THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COOPERATION AND CONFLICT
AND PERCEIVED LEVEL OF MARITAL HAPPINESS
AS INDICATORS OF THE ADLERIAN
CONCEPT OF SOCIAL INTEREST

By
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The purpose of this study was to bridge the existing gap in the literature by exploring the relationship between the Adlerian concept of social interest, expressed through cooperation and conflict, and perceived level of marital happiness. This study explored behaviors along a continuum of social interest from cooperation to conflict. Preexisting data were used from the longitudinal Marital Instability over the Life Course Project funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services and the National Institute on Aging (Booth, Johnson, Amato, & Rogers, 2003).

Data from telephone surveys were collected in 1980, 1983, 1988, 1992-1994, 1997, and 2000 from married individuals who were between the ages of 18 and 55 in 1980. The initial random sample was 2,033, but attrition took place for each of the subsequent waves, resulting in 762 respondents in 2000. Results of hierarchical regression analyses revealed statistically significant relationships in a positive direction between cooperation and marital happiness, and in a negative direction between conflict and marital happiness across all waves of data. Cooperation and conflict as indicators of social interest accounted for between 26% and 37% of the variance in marital happiness,
except for the 1988 wave, which was an aberration on all measures and accounted for only 12% of the variance. This still exceeded the a priori effect size selected for the study, a standardized regression coefficient of |.10|.

Implications for theory, research and practice include focus on the link between higher levels of social interest as demonstrated through cooperative behaviors and greater marital happiness, one between conflict and lower levels of marital happiness. Marriage and family therapists need to consider the underlying goals of conflict such as power that may reveal underdeveloped levels of social interest. Counselors need to focus on helping couples develop relational skills that include the social provisions needed like empathy, understanding, and support. Future research is needed to more clearly define behaviors along the continuum of social interest.
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this research to my husband and closest friend Steve with whom I have experienced marital happiness for almost 35 years.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Completion of this dissertation and doctorate was not a solitary accomplishment. I give thanks to God for giving me times of peace and a sense of sanity through the chaos. I look forward to more times of peace, refreshing, and enjoying the beauty of nature in the future.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In the latter half of the 20th Century, the meaning of marriage changed significantly in the United States as a shift in marital trends began to appear (Amato, 2004; Cherlin, 2004; Oropesa & Landale, 2004; Seltzer, 2004). During this time several themes emerged, including an increased prevalence in nonmarital cohabitation, higher rates of children born outside of marriage, a decline in the marriage rate, and higher numbers of divorce (Amato, 2004). As American culture becomes increasingly individualistic, the institution of marriage seems to be decreasing in importance only to be replaced by a return to more private commitments such as cohabitation or personal contracts that are neither recorded or legalized (Thornton, Axinn, & Xie, 2003). Policy makers in some states are trying to reinstitutionalize marriage by creating barriers to divorce such as the implementation of covenant marriage, in which spouses agree to seek counseling and are prevented from obtaining a no-fault divorce. Other attempts involve providing incentives for marriage such as initiatives that pay for training individuals to teach premarital classes or tax breaks for married couples. While many are choosing not to commit to traditional marriage, the idea of it has become a highly valued, though elusive status symbol (Cherlin, 2004; Gillis, 2004; Smock, 2004). The commitment to becoming part of a couple has become a cultural sign of maturity.

Not only are trends in marriage changing, but the essence and meaning of marriage are changing as well. Marriage is no longer the civil affair it once was. In the early American colonies, the marriage ceremony was commonly officiated by a local magis-
trate in the town hall. Now, it has become more spiritual and personal in character, in that even individuals with no religious affiliation want their marriages sanctified by symbols of holiness (Gillis, 2004).

While fewer individuals live in conventional marital relationships, more individuals live by a “conjugal ideal” that is instilled in childhood (Gillis, 2004, p. 989). In other words, children develop the idea of becoming part of a couple from observation and from story books and then reinforce it through play. Later coupling behavior is reinforced in adolescence through dating. While the realities of marriage are far different than once upon a time, the expectations couples place on relationships have escalated to an almost impossible standard. These expectations are reinforced by society’s idealized concept of marriage. To realize this romanticized ideal, couples and families spend enormous amounts of time and money on the ritual and representations involved in entering into marriage. Sadly, the white wedding, reception, and honeymoon are often given more resources and investment than the marriage itself. The high expectations and social pressure to be happy in marriage appears to set many individuals up for failure in the endeavor. Because marriage is a relationship that can be attempted, terminated, and tried again, divorce has ultimately increased the rate of marriage (Gillis, 2004).

In order to understand how relationships develop over time one must understand the differences people bring to their relationships. Because experiences in the family of origin are of primary importance in shaping the attitudes and behaviors individuals need to succeed in marriage (Adler, 1978), it is necessary to explore a theoretical model rooted in family processes. Adlerian theory offers such application. Alfred Adler explained the human need for social connection and how this becomes a driving force in relationships (Gladding, 2004). The individual is embedded in the field of social context. Adlerian theory teaches that “the socialization of the individual is not achieved at the cost of repression, but is afforded through an innate human ability [italics added], which, however, needs to be developed” (Adler, 1929 p. 2). This ability is what Adler called social
interest. “Because the individual is embedded in a social situation, social interest becomes crucial for his adjustment” (p. 2). Adler again said, “A man’s ability to cooperate may therefore be regarded as a measure of his social interest” (Dreikurs, 1989, p. 5). For example, when a person enters into a marriage, social interest is expressed subjectively in the conscious feeling of belonging. It is through the ability to cooperate that social interest will be expressed objectively. According to Dreikurs (1989), the individual’s ability to adapt to others and share empathetic understanding is dependant upon social interest. Blanton (2000) identified mistaken beliefs within the marital relationship which often result in conflict and are expressive of a lack of social interest. These beliefs centered around an individual’s own status or self-protection that focus on not losing one’s relative power position to one’s partner. “The belief that when interests clashed, the only options open was either to fight or to yield” (Blanton, p. 414) exposes the lack of social interest and cooperation. This study will explore the relationship between cooperation and conflict and perceived level of marital happiness as indicators of social interest.

According to Adlerian theory, counselors working with couples or marital issues must first understand that all behavior has social meaning and purpose. Social meaning is first learned in the family of origin, since this is the first interacting social system within which each individual is socially embedded. The family atmosphere is considered to be the climate of relationships that exist between people. The family constellation is each person’s place in the family organization, both currently and multigenerationally. Together, the family atmosphere and the family constellation create the social meaning of behavior for each individual. Because the basic desire of each individual is to belong or find a place in the group, individual behavior is directed toward this goal, which is driven by social interest (Sherman & Dinkmeyer, 1987).

Adler (1978) explained that social interest is an innate human potentiality that must be consciously developed. An individual’s personality and social learning interact to
produce appropriate goal-attaining, socially desirable behavior. Sherman and Dinkmeyer (1987) explained that inappropriate behavior and failure to cooperate are results of mistaken beliefs about ways of belonging. Adlerian theorists believe that social interest did not properly develop in these individuals. Thus, the goals and beliefs first formed in childhood in the social context of the family of origin continue to pose problems with adult relationships.

People who do not develop social interest in childhood will feel the impact of it in their adult relationships. Power struggles, gender roles and identity, competition, cooperation, affection and communication are negotiated with siblings during childhood. An individual who did not learn to cooperate as a child or later as an adult will not be likely to cooperate with a marital partner. Adler (1978) explained that failures in love and marriage are similar to failures in the other life tasks of work and friendship and result from a lack of training in social interest.

A recurring theme in marital research is that supportive socialization is absolutely vital for marriage (Smock, 2004). Both psychological and sociological researchers make strong statements about the importance of social structures and equity to marital quality, hinting at social interest (Huston & Melz, 2004). Bradbury and Karney (2004) suggested that knowing and understanding stressors and social context are essential to understanding the changes in marital quality over the course of a couple’s relationship. They further indicated the need for understanding not only the learned styles of interaction but also the contextual influences on marital happiness. The development of social interest and interdependence is important for human survival (Gladding, 2004) as well as the survival of the institution of marriage.

Adler (1978) further explained that cooperation between two individuals through love and marriage ultimately benefits humanity. To fully express cooperation, each partner must be equal. Each partner must be more interested in the other than in himself
or herself. Adler asserted that within this cooperation between equals, we find the fundamental meaning of marital happiness. Opposite to the harmonious interaction of cooperation are all those behaviors that create disagreement, friction, and opposition (Dreikurs, 1946). Researchers of marital quality have explored conflict behavior more extensively than cooperative behavior and have indicated that conflict is related to deterioration in marital satisfaction (Karney & Bradbury, 1997). However, researchers have not addressed the underlying goal of conflict, which, if addressed could potentially provide an overarching framework for understanding marriage (Fincham & Beach, 1999). If the underlying goal of conflict is rooted in an underdeveloped level of social interest as Adler (1978) proposed, then this research becomes imperative. Very few researchers have examined the expression of social interest through interactive behaviors such as cooperation or the lack of expression of social interest demonstrated through conflict. Thus, this study begins a new line of research to explore the relationship between cooperation and conflict and perceived level of marital happiness as indicators of social interest.

Statement of the Problem

Marriage is a multi-faceted, ever-evolving endeavor, resulting in various consequences to individuals who attempt it. Romantic expectations, first developed in childhood and later reinforced by society, almost doom relationships before they ever develop. Counselors are faced with individuals who have become discouraged and emotionally depleted over the breakdown of their primary marital relationships. These individuals present a wide variety of systemic issues, with immensely complex relationship combinations. Counselors often have minimal experience or knowledge regarding treatment of these problems and find the decision of how to work with couple and family systems challenging (Smith & Carlson, 1995). The problem for counselors is finding a theoretical framework that explores relationships through both individual expectations and societal
influences. If a link exists between early socialization and later relationship happiness as proposed by Adler (1978) in the concept of social interest, then finding behaviors demonstrating the continuum of development would be beneficial.

Counselors would benefit from increasing their knowledge of the potentially strong link between level of social interest and quality of the marital relationship. Social interest is first an innate potential that must then be developed into skills or abilities either in childhood or as an adult, and finally becomes an “evaluative attitude” toward life directing choices and influencing relationships (Adler, 1970; Ansbacher, 1968; Kazan, 1974). Meyeroff equated social interest to caring or “helping the other to grow” (1971, p. 3, as cited in Kazan). This is a process through which helping the other also creates growth or actualization for the self. Therefore people may have to develop social interest skills like cooperation to succeed in relationships. Social interest or caring for others gives “meaning and order to life” (Kazan, p.8). When this sense of social interest or caring is all-inclusive, there is a sense of stability in life and a sense of belonging in the world. With the increase of divorce, it is clear that there is a need for preventative measures and interventions in marriage relationships. There is a gap in marital happiness research regarding social interest and how it is demonstrated through cooperation or not demonstrated through conflict.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to bridge the existing gap in the literature by exploring the relationship between cooperation and conflict and perceived level of marital happiness as indicators of social interest. The results of this study can be utilized by counselors as they treat whole individuals within their social context. Additionally, the results may help increase counselor educators’ awareness that conflict is a result of the lack of social interest. This new knowledge will impact what counselors share with
clients in session and help them conceptualize the connections between social interest and cooperation. This will enable counselors to better facilitate client insight into the link between family of origin issues and current marital issues.

Hypotheses

The purpose of this study is to begin a new line of research that explores the relationship between cooperation and conflict and perceived level of marital happiness as indicators of social interest. This study used existing data from the longitudinal Marital Instability over the Life Course Project (Booth, Johnson, Amato, & Rogers, 2003). The project began with the interview of a national random sample of 2,034 married individuals between the ages of 18 and 55. It spanned 20 years, and consisted of six waves beginning in 1980. Booth et al. developed instruments to measure marital quality and to predict marital instability and divorce. The first wave focused on the effects of the wife’s employment on marriage and marital instability. The following waves: 1983, 1988, 1992-1994, 1997, and 2000, sought to link changes in economic resources, wife’s employment, children, life goals and health to intentions to dissolve a marriage. Divorce, remarriage, care of aging parents and dependent offspring, financial assets, aging, retirement issues, and physical and mental health were added to the instrument. The new questions in each wave were added to the basic questions asked in 1980. Data were gathered in 1992 and 1994 from adult offspring who had reached the age of 19 to give a picture of impact of childhood experiences. In 1997, the fifth wave also investigated the relationship between marital quality and stability and how it related to marital quality in later life. In 2000, the sixth wave data were collected from the adult panel and a panel from the offspring who participated in 1992 or 1997 to replicate the original cross-section study, concurrently with a comparison sample of persons who married in 1980 and were between 39 and 75
years old. Wave six investigated the participants’ lifestyle, use of alcohol or tobacco, health problems, and level of concern for spouse.

There were several hypotheses for the current study. They are as follows:

1. In the first wave of data, from 1980, it was hypothesized that cooperative type behaviors will relate positively to marital happiness.

2. In the same 1980 wave, it was hypothesized that conflict type behaviors will relate negatively to marital happiness.

3. If hypothesis one was empirically supported, it was hypothesized that cooperative behaviors will relate positively to marital happiness over time (over the 20 years covered by the next five waves, 1983, 1988, 1992-1994, 1997, and 2000).

4. If hypothesis two was empirically supported, it was hypothesized that conflict type behaviors will relate negatively to marital happiness over time (over the 20 years covered by the next five waves, 1983, 1988, 1992-1994, 1997, and 2000).

5. It was hypothesized that there would be no difference in the level of cooperative behaviors and conflict behaviors between the participants in the 1980 wave who did not participate further and the 1983 wave.

Need for the Study

There is a dearth of theory driven, longitudinal research in the area of marriage and family counseling issues (Lindahl, Malik, & Bradbury, 1997). This gap is especially noticeable in the exploration of long term factors contributing to marital happiness such as social interest.
Limitation(s)

Due to attrition in a longitudinal study, valuable information was lost for those participants who for some reason did not choose to respond to follow-up attempts to gather data. Thus the study could suffer from selection effect. For this reason, attempts were made to address the issue of attrition. Participants who chose not to continue were compared to those who did continue to see whether there were significant differences on the constructs measured.

Another limitation involves instrumentation. The instrument utilized in the previous data collection was not specifically designed to measure the construct of cooperation. To address this threat to construct validity, the variable of cooperation was clearly defined based on theory. The measure of spousal interaction was then compared with this construct and found to be similar. Hypotheses were then formulated about how individuals who are more cooperative versus those who are less cooperative will behave in a marriage. These hypotheses were tested both logically and empirically in this study.

A third limitation was the possibility of the Hawthorne Effect, which is the inclination of respondents to answer more positively than they actually feel just because they have been asked to evaluate how they feel. Therefore, because of the study, there exists the possibility that these respondents felt better about their marriages over the 20 years of observation than they would have felt if they had not been part of the study.

A final limitation of this study was the threat of maturation to validity. Research has shown that external pressures like period and cohort effects impact marriage. Therefore it was expected that peoples’ responses would be affected by those pressures. However, people probably answer questions about their own lives, happiness, and marriages without considering these external pressures.
Definition of Terms

Attrition – In this study, attrition is defined as a reduction in the number of participants that continue to participate in a longitudinal study after the initial sample was drawn.

Cooperation – In this study, cooperation is defined as the “orderly interaction, harmonious working together toward a common objective, agreement and mutual assistance. All those acts which stimulate or increase these conditions can be considered as conforming with the rules of cooperation, and whatever creates disagreement, friction, and opposition, as violating them” (Dreikurs, 1946, p. 101).

Conflict – In this study, conflict is defined as a lack of cooperation demonstrated through spousal disagreements, serious quarrels, and arguments involving physical abuse (Booth et al., 2003).

Education - In this study, education is defined as the number of years in school reported by the respondent.

Encouragement – This is the most distinctive Adlerian procedure, according to Corey (2001). It literally is defined as building courage (Bitter, Christensen, Hawes, & Nicoll, 1998).

Family constellation – This is defined as the family system, from the client’s perception, including the conditions that prevailed in the family when the person was young (family atmosphere), birth order, parental relationship and family values, and extended family and culture (Corey, 2001).

Individual Psychology – This is defined as the psychology of the indivisible and undivided person (Sicher, 1991).

Life style – This term is defined as an individual’s basic orientation to life, or the characteristic way an individual moves towards the life goal (Corey, 2001).

Marital happiness – In this study, marital happiness is defined as the positive aspect of marital quality based upon perceived individual feelings.
Sex – In this study, sex is defined as whether the respondent is male or female.

Social interest – This term is defined as an innate potential, from which skills or abilities must be developed either in childhood or adulthood, and which finally becomes an “evaluative attitude” toward life, directing choices and influencing relationships (Adler, 1970; Ansbacher, 1968; Kazan, 1974).

