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Relational Empowerment: The Longitudinal Influence of Perceived Marital Power on Marital Quality and Attachment Security over Five Years of Marriage

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ABSTRACT

Relational Empowerment: The Longitudinal Influence of Perceived Marital Power on Marital Quality and Attachment Security over Five Years of Marriage

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Perceiving shared power in marriage has been linked to higher marital quality and lower attachment insecurity. Yet limited research has examined whether perception of power has a longitudinal influence on how both spouses' perceptions play a role in both spouses' outcomes. To address previous limitations, I utilized 319 couples (94.7% retention from Wave 1) from the Flourishing Families Project to estimate bi-yearly (Waves 1, 3, and 5) and yearly (Waves 3-5) longitudinal actor-partner interdependence models. Reporting shared power in marriage was linked to the actors' higher marital quality and lower attachment insecurity over time (though less consistently for attachment insecurity). Longitudinal partner effects and indirect effects were also found from reports of shared marital power to both marital quality and attachment insecurity over time. Little evidence was found for bidirectionality. The combined evidence suggests that power dynamics in a marriage are an important predictor of couples' overall relational well-being, and not simply a byproduct of other well-being indicators. Husbands and wives should mutually seek to help each other feel empowered in a relationship to reap the benefits of marital quality and secure attachment.

Keywords: marital power, marital quality, attachment security, marriage

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Perception of power, often considered the level of influence someone has over another person (Cromwell & Olson, 1975), is a basic force in social relationships (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003; Russell, 1938). Based on a variety of social cues and hierarchies, we consciously and unconsciously assess our level of power in relation to those around us, engaging in a reciprocal process of external perception and internal regulation (Keltner et al., 2003; Porges, 2011). This process has consequences for relational and individual well-being, as broad research has linked power dynamics to stereotyping (Sidanius, 1993), moral judgment (Asadullah, Siddiquei, Hussain, & Arain, 2017), inferences about nonverbal behavior (Snodgrass, Hecht, & Ploutz-Snyder, 1998), emotional display (Clark, 1990), and sexual aggression (Malamuth, 1996; Williams, Gruenfeld, & Guillory, 2017).

Noticing perceived power's influence on a wide variety of outcomes, some researchers have narrowed the focus of power's social influence to broad dyadic interactions (e.g. Moreland & Levine, 1989; Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991), with a growing body of work assessing perceived power specifically in marriage (e.g., Byrne & Carr, 2000; Byrne, Carr, & Clark, 2004; LeBaron, Miller, & Yorgason, 2014). Extant research on marital power has shown that those who report a power discrepancy in marriage (in these cases, that a partner has more control or influence in the relationship) has been connected to salient outcomes such as lower marital quality (LeBaron et al., 2014), and higher attachment insecurity (Oka, Brown, & Miller, 2016). Broadly, these two separate outcomes are important for consideration in marital power research. Power dynamics could potential have an influence on marital quality, as both partners feeling empowered seems to be connected to engaging in the type of relational practices

that promote well-being for both the self and the spouse (e.g., Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Gottman, 2011; Seider, Hirschberger, Nelson, & Levenson, 2009), whereas a sense of power discrepancy in marriage is typically connected to maladaptive practices that undermine the relationship (e.g., Byrne et al., 2004; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Specifically pertinent to attachment insecurity, studies have suggested that marriages where spouses feel mutual influence are better at validating each other's worth (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008), and building trust (Gottman, 2011), which are crucial components to feeling securely attached to a partner (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

However, to this point, empirical research on perceived marital power has suffered from some limitations. A sizable percentage of empirical articles on perceived marital power utilize small at-risk samples (e.g., Byrne & Carr, 2000; Byrne et al., 2004), cross-sectional community samples (e.g., Brezsnyak & Whisman, 2004), or only wives' perspective (e.g., Bulanda, 2011; Byrne & Carr, 2000). Limited research has examined whether the perception of marital power dynamics has a longitudinal influence on relational outcomes (for exception see LeBaron et al., 2014), or how both spouses' perceptions play a role in both spouses' outcomes in an actor-partner interdependence model (for exception see Oka et al., 2016). In summary, little research exists on whether reports of power dynamics in a marriage can influence outcomes over time, and no research exists on whether a partner's report can also influence outcomes over time.

