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The Relationship Between Partner Perceptions of Marital Power and Sexual Satisfaction as Mediated by Observed Hostile Interaction

Amanda Claire Christenson
Brigham Young University - Provo

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The Relationship Between Partner Perceptions of Marital Power
and Sexual Satisfaction as Mediated by
Observed Hostile Interaction

Amanda Christenson

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science

James M. Harper, Chair
Jonathan G. Sandberg
Richard B. Miller

School of Family Life
Brigham Young University

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ABSTRACT

The Relationship Between Partner Perceptions of Marital Power and Sexual Satisfaction as Mediated by Observed Hostile Interaction

Amanda Christenson
School of Family Life, BYU
Master of Science

Using a sample of 322 married couples (644 spouses) from The Flourishing Families project, this study examined the relationship between marital power and sexual satisfaction as mediated by observed hostile interaction. More specifically, an actor-partner interdependence model (APIM) was used in which husband and wife perceptions of their partner's power were hypothesized to be related to husband and wife self-report of sexual satisfaction, with husband and wife observed hostile interaction as possible mediating variables. Results showed that husband and wife perceptions of power were positively related to their respective husband and wife sexual satisfaction and positively related to their respective hostile interaction. Husband hostile interaction was negatively related to husband sexual satisfaction. Husband and wife perceptions of power were negatively related to their partner's sexual satisfaction, and positively related to their partner's hostile interaction. Husband and wife hostile interaction were negatively related to their partner's sexual satisfaction. Husband observed hostility was a statistically significant mediator of the relationship between husband power and husband sexual satisfaction and of the relationship between wife power and wife sexual satisfaction. Wife observed hostility significantly mediated the relationship between husband power and husband sexual satisfaction.

Keywords: marital power, sexual satisfaction, hostile interaction, observational coding

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Introduction

Sexual intimacy can be problematic in married couples and a reason why they seek therapy. In studying the reasons why 129 couples sought marital enrichment, Demaria (1998) found that sexual dissatisfaction was high on the list and that sexual dissatisfaction was suppressing romantic feelings and marital commitment. There is a widely researched relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction showing that higher levels of sexual satisfaction are related to greater relationship quality and stability (Sprecher & Cate, 2004). In fact, couples rated sexual satisfaction as one of the most important elements of marital happiness (Trudel, 2002), and distressed couples focus more on whether they are satisfied in their sexual relationship than happily married couples (McCarthy & McCarthy, 2009).

Sexual satisfaction has never been explained by a single factor. One of many correlates that has been linked to sexual satisfaction in only a handful of studies is marital power, which is the ability to influence the other partner's emotions, attitudes, cognitions, or behavior in order to get one's way (Komter, 1989). For the purposes of this study, marital power refers to both outcomes, or who has the most influence in decision making between partners, and process, or how a partner manages the interaction to get their way. The measure used in this study asks partners about their perceptions of their spouse's level of power. A substantial amount of evidence shows that the distribution of marital power has a significant effect on individual and relationship functioning (Brezsnyak & Whisman, 2004; Stafford & Canary, 2006; Whisman & Jacobson, 1990). Similarly, marital power may be related to sexual satisfaction.

Furthermore, if marital power is unbalanced between partners, one of the processes partners may engage in is hostile interaction. Interactional behaviors that have been shown to be related to marital power and sexual satisfaction separately include relational aggression (Madsen,

2013) violence, verbal aggression (Sagrestano, Heavey, & Christensen, 1999), hostile sexism, and benevolent sexism (Lisco, Parrott, & Tharp, 2012), but no studies to date have used hostile behaviors as a potential mediating variable between marital power and sexual satisfaction. More so, no studies have used observational coding as a means of measuring hostile interaction in relation to marital power and sexual satisfaction.

Kaplan's (1974) "New Sex Therapy" model included the couple behavioral system in sex therapy, which set the early stage for consideration of couple relational dynamics and their impact on sexual functioning and satisfaction. More recently, Hertlein, Weeks, and Gambescia (2009) introduced the "Intersystem Approach" as a new paradigm in sex therapy, and this approach considers non-sexual relational dynamics as a crucial factor in sexual functioning and satisfaction. Others have considered psychological factors within couples, gender-role perception or adaptation (Young, Denny, Luquis, & Young, 1998), attachment (Butzer & Campbell, 2008), and relationship satisfaction (Stephenson, Rellini, & Meston, 2013) as important dimensions of sexual satisfaction. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between marital power and sexual satisfaction as mediated by observed hostile interaction. More specifically, an actor-partner interdependence model (APIM) was used in which husband and wife perceptions of power were hypothesized to be related to husband and wife sexual satisfaction, with husband and wife hostile interaction as possible mediating variables.

Review of Literature

Theoretical Foundations

Lawrance and Byers' (1995) Interpersonal Exchange Model of Sexual Satisfaction (IEMSS) provides an applicable framework for exploring the connection between sexual

satisfaction and marital power. This model attributes sexual satisfaction to being a product of four primary factors: the balance of sexual rewards and sexual costs in the relationship, the way that sexual rewards and costs compare to one's expected level of sexual rewards and costs, the perceived equality of sexual rewards and costs between partners, and the quality of the nonsexual aspects of the relationship. Byers and Macneil (2006) report that this model has been authenticated in a number of studies and in their two studies, the model was further validated. In reference to the IEMSS, Yucel and Gassanov (2010) explain that when rewards are high, costs are low, the levels of these rewards and costs received compare favorably to the levels expected, and there is equality of costs and rewards between partners, sexual satisfaction is expected to be greater. This model highlights the dyadic nature of a sexual relationship while the marital power research highlights the dyadic nature of a marital relationship. Applying the IEMSS for this study, marital power falls under the last factor, quality of nonsexual aspects of the relationship. When one partner in a marriage is unhappy with the equality or inequality of marital power, the cost of having a sexual relationship may outweigh the benefits. Consequently, feelings of equality in sexual aspects of the relationship may be threatened, causing sexual satisfaction to be lower for both partners.