Subjective perception of reality – or “scheme of apperception”- This is defined as the individual’s perceptions, thoughts, feelings, values, beliefs, convictions, and conclusions (Corey, 2001).
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To provide a better understanding of how the construct of social interest relates to marital happiness, I will explore the related literature. According to Adlerian theory, social interest manifests in relationships through cooperative behaviors, while the lack of social interest is demonstrated through conflict type behaviors. The following topics will be reviewed: (a) Adlerian theory, (b) social interest, (c) cooperation, (d) conflict, (e) marital happiness, and (f) a summary.

Adlerian Theory

*Individual Psychology: View of Human Nature*

Alfred Adler developed Individual Psychology in an effort to understand the creative power of life that is expressed through the human desire to develop, strive, and achieve, and to compensate for defeats in one area by striving for success in another (Adler, 1929). This power is *teleological*—it is expressed in the striving after a goal in which every bodily and intuitive movement cooperates. Adler’s view of human nature was holistic and indivisible, as he believed it absurd to study behavior and mental conditions without considering their relation to the whole individual (Adler, 1929, Gladding, 2004). Therefore, counselors do well to recall that human nature is best understood within the social context in which it occurs, bearing in mind the particular goal for which the individual is striving.
Life goal.

Humans are social beings, but not all humans have the same goals. Each individual’s goal is unique because of subjective perception. For example, siblings from the same family develop different ways of coping or socially adjusting because of differing perceptions. Adler (1929) asserted the importance of understanding the individual context or goal that creates the direction for all of the person’s acts and movements. Understanding the goal enables us to discern the hidden meaning behind various separate acts, which are parts of the whole. On the other hand, when the acts are studied with the knowledge that they are parts of a whole, a better sense is gained of the whole as well. Adler believed that within each mind lies the conception of a goal or ideal to move beyond the present state and to overcome present difficulties. Through this goal, the individual can feel superior to the difficulties of the present because the mind has a picture of success in the future. Without the sense of a goal, individual activity would become meaningless. Thus, the goal provides the key to understanding the individual and subsequently what he or she seeks from a relationship. All evidence indicates that this goal is fixed early in life, during the formative years of childhood, and becomes that person’s life style. For example, a child who initially lacks skill and strength finds himself or herself facing what feels like intolerable circumstances. Therefore the child strives to develop toward a chosen goal, like an arrow directed toward a target. Adler (1978) explained that these strivings, thoughts, expressions, and feelings all aim toward successful resolution of social tasks. Adler admitted it is difficult to say exactly how this goal is fixed, but asserted that it is obvious such a goal exists and dominates the child’s every movement.
Subjective perception of reality.

During this time of establishing the goal, all humans form erroneous beliefs, known as basic mistakes (Adler, 1929). If these mistakes are recognized, correcting them is easier during the early years while the life style is being developed. If early correction does not occur, mistakes may be corrected later on by recalling the entire situation that occurred during that time of life and understanding how the life style is erroneously influencing all life situations. Consequences of basic mistakes can be observed in the lack of social interest that permeates American culture, in which people have become preoccupied with the pursuit of personal happiness (Amato, 2004). As individuals no longer wish to be hampered by obligations to others, there is a decline in marital commitment and thus an increase in the number of divorces. The subjective perception of these individuals is influenced by mistaken beliefs about ways of belonging. These goals and beliefs, which were first formed in the social atmosphere of the family of origin, continue to pose problems in later life. Hence, early memories become a valuable tool for the counselor in recognizing basic mistakes and understanding the life style and the nature of the individual.

Unity of personality.

Unlike Freud, Adler postulated that consciousness and unconsciousness work together to achieve the life goal with no clear line of demarcation between them. This beautiful collaboration between the conscious and unconscious mind indicates a unity of personality (Gladding, 2004), which is different from Freud’s multi-level view of consciousness and unconsciousness. The connection between the two is the pattern of life formed in early childhood. Adler asserted that conscious ideas cooperate with unconscious ones, directing an individual toward the life goal. The energy of the individual, both conscious and unconscious, moves the person toward the goal. This unity is ex-
pressed in the attitudes and behaviors individuals need to succeed in marriage. The family of origin provides the learning atmosphere in which one’s purpose emerges. Because all behavior has social meaning and purpose, the energy of the individual is unified toward the resolution of the need for belongingness, even though it may be directed toward mistaken goals. It follows that basic mistakes formed in the early years of life could cause spouses to work toward differing goals and cause conflict in the marriage relationship.

_Inferiority leads to social interest._

Not only must the individual be regarded as unified in his life style, with both the conscious and unconscious working toward the same goal, but the individual must also be considered in the context of social relations. Adler pointed out that children are born weak and helpless and must be cared for by other persons. Through this process of being cared for by others, the child’s initial inferiority and helplessness are compensated for and the child’s style of life begins to take shape.

Everyone feels inadequate in certain situations. This creates within people the desire to strive for superiority or mastery in different areas. One of the strongest human tendencies has been to form groups and gain assistance in overcoming the difficulties of life. This social life has been a great help in overcoming feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. Thus, Adler explained that the beginning of social life lies in the weakness of the individual. In other words, social interest develops out of a perception of inferiority.

The striving for superiority and the feeling of inferiority are naturally complementary, according to Adler (1929). Further, individuals never stop striving for superiority. Adler explained that the entire social process could be understood by realizing that people are always striving to find a situation in which they excel. Thus when individuals feel weak, they lose social interest as their striving for superiority pushes them toward mastery once again. A balance is required between the striving for superiority and social
interest. Adler called superiority or inferiority taken to the extreme a complex and asserted that either complex competes with the individual’s contribution to the social good or their level of social interest. Therefore, social interest begins to develop in the striving to overcome inferiority and find a place of belonging within the family of origin, and then continues to impact the adult’s ability to cope with life.

Life is filled with difficulties that humans must learn to navigate. Adler explained that humans are weak and helpless initially and as they face difficulties, they feel insecure about their ability to cope with them. The feeling of inferiority exists in all humans, and as long as it is not too great, a child will strive to be useful and worthwhile. These feelings of inferiority stimulate the individual toward movement and action, resulting in the person’s goal, plan, or style of life. Nevertheless, the inferiorities, whether resulting from basic mistakes made as children or from physical disabilities or organic inferiority (Adler, 1929), must be overcome through the development of social interest, described by Adler as one’s attitudinal approach to life that is conducive to the accomplishment of life tasks.

Social feeling and social adjustment are normal compensations, and Adler asserted it would be difficult to find anybody in whom this striving for superiority has not resulted in development. This development results in courage and confidence. The individual is not afraid, but benefits from the difficulties life brings. He or she feels comfortable in the world and realizes there are difficulties, but feels confident to overcome them. Thus, this individual is prepared for all life’s problems, which are at their root social problems. However, if a child does not develop social interest, there will be an impact on his or her relationships in adulthood. According to Adler, lack of training in social interest explains the large number of failed marriages.

Ansbacher (1968) explained three developmental stages implicit in Adler’s concept of social interest. Initially, social interest exists as potential or aptitude for caring.
In stage two, this capacity is developed into certain skills or abilities (Kazan, 1974) such as cooperation, empathy, the feeling of belonging or embededness, and common sense. Finally, social interest is expressed as an “evaluative attitude” toward life (Adler, 1970). Adler (1929) asserted that individuals who lack social interest become problem children, and without appropriate intervention ultimately become criminals, insane persons, or alcoholics. They demonstrate their lack of social interest through conflict type behaviors such as acting out in school, rebelling against authority, or demanding fulfillment of personal wants and desires at the expense of others. Adler explained the need to find ways to influence these individuals to turn to a more useful side of life, and to create within them an interest in others. It is because of this process that Adler explained that Individual Psychology is actually a social psychology.

Social interest for marriage survival.

The development of social interest is critical for the survival of marriage. In order to fully understand marital issues, counselors must first comprehend the difficulties that confronted each individual throughout his or her development. Adler believed that through this comprehension, the importance of social learning in one’s development becomes obvious. An individual’s personal characteristics are not inherited, but rather developed in relation to the social context. Social meaning is learned in the first interacting social system, which is the family of origin.

Feelings in relation to social interest.

The next step to understanding marital issues is to realize each individual’s feelings and the influence they have on their attitudes and behaviors. Adler (1929) remarked that individuals invariably try to justify their attitudes by feelings and concluded
that feelings always agree with the individual’s viewpoint or life goal. Individuals’
actions are driven toward the goal, and feelings simply accompany the act. In the context
of marriage, if an individual is motivated through social interest toward a goal, the result-
ing actions will be cooperative and feelings will be happy. If on the other hand, there is a
lack of social interest, and mistaken goals, conflict and unhappiness will follow.

*Birth order or family constellation.*

Evaluation of the life style is necessary to understand the individuals’ attitudes
toward life that impact the marital relationship. Early mistakes may be costly, as each
individual follows his or her own path in life. No two children, even those born in the
same family, grow up in the same situation; therefore, it is imperative for the couple’s
counselor to consider each individual’s perception of his or her family constellation.
Even though the family atmosphere is the same, the child’s perception of it is quite
unique. The first child has a significantly different set of circumstances from subsequent
children because the first child is initially the center of the parents’ attention. When a
second child is born, the first child loses this primary position and does not like the
change of situation. The ensuing sense of tragedy affects the development of the child’s
life style.

Adler (1929) explained how the position of the second child is also characteristic
and individual. To this child, it seems as though the older sibling is always setting the
pace and the second child feels pressured to catch up, often overcoming the pacemaker.
The older child sometimes becomes frightened by the competition and may not do as
well. If the oldest becomes discouraged, the younger child may take on a leadership role
in the family and develop a perception of first-born characteristics. Each child entering
the family thus enters a different situation. Power struggles, gender roles and identity,
cooperation, competition, affection, and communication all emerge in the milieu of the
family constellation. Adler proposed that all characteristics originate in early childhood, reflecting the particular position in the family constellation, and cannot be changed until the insight of the individual has been increased. Therefore, sibling experiences and perceived birth order are important to the development of social interest and coping skills needed to interact appropriately within the later context of marriage.

*Life style in movements and attitudes.*

Adler (1929) further iterated that individuals might best be understood through their attitudes and movements or behaviors. Movements are expressed or imbedded in attitudes. The attitudes are an expression of the whole style of life and therefore the level of social interest. A person is judged by his manner of standing, walking, moving, or expressing. This judgment may not be a conscious thought, but an intuition or feeling. Body language projects attitude in that how an individual feels about himself or herself is exhibited through how that person moves and carries the body. Thus, a counselor must consider the body language of each spouse as an outward expression of the life style and level of social interest.

*Attitudes, life style, and social interest.*

In the same way that movement is interpreted; attitudes are expressive of the life style. Adler (1929) described individuals as more or less pugnacious. Researchers today might call this resilience or hardiness. This tenacity expresses the level of social interest. Individuals who have developed more social interest demonstrate attitudes reflecting the courage to face life’s tasks. In marriage, they often exhibit cooperation and more interest in the other than in themselves. Adler asserted, however, that by nature, people never really give up, but instead become more or less discouraged. If an individual is discour-
aged and seems to give up, this paradoxically indicates more of a struggle to carry on and to develop the level of social interest necessary to feel part of a whole rather than totally alone in the world.

*Social adjustment.*

The goal of Individual Psychology is *social* adjustment (Adler, 1929). It is through the social context that the person becomes an individual. Social maladjustments demonstrate the consequences of the lack of social interest. The sense of inferiority and the striving for superiority, though they exist in all individuals, may result in maladjustment. Even the terms *inferiority complex* and *superiority complex* express the result after maladjustment has taken place. These complexes are not inborn traits but rather the result of the interaction between the individual and his social environment. Adler questioned why some individuals have a complex and some do not. He explained that the sense of inferiority and superiority is directed into socially useful channels by a psychological mechanism. “The springs of this mechanism are social interest, courage, and social-mindedness, or the logic of common sense” (Adler, 1929, p. 216).

According to Adler (1929), preparation for love and marriage lies in social adjustment. The first few years of life are crucial to the development of social interest, in which lies all the inclinations and skills for love and marriage. The problems encountered in love and marriage are the same as general social problems because there are the same difficulties and tasks. Adler pointed out that it is a mistake to regard love and marriage as an idyll in which one’s desires are all fulfilled. Tasks follow people throughout life, but in marriage, these tasks must be completed while considering the interests of the other person.
Growth of social interest.

Adler proposed that the growth of social interest is slow. To exhibit social feeling, individuals must be trained in the direction of social interest from childhood, and be striving to meet life’s tasks. Individuals who are trained to cooperate as children will be more likely to cooperate with a marriage partner in later life. These individuals are courageous, confident, and find solutions when faced with life problems. Adler (1929) stated they have friends and get along with others in his community. Adler also felt that having a chosen occupation and progressing in it was a small but significant sign of a person’s level of social interest and indicated readiness for marriage.

Social interest in marriage.

Social interest within the context of marriage can be examined by observing the level of equality between spouses. Adler insisted that give-and-take was essential and that love could make a marriage successful only if built upon a foundation of equality. Herein lies the challenge between cooperation reflecting social interest, and conflict, its opposite. Adler described this power struggle between cooperation and conflict as the individual’s desire to conquer. If either spouse continues to act out the need to conquer after the marriage is begun, the marriage will not survive. He explained that it is not possible to be a conqueror in a situation in which there is no place for such behavior. Marriage calls for an interest in the other person and the ability to see things from the other’s perspective. If for example, the sex relationship is exploited for the satisfaction of an inferiority or superiority complex, one person becomes a victim and the other a conqueror. As distress and conflict increase, life together becomes impossible.
Life tasks: Love, work, sex.

A possible explanation for the lack of social interest and conflict in marriage is the lack of training to cope with life’s tasks. Adler (1929) described the three great questions of life (or life tasks) as being love (filial or companionate), work, and sex (romantic love). First, there is the social question which involves the individual’s behavior with others (love). From the first day of life, humans are taught how to act. We are trained by others as well as by books and experts in the areas of social behavior and productive work, the first two life tasks. However, Adler (1929) felt there was a lack of training and preparation for the third task of romantic love and marriage. He described an old German custom used to test the compatibility and preparedness of a couple about to marry. The couple was given a double-handed saw and each person held one end. They were asked to saw a tree down while relatives stood and watched. Sawing a tree in this manner was assumed to be a task for two persons working together cooperatively. Each partner had to be interested in what the other was doing and had to harmonize strokes. This cooperation was considered a good test of fitness for marriage.

Because a person alone feels weak and inferior, humans choose to live in societies. Adler (1929) asserted that social interest and cooperation are necessary to individual well-being, as well as a basic construct of marriage. The mistakes in a majority of cases result from a lack of social interest. Adler explained that marriage is a task for two persons. People are educated to work alone or in groups, but not as pairs. Despite the lack of education, the marriage task can be handled properly if the two individuals recognize the basic mistakes in their character and approach issues in a spirit of equality.
Review of Social Interest in Literature

In the review of social interest, I will begin with a discussion of the social-psychological perspective of marriage and the social provisions of a relationship. Next, I will discuss personal qualities that influence marital happiness because these are qualities that demonstrate social interest. Recent findings that expand conceptions of marital interaction will be reviewed in regard to how social support and positive affect influence problem solving skills. Then I will review a classic Adlerian article that combines the individual life style and personality priorities with communication styles to strengthen social interest (Bitter, 1993). Finally, I will review a cross-sectional study that addresses the perceived adequacy of social support and how that is associated with marital function (Dehle, Larsen, & Landers, 2001).

Social-Psychological Provisions

Personal needs and attachment.

Cutrona (2004) reviewed the literature on marriage and the social provisions of relationship in a special issue of the Journal of Marriage and Family. This discussion was based on Weiss’s (1974) article, in which he described six different relationship provisions. These provisions were (a) attachment or emotional bonding, (b) reassurance of worth, (c) guidance, (d) reliable alliance, (e) social integration, and (f) the opportunity to provide nurturance. Cutrona’s concern was that people are pursuing these interpersonal goals outside the institution of marriage. The high rates of divorce undermine perceptions of marriage as a source of attachment, security, or the demonstration of social interest. The goal should be relationships that provide a larger portion of these social provisions than of strife, criticism, and isolation. Huston and Melz (2004) asserted that marriage in
society is perceived as more self-defining than cohabitation. Thus, Cutrona asserted that
gaps in social provisions offered by marriage might be more significant than gaps in the
context of cohabitation and deserve further study.

*Individual life style.*

Because individual life style differences unfold in the marital relationship over
time, Cutrona (2004) insisted that counselors must understand the manner in which
personality affects receptivity to interventions that attempt to alter behavior (i.e.,
individual’s response to interventions). For this to occur, it is necessary for counselors to
understand that each individual’s life style and basic mistakes are formed in early child-
hood. Cutrona referenced an unpublished work (Cutrona, Russell, and Krebs, 2002, as
cited) that found that the predictive significance of social support behavior is maintained
even after controlling for negative behaviors during conflict-resolution tasks. They
recommended that skill-building interventions should emphasize not only the avoidance
of destructive relationship conflict, but also focus on encouraging one another through all
of the social provisions described by Weiss (1974). This indicates the need for training in
social interest that avoids conflict and enhances cooperation.