For this study, I selected marital quality and attachment insecurity as two separate outcomes of interest, as research has provided evidence of these variables being strong indicators for overall relational well-being (e.g., Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016) and they have clear aforementioned ties to research on marital power (e.g., LeBaron et al., 2014; Oka et al., 2016). I performed the analysis on middle age couples who are in a stable, marital relationship. This

means that any prediction of change over time is a conservative estimate, as the dynamics within these longer-term relationships are relatively stable. This can be seen as advantageous to the study, as any evidence of variables predicting change over time is particularly noteworthy. To be more confident in the direction of associations, I also explored relations bidirectionally. Ultimately, by utilizing data from middle aged, heterosexual married couples over five years of marriage, I aimed to evaluate the longitudinal influence of marital power dynamics on marital quality and attachment insecurity by creating the strongest longitudinal, empirical profile of perceived marital power to date.

Relational Empowerment

Research on power in marriage has dealt with a variety of conceptualizations. Some researchers have acknowledged the importance of evaluating marital power in terms of economic resources such as income (Cromwell & Olson, 1975), though more researchers appear to suggest a psychological element of power that may be related though distinct from other resources (Wanic & Kulik, 2011). This psychological element of power (the element I focused on in this study) often focuses on partners believing their influence is felt in the processes and outcomes of the marriage, versus believing their partner overpowers them in the relationship (LeBaron et al., 2014; Oka et al., 2016). Some debate exists concerning the nature of these reports, as some describe the difference between actual power, the ability to control an outcome, as opposed to perceived power, the amount of power one thinks another holds (Fiske & Berdahl, 2007). While reporting on a partner's level of power in the relationship may or may not be fully indicative of the actual level of power the partner holds, important to understand is that the perception is real in its consequences. An individual who perceives a marital partner to exert power in dominating the relationship will likely report maladaptive outcomes for more affective measures such as

marital quality (LeBaron et al., 2014) and attachment insecurity (Oka et al., 2016), whereas reports of shared marital power are more likely to yield beneficiary results. Both theoretical background and empirical study support this idea.

Some view marriage as a type of dominance hierarchy, with one partner seeking to obtain a power advantage over the other (Brown & Lewis, 2004). This perspective seems embedded in ideas of competition and individualism, which link closely to social exchange theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1978). This lens may make sense amongst business associates, casual acquaintances, or even in the formation stages of a romantic relationship (Beck & Clark, 2010), as individuals use a variety of strategies to self-empower in an attempt to gain relational, material, or sexual favors (Buss, 2017). However, minimal support exists for the idea that the best marriages are those where someone perceives a power discrepancy. In connection with research suggesting a dominance hierarchy (Brown & Lewis, 2004; Wanic & Kulik, 2011), one large review (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983) suggested that the least happy marital relationships are those in which the husband feels powerless (perhaps reflecting husbands having a greater need to feel a sense of power of their marriage), followed by marriages in which the wife felt powerless. However, that same review suggested that marriages that are more egalitarian, reflecting equal partnership or shared power between spouses, are the optimal marriages.

Some have suggested that a major reason for the benefits of a more equal distribution of power is the communal nature of a marriage (Beck & Clark, 2010). Although exceptions certainly exist, once individuals move into the long-term expectations of marital commitment, it seems to increase the likelihood of a union accompanied by a sense of permanence to the relationship (Willoughby & James, 2017; Wood, Avellar, & Goesling, 2008), a non-contingent concern for a spouse's welfare (Beck & Clark, 2010), and a mindset of interdependence rather

than exchange (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008; Thibaut & Kelley, 1978). These ideas are also supported by attachment theory, suggesting that couples become communally oriented to each other by gradually developing trust through reliable responsiveness and alleviation of distress during troubled times (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2012).

