consent

<b><i>Project Title</i></b>	Balancing marriage, motherhood, and work: Women in dual-earner marriages
<b><i>Why is this research being done?</i></b>	This is a research project being conducted by Mary Ann Hoffman and Catherine Sullivan at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are married, are employed in paid work at least 30 hours/week, and your oldest child is age five or under, living with you full-time. The purpose of this research project is to examine the experience of working mothers and their marital relationships.
<b>What will I be asked to do?</b>	The procedure involves completing an online survey. The survey will take approximately 20-25 minutes to complete. You will be asked questions about your beliefs (Women, as compared to men, tend to have a more refined sense of culture and taste), your expectations (I expect to put a lot of time and effort into building and maintaining a marital relationship), problems in your relationship (Physical aggression: man pushes, shoves, slaps, hits or kicks woman), your feelings (I felt lonely), and your relationship with your husband (In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?).
<b>What about confidentiality?</b>	The confidentiality of your responses will be closely protected. The survey does not ask for any identifying information and IP addresses will not be recorded. However, due to the public nature of the internet, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. The possibility of someone intercepting your data is highly unlikely, although theoretically possible. If you do not exit or close your internet browser when you have completed your survey it is possible that another person using your computer at a later time could view your responses. It is therefore important that you exit your browser after you have submitted your survey.
<b>What are the risks of this research?</b>	There may be some risks from participating in this research study. You should be aware that, although unlikely, your participation in this survey could elicit negative emotions (e.g., memories of negative experiences in your relationship).
<b>What are the benefits of this research?</b>	The research is not designed to help you personally, but to help the investigator learn more about the experiences of working mothers and their marital relationships. Completion of the questionnaires included in this study may provide you an opportunity for reflection on the unique challenges and rewards of your relationship. You will also be contributing to research on an important topic.
<b>Do I have to be in this research?</b>	Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You are free to ask questions or withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

Page 2 of 3

Initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

<p><b>What if I have questions?</b></p>	<p>This research is being conducted by Mary Ann Hoffman at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact:</p> <p>Mary Ann Hoffman or Catherine Sullivan  University of Maryland  Counseling and Personnel Services  3222 Benjamin Building  College Park, MD 20742  Ph: 301-405-2865  Email: <a href="mailto:hoffmanm@umd.edu">hoffmanm@umd.edu</a>, <a href="mailto:cms13@umd.edu">cms13@umd.edu</a></p> <p><i>If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</i>  <b>Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742;</b>  <b>(e-mail) <a href="mailto:irb@deans.umd.edu">irb@deans.umd.edu</a>; (telephone) 301-405-0678</b>  <i>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</i></p>
<p><b>Statement of Age of Subject and Consent</b></p>	<p><i>Clicking the button 'I Accept' below indicates that:</i>  <i>you are at least 18 years of age;</i>  <i>the research has been explained to you;</i>  <i>your questions have been fully answered; and</i>  <i>you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"> <input type="radio"/> <b>I Accept</b> <span style="margin-left: 200px;"><input type="radio"/> <b>I Do Not Accept</b></span> </p>	

Appendix N  
Debriefing Form

Thank you very much for participating in this study.

Prior research has suggested that modern-day couples seek equality in their marriages; yet despite these ideals, few are generally able to attain marital equality. It seems that despite women entering the labor force in record numbers, and husbands getting more involved in household responsibilities, women continue to carry a greater proportion of childcare and household labor.

Although couples find it challenging to construct marriages that are not based on traditional assumptions about gender, there are exceptions to these findings, couples who are able to attain relative equality in their marriages. The aim of the current study is to examine working mothers, a group of mothers who would be expected to have the most equal relationships in terms of sharing child and household responsibilities. It is hoped that this investigation will help us better understand that which makes women satisfied in their marriages and less distressed so that we can better work with and meet the needs of working mothers.

Your responses to the questionnaires will be held in strict confidentiality. You have not been asked to supply your name, address, or email address and responses to questions are not linked in any manner with specific individuals. Once the study is completed, the website and all the responses will be removed.

Due to the fact that some women you know may still want to participate in this study, we ask that you not discuss the purposes of this study with anyone. This is crucial to maintaining the study's validity.

If you would like additional information on maintaining a health relationship with your husband, please visit <http://www.apa.org/topics/>. If you are interested in locating a psychologist to discuss any of the concerns that may have arisen for you while completing this questionnaire, please visit <http://helping.apa.org/> or call 1-800-964-2000.

Please contact us if you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study. We are appreciative of your time and effort in assisting us with this important study.

Sincerely,

Catherine Sullivan, M.A., Ed.M.  
Doctoral Candidate  
Counseling Psychology  
University of Maryland, College Park  
[cms13@umd.edu](mailto:cms13@umd.edu)

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