*Personal qualities and conflict.*

Bradbury and Karney (2004) and Huston and Melz (2004) discussed the prevail-
ing approach to marital intervention, and pointed out that there is criticism of the current
approach on conflict-resolution skills as the locus of preventive and reparative marital
intervention. Huston and Melz’s research lends particular credibility to a focus on the
development of social interest. Using case studies spanning 14 years, Huston and Melz
designed a protocol to link courtship experiences to how the marriages turned out. The
researchers concluded that the stable personality traits of the individuals involved were an important determinant of whether or not the marriage succeeded. They identified qualities of people who make good partners and qualities of good relationships. Personal qualities identified were a mixture of conscientiousness, agreeableness, and a secure attachment style (Cutrona, 2004), which can be conceptualized as social interest developed. The qualities attributed to good relationships were (a) frequent and mutual provision of attachment, (b) reassurance of worth, (c) reliable alliance, (d) guidance, (e) social integration, and (f) the opportunity to provide nurturance. These habits appear to be rooted in cultural and family contexts. They made the case that personality makeup and social attitudes are deeply embedded into each individual’s being by the time they reach adulthood. As such, these characteristics are relatively stable and push individuals into life circumstances that reinforce them (Caspi & Bem, 1990; Conley, 1985; Huston & Melz, 2004; McRae & Costa, 2002) in the same way that Adler’s life style, formed in early childhood, motivates the individual. These findings are probabilistic; however, these researchers did follow a cohort of couples, married at a particular time, over a number of years. This was not a nationally representative sample, so the associations between personality and marriage were not tested across subpopulations. Huston and Melz called for further research efforts to identify the inner qualities and the cultural and family contexts that lay the groundwork for successful and enduring marriages.

Connecting social interest and interaction.

Bradbury and Karney (2004) reviewed recent findings highlighting the value of expanding conceptions of marital interaction by considering how social support and positive affect moderate the effects of problem-solving skills on changes in marital quality. They found weak and counterintuitive findings linking couples’ interactional
processes to marital outcomes and point to the need for research considering social interest issues (e.g., social support, individual strengths and vulnerabilities as antecedents of hostile interaction, ability to handle life circumstances). They suggested that experiences in the family of origin shape attitudes and behaviors relevant to marital success. These authors believe that the Healthy Marriage Initiative, advanced by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, promises to create new opportunities and challenges for scholars of marriage.

Connecting social interest and personality.

Bitter (1993) addressed personality priorities and social interest and their influence on communication styles. He described social interest as the relational sense people have of themselves in the context of the personalities and systemic interactions observed in the family. Within the family, individuals develop a sense of self and discover their potential for the future. It is within this context that people first make sense of relationships, learning how to bond, fight, solve problems, and relate to members of their own or the opposite sex.

Bitter (1993) suggested that the seeds of relationships are planted long before mating. Humans are born into a position of inferiority. The first experience of an infant is fear as he or she moves from the safety of the womb into the unknown world. Even in this helpless state, the infant immediately starts to cope by searching for comfort, familiarity, and warmth. Bitter suggested that as the infant’s needs are met by parents and family members, fear is replaced with at least a temporary joy and a growing sense of safety. It is within the family that the child finds a balance between safety and movement. Parents encourage the progress of the child as he or she takes first steps and speaks first words. This encouragement gives a perceived stability to the world. In the natural process of development, the more the child learns to do, the more he or she wants to do. Bitter
explained that each step in development leads to new challenges, demands for skills and resources that the child has yet to master. Naturally, these challenges lead to feelings of helplessness or inferiority.

**Inferiority motivates development of social interest.**

Bitter (1993) pointed out that Adler was the first to suggest that inferiority feelings were normal, and a prime motivator of human development. Bitter described the development of an inferiority complex as a “debilitating sense of inadequacy” that robs a person of the courage to face life (p. 331). Individuals with inferiority complexes develop low self-esteem and tend to cope by overcompensating. Most people, however, use the striving for superiority as a motivator toward the life goal. Bitter described the constant conflictual strivings within all individuals’ life styles to (a) overcome difficulties, (b) meet life’s tasks, (c) reach self-selected goals, and (d) safeguard one’s self-esteem.

Based on the safeguarding tendency, Bitter draws a parallel between Kefir’s (1971, as cited) work on personality priorities and Satir’s (1988, as cited) communication styles. The four priorities are: (a) pleasing, (b) significance (originally superiority), (c) control, and (d) comfort. The communication styles are (a) placating, (b) blaming, (c) being super-reasonable, and (d) distracting. Bitter asserted that the link between observable communication processes (Satir) and the immediate safeguarding goal represented in priorities (Kefir) can be used to assess coping strategies.

**Bitter’s model of coping processes.**

Bitter (1993) created a model to classify coping processes based on this integration of Kefir’s personality priorities and Satir’s communication styles. The integrated processes were (a) placating-pleasing, (b) blaming-significance, (c) super-reasonable-
control, (d) distracting-comfort, and (e) congruence-social interest. Bitter explained that people who placate when stress is high sacrifice themselves in an effort to please others. More than anything else, these individuals fear rejection. The other side of the placating-pleasing coin is blaming. Blaming individuals are so strong in their struggle for superiority that they will sacrifice others to maintain self-worth. Super-reasonable individuals remain rational, abstract, and emotion-free as much as possible. Their desire to keep life under control and fear of embarrassment or humiliation results in a self-imposed social distance. Comfort as a personality priority is not maintenance of pleasure or ease; instead it is choosing situations which lack stress or pain. When stress in social interactions increases, this type of individual will do anything to distract, such as changing the subject or answering a question with a question. Finally, the congruent individual approaches a stressful situation holistically. This person approaches the stressor as a challenge and is flexible and able to negotiate. Social interest is demonstrated here as the individual keeps in mind his or her own needs, the needs of others, and the needs of the situation. Because this individual has developed social interest, courage and confidence are inherent as the individual feels a connection to others. This person can ask for help or lend a hand when needed. Bitter then explains how individuals become couples and how this communication/priority model can inform counselors of strategies for working with them.

Social interest demonstrated.

Dehle, Larsen, and Landers (2001) examined the role of perceived adequacy of social support provided by spouses for both marital and individual functioning. In other words, in the participant’s opinion, how much social interest was demonstrated by their marriage partner? A college sample of 177 married individuals reported the adequacy of specific supportive behaviors provided by the spouse on a daily basis for 7 days. The dimensions measured included marital satisfaction, depressive symptomology, the degree
to which life situations were stressful, and the tendency of respondents to describe their marriage as socially desirable. The results indicated that the perception of adequate social support provided by a spouse is associated with both increased marital quality and individual functioning. The primary limitation of this study was the cross-sectional nature of the findings. It is impossible from this one study to determine whether the link between perceived social support and marital quality exists over time. Generalizability of the findings was also limited by the lack of diversity in the sample (most of the participants were Caucasian). And finally, although the associations were statistically significant, the effects were modest across most of the variables. However, the authors pointed out that evidence of associations in a non-clinical sample might provide early indicators of risk factors for marital deterioration. These researchers called for further efforts to better understand the specific mechanisms through which social support influences spouses and marriages.

To review the literature on the concept of social interest, the discussion began with the social provisions necessary to maintain marriage relationships and pointed out the significant gaps in this area of research. The need for a well-developed sense of social interest was illustrated by current research demonstrating that people with concern for others make good marriage partners. Personal qualities stemming from social interest such as conscientiousness, agreeableness, and a secure attachment style were shown to influence happiness over time. The individual life style and personality influences were combined with communication styles to strengthen social interest. The perception of adequate social support provided by spouses was associated with both marital and individual functioning. Investigators recommended consideration of how the demonstration of social interest through social support and positive affect influence problem-solving skills and marital quality through more longitudinal designs.
Review of Conflict Literature

In this section, the following topics will be reviewed: (a) the link between marital interaction and sibling experiences, (b) the conflict over division of household chores and its relationship to marital quality, and (c) a comparison of family systems processes and organizational behavior from the perspective of Individual Psychology. These areas will be reviewed to reinforce the importance of family of origin experiences, family systems processes, and patterns of interaction demonstrating cooperation or conflict that appear to be carried into marriage.

Marital Interaction and Sibling Experience

Mones (2001) explored themes of sibling experience to help couples resolve conflict. The themes of marital conflict discussed were: (a) power and hierarchy, (b) complementary role development, (c) proximity-distance, (d) fairness and justice, (e) communication styles and conflict resolution, (f) friendship and loyalty, and (g) altruism. It is commonly accepted that within sibling experience, individuals learn to deal with differences, fairness, sharing and conflict. Childhood experiences are considered the social learning laboratory where siblings learn discipline and how to share family resources like love and attention. Brothers and sisters regularly negotiate these processes. Mones proposed that these are the same skills and competencies that are crucial to marital interactions. How well these skills have been learned and can be negotiated often determines the success or failure of marriage. The roots of conflict can be traced to early sibling interaction. Mones pointed out that blatant aggression and abuse among siblings is common and leads children to make a role choice of bully or victim. Roles or positions chosen are then re-enacted during marital disputes. Hurt and disappointment often lead to anger and conflict or withdrawal. Emotional needs remaining from childhood may lead to obstructions and conflict in marriage. Mones suggested that exploring current themes in
light of their historical antecedents could help propel partners from the stuck place of disillusionment and dissonance to acceptance and empathy. Following Adler’s (1929) suggestion of reconstructing early remembrances around sibling conflict, Mones (2001) proposed working through emotional triggers and points of tension that can facilitate greater self-growth while diminishing negativity and blame.

On the other side of this issue, Mones suggested identifying and utilizing sibling histories of protection, sharing, and transcendence of life’s pressures to facilitate cooperation within the marriage. Stories of older siblings protecting the younger, teaching skills, or just sharing this important time of life can be connected to a spirit of cooperation in marital relationships. A secure sibling bond can contribute to greater social interest demonstrated through respect and equality in the partnership. Keeping in mind themes of conflict and cooperation from each person’s powerful sibling influence, counselors can facilitate couples’ growth toward their full emotional potential.

*Division of Household Labor*

One area in which conflict is exhibited in marriage is in the division of household labor. Suitor (1991) examined life-cycle variations in satisfaction with the division of household labor and its relationship to marital quality. The author reported a study of the data from a national survey of 741 men and 964 women. Life-cycle state was determined by the lack or presence of children and the ages of children, if present. Marital happiness was measured by three questions regarding past and current feelings about one’s marriage with responses collapsed into three categories. Marital conflict was measured by asking respondents how often they agreed with their spouse over the past year on issues of money, chores, social activities, and physical affection. Suitor also measured verbal aggression with the Conflict Tactics Scale developed by Straus (1979, cited in Suitor, 1991). Variables of age, education, and amount of time the wife spent working outside
the home were controlled for, as these variables have been found to be associated with marital conflict and verbal aggression.

Results indicated that satisfaction with division of household labor was associated with greater marital happiness and lower marital conflict for both men and women. For marital happiness, the relationship, while moderate, was stronger for women for all life-cycle stages. For marital conflict, there was a negative correlation with perceived satisfaction with the division of these chores that was similar in strength for both men and women. These findings suggest that when spouses cooperate over things like household chores, marital happiness is greater. Further, when they disagree and compete over who does what and how much, conflict increases and marital happiness decreases.

Family Systems Processes and Organizational Behavior

Kern and Peluso (1999) used concepts borrowed from Individual Psychology to compare family systems processes and organizational behavior. Through discussion of individual and group behavior, similarities between organization and family of origin behavior are presented. The authors proposed that either positive or negative patterns of interaction learned in the family of origin might emerge in relationships with coworkers. Methods of cooperation or conflict learned in the social setting of the family are repeated in the workplace. Just as the family is the social organization from which one acquires skills to lead and interact within more formal settings, so the workplace is an association of people who must generally be willing to cooperate.

According to the authors, the first social world known by the child is the family, which shapes expectations of social interactions in the larger world. The family constellation is the context in which a child learns behaviors that could enhance or impede interactions with peers. As discussed previously, family constellation is more than the ordinal position of siblings, but includes perceptions of one’s own place, as well as the places of
all other members of the family. Competition for attention from parents and struggles to
develop social interest affect beliefs and attitudes adopted for coping with problems at
home, school, and later work. Thus, an employee may compete with coworkers for the
attention of a manager in the same way that siblings do with parents. The family atmo-
sphere may be conducive to the development of greater social interest by fostering coop-
eration, or impede such development by allowing conflict over valuable resources (like
parental attention or toys). It is important to remember that each child perceives the
family atmosphere subjectively. Thus, the authors asserted that much of this nebulous
atmosphere evolves from the parents’ interactions with each other, and how these interac-
tions are perceived, interpreted, and acted upon by each individual child. Organizations
can foster climates of encouragement, cooperation, and teamwork, or they can value
conflict, conformity to rule and regulations, and performance within the organization.
The individual may thrive in this environment or become discouraged depending on
whether the culture affords the opportunity to further develop social interest, or to satisfy
the need to belong.

To summarize, skills and competencies learned in the family of origin are crucial
to marital interaction. Among married couples, conflict over household chores was
associated with a decrease in marital happiness, while satisfaction in this area was corre-
lated with greater happiness, especially for women. Marital conflict was discussed
through the lens of sibling experience. Rules of sibling strife often emerge in adult rela-
tionships. These patterns of interaction, like cooperation or conflict, were demonstrated in
the workplace and generalize to any relational setting. Social interest is incubated in the
family, where power, conflict, and cooperation are regularly negotiated between brothers
and sisters.
Review of Cooperation Literature

In this section the following topics will be reviewed: (a) problem solving in early marriage and (b) interactional behaviors used by couples to maintain their relationships. In the research on problem solving, a model will be presented that introduces conditions that lead to cooperation. The research on interactional behaviors will be discussed because it describes positive behaviors that are cooperative in nature. The scarcity of research linking cooperative behaviors and marital happiness clearly demonstrates the need for further study in this area.

Problem Solving

Tallman and Hsiao (2004) found cooperation to be essential in the resolution of interpersonal marital problems in a study of problem solving in early marriage. Using data from a sample of newlywed couples, these researchers used structural equation modeling methods to test a model stipulating marital satisfaction and trust as antecedent conditions leading to cooperative problem solving. This model is logical when considered in the light of the development of social interest in individuals and the link to cooperative behaviors in marriage.

Interactional Behaviors That Maintain Relationships

Over the past several years, researchers have identified interactional behaviors couples use to maintain their relationships (Baxter & Dindia, 1990, Dainton & Stafford, 1993, Stafford & Canary, 1991, Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 1999a). The most positive of these behaviors could be considered cooperative in nature. Although scholars disagree on basic assumptions and definitions regarding behaviors that maintain relationships, most agree on the particular kinds of behaviors that function to preserve ongoing relationships.
Canary and Stafford (1992, 1994) proposed a model of relational maintenance rooted in everyday behavioral strategies that both sustain a relationship and lead to greater satisfaction, commitment, and love. These maintenance behaviors cover five dimensions: (a) positivity, (b) openness, (c) assurances, (d) networks, and (e) sharing tasks. The constructs fall within the dimension of social interest and cooperation as proposed by the previous discussion of Adlerian theory. These researchers set out to confirm Canary and Stafford’s (1992) proposition that these behaviors affect the very nature of the relationship.

Most of the research on maintenance behaviors has been cross-sectional. Weigel and Ballard-Reisch (2001, 1999a, b, c) studied the use of relationship maintenance behaviors in marriages of varying durations and most recently conducted a longitudinal study that spanned a one-year period. They found that the reported frequency of use of relational maintenance behaviors at Time 1 would be positively related to perceptions of marital satisfaction at Time 2. Using a canonical correlation, 69% of the variance in marital satisfaction at Time 2 could be explained by wife and husband relational maintenance behaviors. Although correlational research cannot support claims of causation in nature, these results seem to support the robustness of maintenance (or cooperative type) behaviors (Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2001) as a predictor of marital satisfaction. These researchers call for further studies on the relationship between these constructs that would separate out or control for extraneous variation occurring over the longer time span.

In review, Tallman and Hsiao (2004) found cooperation to be essential in resolution of marital problems. These researchers developed a model stipulating marital satisfaction and trust as conditions that must be present for cooperative problem solving to occur. Weigel and Ballard-Reisch (1999a) identified interactional behaviors couples use to maintain their relationships. The most positive of these behaviors are cooperative in nature. Using a measure developed by Canary and Stafford (1992, 1994), these research-
ers examined positivity, openness, assurances, networks, and sharing tasks. This one-year longitudinal study examined the relationship between the constructs at the beginning of the year and the end of the year. They found a strong correlation indicating that variance in marital satisfaction at Time 2 could be explained by social interactional behaviors at Time 1. It is clear that more research is needed to see whether cooperative behaviors relate positively to marital happiness, and if this holds up over time.