Another theoretical framework is the Intersystem Approach as applied in sex therapy (Hertlein et al., 2009) which was originally developed by Weeks (1977) and has been refined by Weeks and Cross (2004). The Intersystem Approach includes individual biological, individual psychological, dyadic relationship, family-of-origin, and cultural aspects when considering sexual functioning in couples. More specifically, this framework includes systemic aspects of relationship including congruence, interdependence, and attribution. Related to the questions in this study, congruence refers to how couples share or agree on how events are defined. Partners

may not be congruent in their perceptions pointing to the need for a study to use an Actor Partner Independence Model (APIM). Interdependence refers to how partners depend on one another including how partners trust that the other will meet his or her needs. This concept can be applied to levels of marital power, taking into consideration that marital power can influence many aspects of a couple's daily life in addition to sex, such as chores, finances, or parenting. Finally, attributional strategy refers to how partners ascribe meaning to an event. This is applicable to how couples ascribe meaning to their degree of power (e.g., a wife may feel she has less power and ascribe the meaning that her husband does not care about her happiness as much as his own) or to sexual aspects of the relationship (e.g., a husband may be rejected sexually by his wife and ascribe the meaning that she is upset with him and trying to manipulate) (Hertlein & Weeks, 2009).

Marital Power

Decades of research address the distribution of power in marriages. Much of this research indicates that marriages are typically more traditional with husbands holding the most power and making final decisions, and wives generally having less power (Ball, Cowan, & Cowan, 1995). More recently, Kornrich, Brines, and Leupp (2013) state that a new narrative exists for contemporary marriage. Today's marriages are described as more egalitarian, flexible, and fair than those of the past (Sullivan, 2006). For example, Myers and Booth (2002) report that men and women are now more likely to agree that wives can play an equal role in family decision making.

Blanton and Vandergriff-Avery (2001) state that the empirical work related to power creates a picture that looks like men have the most power and women have much less, but this picture is in reference to what Fox and Blanton (1995) termed positional power, which includes

exerting influence based on status and access to economic and other culturally valued resources. Positional power has not been as available to women in the past and as a result, it can be assumed that men feel more powerful. However, Fox and Blanton (1995) also present relational or personal power as the power that women are more likely to hold. This form of power refers to the influence one has over another, based on the nature of their personal relationship and the individual's ability to exert authority through the context of the relationship.

Research studies have been fairly consistent in finding that egalitarian couples report the highest relationship satisfaction while the most likely to be unhappy are marriages with wives having greater power (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983). In egalitarian marriages, partners have been found to experience individual gains such as better marital adjustment (Gray-Little, Baucom, & Hamby, 1996), greater physical health (Loving, Heffner, Kiecolt-Glaser, Glaser, & Malarkey, 2004), and less likelihood to experience depression (Byrne & Carr, 2000). Research has also found positive relationship outcomes associated with shared power in marriage such as greater likelihood to be effective parents (Lindahl, Malik, Kaczynski, & Simons, 2004), higher marital satisfaction (Brezsnyak & Whisman, 2004; Stafford & Canary, 2006), and husbands being less likely to divorce (Kaufman, 2000). Brezsnyak and Whisman (2004) also found that couples who share power have higher levels of sexual desire, a variable that is positively related to sexual and relationship satisfaction (Mark, 2012).

Becker (1991) argued that a traditional division of labor contributes to marital stability because partners trade services and depend on each other. Findings from very early studies supported Becker's finding that traditional married women are happier (Alspach, 1982) and less likely to divorce or separate (Lueptow, Guss, & Hyden, 1989) than women in nontraditional

marriages. However, Madsen (2013) found that husbands with more marital power were less satisfied in their marriages.

In marriages with wives holding greater power, Steil (1997) found that wives holding greater dominance in decision-making was associated with both partners having lower marital satisfaction. Sagrestano et al. (1999) also found that higher perceived power by women and lower perceived power by men was associated with violence and verbal aggression by both spouses. These findings led us to hypothesize that, similar to the relationship between power and marital satisfaction, when wives have more power than husbands, both partners will report lower sexual satisfaction.

Abernathy (1974) and Gray (1984) have studied the relationship between power and sexual variables. While they did not focus on sexual satisfaction, it is possible that the variables they studied are correlated with sexual satisfaction. Abernathy hypothesized from primatological, ethnographic, and psychiatric evidence that the distribution of dominance between partners affects the quality and quantity of sexual activity within marriage. She argued that frequency of intercourse was reduced when females were more dominant in the relationship and was increased when males were more dominant. In a holocultural, or cross-cultural, study of 122 societies, Gray (1984) found that high levels of female power did not negatively affect male's sexual functioning including variables such as frequency of sexual affairs, sex anxiety, and sexual aggressiveness. While Gray's findings are useful for understanding societal norms, he did not examine sexual satisfaction between partners.

In a four-year longitudinal study for newly married couples, Henderson-King and Veroff (1994) found that couple's unhappiness with the sexual relationship may be related to a person's diminished sense of control in the marriage. Henderson-King and Veroff explain that sex can be

an area of the relationship that partners feel they can rely on to improve negative situations, therefore, unhappiness with the sexual relationship may diminish a partner's overall sense of influence in the marriage. In a qualitative study, Betchen (2006) studied three dual-career couples throughout therapy and gathered information on power imbalances in the relationship and their associations with sexual dissatisfaction. Betchen describes that as women adapt to balancing career and family, men struggle with their reduction of power and report that they are sexually dissatisfied. Obviously, the little amount of empirical research that has been conducted has not clarified the relationship between marital power and sexual satisfaction, which furthers the need for more research that focuses on these variables and what processes, specifically hostile interaction, might mediate this relationship.