In these types of long-term relationships, perceiving a partner to have a higher degree of influence than oneself on the relationship could be perceived as a threat to the intimacy in the relationship, built upon a shared vulnerability. Vulnerability (an important element for developing marital quality, and secure attachment relationship; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2012) is particularly challenging to attain in a marriage where either partner perceives a power discrepancy. The partner who feels he or she has more power is afraid of displaying vulnerability because it would show weakness, and the partner who perceives himself of herself to be powerless is afraid of displaying vulnerability for fear of upsetting the partner (Beck & Clark, 2010; Knudson-Martin, 2013). In connection with this idea, multiple reviews have suggested that when both partners feel relationally empowered and mutual support, the couple is more likely to have a relationship of empathy, teamwork, emotional regulation, vulnerability, and overall care put into the relationship (see Fishbane, 2011 and Knudson-Martin, 2013 for a more comprehensive review of the research).

This line of work also suggests the potential for partner effects of perceived marital power between spouses, possibly due to a non-contingent communal concern that can accompany the long-term commitment found in marriage (Beck & Clark, 2010). There is good reason to believe that both partners feeling empowered is connected to both engaging in the type of relational practices that promote well-being for both the self and the spouse (e.g., Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Gottman, 2011; Seider et al., 2009). This means a spouse feeling mutual

empowerment in the relationship could possibly be beneficial for personal well-being; inversely, feeling a sense of mutual empowerment in the relationship could positively influence a spouse's well-being, both in terms of marital quality and attachment security.

Current Study

There is strong theoretical reasoning, and some empirical evidence for why believing the spouses who report shared power would have higher levels of well-being than feeling a sense that the partner has more influence than oneself in the relationship. However, many of these studies suffer from weaknesses that limit empirical confidence; much remains to be learned about the problematic nature of feeling a power discrepancy in a marriage as opposed to feeling shared influence. For example, the lack of longitudinal evidence makes it difficult to ascertain the extent that feeling shared power in marriage is simply a by-product of overarching relational and individual factors, or if feeling shared power in marriage is actually a core component of marriage that is associated with change in outcomes over time. Additionally, the lack of evaluating both partners' perspectives makes it difficult to ascertain whether partner effects have any relevance in this field.

In this study, by longitudinally assessing bidirectional, actor and partner associations between perceived marital power (again, the degree to which one reports a partner having more power in marriage versus reporting a sense of mutual influence) and various indicators of well-being, I can provide some of the strongest empirical insight to date for the extent perceived marital power is an important factor for change over time, or is simply part of a reciprocal process with other outcomes. The ability to test for longitudinal partner effects also brings a unique, valuable contribution to the literature. The outcomes of marital quality and attachment insecurity are appropriate constructs to use in this approach because they are strong indicators for

overall relational well-being (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). They have also been targeted outcomes for previous studies that have suffered from methodological limitations of cross-sectionality (e.g., Oka et al., 2016), and only including one partner's perspective (e.g., LeBaron et al., 2014).

A couple of limited cross-sectional studies have evaluated the association between perceived marital power and marital quality (Brezsnyak & Whisman, 2004; Bulanda, 2011; Kulik, 2004). One even attempted to assess directionality, as a longitudinal study (LeBaron et al., 2014) showed no directional influence of wives' perception of power (the extent they reported equal partnership or their husband having more power over them) and marital happiness. The researchers should be commended for this attempt at evaluating perceived power's directionality. However, their limited statistical power (67 participants) and 15-year lag between marital quality measures likely made it difficult to detect a direct longitudinal effect. This is because the quality of a marriage can change drastically over the period of 15 years (Anderson, Van Ryzin, & Doherty, 2010; Karney & Bradbury, 1997; VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001) and several unaccounted for factors over such a long period may confluence results (Little, 2013). In summary, although one previous study failed to find a longitudinal link between perceived marital power and marital quality, there is reason to believe that a connection may be found with higher statistical power and shorter longitudinal intervals. Considering the importance of both partners reporting equal influence in the relationship (Fishbane, 2011; Gray-Little & Burks, 1983), I hypothesized (H1) that both husbands and wives higher perception of shared power in the marriage will have a positive longitudinal actor and partner effect on both partners' marital quality.