**Review of Marital Happiness Literature**

In this section, the following topics will be reviewed: (a) the myth of the U-shaped trend of marital happiness, (b) trends in marital research in the twentieth century, and (c) the link between cooperative behaviors in spousal interaction and marital happiness. The U-shaped trend will be discussed because it has been commonly accepted in psychological literature and explained by developmental changes in family structure. The link between the cooperative behaviors in spousal interaction and marital happiness will be explored because of the interesting feedback loop discovered.

**The U-shaped Trend**

There have been many explanations for developmental change in marital happiness. One of the most widely used conceptual models explains the U-shaped trend in marital happiness based on changes in family roles and structures (Aldous, 1978; Duvall, 1977; Hill & Mattesessich, 1979; Rodgers, 1964; VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001). These studies propose that different stages of married life, such as adding and subtracting children, transitions into or out of the workforce, and retirement, pose differing amounts of stress on the marriage. Social-psychological explanations for the early decline in marital happiness address interactional processes and initial high expectations
(VanLaningham et al.), particularly in Western culture where the romantic ideal of “happily ever after” is perpetuated. Young couples marry full of high expectations that marriage will be a perpetual source of personal fulfillment and self-actualization, an impossible expectation. Other scholars explain the link between marital duration and marital happiness via period effects (Conger & Elder, 1994, Voydanoff, 1988). These researchers attribute changes in marital happiness not to intrinsic processes, but to extrinsic factors from the larger social or economic environment, for example, in entire cohorts that have been affected by recession, or the erosion of men’s real wages since 1973 (VanLaningham et al.). Shrinking wages demand longer work hours or multiple jobs, creating additional stress on the marriage and in theory, affecting marital happiness.

VanLaningham et al. (2001) investigated the U-shaped curve of marital happiness using data from a national, 17-year, 5-wave panel sample. Marital happiness was measured with an 11-item summated scale reporting participants’ perceptions of happiness toward various aspects of the marital relationship (e.g., amount of understanding received, amount of love and affection received, agreement about things, sexual relationship, etc.). Marital duration, a continuous variable, was measured by the number of years the participants were married at the time of interview. This study provided evidence that the U-shaped curve is an artifact of cross-sectional research, and is not typical of U. S. marriages (VanLaningham et al.). In fact, using a fixed-effects pooled time-series model on the multiple wave panel data, the researchers found that marital happiness either declines at all marital durations, or flattens after a long period of decline.

The relatively rapid decline of marital happiness in the early years of marriage is consistent with social-psychological perspectives of intrinsic change as couples negotiate the responsibilities of married life (VanLaningham et al., 2001). At this time, couples must develop cooperation to achieve relational goals. Individuals with high expectations are more likely to experience disappointment (Booth, 1999; Glenn, 1996; Huston &
Houts, 1998) and experience more conflict over family resources and time. VanLaningham et al. (2001) stated that most researchers approaching marriage from social-psychological perspectives have not extended their predictions beyond the early years of marriage.

_Trends in Marital Research_

Gottman and Notarius (2002) reviewed marital research in the 20th Century and presented recommendations for future research. They pointed out that early research on personality and marital happiness found the importance of each partner’s perception on marital satisfaction. In the 1950s, the focus of research changed from personality-based to an interactional perspective. Researchers observed dysfunctional interaction patterns and focused more on process. This observational research on interactions led investigators to the importance of affect in understanding marital function (Gottman, 1979). Greenberg and Johnson (1988) developed emotionally-focused marital therapy as a result. These researchers found links between negative affect and marital unhappiness while softening attempts like humor were viewed as reparative to relationships. Positive affect during marital conflict was reported by Gottman, Coan, Swanson, and Carrere (1998) as the only predictor of both marital stability and marital satisfaction six years into the marriage. Investigators branched into the effect of other areas like health, illness, and longevity on the quality of close relationships and found emotional qualities to be predictors of happiness. However, Gottman and Notarius pointed out that the emphasis of marital research remained cognitive, not affective. They called for a determined focus on interactional process in marital research and proposed observational research both to describe and build theories of family system mechanisms. The current study, while not observational, studied twenty years of interaction and how this related to marital happiness from an already existing theoretical orientation.
Cooperative Interaction and Marital Happiness

White (1983) established the presence of an internal feedback loop between interaction and marital happiness. Interaction was described as cooperative or collaborative type behaviors and was measured through a list of five cooperative activities: (a) eating main meal together, (b) shopping together, (c) visiting friends together, (d) going out in the evening, and (e) working around the house together. The same summated scale discussed in VanLaningham, Johnson, and Amato’s study above measured marital happiness.

Based on the earlier work of Lewis and Spanier (1979; Spanier & Lewis, 1980), White (1983) included marital happiness as well as structural factors (e.g., job involvement, presence of children, sex-role measures, and socioeconomic status). Structural factors, like husbands’ and wives’ work irregularities were found to have a negative effect on marital interaction (small effect). Presence of children was also significantly negatively correlated with spousal interaction (moderate effect). Gender roles did not correlate significantly with interaction, but traditional division of housework did (moderate effect). These findings suggest that increased cooperation regarding issues of work schedules, childcare, and chores around the house would lead to increased marital happiness. Likewise, increased conflict over who does what would lead to decreased marital happiness. Cooperation over distribution of household chores was the strongest predictor of marital interaction, followed by number of children (both with medium effects, $R^2 = .070$).

White (1983) pointed out how little of the variance in interaction is explained by these variables: 6% for Whites and a maximum of 22% among Hispanics. This led White to conclude that the structural variables explored, while significantly related to interaction, are not the major determinants of spousal interaction. She goes on to posit that marital happiness may be the missing factor that would explain the other 80% - 95% of
the variance in spousal interaction. White explained that as suggested by the theoretical literature, there is a positive correlation between interaction and marital satisfaction (large effect, $R^2 = .24$).

Using two-stage least-squares analysis, White attempted to establish the relative strength of two paths: interaction to marital happiness, and marital happiness to interaction. Following the work of Spanier and Lewis (1980; Lewis & Spanier, 1979) White included the following determinants of marital happiness in her model: (a) role conflict, (b) communication effectiveness, (c) positive regard for spouse, (d) egalitarianism, (e) number of children, (f) income, (g) education, and (h) amount of interaction. While the focus of the analysis was on the inter-relationship between interaction and happiness, the model behaved as expected and all the variables of the Spanier-Lewis model except education, number of children, and egalitarianism had statistically significant relationships to marital happiness (with small effects, except for communication, which had a medium effect). Considering the recursive paths of interaction and happiness, both plausible paths were supported. From marital happiness to interaction there was a medium effect while the reciprocal yielded a small effect. For each race/ethnic group, White reported the path from interaction to happiness is substantially weaker than the path from happiness to interaction. It is not surprising that there probably exists a feedback loop between cooperative behaviors and marital happiness. Counselors can take advantage of such a reciprocal relationship to encourage greater cooperation to increase happiness and use feelings of happiness to encourage greater cooperation.

In sum, there have been many explanations for developmental change in marital happiness. VanLaningham et al. (2001) debunked the myth of the U-shaped trend of marital happiness, demonstrating it to be an artifact of cross-sectional data. There is indeed a rapid decline in marital happiness in the early years as social-psychological perspectives suggest. At this time, couples must develop cooperation to achieve relational
goals, or disappointment occurs and couples become more competitive and conflicted over time. Interaction has been linked to marital dysfunction and happiness. Cooperative behaviors exhibited through interaction affects marital happiness, but even more strongly marital happiness affects interaction. Counselors working with couples need to know of this feedback loop and take advantage of it to increase cooperative behaviors and happiness. Most psychological research has not gone beyond the early years to look at marriage longitudinally, therefore the effects of cooperative behaviors on marital happiness over time are not known.

Summary of Review of Literature
This review of literature was assembled to provide a better understanding of the development of social interest, how it is exhibited through cooperation, how lack of it results in conflict, and how these constructs relate to marital happiness. The construct of social interest emerged from Adler’s holistic view of human nature. Humans are born with a need to belong, and if developed properly this sense of being part of a greater whole leads to stronger families, communities, and societies. Through theory and previous research, the proposition was presented that social interest is manifested in marital relationships through interactions like cooperation or conflict. Cooperation and conflict are methods of coping learned during childhood and are guided by rules of sibling strife. Implications were drawn from previous studies that further research is needed regarding the link between social interest and marital happiness, specifically, how interactions like cooperation and conflict relate over time to happiness over time.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research design, participants, instrumentation and variable composition, procedures, and data analysis that were utilized in the study.

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between cooperation and conflict and perceived level of marital happiness as indicators of social interest. This study took a causal-comparative or ex post facto approach. This form of associational research attempts to determine the cause or consequences of differences that already exist among individuals (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). As with all correlational research, relationships can be identified, but causation cannot be fully established. The variables under consideration resulted from the summated values of the Likert-type scaled questions contributing to each variable and were treated as interval level data. It is important to note that the questions asked for participants’ perception of the items so the answers, while numeric, were subjective. This study used an already existing data base.

Participants

This study was derived from the longitudinal Marital Instability over the Life Course Project funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services and the National Institute on Aging that began in 1980. The principal investigators for this project
were Alan Booth, David Johnson, Paul Amato, and Stacy Rogers. To examine the causes of marital instability throughout the life course, data from married individuals who were between the ages of 18 and 55 in 1980 were collected in six waves between 1980 and 2000.

The population sampled was all husbands and wives in households in the contiguous United States. Both spouses had to be present, under the age of 55, and had to have access to a telephone. The sample was a national probability sample selected using a random-digit dialing technique. Groves and Kahn (1979) proposed a clustering technique that was used in this sample to reduce selection costs. There was sufficient geographic dispersion so that it was not necessary to create a design effect requiring attention in the analysis of the data. If more than one couple lived in the household, an additional random procedure was used to select the participants. Refusal rates were higher in metropolitan areas (63% of the sample was from metropolitan statistical areas as compared to 74% of the general population) so data were weighted to adjust for under-representation in these areas.

The respondents were between the ages of 17 and 55 years of age at the time of the initial telephone interview in 1980. The initial sample size was 2,034; however, in 1983 it was discovered that one of the initial respondents had not been married in 1980, so that case was eliminated from the data set, comprising a 65% completion rate for eligible households. After ten callbacks, 17% of targeted telephone numbers could not be contacted. With respect to age, race, household size, presence of children, housing tenure, and region, the individuals in the original sample were found to be representative of the population of the United States as compared to estimates made by the U.S. Census Bureau.

In 1983, 78% of the participants, or 1,592 respondents, were re-interviewed. In 1988, 66% of the original sample, or 1,341 respondents, were re-interviewed. The 1992
wave included 58%, or 1,188 respondents, and 52%, or 1,047 respondents, in 1997, and 37%, or 762 respondents, still participated in 2000. Due to sample attrition, later waves were slightly less representative with respect to African Americans, Hispanics, younger respondents, renters, and those without a college education.

Adult offspring (19 years of age or older) of the primary respondents were interviewed in 1992, 1997, and 2000. The majority of these participants (92%) were White, 51% were women, and 52% had children of their own. In 2000, the median age for offspring was 32 and the median duration of marriage of offspring (for those currently married) was 7 years. Eighty-seven percent of parents with eligible children provided names and telephone numbers for their children, 88% of whom were interviewed. When parents had more than one eligible child, a random procedure was used to select the child included in the study. Offspring who were interviewed for the first time in 1992 were re-interviewed in 1997 and 2000, while those interviewed for the first time in 1997 were re-interviewed in 2000. A total of 691 adult offspring were interviewed at least once.

The 1983 wave was to link changes in factors such as economic resources, wife’s employment, children, marital satisfaction, life goals, and health to intentions to dissolve the marriage. Wave three, gathered in 1988, further investigated the impact of changes in employment, finances, and health on marital relationships. Questions were asked about divorce and remarriage, care of aging parents and dependent offspring, financial assets, aging, and physical and mental health. In 1992, Wave four data investigated changes in employment, economic status, and health. Questions were included about retirement issues, family structure, and the impact of caring for aging parents and dependent offspring. The new questions in each wave were added to the basic questions asked in 1980, so the variables considered for this study were continuous throughout.

The data gathered in 1992 and 1994 from adult offspring allowed the investigators to explore the importance of childhood experiences on developmental transitions to
adulthood and parallel perceptions of children and parents. A second sample of adult offspring contributed to the fifth wave of data (N = 202) along with second interviews of offspring selected in 1992 (N = 606). Wave five also investigated the relationship between marital quality and stability and how it related to marital quality in later life.

In 2000, the researchers replicated the original 1980 cross-section study of individuals between the ages of 19 and 55 who were currently married. Data were collected from the adult panel and a panel of their offspring who participated in 1992 or 1997, concomitantly with a comparison sample of persons between 39 and 75 years old who were married in 1980. In Wave six, changes in marital quality between 1980 and 2000 were discovered, and factors were identified that might have contributed to these changes. The investigators looked for the impact of these factors on the health and longevity of older persons. Additional questions in Wave six covered whether the participant thought he or she had an organized lifestyle, used alcohol or tobacco, experienced health problems or physical limitations, and level of concern expressed for and received from spouse.

Instrumentation and Variable Composition

Marital Instability over the Life Course Project (United States)

The Booth, Johnson, Amato, and Rogers (2003) study spanned 20 years beginning in 1980 and ending in 2000, with follow-up waves in 1983, 1988, 1992-1994, 1997. The first wave of the project focused on the effects of wives’ participation in the labor force on marriage and marital instability. Measures were developed to predict marital instability and divorce and to measure marital quality. A great deal of data was collected creating variables regarding almost every aspect of the couples’ lives, including income, commit-
ment to work, occupational status, religiosity, etc. This study examined three primary variables from this database: (a) marital happiness, (b) cooperation (measured by spousal interaction), and (c) conflict (measured by spousal disagreement). The initial analysis was performed on the 1980 wave, and since it was statistically significant, the analysis was performed on all five subsequent waves.

**Variable Composition**

Demographic variables in all six waves included age, sex, educational level, marital status and history, number of children, and income level. Variables around perception in all six waves included attitude toward divorce, perceived marital happiness, cooperative behaviors demonstrated through interactions, competitive behaviors resulting in disagreements, and attitudes toward work and childcare.

Variables controlled for in this study were sex, age, education, and family income as an indicator of socioeconomic status. Sex was coded 1 for Male and 2 for Female. Age was coded by number of years. Education was coded by number of years in school. Family income was coded initially as $20,000 or more (1) or less than $20,000 (2). If family income was less than $20,000, it was coded as follows: 1 – Under $5000, 2 - $5000 - $9999, 3 - $10,000 - $14,999, 4 - $15,000 - $19,999. If family income was more than $20,000 it was coded as follows: 1 - $20,000 - $24,999, 2 - $25,000 - $29,999, 3 - $30,000 - $39,999, 4 - $40,000 - $49,999, 5 - $50,000-$59,999, 6 - $60,000 or more. Individuals who said their income was less than $20,000 but would not specify further were assigned the value of $12,500. Individuals indicating incomes of $20,000 or above who did not specify further were assigned the value of $27,500. The midpoint of each interval listed in the question was used to assign dollar value. For the last interval, $65,000 was used.
Primary variables under consideration for this study were marital happiness, cooperation, and conflict. The marital happiness measure was coded marital happiness. However, the measures for cooperation and conflict were coded spousal interaction and spousal disagreement. The description of these variables follows.

**Marital Happiness**

Marital happiness measured the positive aspect of marital quality based upon perceived individual feelings. The marital happiness scale (coded MARHAP1-MARHAP6 in database) comprised 10 Likert-type scale items. The first seven were on a five-point scale, each scored from 0 (least happy) to 4 (most happy). The last three items were scored on a three-point scale of very happy, pretty happy, and not too happy. The items reflecting the amount of happiness were: (a) extent of understanding received from spouse; (b) amount of love received; (c) sexual relationship; (d) spouse as someone who takes care of things around the house; (e) spouse as someone to do things with; (f) spouse’s faithfulness; (g) evaluation of marriage or relationship as very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy; (h) compared to other marriages or relationships, respondent’s is better, same, or not as good; (i) comparing the marriage or relationship to three years ago, it is getting better, staying the same, or getting worse; and (j) strength of feelings of love the respondent has for spouse or partner. Higher scores on this scale indicated greater perceived marital happiness.