Hostile Interaction as a Potential Mediating Variable

It is likely that there are mediating processes that help explain how marital power is related to sexual satisfaction. One of these mediating processes may be hostile interaction, which in this study includes acts such as hostility, contempt, angry coercion, and antisocial behavior. Leonard and Senchak (1996) found that a mixture of hostility and dominance were predictive of marital aggression and that the more non-egalitarian partners perceive their relationship, the greater the husbands' level of aggression. Sagrestano et al. (1999) also found that higher perceived power by women, and lower perceived power by men, were associated with violence and the use of verbal aggression by both spouses. Fishbane (2011) states that when power takes the form of domineering behavior, humiliation, or contempt, couple dynamics can turn "toxic" ending in angry escalations, violence, or disempowerment of partners.

While there is very little literature linking relational hostility to couple's sexual relationship, there is literature that supports sexual aggression, including marital rape, being

linked to sexual dissatisfaction (Martin, Taft, & Resick, 2007; Mbunga, 2011). This gives reason to hypothesize that non-violent acts of hostility would also negatively impact sexual satisfaction. Lansky and Davenport (1975) found from a sample of 10 sexually dissatisfied couples seeking sex therapy that those exhibiting hostility and blame were less compliant with directive sex therapy, and their marital difficulties were aggravated by the treatment. From this study and other literature (Hertlein, Weeks, & Sendak, 2009; Snyder & Berg, 1983) it is generally accepted that nonsexual aspects of a couple relationship including hostility and conflict can be mediators of sexually dissatisfied couple's response to sex therapy. Theoretically, the Interpersonal Exchange Model of Sexual Satisfaction helps conceptualize hostility in marriage as being a cost of the relationship, and therefore impacting the sexual satisfaction. Additionally, the Intersystem Approach includes the dyadic relationship being associated with the sexual relationship, giving theoretical support for hostility having some relationship with sexual dissatisfaction.

Betchen's (2006) qualitative study mentioned earlier observed that men who have insecurities with their own personal power in the relationship often exhibited criticism of their wives in regards to their sexual relationship. Betchen suggests that men link sexual activity to a perceived sense of masculine power, thus husband's reporting of sexual dissatisfaction and hostility toward wives as a result of new power roles. This is the only published study that has explicitly connected marital power, sexual satisfaction, and hostility in the form of criticism.

Methodological Approach

This study uses a variety of data approaches. Marital power was measured using husband and wife reports of their perception of their partner's level of power. Sexual satisfaction was measured using husbands' and wives' reports of their own sexual satisfaction. Hostile interaction was measured using trained coders' observations of couple interactions.

The current understanding of hostile interaction is based largely on individual self-perceptions of actor and partner hostility. These data provide useful views of hostility from partners, however they may not provide a full view of actual systemic interactions between married spouses. Observational coding has been useful in the field of marital research (Kerig & Baucom, 2004) by adding an objective component to the study of couple dynamics that self-report surveys cannot provide. In addition to adding a greater scope of data, Observational coding has been found to predict marital quality and marital stability (Clements, Stanley, & Markman, 2004; Schilling, Baucom, Burnett, Allen, & Ragland, 2003). Because this study uses husband's and wife's perception of their partner's level of power and self-report of sexual satisfaction, observational coding data for hostile interaction is a strength to the study in order to discover possible mediating effects between marital power and sexual satisfaction.

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between marital power and sexual satisfaction as mediated by observed hostile interaction. More specifically, an actor-partner interdependence model (APIM) was used in which husband and wife perceptions of partner's power were hypothesized to be related to husband and wife sexual satisfaction, with husband and wife hostile interaction as possible mediating variables.

Hypotheses

Figure 1 shows the measurement model and the hypothesized structural model. It was hypothesized that marital power would be negatively related to sexual satisfaction for both husbands and wives; marital power would be positively related to hostile interaction; and hostile interaction would be negatively related to sexual satisfaction. It was also hypothesized that partner's marital power would be negatively related to her/his partner's sexual satisfaction; marital power would be positively related to partner's hostile interaction; and partner's hostile

interaction would be negatively related to her/his partner's sexual satisfaction. It was hypothesized that hostile interaction would be a partial mediating variable for actor effects between marital power and sexual satisfaction and that partner's hostile interaction would be a partial mediating variable between marital power and sexual satisfaction.

Methods

Participants

The participants for this study were involved in the *Flourishing Families Project* (FFP) a study of inner family life involving families with a child between the ages of 10 and 14. The sample for wave 1 consisted of 500 families (337 two-parent, 163 single-parent). Only the two-parent families who participated in wave 2 of the study were used because the sexual satisfaction measure was not available at wave 1. Ninety-six percent of two-parent families from wave 1 (322 couples) participated in wave 2.

Of the 322 couples, 87.5% of husbands and 81.5% of wives mothers were European American, 5.4% of husbands and 5.0% of wives were African American, and 7.1% of husbands and 13.4% of mothers were from other ethnic groups or were multiethnic. The mean age of husbands was 46.34 ($SD=5.96$) and of wives was 44.40 ($SD=5.70$). In terms of education, 68.5% of wives and 74% of husbands had a bachelor's degree or higher. In terms of household income, 9.8% made less than \$59,000 per year, 34% made between \$60,000 and \$99,000 a year, 32% made more between \$100,00 and \$139,000, with the remaining 24% making more than \$140,000.