I know of only one cross-sectional study that has considered perception of marital power and attachment insecurity, which showed the two constructs to be significantly correlated (Oka et al., 2016), as feeling a partner had more influence in the relationship was associated with feeling an insecure attachment. Conceptually, this study only considered the possibility of attachment being a predictor of perceived marital power and not the inverse. However, considering a growing body of research suggesting that relational experiences can influence attachment insecurity over time (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2012), and that feeling mutual influence in marriage seems to validate each other's worth (Greenberg & Goldman, 2009), I hypothesized (H2) that both husbands and wives higher perception of shared power in the relationship will have a negative longitudinal actor and partner effect on both partners' attachment insecurity. For the sake of parsimony, similar to the Oka et al. (2016) study, I conceptualized attachment insecurity as an overall level of interpersonal insecurity in the relationship (e.g., Clark et al., 2011; Clark, von Culin, & Hirsch, 2015), combining items from anxious and avoidant attachment sub-scales.

In assessing the longitudinal associations of these constructs, I also assessed potential bidirectionality, a possibility for any of our constructs of interest. For example, lower marital quality and higher attachment insecurity could each lead to reporting lower shared power in the marriage. Individuals with these characteristics may be more likely to misinterpret benign actions or intentions of their partner as malevolent, and thus a threat to their sense of power in the relationship (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2012). I felt it was important to assess bidirectionality to increase confidence in whether perceived marital power is more at the root of well-being over time, or simply a piece of a reciprocal process with other outcomes. Considering the possibility of various well-being outcomes coloring the perception of the relationship (Shaver &

Mikulincer, 2012), I therefore hypothesized (H3) that the relationship between marital power and my chosen outcomes will be bidirectional.

H1: Husbands and wives higher perception of shared power in the relationship will have a positive directional actor and partner effect on both partners' marital quality.

H2: Husbands and wives higher perception of shared power in the relationship will have a negative directional actor and partner effect on both partners' attachment insecurity.

H3: The relationship between perceived marital power and my chosen outcomes will be bidirectional.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants were selected from a large northwestern city in the United States and were interviewed once a year for 5 years (2007-2011). Families were primarily recruited using Polk Directories/InfoUSA that describes the presence and age of children in each household. Families identified using this directory were randomly selected from targeted census tracts that mirrored the socioeconomic 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 Flourishing Families Project (FFP). Of the 692 eligible families contacted, 423 agreed to participate (61% response rate). Families of lower socioeconomic status were slightly underrepresented by using this technique. Therefore, in an attempt to more closely mirror the demographics of the local area, a limited number of families were recruited into the study through other means (e.g., referrals, fliers; n = 77, 15%, for a total N = 500).

All questionnaires were screened for missing answers and double marking. The final sample for the current study consists of parents only that were drawn from the FFP study's first

five waves of assessment (total n = 500 families, comprising 337 two-parent families and 163 single-parent families at Wave 1). Only married couples who had complete data over the 5 years were included in the current analysis. Thirteen couples reported cohabiting at Wave 1 and these were excluded from the analysis. Over the course of 5 years, nine couples divorced, three separated, and two were widowed.