Reliability coefficients were computed for the marital happiness scale. Cronbach’s alpha for the marital happiness scale for the 1980 wave was .86, \((M = 26.2, SD = 3.8)\). For the 1983 and 1988 waves, Cronbach’s alpha was .87 \((M = 25.6, S.D. = 4.0)\) and 1.0 \((M = 26.6, S.D. = 2.6)\) respectively. Cronbach’s alpha for the 1992 wave was 1.0 \((M = 25.5, S.D. = 4.1)\). For 1997 and 2000 respective Cronbach’s alphas were
.88 (M = 25.7, S.D. = 3.9) and .90 (M = 26.6, S.D. = 4.0). The range of the coefficients (.86-1.0) demonstrated a fairly reliable and consistent measure.

Cooperation

The level of cooperation experienced by the respondents was measured by the spousal interaction scale. This is a summated scale having five items: (a) eat main meal together; (b) go shopping together; (c) visit friends together; (d) work around home together; and (e) go out together. The scale had possible values from 5 to 20, indicating a possible score on each individual item from 1 to 4. Higher scores indicated greater interaction and therefore greater cooperation. Scores from the 1997 wave demonstrated a marked difference from other waves by about two standard deviations. No explanation was found to address this discrepancy. Booth et al measured internal consistency by Cronbach’s alpha and yielded scores are recorded in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Reliability of Cooperation Scale Measured by Cronbach’s Alpha across Waves

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<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s Alpha</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.68</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>15.80</td>
<td>15.30</td>
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<td>14.79</td>
<td>9.92</td>
<td>15.43</td>
<td>14.84</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Conflict

The spousal disagreement scale was used to approximate the amount of conflict between spouses. This summated scale used four items: (a) disagreements over share of housework done by respondent; (b) frequency of disagreements with spouse; (c) number of serious quarrels with spouse within the last two months; and (d) arguments involving physical abuse. Scale values ranged from 0 to 12. Higher scores indicated higher levels of disagreement and increased conflict. While other measures from the marital problems scale, such as whether a spouse was domineering, demonstrate conflict type behaviors, the outcome of the spousal disagreement scale seemed to best fit the construct of conflict that flows from the social interest model. Disagreement may result from spousal conflict over such issues as family resources, time, child care, or family labor.

Internal reliability as measured by Cronbach’s alpha and reported by Booth et al is demonstrated below (see Table 2). Internal consistency was lowest for this summated measure. As the scale was designed, it was not going to yield very reliable scores. Two of the questions were designed to be answered yes/no, and the other two were a Likert-type scale and an absolute number of serious quarrels. This was a limitation of using an already existing data set. There were no questions that fit the construct of conflict better and by combining the questions into one scale, the regression can account for more variance. Since low reliability caused more error variance, it was harder to detect a relationship. Again, the 1997 wave yielded remarkably different scores, more than two standard deviations at times, with no explanation for the marked difference.
Table 3.2 Reliability of Conflict Scale Measured by Cronbach’s Alpha across Waves

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s Alpha</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>7.46</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>2.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>1.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procedure

The Mississippi State University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) has approved the use of this data to continue marital quality research that I previously completed. In 2003, qualitative research was completed on seven couples to discover emerging themes about marital quality. IRB approval was obtained to complete that research. When I became aware of this data set available from the Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), an addendum was requested from IRB to include this data set to further research marital quality using a national sample. Due to the commonalities discovered in earlier research, the variables examined in this data set, and Adlerian constructs, I decided to use this research to explore the relationship between cooperation, conflict, and perceived level of marital happiness using this existing database.
Hypotheses

There were several hypotheses for this study. They were as follows:

1. In the first wave of data, from 1980, it was hypothesized that cooperative type behaviors will relate positively to marital happiness.

2. In the same 1980 wave, it was hypothesized that conflict type behaviors will relate negatively to marital happiness.

3. If hypothesis one was empirically supported, it was hypothesized that cooperative behaviors will relate positively to marital happiness over time (over the 20 years covered by the next five waves, 1983, 1988, 1992-1994, 1997, and 2000).

4. If hypothesis two was empirically supported, it was hypothesized that conflict type behaviors will relate negatively to marital happiness over time (over the 20 years covered by the next five waves, 1983, 1988, 1992-1994, 1997, and 2000).

5. It was hypothesized that there would be no difference in the level of cooperative behaviors and conflict behaviors between the participants in the 1980 wave who did not participate further and the 1983 wave.

Data Analysis

Data collected in 1980 were used to run hierarchical regression analysis, a correlational design on the sum of the indicators for cooperative behaviors and conflict behaviors with marital happiness to establish a baseline. The control variables were regressed against marital happiness first to identify the amount of variance accounted for by each of these. Then, controlling for this variance, the measures for spousal interaction demonstrating cooperative behaviors, and spousal disagreement, representing conflict behaviors, were regressed against marital happiness to determine if the regression coefficients were
significantly different from zero. Because the proposed model demonstrated a statistically significant relationship, the researcher proceeded to look at the variables longitudinally. Due to the unique data set available, the model could be tested over a 20-year period to see if it was consistent over time. Would the relationships between these variables persist or change? This comparison over time would make a stronger case that these behaviors may influence marital happiness. In addition, the researcher censored attrition on these variables. The cases that disappeared from the sample between the 1980 and 1983 waves were compared to determine if these factors were different for those that divorced or dropped out for other reasons, and those that remained married and chose to continue to participate.

A discussion of the analysis for this study must address how the researcher would define the relationship as present or noteworthy. While previous research has been done on the relationship between the interaction variable used to describe cooperation and marital happiness, and conflict and marital satisfaction, no research has considered the predicted inverse relationship as proposed by this study. Due to the initially large sample size, statistical significance could be found. Therefore it was important to determine what strength of association would be enough to indicate that this is a meaningful study to pursue. In other words, what power could be expected?

A way to consider what could be expected in this study was to look at previous research in the area. Using this same database, White (1983) found 26% of the variance in marital happiness was explained by the inter-relationship with interaction. However, the direct path from interaction to marital happiness was weaker, explaining 13% of the variation. Rogers (1999) found that an increase in wife’s income was related to level of marital discord in 1988 \((\beta = .20)\). In these, like many studies, \(R^2\) values are low.

In another 1997 study, Rogers and Amato researched the relationship between marital interaction, marital conflict (two of the variables under consideration for the
present study) and marital problems. Even though the $R^2$ values for the equations were low, Rogers and Amato felt the effect size was a better indicator as it expressed the adjusted difference between groups in standard deviation units. They cited Glenn and Shelton’s (1983) argument that an effect size of one-tenth of a standard deviation is large enough to be considered non-trivial in survey research. Rogers and Amato found effect sizes, or what appear to be standardized regression coefficients, were .17 for marital interaction, .29 for marital conflict, and .26 for marital problems. Again, when comparing two of these cohorts on marital discord, Rogers and Amato (2000) found a statistically significant relationship, but low $R^2$. However, they interpreted the effect size, or what appears to be the standardized regression coefficient, as strong enough to be important (.18). Thus, for this same database, statistical significance has been demonstrated in differing types of studies with repeated low $R^2$.

Effect sizes above .10 were considered important for survey research and provide a meaningful threshold for the present study. Therefore, if standardized regression coefficients $\geq |.10|$, they would be considered noteworthy. With an alpha level of .05, power in the first wave should approximate .94. This gives us a good probability that the test would yield statistically significant results given effects of this magnitude in the population. However, it was expected that the least power would probably be found in the last wave.

In the last wave, only 450 offspring were married, and therefore suitable for this analysis. Hence, a power analysis was computed on this last wave. Based on a sample size of 450, alpha = .05, and anticipated effect size of .10, power to detect a significant relationship drops dramatically to .68. If the alpha level was lowered to decrease the probability of a Type I error, the power would drop also and increase the risk of failing to detect a true significant effect. Previous research using this longitudinal database has uncovered a cohort effect in the 1988 wave. This effect has been explained by the eco-
nomic recession during the 1980s. This wave may yield an effect size lower than other waves due to external forces and may not reach the effect size needed to appear meaningful.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter contains a description of the results of the data analysis used to evaluate the hypotheses established in the previous chapters. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between cooperation and conflict and perceived level of marital happiness. A causal-comparative approach was taken to determine the influence of the independent variables of cooperation and conflict on the dependent variable of marital happiness while controlling for the sociodemographic variables of (a) sex, (b) age, (c) education, and (d) family income (as an indicator of socio-economic status (SES)). The .05 alpha level was chosen for all tests of significance. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to examine the data and answer the research questions. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Pearson product-moment correlations were used to measure (a) whether there is a linear relationship between the variables, (b) the strength and direction of the relationship between cooperation and marital happiness, and (c) conflict and marital happiness while controlling for the sociodemographic variables.

Preliminary Analyses

Data Screening

Before performing any analyses, the data were screened for accuracy and relevance through frequency tables and histograms to find improbable scores or missing data. Cases
with missing data were scanned individually to look for similarities between cases. Data were considered to be missing completely at random as no pattern was observed. Because of the information that would be lost if listwise deletion were implemented, methods were chosen to save as much data as possible. In the first wave of data, if an individual case was complete in the demographic variables except for one missing data point, the mean of the entire sample was used to replace that data point. In subsequent waves, the individual case was compared with the previous wave before using the mean. For example, if age was left out in the second wave, the case was checked in the first wave to see if the information was there, if not, the procedure continued. When looking at the independent and dependent variables, if a participant had answered over half of the questions for a particular summated variable, the mean answer was taken from the participant’s other answers and placed in the missing cells. This preserved the data that was collected for this study, but did not significantly change the scores reported by that one respondent by imputing 1 to 3 missing points. If the participant answered less than half of the questions on any variable under consideration, the case was excluded from analysis. Due to the nature of the variables, no outliers were discovered. The only items discovered were coding errors in which a value was duplicated in a cell (e.g., 22 for 2 when coding sex). These few coding errors were corrected.

Normality

Normality of the distributions was examined. There was a problem with skewness for the 1980 family income indicator and kurtosis for sex, age, and income. If the skewness was corrected, the kurtosis became a problem and vice versa. Every transformation attempted failed to normalize the distributions. The distribution problem followed through the subsequent waves. The marital happiness variable was negatively skewed.
with more of the sums clustering toward the upper end of the scale rather than the lower
(skewness = -1.56, kurtosis = 2.45). The conflict scale was just the opposite with more of
the scores clustering toward the lower end (skewness = 1.04, kurtosis = 1.56). These
distributions were logical since these are summated variables based upon self-reported
happiness or conflict using Likert-type scales. Transformations were attempted to nor-
malize these distributions, but none worked satisfactorily. The data set was examined and
there were no notable outliers.

Comparing Dependent Variable Scores across Demographic Variables

Scores were examined across gender groups to determine whether gender limited
scores on the variables of interest. Independent samples t-tests were run on 821 males and
1212 females for the variables of conflict, cooperation and marital happiness. There was
no mean difference for sex of respondent for conflict ($t_{(2031)} = -.851, p = .395$) or coop-
eration ($t_{(2031)} = 1.95, p = .051$) because the $p$ value was larger than the established alpha
level of .05. However, for marital happiness, the sex of respondent could influence scores
($t_{(2031)} = 4.60, p < .001$). To consider this finding further, the means and standard devia-
tions were compared (Males $M = 26.65$, $SD = 3.41$, $SE = .119$, Females $M = 25.87$, $SD =$
$3.96$, $SE = .11$) and the effect size $r$ computed ($r = .10$). This is considered a small effect
size. The effect size $r$ is the unstandardized correlation coefficient for sex and marital
happiness ($r_{\Delta} = \sqrt{r^2/(r^2 + df)}$). The predetermined measure of practical significance is a
standardized regression coefficient of $|0.10|$. Therefore even though scores between males
and females for marital happiness were statistically significantly different on marital
happiness, the effect size of the difference was considered too small to be greatly influen-
tial on overall outcomes.

To determine whether age, education or family income predicted scores on coop-
eration, conflict, or marital happiness, the criterion variables were regressed indepen-
dently on each demographic variable. Age accounted for 3.6% of the variance \((F(3,2032) = 25.2, \, SE = 9.1, \, p < .001, \, R^2 = .03)\) in the model and reached statistical significance, but not practical significance which was previously established as a standardized regression coefficient greater than or equal to |.10|. Age could play an important role and will be considered further. Education and family income explained less than 1% (.008, .003 respectively) of the variance \((F(3,2032) = 5.5, \, SE = 2.6, \, p = .001, \, R^2 < .01)\). While education was statistically significant, the amount of variance explained was not deemed practically significant.

**Homogeneity of Variance**

Homogeneity of variance was checked by visual examination of plots of the standardized residuals (the errors) by the regression standardized predicted value. Across all waves no heteroscedasticity was observed in the control variables. However, when the variables for cooperation and conflict were added to the model heteroscedasticity was observed for all waves. A classic funnel shape was observed in the 1983 wave indicating the variance of errors differs at different values of the independent variable. Residuals in the other waves were more dispersed creating more of a general fan shape, but still not evenly dispersed around the line. This was not totally unexpected as I had anticipated a connection between cooperation and marital happiness. However, this does reduce the robustness of the regression.

**Analyzing Intercorrelations**

A test of the multiple linear regression computed from the 1980 wave was evaluated to see if the multiple correlation between marital happiness and the independent variables was in fact zero in the population. This would demonstrate if the variables are
in reality linearly independent of each other. The ANOVA yielded an $F (6,2032) = 185.31, p < .001, R^2 = .35$. Therefore I rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that the variables are not linearly independent of one another overall. In other words, there is a linear relationship between the variables. Collinearity diagnostics were investigated to explore the strength of the linear relationships, and were found to demonstrate relatively small eigenvalues (ranging from .007 to .245). The residuals were inspected through normal P-P plots and demonstrated good formation, and the descriptive measures of skewness (-.70) and kurtosis (.79) fell between plus or minus one. However, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov $Z$ test of normality indicated the residuals were not normally distributed. This was expected since normality was not found earlier in the preliminary analyses.

Descriptive Statistics

Two thousand thirty three married participants between the ages of 17 and 55 ($M = 35.46$, $SD = 9.25$) in 1980 were involved in the first wave of this study. There were 821 male and 1212 female respondents. Education ranged between zero years reported by one respondent and 26 years reported by another. The zero was recoded as 1 so the statistical package would include the case, but it did not make a difference in the regression outcome. The mean and median for education were close together (13.43 and 13.00, respectively) while the mode was 12. The mean for family income was $27,470 ($SD = $13,098) with a fairly normal distribution. Individuals reporting incomes of $65,000 or greater represented 6.4% of the respondents, while those reporting $7,500 or less represented 4.2%.
Hierarchical Analysis

Data collected in 1980 were used to run hierarchical regression analysis, a correlational design on the sum of the indicators for cooperative behaviors and conflict behaviors with marital happiness to establish a baseline. Marital happiness was regressed against the control variables first to identify the amount of variance accounted for by each of these. Then, controlling for this variance, the measures for cooperative behaviors and conflict behaviors were added to the model to determine if the regression coefficients are significantly different from zero.

In the first step, the control variables of family income, sex, age and education accounted for a small amount of the variance in marital happiness ($R^2 = .016$, $F(4,2032) = 8.46$, $p < .001$). Although the first model utilizing only the control variables reached statistical significance, it was not deemed practically significant as the adjusted $R^2$ did not reach the effect size of $.10$ previously determined. In the second step, the predictor variables of cooperation and conflict were included in the regression along with the control variables ($R^2 = .354$, $F(6,2032) = 185.30$, $p < .001$). Cooperation and conflict explained a significant amount of additional variance after controlling for the variance explained by income, sex, age, and education ($R^2$ change = .338 ~ 34%). This increase in R-squared was found to be statistically significant ($F(2,2032) = 530.11$, $p < .001$).

The first hypothesis proposed that in the 1980 data cooperative behavior related positively to marital happiness. This hypothesis was supported ($t = 19.20$, $p = .000$, Beta = .35). Empirically, this demonstrates that cooperative behaviors were statistically significantly related to marital happiness and strengthens the argument that the development of social interest is of primary importance. Next, conflict was tested through the correlation of the conflict scale and the marital happiness scale. The research hypothesis stated that in the same 1980 wave, conflict type behaviors would relate negatively to marital
happiness. This hypothesis was also supported at any reasonable level of significance ($t = -19.99, p = .000, \beta = -.38$), as demonstrated in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Regression Analysis Summary for Predictors of Marital Happiness (1980)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unstandardized Regression Coefficient</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Standardized Regression Coefficient</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>22.77</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td></td>
<td>32.19</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>19.20</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>-.62</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.39</td>
<td>-19.99</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>-.627</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-4.50</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-5.47</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note N = 2033*

After controlling for sex, age, education and family income, 34% of variance in marital happiness was explained by the predictor variables in this model as exhibited through the change in $R^2$ (Model 1 $R^2 = .016$, $SEE = 3.73$, Model 2 $R^2 = .354$, $SEE = 3.03$). Of the control variables, only sex and age demonstrated a statistically significant correlation to marital happiness ($t = -4.50, p = .000$, for sex, and $t = -5.47, p = .000$, for age). The relationship between sex and marital happiness was not considered powerful enough to be important, however, the standardized regression coefficient for age at $.10$ was considered worthy of note and further consideration.