Procedures

Families were primarily recruited using a purchased national telephone survey database (Polk Directories/InfoUSA). This database contained 82 million households across the United States and had detailed information about each household, including presence and age of children. Families identified using the Polk Directory were randomly selected from targeted census tracts that mirrored the socio-economic and racial stratification of reports of local school districts. All families with a child between the ages of 10 and 14 living within target census tracts were deemed eligible to participate in the FFP. Of the 692 eligible families contacted, 423 agreed to participate, resulting in a 61% response rate. However, the Polk Directory national database was generated using telephone, magazine, and internet subscription reports; so families of lower socio-economic status were under-represented. In an attempt to more closely mirror the demographics of the area, 77 additional families were recruited into the study through other means (e.g., referrals, fliers; 15%). By broadening our approach, we were able to significantly increase the social-economic and ethnic diversity of the sample.

Recruitment was conducted in a multistage approach. First, a letter of introduction was sent to potentially eligible families (this step was skipped for the 15 families who responded to fliers). Second, interviewers made home visits and phone calls to confirm eligibility and willingness to participate in the study. Once eligibility and consent were confirmed, interviewers made appointments to come to the family's home and administered surveys to each parent and the target child as well as videotaping interactions. Discussion within the videotaped tasks was prompted by cards given to the participants who were asked to read the cards aloud and discuss the answers. These discussions served as the content for observational coding procedures.

The most frequent reasons cited by families for not wanting to participate in the study were lack of time and concerns about privacy. It is important to note that there were very little

missing data. As interviewers collected each segment of the in-home questionnaires, they screened for missing answers and double marking and asked participants to respond to the question again.

Measures

Marital Power. Data for Marital Power came from participant's responses at wave 1. Because the principal investigators in Flourishing Families researchers felt there were no good, psychometrically tested marital power scales available, the marital power scale in this study was developed using items from other power scales (i.e., Ball et al., 1995; Crosbie-Burnett, & Giles-Sims, 1991; Lindahl et al., 2004; Sagrestano et al., 1999). Using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), both husbands and wives were asked to respond independently to 15 items related to power in their relationships. Husbands and wives answered items according to their perception of their partner's level of power. Items included: "It often seems my partner can get away with things in our relationship that I can never get away with" and "When disagreements arise in our relationship, my partner's opinion usually wins out". The higher the score, the more husbands and wives perceived their partner as having power.

Alpha reliabilities were .92 for both husbands and wives. Factor analysis showed that all 15 items loaded satisfactorily with factor loadings ranging from .84 to .95 for wives and from .86 to .94 for husbands. The mean of items for the husband and the mean of items for the wife were used as the measures of husband marital power and wife marital power.

Sexual Satisfaction. Two latent variables, wife sexual satisfaction and husband sexual satisfaction were created using five indicators each that came from their responses at wave 2 to four items from the Sexual Satisfaction Subscale of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory-Revised, MSI-r (Snyder, 1997), and their response to an item related to conflict about sex from the

RELATE questionnaire (Busby, Holman, & Taniguchi, 2001). Using a Likert-type response scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*all of the time*), participants answered such questions as “I hold back my sexual interest because my partner makes me feel uncomfortable (reverse scored)” and “I would like my partner to express a little more tenderness during intercourse (reverse scored)”.

Chronbach’s alphas for the 5 item scale were .71 for wives and .65 for husbands. Factor loadings for the 5 items ranged from .82 to .94 for wives and from .85 to .92 for husbands. The same husband and wife latent variable for their sexual satisfaction at wave 1 was created using their responses to the same items at wave 1. As can be seen in Figure 1, wave 1 husband and wife sexual satisfaction will be used in the model as a control variable.

Observed Hostile Interaction. A latent variable called observed hostile interaction was created for both husband and wife using four codes of their interactional behavior during a 25-minute discussion task in wave 1 from the *Iowa Family Interaction Rating Scales* (IFIRS; Melby et al., 1998). The four codes were hostility, contempt, angry coercion, and antisocial behavior. Specifically, IFIRS defines hostility as the extent to which hostile, angry, critical, disapproving, rejecting, or contemptuous behavior is directed toward another interactor’s behavior (actions), appearance, or personal characteristics. Contempt is defined as a specific form of hostility characterized by disgust, disdain, or scorn of another person. Angry coercion is defined as control attempts that include hostile, contemptuous, threatening, or blaming behavior. The antisocial scale is defined as demonstrations of self-centered, egocentric, acting out, and out-of-control behavior that show defiance, active resistance, insensitivity toward others, or lack of constraint that reflect immaturity and age-inappropriate behaviors.

Training of Observational Coders. Training for observational coders was conducted over several weeks. Each coder was required to read the coding manual and participate in a series of tests designed to familiarize coders with the Iowa Family Interaction Rating Scales (Melby et al., 1998). Coders in training coded parenting tasks and marital tasks and participated in discussion groups with trained coders. They then coded a task that had been coded by certified coders at the Iowa State Coding Lab and tasks coded by certified coders in the BYU coding lab. They were required to achieve 80% agreement with the Iowa Coders (Melby & Conger, 2001) and the BYU coders. When a coder was consistently reaching 80% inter rater agreement, they were certified to code actual research tasks. Actual coding performance based on interrater reliability scores was carefully tracked on a weekly basis for each coder, and if a coder drifted from the 80% standard, they were asked to participate in coder group meetings where the group coded a task together. Tasks were assigned to a primary coder, and 30% of tasks were assigned to a secondary coder in such a way that neither the primary or secondary coder was aware that the task was being double coded. Based on frequency, intensity, and context, coders assigned a rating to family members ranging from 1 (not at all characteristic) to 9 (totally characteristic) for 30 codes including the codes for hostility, contempt, angry coercion, and antisocial behavior used in this study.

Control Variables. The following variables were controlled for in the analysis: husband age, wife age, husband education, wife education, length of relationship, and household income. This was done by examining the coefficients for paths between them and sexual satisfaction for husband and wife.