At Wave 5, the final sample consisted of 319 couples (94.7% retention from Wave 1). The average age of husbands in the sample was 45.39 years (SD = 5.97) at Wave 1, and the average age of wives was 43.44 years (SD = 5.42) at Wave 1. At Wave 1, the average length of time in the current relationship was 17.85 years (SD = 5.21). Additionally, 75% of families were of European American ethnicity, 4.2% were African American, with smaller number for Hispanics (0.3%) and Asian Americans (1.2%). Nineteen percent of families are considered multiethnic in nature, based on a combination of two or more ethnic cultures among family members. In terms of parental education, 72% of women and 69% of men had a bachelor's degree or higher. For income, 14% made less than $25,000 per year, 16% made between $25,000 and $50,000 a year, and 70% made more than $50,000 per year, with 21% of two-parent mothers and 5% of two-parent fathers reporting being unemployed.

I briefly note that although data were collected for the couples across five years of marriage (2007-2011), Wave 2 (2008) was not usable for my particular analysis because the participants did not answer questions about attachment insecurity. For that reason, I utilized Waves 1 and 3-5 for my analyses. I explain my data analysis plan in further detail below.

Measures

Marital power. For this study, the Marital Power Index was used, which asks respondents to report on his or her perception of their partner's displays of power in the

relationship (Bogue, Miller, & Day, 2008; LeBaron et al., 2014; Oka et al., 2016). Each of the questions had a continuum from perceiving a partner to have greater influence than oneself in the relationship to perceiving the relationship to be a relationship of more equal influence. This 15-item measure was coded so that higher scores indicated a higher level of feeling shared power in the relationship, or a higher indication of believing the relationship had equal influence. Items were based on a 5 point Likert-type scale (e.g., "My partner and I talk about problems until we both agree on a solution" and "My partner has more influence in our relationship than I do (reverse coded)").[1] Marital power had high reliability at all four waves with Cronbach's alphas between .92 and .93 for husbands, and between .91 and .93 for wives.

Marital quality. Marital quality was assessed using a 5-item modified version of the Quality Marriage Index (Norton, 1983). The responses were based on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 6 (very strongly agree). Items included "My relationship with my partner makes me happy" and "My relationship with my partner is very stable." Higher scores indicated higher perceived marital quality. Marital quality had acceptable reliability at all four waves, with Cronbach's alphas between 97 and .98 for wives, and between .96 and .97 for husbands.

Attachment insecurity. Attachment insecurity was measured using the Experiences in Close Relationships scale (ECR; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). The ECR is a measure designed to examine dimensions of insecure attachment, including subscales of avoidance and anxiety. Eight items from the revised version were used for this study, including items such as "I

[1] Exploratory factor analyses showed that the reverse coded items loaded onto the same factor as the items with a higher scores indicating a sense of power. Two factors emerged for subscales of processes and outcome suggested in previous research (Bogue et al., 2008). However, all items successfully loaded onto an aggregate marital power measure in CFAs (details below). Also, authors of the measure (Oka et al., 2016) has used the two subscales as an aggregated score in past research when their research question did not focus on the differentiation of subscales.

am afraid that I will lose my partner's love," and, "I am very comfortable being close to my partner (reverse coded)." Items were based on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Items were summed to obtain a combined anxiety and attachment score for each partner, and coded so that the higher on the scale indicated higher overall attachment insecurity (see Oka et al., 2016 for a similar approach to previous research on attachment and marital power). Attachment insecurity had acceptable reliability at all four waves, with Cronbach's alphas between .83 and .87 for husbands, and between .84 and .89 for wives.

Control variables. I utilized a number of control variables that have been found to relate to the variables of interest (Keltner et al., 2003). Education was assessed by asking both husbands and wives to report on their highest completed grade/level in school on a 7-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from 1 (less than high school) to 7 (advanced degree). Income was assessed by asking both husbands and wives to each report their individual annual income, ranging from 1 (Under $10,000 per year) to 12 ($200,000 or more per year).[2] Both respondents age, race (dummy coded, with white as the comparison variable), and the wife's report of the length of the marital relationship were also used as controls.