After finding statistically significant relationships that empirically supported hypotheses one and two, further analyses were conducted to explore the following three hypotheses. It was hypothesized that cooperative type behaviors related positively to
marital happiness over time (over the 20 years covered by the next five waves, 1983, 1988, 1992-1994, 1997, and 2000). It was further hypothesized that conflict type behaviors related negatively to marital happiness over the same period of time. It was also hypothesized that there would be no difference in the level of cooperative type behaviors and conflict type behaviors between the participants in the 1980 wave that did not participate further and the 1983 wave.

In the 1983 wave of data there were 593 male and 890 female respondents, creating a total sample of 1483. The mean age demonstrated a logical increase ($M = 38.99, SD = 9.15$), while the mean of years of schooling changed only slightly ($M = 13.75, SD = 2.68$). The greatest change in demographic description of this group of respondents was the increase in family income ($M = 34,352, SD = 15,387$). This also made sense with the aging of the sample, the increase in earning potential and inflation.

Testing the overall regression on the 1983 wave of data, marital happiness was evaluated to see if it was linearly independent of the control variables of sex, age, education and family income. The ANOVA demonstrated a similar linear relationship found between the variables in 1980 ($F(6,1482) = 92.12, p < .001$). The data yielded the same type of P-P clusters (i.e., good formation), but the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z indicated the distribution was still not normal. Utilizing the hierarchical regression sequence the same two steps were followed. First the control variables of sex, age, education and family income were put in, then the two scores of cooperation and conflict were added. Cooperative type behaviors were statistically significantly related to marital happiness in 1983 ($t = 20.34, p < .001, Beta = .46$). Conflict type behaviors were again demonstrated to be negatively related to marital happiness with statistical significance ($t = -7.62, p < .001, Beta = -.17$). Family income demonstrated a statistically significant relationship to marital happiness ($t = 2.03, p = .04$) but did not demonstrate a strong enough relationship to be practically significant ($Beta = .05$). Difference in $R^2$ for this wave between the control variable model and the all-inclusive model indicated 26% of
variance was accounted for by the predictor variables. The explained variation from model 1 using only the control variables was less than 1% (Model 1 $R^2 = .009$, $SEE = 3.94$, $F(4,1482) = 4.20$, $p = .002$), while the model that added cooperation and conflict scores was 27% (Model 2 $R^2 = .269$, $SEE = 3.81$, $F(6,1482) = 92.12$, $p < .001$). This increase in R-squared was found to be statistically significant ($F(2,1482) = 262.52$, $p < .001$). In this wave, age was no longer of note statistically as indicated in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2 Regression Analysis Summary for Predictors of Marital Happiness (1983)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unstandardized Regression Coefficient</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Standardized Regression Coefficient</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>16.91</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>19.56</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>20.34</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-7.62</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>-.39</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-2.13</td>
<td>.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-1.10</td>
<td>.271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>.043</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note $N = 1482$

In 1988, there were 471 male and 745 female respondents for a total sample size of 1216. Education for this wave had increased slightly ($M = 13.92$, $SD = 2.72$). Family income had increased overall by about $8,000 from 1983 ($M = 42,530$, $SD = 15,578$). There still existed the linear relationship between the variables as exhibited in previous waves ($F(6,1215) = 29.09$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .12$), and the same problem existed with the distribution of the data set. Cooperative type behaviors were found to be statistically
significantly related to marital happiness \((t = 7.16, p < .001, \text{Beta} = .20)\). Conflict type behaviors demonstrated a statistically significant negative relationship \((t = -8.97, p < .001, \text{Beta} = -.25)\). Hierarchical regression yielded a change in \(R^2\) of 12\% (Model 1 \(R^2 = .003, \text{SEE} = 2.58, F(4,1215) = 1.88, p = .111\), Model 2 \(R^2 = .122, \text{SEE} = 2.42, F(6,1215) = 29.09, p < .001\), indicating that 12\% of the variance beyond that explained by the control variables was explained by or accounted for by the predictor variables. This change in R-squared was statistically significant \((F(2,1215) = 81.93, p < .001)\).

Table 4.3 Regression Analysis Summary for Predictors of Marital Happiness (1988)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unstandardized Regression Coefficient</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Standardized Regression Coefficient</th>
<th>(t)</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>25.23</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>34.84</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>7.16</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>-.30</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.25</td>
<td>-8.97</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Variables</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
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<td>.15</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>.276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>.01</td>
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<td>.031</td>
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<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.29</td>
<td>.775</td>
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<td>Income</td>
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<td>.00</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>.008</td>
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</table>

*Note N = 1215*

In 1992, 396 respondents were male and 643 were female with a mean age of 47 years \((SD = 9\text{ years})\). Education continued to increase slightly in this wave \((M = 14.16, SD = 2.75)\). Mean family income increased to $47,332 \((SD = $15,857)\). A test of the multiple linear regression for the 1992 data indicated there is still a linear relationship between the variables \((F(6,1038) = 105.19, p < .001, R^2 = .38)\). The Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for normality indicated there is still a problem with normality \((Z = 2.00, p\)
Cooperative behaviors were statistically significantly related to marital happiness in a positive direction ($t = 15.13, p < .001, \text{Beta} = .39$). Again, as hypothesized, conflict behaviors were negatively related to marital happiness. This relationship was statistically significant ($t = -15.25, p < .001, \text{Beta} = -.40$). The difference in $R^2$ in the hierarchical regression indicated that 37% of the variance beyond that accounted for by the control variables was explained by the predictor variables (Model 1 $R^2 = .004, \text{SEE} = 4.11, F(4,1038) = 2.16, p = .072$, Model 2 $R^2 = .376, \text{SEE} = 3.25, F(6,1038) = 105.19, p < .001)$. This change in R-squared was statistically significant ($F(2,1038) = 307.03, p < .001$).

Table 4.4 Regression Analysis Summary for Predictors of Marital Happiness (1992)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regression Coefficient</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficient</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficient</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
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<td>1.09</td>
<td>20.18</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>15.13</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
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<td>.05</td>
<td>-.40</td>
<td>-15.25</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Control Variables</td>
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</tr>
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<td>.21</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-1.46</td>
<td>.144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.01</td>
<td>-.11</td>
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<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.04</td>
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<td>.160</td>
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<td>.00</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>.165</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note N = 1038*

There were 395 male and 666 female respondents in the 1997 wave, with a mean age of 51.73 ($SD = 8.84$). Family income increased overall ($M = $51,258, $SD = $14,735). The mean years of education increased only slightly ($M = 14.42, SD = 2.85$). The relationship between family income and marital happiness was statistically significant ($t = $
2.25, \( p = .025 \), but the strength of the relationship was not practically significant (\( \text{Beta} = |.065| \)). The predetermined measure of practical significance was a standardized regression coefficient equal to or greater than |.10|. A test of the multiple linear regression for the 1997 data indicated there is still a linear relationship between the variables \( (F(6,902) = 85.95, p < .001, R^2 = .36) \). The relationship between cooperation and marital happiness was again positive and statistically significant \( (t = 12.26, p < .001, \text{Beta} = .34) \). The relationship between conflict and marital happiness demonstrated a negative correlation and was statistically significant \( (t = -14.78, p < .001, \text{Beta} = -.41) \). The same problems were noted with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for normality although the P-P plots produced good clusters and demonstrated the positive and negative trends expected.

There was a 35% change in \( R^2 \) beyond that accounted for by the control variables due to the predictor variables (Model 1 \( R^2 = .008, \text{SEE} = 3.91, F(4,902) = 2.73, p = .028 \), Model 2 \( R^2 = .361, \text{SEE} = 3.14, F(6,902) = 85.95, p < .001 \)). This change in R-squared was statistically significant \( (F(2,902) = 247.23, p < .001) \).

Table 4.5 Regression Analysis Summary for Predictors of Marital Happiness (1997)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unstandardized Regression Coefficient</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Standardized Regression Coefficient</th>
<th>( t )</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>24.22</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>18.69</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>12.26</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>-.75</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.41</td>
<td>-14.78</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>-.25</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-1.17</td>
<td>.243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-1.90</td>
<td>.057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>.193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>.025</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note \( N=902 \)
In the final 2000 wave of data, there were 290 male and 472 female respondents, with mean of years of education reaching 14.45 ($SD = 2.84$). The mean for family income had increased to $54,162 ($SD = 14,712$). The shape of the residual distribution was still not normal (Kolmogorov-Smirnov $Z = 2.85$, $p < .001$). In the test of the overall multiple linear regression ANOVA indicated that the variables were not linearly independent ($F(6,761) = 65.44$, $p < .001$). For the first time in this study, family income reached statistical significance ($t = 2.95$, $p = .003$) and approached practical significance ($Beta = .097$, whereas the cut-off was $.10$). Cooperative behaviors were statistically significantly related to marital happiness ($t = 9.89$, $p < .001$). This positive relationship was strong enough to be practically significant ($Beta = .30$, $SE = .04$). The relationship between conflict type behaviors and marital happiness continued to be statistically significantly negative ($t = -13.47$, $p < .001$). The relationship continued to be powerful ($Beta = .41$, $SE = .06$) as demonstrated in Table 6 below. The change in $R^2$ beyond that explained by the control variables and accounted for by the predictor variables was 31% (Model 1 $R^2 = .337$, $SEE = 3.92$, $F(4,761) = 6.80$, $p = .000$, Model 2 $R^2 = .030$, $SEE = 3.92$, $F(6,761) = 65.45$, $p < .001$). This change is R-squared was statistically significant ($F(2,761) = 174.57$, $p < .001$).
Table 4.6 Regression Analysis Summary for Predictors of Marital Happiness (2000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unstandardized Regression Coefficient</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Standardized Regression Coefficient</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>21.77</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>14.75</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>9.89</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>-.86</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.41</td>
<td>-13.47</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Variables</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>-.94</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-3.82</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.99</td>
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<td>.09</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note N = 761

Therefore the hypotheses were supported that the positive relationship between cooperation and marital happiness and the negative relationship between conflict and marital happiness hold up over time as demonstrated over the 20 year span covered in this study.

The final hypothesis tested whether the people that were lost to the study and the people that remained were different on the variables between 1980 and 1983. In the 1983 wave, 550 respondents did not participate and 1483 respondents did. The mean score for marital happiness in 1980 was 26.18 (SD = 3.76). In 1983 the mean score for marital happiness was 25.62 (SD = 3.96). A one-way ANOVA for marital happiness demonstrated that there was a statistically significant difference between groups ($F(1,2032) = 31.03, MSE = 13.97, p < .001$). Examining the variables, conflict was statistically significantly different for the attrition group ($F(1,2032) = 7.31, MSE = 5.16, p = .007$). Reviewing the means and standard deviations by group revealed that conflict was higher in the attrition group ($M = 4.21, SD = 2.45, SE = .10$) compared to the remaining group ($M = $
3.90, $SD = 2.20$, $SE = .06$). There was no statistically significant difference between groups for cooperation. Education was statistically significantly higher ($M = 13.68$, $SD = 2.55$, $SE = .07$) in the group that remained ($F(1,2032) = 51.41$, $MSE = 6.75$, $p < .001$) than in the attrition group ($M = 12.75$, $SD = 2.71$, $SE = .12$). Family income was higher as well ($F(1,2032) = 28.81$, $SE = 169,243,743$, $p < .001$). The mean income for the group remaining was $M = 28,413$, $SD = 13,213$, $SE = 343$ as compared to attrition group $M = 24,927$, $SD = 12,442$, $SE = 530$. This would indicate the group remaining initially demonstrated a greater overall level of marital happiness, lesser conflict, higher education, and higher family income.

Summary

The proposed model demonstrated a statistically significant relationship in the original 1980 data between the predictor variables of cooperation and conflict and marital happiness after controlling for sex, age, education and family income. In the first step of the regression on each wave, these demographic variables were regressed on cooperation, conflict, and marital happiness to see whether they predicted scores influentially. Age was the only variable that reached statistical significance in the first wave, accounting for 3.6% of the variance. However, age did not achieve practical significance (established at $| .10 |$ based on previous studies) and in future waves never again demonstrated even statistical significance. It is possible that age could be an important indicator if looking at other variables not included in this study. It is logical that earlier age at marriage could be associated with lower levels of perceived marital happiness when considering earning potential and education. In this study, sex, education, and family income explained less than 1% of the variance and were not deemed significant. These variables were controlled for in all steps of the regression and the variance accounted for by them removed from the regression model.
I proceeded to examine the variables longitudinally over a 20-year period to determine if the model is consistent over time. The relationships between these variables persisted as demonstrated in Table 4.7 below.

Table 4.7 Hierarchical Regression Analyses Showing Amount of Unique Variance Accounted For By Cooperation and Conflict after Adjustment for Control Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Step 1 R</th>
<th>Adjusted R²</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Degrees of freedom</th>
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</thead>
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<td>1980</td>
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<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.46</td>
<td>4, 2032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 2 .59</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>185.31</td>
<td>6, 2032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Step 1 .11</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>4, 1482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Step 2 .52</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>92.12</td>
<td>6, 1482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Step 1 .08</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>4, 1215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 2 .35</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>29.09</td>
<td>6, 1215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Step 1 .09</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>4, 1038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 2 .62</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>105.19</td>
<td>6, 1038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
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<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>4, 902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 2 .60</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>85.95</td>
<td>6, 902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Step 1 .19</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.80</td>
<td>4, 761</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 2 .59</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>65.45</td>
<td>6, 761</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This comparison over time makes a stronger case that these cooperation and conflict behaviors may influence marital happiness. In addition, I addressed what appears to be a selection effect by analyzing attrition on these variables. The cases that disappeared from the sample between the 1980 and 1983 waves were compared to determine if these factors were different for those who divorced or dropped out for other reasons and those that remained married and chose to continue to participate. There is a difference and possibly a selection effect as the attrition sample was statistically significantly different on all variables except cooperation. This finding, while limiting generalizability,
could mean that the participants remaining in the study, who are more educated, earn more, and are happier in marriage, already express higher levels of social interest.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter will summarize the study, discuss the results described in Chapter IV, and present implications that emerge from the research. Initially, the findings will be briefly presented, then an in-depth discussion of each hypothesis in order will follow. Limitations of the study will be addressed. Finally, implications that can be drawn from the findings will be presented as they relate to theory, counseling practice, and the need for further research.

Summary

This study was conducted to explore the relationship between cooperation and conflict (as indicators of social interest) and perceived level of marital happiness. This study addresses a gap in marital happiness literature and will increase the knowledge base regarding social interest.

According to Adlerian theory (Adler, 1929), social interest manifests itself in cooperative behaviors, while the lack of social interest is demonstrated in many ways including conflict type behaviors. The need for a well-developed sense of social interest was illustrated by researchers who identified significant gaps in the literature regarding the social provisions necessary to maintain marriage relationships, the qualities of good partners, and good relationships (Cutrona, 2004; Huston & Melz, 2004). Personal qualities stemming from social interest such as conscientiousness, agreeableness, and a secure
attachment style were shown to influence happiness over time (Caspi & Bem, 1990; Conley, 1985; Huston & Melz, 2004; McRae & Costa, 2002).

When looking at ways of resolving marital conflict, Mones (2001) suggested that skills and competencies crucial in marriage are learned in the family of origin. Social interest is incubated in the family as power, conflict, and cooperation are regularly negotiated among brothers and sisters (Kern & Peluso, 1999). In a study of marital conflict, Suitor (1991) suggested that when spouses cooperate over things like household chores, marital happiness is greater; however, when they are in conflict over such things, marital happiness decreases.

In reviewing the literature on conflict, the social-psychological perspective of marital happiness suggests a rapid decline in the early years due to developmental changes like the addition of children into the marriage. VanLaningham et al. (2001) demonstrated that the U-shaped trend is an artifact of cross-sectional data, and called for longitudinal studies to be done. After reviewing observational research uncovering links between negative affect exhibited during conflict and marital happiness, Gottman and Notarius (2002) recommended further exploration of marital interaction and how it relates to marital happiness. The current study explored marital interaction over the course of twenty years in order to further the understanding of social interest as it relates to cooperation and conflict within marriage.

This study was derived from the longitudinal Marital Instability over the Life Course Project funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services and the National Institute on Aging (2003). Participants were selected initially utilizing random digit dialing. Data were collected in the form of a telephone survey in six waves between 1980 and 2000 from married individuals who were between the ages of 18 and 55 in 1980. The initial sample size was 2,033, but attrition took place for each of the subsequent waves, resulting in 762 respondents in 2000. While the initial sample was
representative of the population of the United States according to the census, the later waves were slightly less representative with respect to African Americans, Hispanics, younger respondents, renters, and those without a college education. The current study utilized an ex post facto or a causal comparative design in order to analyze already existing data.