Results

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations for all measured variables in the study. The mean for wife power was 2.27 ($SD=.67$) and for husband power was 2.25 ($SD=.75$) indicating that on average perceptions indicated that their relationships were more egalitarian. Means for observed hostility for both wife (1.74 to 3.10) and husband (1.44 to 3.19) indicated that on average, both husbands and wives participate in some degree of hostile interactions. Means for the items for sexual satisfaction varied from 3.12 to 4.35 for wives and from 3.14 to 4.16 for husbands, indicating that in general, husbands and wives were fairly satisfied with their sexual relationships, which is what we expected in a community based sample.

Correlations for variables were not all in the hypothesized direction. It was hypothesized that marital power would be negatively related to sexual satisfaction for both husbands and wives, but results actually showed a significant positive relationship ($\beta=.31, p<.001$, for husbands; $\beta=.22, p<.01$, for wives). It was also hypothesized that hostile interaction would be negatively related to sexual satisfaction for both husbands and wives, but this finding was only significant for husbands ($\beta=-.18, p<.01$).

Figure 2 shows the significant Beta Coefficients for the various paths in the APIM. Husband power was positively related to husband sexual satisfaction ($\beta=.31, p<.001$), and wife marital power was positively related to wife sexual satisfaction ($\beta=.22, p<.01$). Both husband and wife power were positively related to their respective hostility ($\beta=.38$, for husbands; $\beta=.32$ for wives, both $p<.001$). Husband hostility was negatively related to husband sexual satisfaction ($\beta=-.18, p<.01$), and wife hostility was not significantly related to wife sexual satisfaction.

Husband marital power was negatively related to wife sexual satisfaction ($\beta=-.46, p<.001$), and wife marital power was negatively related to husband sexual satisfaction ($\beta=-.29,$

$p < .001$). Husband and wife marital power were positively related to their partner's hostility ($\beta = .34, p < .001$ for husband marital power to wife hostility; $\beta = .18, p < .01$ for wife marital power to husband hostility). For both, hostility was negatively related to their partner's sexual satisfaction ($\beta = -.20, p < .01$ for husband hostility to wife sexual satisfaction; $\beta = -.14, p < .05$ for wife hostility to husband sexual satisfaction).

Tests of Mediation

Bootstrapping was used to test for mediation following Preacher and Haye's recommendations (2008) with 5000 draws. As seen in Table 2, results indicated that three paths were significantly mediated by hostile interaction (h power-h observed hostility-h sexual satisfaction; h power-w observed hostility-h sexual satisfaction; w power-h observed hostility-w sexual satisfaction). Observed wife hostility did not significantly mediate the path from wife power to wife sexual satisfaction.

Discussion

This study examined the relationship between marital power and husband and wife sexual satisfaction as mediated by husband and wife hostile interaction observed in a discussion based observation task in mid-life couples. Results showed that, on average, marital relationships were more egalitarian. This supports the contention of Sullivan and Coltrane (2008) in describing today's marriages as more egalitarian than those of the past. Because participants reported having mostly egalitarian relationships, there was limited data from relationships with large discrepancies of high power versus low power. It should also be taken into account that the power measure did not report a result of shared power between spouses, but rather individual perceptions of one's partner's degree of power in the marriage. Husband and wife perceptions of

partner power should be considered within the context of their spouse's perception of power to understand the true systemic relationship. Results also indicated that on average, both husbands and wives displayed degrees of hostility, contempt, angry coercion, or antisocial behavior.

Findings showed that marital power was positively related to sexual satisfaction for husbands and wives, contradicting the proposed hypotheses. It was hypothesized that marital power would be negatively related to sexual satisfaction based off of Brezsnyak and Whisman's (2004) finding that couples who share power have higher levels of sexual desire, a variable that is positively related to sexual satisfaction (Mark, 2012). However, it is possible that having higher perceived marital power by one's partner means that husbands and wives have higher levels of influence in sexual interaction, increasing their sexual satisfaction. For example, one of the items in the Sexual Satisfaction Subscale is, "I hold back my sexual interest because my partner makes me feel uncomfortable". If one partner has a higher perceived degree of marital power, he or she may also have influence in sexual practices and would not be holding back sexual interest. In fact, he or she may be driving the sexual relationship and making more decisions within this context, contributing to a higher degree of sexual satisfaction for the partner with power.

The finding that marital power was positively related to hostile interaction for both husbands and wives supports Sagrestano et al.'s (1999) finding that higher perceived power by women, and lower perceived power by men, were associated with violence and the use of verbal aggression by both spouses. This finding was also similar to Senchak's (1996) conclusion that the more non-egalitarian partners perceive their relationship, the greater the husbands' level of aggression. In addition, Gottman, Coan, Carrere, and Swanson (1998) found that husbands who rejected influence from their wives as a refusal of sharing power were more likely to have higher

scores on a hostility subscale. Our findings add to the current literature by showing significant effects for both husbands and wives with perceived power being related to more hostile behavior toward their spouse. Madsen (2013) found that the more power husbands and wives reported, the more likely they were to use romantic relational aggression including love withdrawal and social sabotage. Hostile strategies may be motivated by attempts to maintain current levels of power or as a tool that helps partners gain and maintain marital power initially.

It appears that husbands' sexual satisfaction suffers when they engage in hostile behaviors, but wives' sexual satisfaction is not significantly impacted when they engage in hostile behaviors. This is the only finding in this study that showed significant gender differences. Based on Krivickas, Sanchez, Kenny, and Wright's (2010) finding that wives are more likely to use a hostile style of communication while husbands are more likely to use a withdrawing style, it is possible that when a wife is hostile, it is normal for her and therefore, it is less likely to affect her sexual satisfaction with her husband. Her husband may not react in a noticeable way, so her sexual satisfaction does not have a significant impact. However, when husbands are hostile toward wives, this is a disruption of pattern and there may be a more significant impact on the sexual relationship, hence his lower sexual satisfaction. However, in this study, descriptive statistics indicated that wives did not exhibit more hostility in the observed tasks than men. In terms of covert relational aggression, a more subtle form of marital hostility such as love withdrawal and social sabotage, Hughes (2010) found that when wives engage in relational aggression, their sexual satisfaction is lower, and when husbands engage in relational aggression, their sexual satisfaction is not affected. Further research would be useful to explain the differences of results between observed hostility and romantic relational aggression having opposite impacts on husband and wife sexual satisfaction.

A person's perceived power was negatively related to their partner's sexual satisfaction for both husbands and wives. This finding is somewhat contrary to Gray's (1984) finding that high levels of female power did not negatively affect male's sexual functioning, but sexual satisfaction was not an area he addressed in his construct of sexual functioning and his measure of power was different than the one used in this study. Perceiving one's partner as having greater power means that one views oneself as more oppressed, thus lowering sexual satisfaction. The finding that a partner's perception of marital power is positively related to the partner's sexual satisfaction seems to put partners in a bind because the partner's perception of power is negatively related to their own sexual satisfaction. There is probably a systemic balance between having one's own degree of perceived power showing positive effects such as higher sexual satisfaction, and one's degree of perceived power crossing a certain threshold of being too much associated with partner's sexual satisfaction deteriorating.

The hypothesis that marital power would be positively related to partner's use of hostility was true for both husbands and wives. This supports Gray-Little and Burks' (1983) results of perceived lower marital power increasing the use of coercive techniques in marriage. It appears that when husbands have more power, wives will use more hostility and visa versa. Spouses with less power may feel repressed or disempowered, and may have the desire to gain more power in the relationship by using hostility. Another possibility is that spouses with less power may be bitter and resigned to this non-egalitarian structure, so as a means of punishment, they may be hostile toward their powerful spouse. Considering the combination of actor and partner effects, marital power appears to be significantly associated with use of one's own hostility as well as to the partner's use of hostility.

Hostile behavior was also negatively associated with a partner's sexual satisfaction. Newton and Kiecolt-Glaser (1995) found actor and partner effects for hostility being related to linear decreases in marital quality in the first three years of marriage. As mentioned earlier, marital satisfaction is highly related to sexual satisfaction, so the use of hostility would intuitively lower marital satisfaction as well as sexual satisfaction. When a partner is hostile toward the other, it is likely that the victim of the hostility may not feel as close and connected, affecting his or her ability to be satisfied with the sexual relationship.

Mediating Effects of Observed Hostility

Partner's hostility was a partial mediating variable between marital power and sexual satisfaction and three of the four potential pathways for this relationship were found to be significant (h power-h observed hostility-h sexual satisfaction; h power-w observed hostility-h sexual satisfaction; w power-h observed hostility-w sexual satisfaction). The Intersystem Approach is a useful framework for understanding hostile interaction's partial mediation in terms of attributional strategy. How partners make meaning out of levels of power or sexual aspects of the relationship may influence their behaviors, influencing them to use hostile interaction as a consequence. Also, a partner's use of hostility can take on negative meanings that may influence future levels of power or sexual satisfaction. Observed wife hostility did not significantly mediate the path from wife power to wife sexual satisfaction. This is related to wife's use of hostility not being significantly associated with her sexual satisfaction. Similarly to the possible explanation of non-significance of the actor effect, it is more common for women to use hostility casually and husbands may not noticeably react, leading to a lack of significant effects on wife's sexual satisfaction.

Implications for Treatment

With these findings, couple therapists can be better informed to aid couples with many different presenting problems. Marital power dynamics have an impact on several different areas of functioning including physical health (Loving, Heffner, Kiecolt-Glaser, Glaser, & Malarkey, 2004), depression (Byrne & Carr, 2000), parenting (Lindahl, Malik, Kaczynski, & Simons, 2004), marital satisfaction (Brezsnyak & Whisman, 2004; Stafford & Canary, 2006), and sexual desire (Brezsnyak and Whisman, 2004) among many others. For any of these reasons and more, couples, individuals, or families will come to therapy in hopes of improving their lives.

Huenergardt and Knudson-Martin (2009) describe that in therapy, a prerequisite to clinical change and intimacy for couples is to address power inequalities. As illustrated, this study found significant relationships between marital power and sexual satisfaction. Using these findings, therapists can be aware that when couples present with sexual dissatisfaction, increasing power equality is an important goal in the beginning of treatment. To address power imbalances, Ward and Knudson-Martin (2012) provide therapists with six actions found to encourage more equal power including interventions such as naming power discrepancies and validating the competence of the one-down partner.

When sexual issues are the presenting problem, as many couples come to therapy in hopes of improving their sexual relationship (Basson et al., 2000; Rosing et al., 2009), the significant mediating effects of hostility can also be useful for treatment. When sexual satisfaction is low for either partner, therapists can assess for observed hostility in session or ask clients about instances of hostility outside of session, giving them a bigger picture of understanding the dyadic relationship within the Intersystem Approach (Hertlein et al., 2009). Clients may be unaware that their hostility toward their partner is linked to the sexual satisfaction of themselves as well as their partner. A therapist can use this knowledge as a tool to educate

clients and help them be aware of how their relationship dynamics such as marital power and hostile interactions can be affecting their sexual relationship in a significant way.

A therapy model that may be useful for targeting the mediating effects of hostile interaction is Greenburg and Johnson's (1988) Emotionally Focused Therapy, which is based on attachment theory. Therapist's softening of partners and reframing insecurities or hostility into vulnerable emotions and attachment needs are tools to combat the negative effects and frequency of hostile interactions between spouses.

Strengths and Limitations

Much of the current research on sexual experience is based on studies with data from individuals rather than from two people involved sexually with each other (DeLamater and Hyde, 2004) and only a few studies focus on married couples at mid-life (Appleton & Bohm, 2001). This study on married couples makes an important contribution to the current research because it examines sexual satisfaction from both partners of a marriage who are in a mid-life stage using an Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (Kenney, Kashy, & Cook, 2006).