The database included a great deal of collected data, but this study only examined three summated variables: (a) marital happiness, (b) cooperation, and (c) conflict. The dependent variable was marital happiness while the independent variables were cooperation and conflict. Demographic variables controlled for in this study were sex, age, education, and family income (as an indicator of socioeconomic status). Marital happiness, cooperation, and conflict variables were all derived from summative scales based on responses to Likert-type questions.

A correlational design, hierarchical regression analysis, was used to explore the relationships among the variables. First, marital happiness was regressed against the demographic variables of sex, age, education, and family income to identify the amount of variance each of these could explain. Controlling for this identified variance, the cooperation and conflict variables were then added as independent variables to determine whether there was a significant relationship with marital happiness. Finally, cooperation and conflict were regressed against marital happiness in subsequent waves of the study (e.g., over time) to see if these results were consistent over 20 years. After the hierarchical regression was completed, attrition was examined to see if there was a difference in those who were lost to the study between 1980 and 1983 in order to expose a selection effect if one was present.

The hypotheses for the current study were as follows:

1. In the first wave of data, from 1980, it was hypothesized that cooperative type behaviors will relate positively to marital happiness.
2. In the same 1980 wave, it was hypothesized that conflict type behaviors will relate negatively to marital happiness.

3. If hypothesis one was empirically supported, it was hypothesized that cooperative behaviors will relate positively to marital happiness over time (over the 20 years covered by the next five waves, 1983, 1988, 1992-1994, 1997, and 2000).

4. If hypothesis two was empirically supported, it was hypothesized that conflict type behaviors will relate negatively to marital happiness over time (over the 20 years covered by the next five waves, 1983, 1988, 1992-1994, 1997, and 2000).

5. It was hypothesized that there would be no difference in the level of cooperative behaviors and conflict behaviors between the participants in the 1980 wave who did not participate further and the 1983 wave.

The analyses provided resounding support for the first four hypotheses. The first hypothesis, which conjectured that cooperative behaviors would relate positively to marital happiness in the 1980 data, was supported. This finding strengthens the argument that the development of social interest through cooperative behaviors is an important factor in marital happiness. The second research hypothesis, that conflict type behaviors would relate negatively to marital happiness, was supported at any reasonable level of statistical significance. After controlling for the demographic variables, the results showed that 34% of the variance in marital happiness could be explained by cooperative behaviors and conflict type behaviors. The results indicated that the positive relationship between cooperation and marital happiness and the negative relationship between conflict and marital happiness held up over the 20 years of the study, as indicated in Table 4.7. The analysis of the final hypothesis to determine whether a selection effect existed between the group that was lost to the study and the one that was not revealed that con-
conflict was statistically significantly different for the attrition group. The group remaining demonstrated a greater overall level of marital happiness, less conflict, higher education, and higher family income.

Statistically significant relationships were found between levels of cooperation and conflict and perceived level of marital happiness in the direction predicted which met and exceeded the a priori levels of power determined to achieve practical significance. The data utilized for this study allow a unique look through an Adlerian lens at couples’ relationships over a span of 20 years. This unique look was accomplished through hierarchical regression on the variables of interest that represented the theoretical constructs of cooperation and conflict. Thus, the analysis began by exploring the hypothesized relationship between the proposed indicators of social interest – cooperation and conflict – and marital happiness in the first wave of data from 1980. Only after confirming that such a relationship existed were the hypotheses tested on the other waves. The discussion will follow that procedure. Limitations of the study will be addressed, as well as recommendations and implications for theory, practice, and research for counselors and counselor educators.

Discussion

Hypothesis One

The first hypothesis tested the 1980 data to determine whether cooperative type behaviors related positively to marital happiness. Theoretically, the question here is whether cooperative behaviors theorized to constitute an increased level of social interest related to increased marital happiness. This hypothesis was supported and demonstrated a strong positive relationship. The more cooperative behaviors a couple engaged in, the
happier they reported their marriage being. This provides an encouraging picture of behaviors that contribute to perceived marital happiness and a potential link between the development of social interest and marital happiness. These individuals were cooperating with each other in a variety of ways from sharing chores around home to visiting friends together. They appear to have come to some form of agreement about the social meaning of their behaviors that contributes to their marital happiness. While creating their own family atmosphere, they are finding a place to belong. By increased cooperation they find ways to create a happier marriage. Through the interaction of each partner’s personality traits and their created family atmosphere, they may be developing higher levels of social interest.

Alternatively, from a behavioral standpoint, it is possible that individuals receive positive reinforcement for cooperative behaviors and this leads to their perceived increase in marital happiness. This reinforcement could come from each other or from society in general.

_Hypothesis Two_

Hypothesis two tested the same 1980 data to determine whether conflict type behaviors related negatively to marital happiness. Again this hypothesis was soundly supported. The analysis found a strong negative relationship between conflict and marital happiness. With higher levels of conflict, lower levels of marital happiness were observed.

While many explanations could exist for this strong negative relationship, one may certainly propose that the behaviors measured for conflict may represent factors of an underdeveloped level of social interest. During the formation of the life style in the early years of life, children learn how to relate to the world in the social context of interactions within the family atmosphere. Through this social learning, individuals develop
beliefs about ways of belonging which will impact how they behave and cooperate within the family system. If inappropriate behavior and failure to cooperate are a result of mistaken beliefs about ways of belonging, one may assume that social learning has not occurred fully. Mones (2001) suggested that it is within sibling relationships that cooperation is learned and power roles are adopted. It is within these relationships that the ways of interacting and dealing with conflicts are established. These learned interaction skills are carried over into marital disputes. When dysfunctional ways of interaction are established in childhood, they must be examined and relearned before marital relationships can be fully functional.

On the other hand, if conflict type behaviors are a way of seeking attention, however misguided the attempt, behaviorists could contend that a conflict response from the other partner only serves to reinforce the behavior, thus escalating the conflict cycle. Still others may support the idea that conflict is a healthy way of resolving differences and contributes to better relationships. In the light of the current findings, this would be hard to support.

**Hypotheses Three and Four**

Based upon the strong relationship demonstrated between cooperation and marital happiness in the 1980 data, the analysis was expanded to discover whether cooperative behaviors would relate positively to marital happiness over time, in this case, over the 20 years covered by the next five waves. Theoretically, it would be logical that partners demonstrating more cooperative behaviors and higher marital happiness in 1980 would continue seeking that positive reinforcement. In the same way, the hypothesis was tested that conflict type behaviors would relate negatively to marital happiness over time. If the partners who demonstrated more conflict type behaviors continued to perceive the rela-
tionship negatively, it would make a stronger case that conflict type behaviors may have a negative impact on marital happiness.

In each of the subsequent waves of data, the regression analyses demonstrated again and again a strong positive relationship between cooperation and marital happiness and a negative relationship between conflict and marital happiness. As proposed by Kern and Peluso (1999), it appears that cooperation within the family atmosphere may encourage the development of greater social interest. Therefore, the individuals within these marriages seem to have developed the capacity to consider the interests of the other partner in order to promote happiness through cooperation. In a climate of cooperation and teamwork, these partners encourage one another and are happier within the relationship.

This study confirmed previous research (Baxter & Dindia, 1990; Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Stafford & Canary, 1991; Tallman & Hsiao, 2004; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 1999a), as this researcher found that cooperative behaviors contribute to positive relationship behaviors that ultimately related to greater marital happiness. Canary and Stafford (1992) proposed that the maintenance behaviors falling within the dimensions of social interest influence the marital atmosphere. While previous results were cross-sectional, the results of this study demonstrate that the relationship between cooperative behaviors and marital happiness holds up over time.

Like Kern and Peluso (1999), this researcher found that greater conflict was associated with lower levels of marital happiness. Because social interest first emerges in the family of origin, it is logical that rules of sibling conflict probably influence adult conflict. One-ups-manship and power struggles often evolve from ways of interacting with siblings. The criticism of the current approach to developing conflict-resolution skills as the main focus of preventive and reparative marital intervention is logical in the light of this research (Bradbury & Karney, 2004; Huston & Melz, 2004). Instead of the
focus being solely on resolving the immediate conflict, attention should be directed to the
development of social interest that encourages development of the qualities demonstrated
in good relationships. Mones (2001) encouraged counselors to explore current conflict in
the light of historical antecedents from the family of origin. Power struggles and roles
written into the life script in childhood often provide a starting place for working through
adult conflict. Examining these early memories can provide insight into individual goals
and levels of social interest. Mones suggested that positive memories could translate into
facilitation of greater cooperation within marriage. If an environment can be created
within the counseling session that links the individual goal to social interest, social
learning can occur and insight can lead to positive behavior.

Suitor (1991) demonstrated this in his study that linked satisfaction with division
of household labor and marital happiness. When couples cooperated over household
chores, they reported less conflict and greater happiness. The current study demonstrates
that couples that have learned to cooperate report a happier marriage. Perhaps they have
created a family atmosphere in which they can continue to develop and exhibit social
interest.

Hypothesis Five

The final hypothesis, which was that there would be no difference in the level of
cooperative behaviors and conflict behaviors between the people who were lost to the
study between 1980 and 1983 and those who remained, was rejected. The most important
findings in this analysis were those on cooperation and conflict. There were no statisti-
cally significant differences in the levels of cooperative behaviors reported. However,
this finding does not lessen the import of the long-term relationship between cooperative
behaviors and marital happiness. The respondents remaining in the study consistently
demonstrated a strong positive relationship occurring between cooperative behaviors and marital happiness over time.

As one would logically expect, respondents who dropped out of the study by 1983 reported significantly more conflict type behaviors in 1980 and lower marital happiness. This would indicate a selection effect. One could conjecture that respondents who decided to opt out of the study were probably also deciding to opt out of marriage. However, it is possible that these individuals simply could no longer be tracked.

Additionally, this analysis revealed that education and family income were higher in the group remaining in the study. This suggests a possible relationship among lower education, lower earning potential, and conflict within marriage. It is commonly accepted that financial difficulties are high on the list of reasons for conflict in relationships. Lower education may be indicative of lower future earning potential. Those who did not go on to higher levels of education may have experienced financial difficulties over an extended period of time, causing marital conflicts resulting in the disintegration of the marriage relationship.

Limitations

Instrument limitations.

The instruments used for this study were created to rely completely on self-report of the individuals surveyed. This creates a limitation in itself because self-report relies completely on subjective perception. Because only one spouse was surveyed from each couple, there is no way to determine whether the spouses would have been in agreement over the responses. Another limitation is that the instrument was not developed to measure the construct of social interest. The link between levels of cooperation and conflict
and social interest are theoretical and were not specifically tested by the instrument. This needs to be addressed in future research. Instruments need to be developed that measure the construct of social interest specifically.

Methodological limitations.

This study took a causal-comparative or ex post facto approach attempting to find cause or consequences of differences that already existed among the individuals in the study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). As with all correlational research, relationships can be identified, but causation cannot be fully established. Therefore, while there is a strong positive relationship between cooperation and marital happiness, one cannot therefore conclude that increased cooperation causes increased marital happiness. A different methodological approach would have to be taken in order to prove such a claim, for example, tracking individual cases longitudinally.

Another limitation was the low reliability of the conflict scale. The questions making up the scale were different in format and fewer in number, decreasing the overall reliability. However, they were the closest approximation found in the original data set to behaviors believed to be on the lower end of the continuum of social interest. To address differences in coding and increase reliability, some scale values were reversed so that lower numbers indicated less conflict and higher numbers indicated more conflict. However, with the less than perfect reliability of this variable, there is a greater likelihood that the variance accounted for is not apportioned correctly. This increases the potential that the relationship between conflict and marital happiness is underestimated.

A further limitation was the relationship between the variables under consideration; however, this was not unexpected, as prior research had established a link between cooperation and marital happiness. This problem with homogeneity of variance would, of
course, weaken the robustness of the regression, but the results were strong enough in the opinion of this researcher to overcome these reservations.

There existed an intercorrelation between the variables; they were not linearly independent of each other (see Appendix B for complete Pearson Correlation Matrices). However, the eigenvalues were small (less than .3), indicating that these relationships were not very strong. This was not unexpected as White’s (1983) research had proposed a reciprocal relationship between some of the interactions involved in cooperation and marital happiness. She demonstrated that as one increased the other did too.

Implications

Implications for Research

From a research perspective, this study raises awareness that social interest may be an important factor in marital happiness. Research needs to be conducted to explore the implications of social interest in the marriage relationship. This could begin by taking a qualitative approach to interview marriage partners as well as Adlerian theorists regarding the construct of social interest. This could uncover behaviors within marriage that demonstrate social interest. Once the continuum of behaviors has been objectively defined, a survey instrument can be developed and piloted that would measure these behaviors. Instead of likert-type scales, absolute numbers of behaviors could be obtained. This social interest scale would need to be piloted and validated. Once this has occurred, more wide-spread research may be undertaken to more accurately test the theoretical link between social interest and marital happiness.

In the realm of marital counseling, protocols need to be created for developing social interest. Such protocols could include exploring levels of cooperation currently
existing in the relationship as well as ways of increasing teamwork and collaboration. Assessment of early experiences could be implemented to encourage insight about ways of belonging. These protocols would need to be tested experimentally to compare them with current conflict resolution protocols.

Further research is needed to determine if the relationship between cooperation and marital happiness holds true over time for African Americans, Hispanics, younger respondents, renters, and those without a college education. These populations were underrepresented in the later waves of the study. Investigation is needed to determine if there is a difference in the longitudinal course of marriage for these groups.

Further study is needed to determine whether incorporating discussion of career training for young adults before marriage would aid in lessening conflict and increasing marital happiness. This study did not consider whether happiness with the life task of work is related to marital happiness. Important conclusions may be drawn from a study that included those factors that would inform counselors working with couples who are about to enter marriage. Longitudinal research is also needed to follow young adults through the life course to determine whether increased levels of social interest result in a happier life as well as happier marriage. Individual cases could be tracked longitudinally to see if this occurs.

The link between social interest and life tasks also needs to be explored in work relationships, community relationships, and even institutional relationships. This information may be of use to many specialties outside the field of counseling. All helping professionals and service-related fields could be impacted by the potential relationship between behaviors indicating higher levels of social interest and happiness. For example, future research could explore whether cooperative behaviors in school-age children relate to overall feelings of happiness or well-being. Many other relationships could be explored, including parent/child relationships, co-worker relationships, employer/employee relationships, teacher/student relationships, and so on.
Institutional relationships such as marriage, government, religion, or world relations could be examined in light of the concept. If research could identify and measure collaborative, cooperative behaviors for these institutions, perhaps this would reveal whether greater levels of social interest and greater satisfaction with these institutions would create a happier populace. If countries could work in a collaborative manner, it is logical that this could lead to greater social interest in those countries and happier relationships. It could contribute to the development of greater social interest through cooperative behaviors globally.

This leads us to the basic issue of how social interest is defined objectively across cultures and societies. Perhaps levels of social interest can be measured by measuring levels of cooperation. Future research could determine if cooperative behaviors are universal or change from culture to culture. It is conceivable that what is considered cooperative in one culture could be offensive in another. If cooperative behaviors can be identified that could effectively measure the level of social interest, measures could be developed to study this concept. Additionally, further research is needed to clearly identify behaviors on the lower end of the social interest spectrum. Further research is needed to objectively define social interest, to develop ways to measure it, and finally to develop protocols for disseminating this knowledge.

Implications for Theory

From a theoretical perspective, this research demonstrated a strong relationship between cooperative behaviors theorized to constitute an expression of social interest and marital happiness. This link could provide the beginning for creation of new theory centered around social interest. Especially in the field of marriage and family therapy, the implications for returning to the roots of Adlerian theory in the development of new applications are immense. Research has demonstrated a strong link between marital
happiness and relational maintenance behaviors (Baxter & Dindia, 1990), such as those described in this study as cooperative. The current study further supports that link between cooperative behaviors that maintain relationships and marital happiness. If cooperative behaviors are indeed an expression of social interest as Adler (1929) theorized, then higher levels of social interest may be related to greater amounts of happiness within marriage. This strengthens the case that further research is needed to fill the existing gap in the counseling literature about social interest.

On the other end of the continuum of expression of social interest, there was a strong negative relationship between conflict and marital happiness. This could indicate an underdeveloped level of social interest in those who exhibit higher levels of conflict behaviors. Adler (1929) proposed that individuals needed to be trained in the development of social interest in order to exhibit social feeling. It can be theorized that individuals demonstrating conflict behaviors have not yet fully developed social interest and are unable to properly communicate social feeling. Adlerians maintain that love relationships are a task of life that people must learn how to meet. The implication is that individuals exhibiting higher levels of conflict behaviors did not experience the social learning necessary to acquire the skills to maintain long-term love relationships. If such social interest was not learned during the childhood years, the individual may need to address this lack in order to excel in this task of life. Counselors may begin addressing this lack by allowing the unfolding of social interest in the counseling relationship. Once insight begins to occur, the modeling of this behavior can be generalized outside of the counseling session.