Considering the benefits of observational coding, this study adds to the current literature of self-report data and observational data because it used both methods: self report for marital power and sexual satisfaction and observed for hostile interaction.

A limitation of this study is that it is not generalizable to all geographical areas of the U.S. or to other countries. While the sample was more diversified than many marital studies, diversity concerning race, especially Latinos did not reflect the population of Latinos in the U.S. Most of the sample was also above average income so caution should be exercised in generalizing to lower income groups. It would be helpful to consider the relationships among these variable in same sex couples, but there were not enough in this sample to do that. A

limitation to the generalizability of this study to other research is that there is little consensus on the measurement of marital power. A final limitation is that the study was cross-sectional so the ordering of the variables could actually be reversed. Longitudinal studies would be needed to determine if power drives hostility or if hostility is a way of gaining power.

Conclusion

This study shows that marital power and sexual satisfaction have a significant actor and partner relationship. Marital power is positively related to sexual satisfaction for actor effects and negatively related to sexual satisfaction for partner effects. In addition, marital power was significantly positively related to hostile interaction for partners and actors. Actor effects for hostile interaction were negatively related to sexual satisfaction only for husbands, and partner effects for hostile interaction were negatively related to sexual satisfaction for husbands and wives. Finally, observed hostile interaction is a partial mediator between marital power and sexual satisfaction for actors and partners, with exception of the mediating path from wife power to wife sexual satisfaction.

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Figure 1. Measurement and Hypothesized Structural APIM

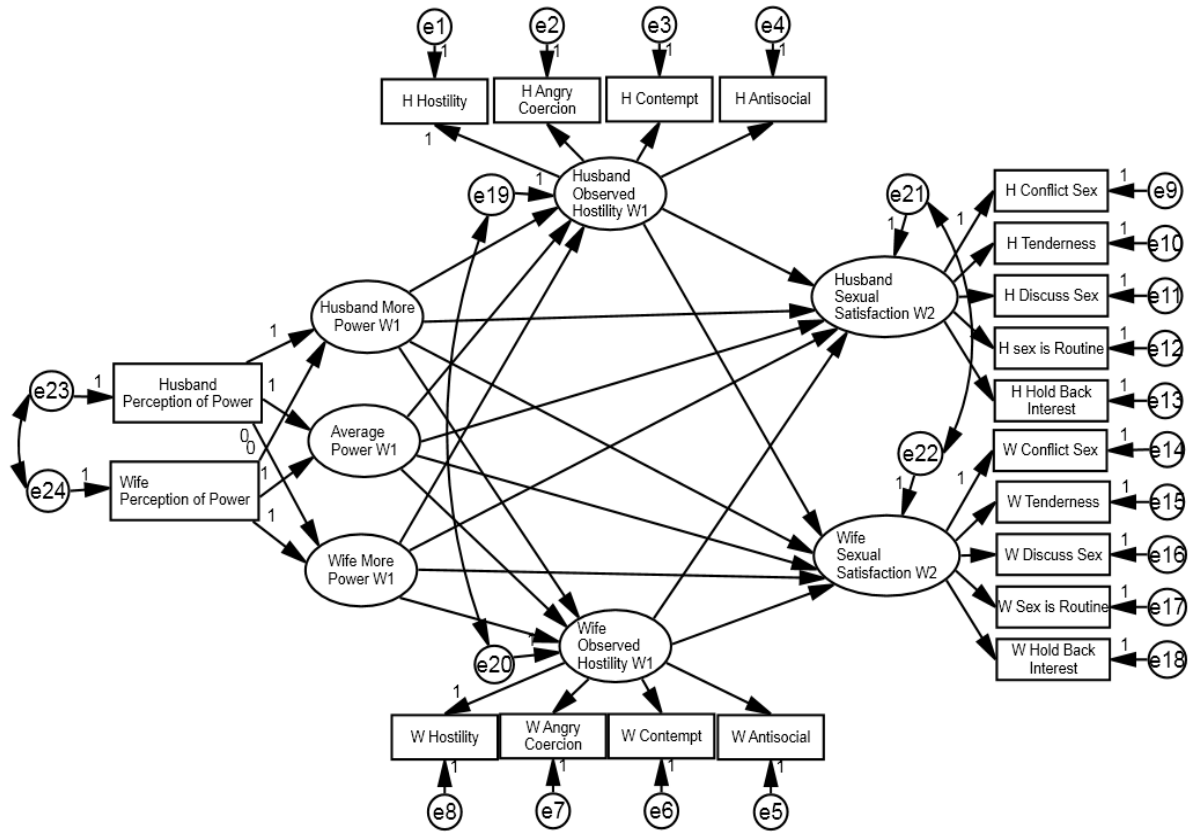
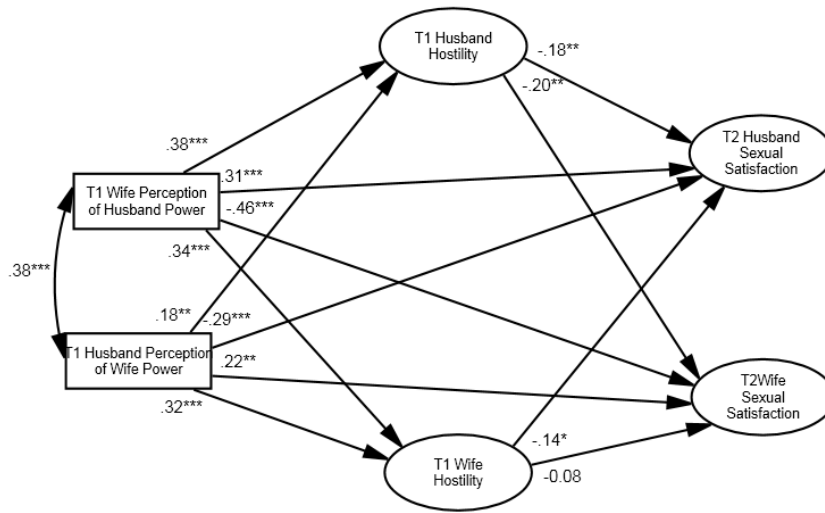


Figure 2. SEM Results for husband and wife power predicting T2 husband and wife sexual satisfaction with T1 husband and wife hostility as mediating variables.



$X^2 = 162.6, df = 145, p = .15$
 $CFI = .991, RMSEA = .010, SRMR = .034$

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

NOTE: Time 1 husband and wife sexual satisfaction were control variables in this model. Husband and wife education, age, length of relationship, and income were also control variables, but since none of them were significant predictors, they are not included in the model.

Table 1. Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Measured Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.Husband Perception of Wife Power	1.0									
2.Wife Perception of Husband Power	.38***	1.0								
Wife Hostility T1										
3.Hostility	.40***	.25***	1.0							
4.Angry Coercion	.26***	.13*	.69***	1.0						
5.Contempt	.35***	.26***	.82***	.67***	1.0					
6.Antisocial	.30***	.20***	.81***	.64***	.72***	1.0				
Husband Hostility T1										
7.Hostility	.41***	.28***	.58***	.42***	.46***	.47***	1.0			
8.Angry Coercion	.37***	.28***	.44***	.46***	.47***	.38***	.69***	1.0		
9.Contempt	.37***	.30***	.53***	.40***	.52***	.44***	.81***	.69***	1.0	
10.Antisocial	.41***	.21***	.52***	.42***	.46***	.51***	.74***	.57***	.69***	1.0
Wife Sexual Satisfaction T2										
11.Conflict over Sex (r)	.24***	-.22***	-.09	.08	.06	.06	-.16**	-.16**	-.08	-.06
12.Little more tenderness (r)	.37**	-.24***	.19**	.08	.12*	.14*	-.24***	-.16**	-.23***	-.19**
13.Do not discuss (r)	.18**	-.14*	.06	.03	.03	.08	-.07	-.05	-.07	-.04
14.Sex is routine (r)	.32***	-.23***	.17**	.16**	.14*	.08	-.08	-.07	-.05	-.02
15.Hold back interest (r)	.39***	-.35***	.16**	.07	.11	.09	-.17**	-.15**	-.15**	-.09
Husband Sexual Satisfaction T2										
16.Conflict over Sex (r)	-.20**	.40***	-.13*	-.13*	-.13*	-.08	-.19**	-.21**	-.18**	-.10
17.Little more tenderness (r)	-.25***	.25***	-.12*	-.06	-.12*	-.13*	-.10	-.03	-.16**	-.11
18.Do not discuss (r)	-.29***	.29***	-.04	-.07	-.09	-.08	-.05	-.05	-.13*	-.07
19.Sex is routine (r)	-.30***	.30***	-.16**	-.09	-.15**	-.09	-.14*	-.13*	-.18**	-.16**
20.Hold back interest (r)	-.39***	.39***	-.12*	-.08	-.12*	-.13*	-.15**	-.15*	-.19**	-.13*
M	2.27	2.25	2.86	1.74	2.16	3.10	2.45	1.44	1.88	3.19
SD	.67	.75	1.77	1.35	1.69	1.56	1.62	1.13	1.46	1.60

Table 1. Continued

	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1.Husband Perception Of Wife Power										
2.Wife Perception of Husband Power										
3.Hostility										
4.Angry Coercion										
5.Contempt										
6.Antisocial										
Husband Hostility T1										
7.Hostility										
8.Angry Coercion										
9.Contempt										
10.Antisocial										
Wife Sexual Satisfaction T2										
11.Conflict over Sex (r)	1.0									
12.Little more tenderness (r)	.29***	1.0								
13.Do not discuss (r)	.22***	.29***	1.0							
14.Sex is routine (r)	.45***	.40***	.30***	1.0						
15.Hold back interest (r)	.38***	.39***	.26***	.46***	1.0					
Husband Sexual Satisfaction T2										
16.Conflict over Sex (r)	.46***	.21***	.12*	.26***	.41***	1.0				
17.Little more tenderness (r)	.21***	.26***	.12*	.20**	.15*	.22***	1.0			
18.Do not discuss (r)	.10	.10	.22***	.14*	.19**	.26***	.25***	1.0		
19.Sex is routine (r)	.23***	.16*	.02	.19**	.25***	.24***	.34***	.14*	1.0	
20.Hold back interest (r)	.18**	.07	.08	.12*	.23***	.36***	.29***	.26***	.40***	1.0
<i>M</i>	2.79	2.39	2.58	2.52	1.65	2.86	2.35	2.59	2.62	1.84
<i>SD</i>	1.06	.99	1.08	1.02	.88	1.03	1.01	1.01	.94	.95

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

NOTE: (r) means item was reversed

Table 2. Estimates of the Indirect Effects on Husband and Wife Sexual Satisfaction Through Husband and Wife Observed Hostility.

Indirect Paths	Estimate	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	CI (lower)	CI (Upper)
W perception of H power-Observed H hostility-H Sexual Satisfaction	-.073	.026	<.01	-.147	-.012
W perception of H power-Observed W Hostility-H Sexual Satisfaction	-.052	.027	<.05	-.116	-.025
H perception of W power-Observed W Hostility-W Sexual Satisfaction	-.012	.023	N.S.	-.245	-.023
H perception of W power-Observed H Hostility-W Sexual Satisfaction	-.048	.032	<.05	-.138	-.014

Note: The confidence intervals (CI) were obtained through bias-corrected bootstrap with 5000 draws.