The results made a strong case that the expression of social interest through cooperative behaviors resulted in greater marital happiness over time. This extends White’s (1983) finding that there is a reciprocal loop between cooperation and marital happiness. The present results are consistent with a view that the more these couples
cooperated with each other, the happier they were, and the happier they were, the more they cooperated with each other. Alternatively, it was also demonstrated that behaviors potentially on the lower end of the social interest spectrum, such as begrudging the amount of housework expected of one or trying to physically dominate one’s spouse, were related negatively to marital happiness over time. One could conjecture that the same feedback loop exists, that continual conflict results in feelings of unhappiness, which results in more conflict, and so on.

While many models focus only on the here and now when working through conflict, this research provides a theoretical basis for utilizing significant early experiences to understand the individual goals that underlie conflict. Mones (2001) encouraged finding that stuck place where the development of social interest stopped. There is the potential that exploring early stuck places within individuals can facilitate insight. As a result of this insight, social learning can occur and lead to positive behavior. This positive behavior can reinforce the development of social interest and facilitate positive change within relationships.

Furthermore, through cooperative behaviors, couples are theoretically increasing their levels of social interest. Each partner contributes to the relationship through his or her unique personality traits. Combined with their subjective perceptions and cooperative behaviors, a family atmosphere is created. While couples are creating their own family atmosphere, they are finding a place to belong. Perhaps this is why social interest can be conceptualized as belongingness. By increased cooperation, couples find ways to create a happier marriage. Through the interaction of each partner’s personality traits and their created family atmosphere, they may be developing higher levels of social interest.

Finally, there are theoretical implications for programs that focus on training counselors to work with marriage and family issues. First, when addressing family systems, there should be an incorporation of Adlerian theory that addresses evaluating
and encouraging social interest. A more holistic approach must be taken that addresses not only training in dealing with the current conflict within the system, but also evaluation of the social contexts within which the situation occurred. This training should include assessment of both partners’ family of origin and the early beliefs acquired there. This could expose feelings of inferiority or other basic mistakes which would need to be addressed through providing an encouraging framework for the development of the social interest needed for relationships to occur.

Implications for Practice

From a clinical perspective, counselors working with couples who are preparing for marriage or experiencing problems in their marriage need to be informed about the significant relationship over time between cooperative behaviors and marital happiness. This finding points to the importance of early training for individuals in the development of social interest. Some individuals who enter into a marriage may not have experienced the social learning to acquire necessary relationship skills in childhood. Basic mistakes are made about ways of belonging and incorporated into the life style. Nevertheless, it is easy during the infatuation stage of early marriage to exhibit cooperative behaviors as the perception is that all of one’s needs are being met. However, as time passes and the infatuation wanes, cooperation is more difficult to maintain unless one has acquired social interest. Practitioners may need to identify and address the basic mistakes in life style that formed in the developing years. Counselors can help individuals understand their life styles and basic mistakes as well as help them develop the social skills necessary to maintain happiness in the relationship.

The finding that conflict type behaviors related negatively to marital happiness could significantly impact the way counselors address marital conflict. Instead of focus-
ing entirely on conflict resolution, a technique which has recently come under criticism (Bradbury & Karney, 2004), counselors may find it beneficial to focus on uncovering the social meaning, or goal, behind behaviors. These goals may become evident through examining power struggles and communication problems as well as the conflict itself. Finding the goal or lifestyle motivating the individual may uncover underdeveloped levels of social interest in one or both partners. This could prove to be the key to finding a greater level of cooperation and a lower level of conflict. As counselors facilitate a collaborative atmosphere within the counseling session, links may emerge between the individual’s goal or need and social interest. Social learning can then occur and insight can lead to positive behavior, such as greater cooperation. Theoretically, the end result of finding a greater level of cooperation would be an increased sense of social interest that could prevent reoccurrence of similar conflicts in the future.

The implications for counselors and counselor educators working with couples when exploring the roots of conflict are immense. Instead of focusing only on the here and now, counselors should begin to explore the early experiences which developed the individual’s goal because these goals underlie the conflict. For example, if an individual developed the goal of superiority as a child, conflict in the marriage will probably result because that person is still trying to be superior. After that underlying goal of conflict has been uncovered, the counselor can begin encouraging the individual to develop greater social interest through identification of behaviors that the spouse perceives as cooperative. Following the recommendations of Cutrona, Russell, and Krebs (2002), the findings of this study further reinforce the need for skill-building interventions that focus on avoiding destructive relationship conflict and encouraging one another through social provisions. These social provisions could include working through attachment or bonding issues, feelings of self-esteem, security issues, social integration, and the need for nurturing. Encouraging social interest through the development of these provisions would offset
the development of strife, conflict, and isolation. Providing this training could help couples avoid conflict and enhance cooperation.

Marriage counselors need to consider the level of social interest exhibited in the relationship, exploring partners’ ability to cooperate as well as ways of increasing teamwork and collaboration. A brief life style assessment including early experiences could prove advantageous when exploring ways of belonging. If counselors are going to address the high levels of divorce and begin to stem the tide of deteriorating relationships, more research is imperative to determine what makes marriage work and what does not.

A further implication for practice is a need for holistic development in all of the Adlerian life tasks including work. Adler (1929) proposed that an indication of social interest was an individual’s ability to cope with the task of work. This is logical in the light of the finding that there is a potential link between education, earning potential, and marital happiness. It may be important to integrate career development and progress through life stages into preparation for marriage. Through this integration, counselors may facilitate a more holistic view of life and further the development of social interest. Other counseling specialties may benefit from this insight as well. For example, school counselors may need to take a holistic view that incorporates the development of social interest into career exploration as well as relationship skills. This holistic view could also be taken by premarital counselors who need to include, for example, segments of career and financial discussions when working with engaged couples. Whatever the specialty area, viewing clients holistically is important so that counselors can facilitate the furtherance of social interest.
Conclusion

Couples in general are faced with systemic relationship issues. For some, dealing with these issues is not a problem because they have developed greater levels of social interest which is demonstrated by greater social adjustment. This adjustment is evident in the levels of cooperative behavior which result in a happier marriage and help couples deal with these systemic issues. On the other hand, couples in which one or both partners have an underdeveloped level of social interest demonstrate more conflict and more difficulty adjusting to systemic issues.

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between cooperation and conflict and perceived level of marital happiness as indicators of social interest. The results of this study can be utilized by counselors as they treat whole individuals within their social context. Counselors can help individuals develop the relational skills they need to make social adjustments and increase social interest. Additionally, the results help increase counselor educators’ awareness that conflict may be a result of an underdeveloped level of social interest. This new knowledge will impact what counselors share with clients in session and help them conceptualize the connections between social interest and cooperation. This will enable counselors to better facilitate client insight into the link between family of origin issues and current marital issues.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

LIST OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH IDENTIFIERS
Variable identification begins with the 1980 Wave and continues through 1983, 1988, 1992, 1997, and 2000. Following each question the identifier is italicized, then the variable numbers are listed as Var73A, for example. Question numbers are those taken from the original interview schedule and will not appear consecutively.

Questions included in the cooperation scale.

73. I am going to mention some of the things couples sometimes do together. For each one, I would like you to tell me how often you and your spouse do this together.

A. How often do you eat your main meal together – almost always, usually, occasionally, or never? (V1260, Var73A, v43A, t387, f423, e421, s421)
   - Almost always ..........1
   - Usually ..................2
   - Occasionally .............3
   - Never ......................4
   - Don’t Know (DK).........8
   - Refused (REF)............9

   *Note: Questions were reverse coded so that higher scores indicated greater frequency of behavior. Responses coded 8 or 9 were excluded.*

B. Go shopping together? (REPEAT RESPONSES AS NECESSARY.)
   (V1261, Var73B, v43B, t388, f424, e422, s422)
C. How often do you visit friends together? (V1262, Var73C, v43C, t389, f425, e423, s423)
D. Work together on projects around the house? (V1263, Var73D, v43D, t390, f426, e424, s424)
E. When you go out – say, to play cards, bowling, or a movie – how often do you do this together? (V1264, Var73E, v43E, t391, f427, e425, s425)
Questions included in the conflict scale.

*Note: Questions were reverse coded so that higher scores indicated greater frequency of behavior (except for question 101). Responses coded 8 or 9 were excluded.*

83. Do you and your (husband/wife) have arguments or disagreements about whether one of you is doing their share of the housework? (V1282, Var83, v48, t395, f431, e434, s434)

Yes ………………………1
No ………………………2
DK……….8
REF………9

100. How often do you disagree with your (husband/wife)? Would you say never, rarely, sometimes, often, or very often? (V1311, Var100, v62, t401, f437, e440, s440)

Never …………………….1
Rarely …………………….2
Sometimes ………………..3
Often ……………………..4
Very Often ……………….5
DK ……….8
REF ………9

101. How many serious quarrels have you had with your spouse in the past two months? (V1314, Var101, v63, t402, f438, e441, s441)

Number …………….. __ __
DK ……….8
REF ………9
102. In many households bad feelings and arguments occur from time to time. In many cases people get so angry that they slap, hit, push, kick, or throw things at one another. Has this ever happened between you and your (husband/wife)? (V1315, Var102, v64, t403, f439, e442, s442)

Yes ………………………1
No ………………………2
DK……….8
REF………9

Questions included in the marital happiness scale.
The following were scored on a 3-point scale.

Note: Questions were reverse coded so that higher scores indicated greater level of happiness. Responses coded 8 or 9 were excluded.

109. I am going to mention some different aspects of married life. For each one, I would like you to tell me whether you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy with this aspect of your marriage.

A. How happy are you with the amount of understanding you receive from your (husband/wife)? (V1333, Var109A, V74a, t432, f468, e472, s472)

Very happy………………..1
Pretty happy ………………2
Not too happy ……………..3
DK ……….8
REF ………9

B. With the amount of love and affection you receive? (V1334, Var109B, v74b, t433, f469, e473, s473)

D. With your sexual relationship? (V1336,Var109D, v74d, t435, f471, e475, s475)
G. With your spouse as someone who takes care of things around the house?  
\((V1339, \text{Var109G, v74g, t438, f474, e478, s478})\)

H. With your spouse as someone to do things with? \((V1340, \text{Var109H, v74h, t439, f475, e479, s479})\)

I. With your spouse’s faithfulness to you? \((V1341, \text{Var109I, 74i, t440, f476, e480, s480})\)

129. Would you say the feelings of love you have for your (husband/wife) are extremely strong, very strong, pretty strong, not too strong, or not strong at all? \((V1420, \text{Var129, v94, t506, f532, e535, s535})\)

- Extremely strong ..........1
- Very strong ...............2
- Pretty strong ...............3
- Not too strong ............4
- Not strong at all ..........5
- DK .............8
- REF ...........9
The following variables were scored on a 3-point scale as indicated.

Note: Questions were reverse coded so that higher scores indicated greater level of happiness. Responses coded 8 or 9 were excluded.

115. Taking all things together, how would you describe your marriage? Would you say that your marriage is very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy? (V1367, V115, v80, t460, f496, e500, s500)

   Very happy .................1
   Pretty happy ................2
   Not too happy ..............3
   DK ...........8
   REF ...........9

116. Compared to other marriages you know about, do you think your marriage is better than most, about the same as most, or not as good as most? (V1368, Var116, v81, t461, f497, e501, s501)

   Better ......................1
   Same .......................2
   Not as good ...............3
   DK ...........8
   REF ...........9

127. Comparing your marriage to three years ago, is your marriage getting better, staying the same, or getting worse? (V1418, Var127, v92, t505, f531, e534, s534)

   Better ......................1
   Same .......................2
   Worse .....................3
   DK ...........8
   REF ...........9
APPENDIX B
PEARSON CORRELATION MATRICES FOR EACH WAVE
### 1980 Correlation Matrix

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*Note: N = 2033*
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*Note: N = 1483*
### 1988 Correlation Matrix

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*Note: N = 1216*
## 1992 Correlation Matrix

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### Mean
- 25.49
- 14.79
- 3.93
- 47.08
- 14.16
- 47332

### SD
- 4.12
- 3.00
- 2.13
- 9.04
- 2.75
- 15857

### Sig. (1-tailed)

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*Note: N = 1039*
## 1997 Correlation Matrix

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| Mean | 25.75 | 15.08 | 3.52 | 51.73 | 14.42 | 51258 |
| SD | 3.93 | 3.03 | 2.16 | 8.85 | 2.86 | 14735 |

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*Note: N = 903*
2000 Correlation Matrix

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*Note: N = 762*
APPENDIX C

MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

BOARD APPROVAL
April 9, 2003

Debra Leggett
600 Broad Street
Starkville, MS 39759

Re: IRB Docket #03-063 — “Social and Psychological Factors Influencing Marital Quality”

Dear Debra:

The above referenced project has been approved via expedited review for a period of April 9, 2003 through March 15, 2004 in accordance with 45 CFR 46.110 #7.

If additional time is needed to complete the project, you will need to submit a Continuing Review Request form prior to February 15, 2004. Additionally, any modification to the project must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Any failure to adhere to the approved protocol could result in suspension or termination of your project. Please note that the IRB reserves the right, at anytime, to observe you and any associated researchers as they conduct the project and audit research records associated with this project.

Please refer to your docket number (03-063) when contacting our office regarding this application.

Thank you for your cooperation and good luck to you in conducting this research project.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]

Tracy S. Arwood
Regulatory Compliance Officer

TSA/jim

cc: Jianzhong Xu
    File

Office for Regulatory Compliance
P. O. Box 6235 • 300 Bowen Hall • Maitzstop 9563 • Mississippi State, MS 39762 • (662) 325-3394 • FAX (662) 325-8775
Continuing Review Report Form

PI Name: Debra Leggett
Address: 600 Broad Street
          Starkville, MS 39759
Advisor: Jianzhong Xu

IRB Docket #03-063
Project Title: Social and Psychological Factors Influencing Marital Quality
Expiration date: 2/15/05

Funding status:  □ Awarded  List agency:  □ Pending  □ Not awarded  □ No cost study

1. Number of subjects involved in the project (to date, if ongoing): 14
2. Were there any adverse events or unanticipated problems?
   □ YES, Provide a detailed statement:
   □ NO

3. Number of subjects who withdrew from the project: 0
4. Were there any complaints regarding the project?
   □ YES, Provide a detailed statement:
   □ NO

5. Is there any new information since the last IRB review that might impact the Board’s understanding of the risks or benefits?
   □ YES, Provide a detailed statement:
   □ NO

6. Has the project been modified since the last IRB review?
   □ YES, Have all changes been submitted for IRB approval:  □ YES  □ NO
   □ NO

7. Are you still collecting data?  □ YES  □ NO
8. Are your remaining activities confined to data analysis?  □ YES  □ NO
9. Projected end of project (data analysis complete): 2/15/06
10. Please attach a current consent form.

Debra Leggett
Principal Investigator

[Signature]
Date 2/15/05

Research Advisor (if applicable)

[Signature]
Date 2/14/05

Office Use Only

□ Administrative
☑ Expedited
□ Full Board

Approved: Mary Howard
Date 2/15/05

New expiration date: 11/15/06
Mississippi State University

CONTINUING REVIEW
REPORT FORM

PI Name: Debra Leggett
Address: 600 Broad Street
         Starkville, MS 39759
Advisor: Jianzhong Xu

IRB Docket #03-063
Project Title: Social and Psychological Factors Influencing Marital Quality
Expiration date: March 15, 2004

Funding status: □ Awarded □ Pending □ Not awarded □ No cost study

1. Number of subjects involved in the project (to date, if ongoing): 10
2. Were there any adverse events or unanticipated problems?
   □ YES, Provide a detailed statement:
   □ NO

3. Number of subjects who withdraw from the project: None, data from 2 participants was dropped because spouse data was not available.
4. Were there any complaints regarding the project?
   □ YES, Provide a detailed statement:
   □ NO

5. Is there any new information since the last IRB review that might impact the Board's understanding of the risks or benefits?
   □ YES, Provide a detailed statement:
   □ NO

6. Has the project been modified since the last IRB review?
   □ YES, Have all changes been submitted for IRB approval:
   □ YES □ NO
   □ NO

7. Are you still collecting data? □ YES □ NO
8. Are your remaining activities confined to data analysis? □ YES □ NO
9. Projected end of project (data analysis complete): March 15, 2005
10. Please attach a current consent form.

   Debra Leggett
   Principal Investigator
   1/13/04
   Date

   Research Advisor (if applicable)
   Date

OFFICE USE ONLY

Administrative □ Approved: J. W. Alexander □ Date 2/24/04
Expedited □ New expiration date: 3/15/05
Full Board