Results

Data Analysis Plan

Means and standard deviations for all main variables are found in Table 1. I tested for mean differences between husbands and wives on each of the variables of interest across time. I also tested correlations between all study variables. Only variables from Wave 1 are shown in

[2] Supplementary analyses were conducted throughout the study on income discrepancy to see if the variable added anything different than both spouses reports of their own income. Like the income variables, income discrepancy showed little association with any of my constructs of interest (full results available upon request).

Table 2. Throughout the results section, I use abbreviations for the main constructs of interest to help with readability (e.g., Wave 1 Husbands' Report of Shared Marital Power = HP1; Wave 4 Wives' Attachment Insecurity = WI4). The code for abbreviations are listed beneath Table 2 and Table 3.

I used cross-lagged models to examine whether either spouses' perception of marital power has a directional influence on both spouses' marital quality and attachment insecurity (see Figure 1 for hypothesized model). Considering the limited longitudinal research on perceived marital power, it was unclear whether the influence of marital power is best captured by assessing yearly or bi-yearly intervals between waves of data. It may be a salient predictor of outcomes for more short-term intervals, or its effects may only be made manifest over a longer passage of time. Furthermore, Wave 2 of the study was not usable because participants did not answer questions about attachment insecurity. For these reasons, I decided to create multiple cross-lagged models: one with yearly intervals, and one with bi-yearly intervals. The first model consisted of Waves 1, 3, and 5 to assess whether perceived marital power has a directional influence on my outcomes of interest at a bi-yearly interval (see Figure 2). The second model consisted of Waves 3-5, to assess the directional influence of perceived marital power at yearly intervals (see Figure 3). By having models with both yearly and bi-yearly intervals, if the models are consistent with each other, it can increase confidence in the longitudinal associations. Meanwhile, if inconsistencies are found between the two models, it can provide insight into the appropriate length of lag needed to detect effects of and on perceived marital power (Little, 2013). Although not the primary focus of the study, I also tested bidirectionality by assessing whether both spouses' marital quality and attachment insecurity have a directional influence on husbands and wives perceptions of marital power.

Ideally, it would be advantageous to create latent variables for each of the constructs of interest for the SEM models. Unfortunately, the sample did not have sufficient power to utilize latent variables for each construct. To help account for some of the measurement error, I instead created factor scores for each of the constructs. Based on the suggestion that there should be ten cases for every observed variable (Kline, 2016), I created a total of 12 measurement models when obtaining factor scores (e.g., HP1 and WP1; HI1 and WI1; HQ1 and WQ1). For example, because the construct for marital power had 15 items, I modeled latent variables for husbands and wives (30 total items; within the parameters recommended by Kline) and obtained their factor scores. After obtaining factor scores for each construct, I created the most parsimonious model possible by first entering only the stability coefficients, cross-lagged patterns, and control variables. Afterwards, I used modification indices to add necessary AR2 pathways (Little, 2013), to obtain acceptable model fit (CFI > .90 and RMSEA < .08; Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Kline, 2016).

Finally, I checked for any indirect effects in the model for all variables of interest with 5000 bootstraps. With the complexity of each model yielding over 200 unique indirect effects, it would be impractical to list them all. Instead, I briefly summarized the significant indirect effects of note in my results section, and created a table showing each significant indirect effect (see Table 3).

Preliminary Analyses

Using t-tests, I explored gender differences for all the variables. At each wave, husbands reported a lower level of shared power in marriage than wives (each t-value was above 4.01, $p < .001$). No differences were found between husbands and wives for marital quality at any wave (each t-value below 1.3, $p > .05$). Husbands reported higher attachment insecurity at Wave 1 (t =

2.68, $p < .01$), but there were no gender differences for Waves 3-5 (each t-value was less than 1.50, $p > .05$). Finally there were some significant differences for the controls, as husbands were slightly older (t = 4.27, $p < .001$), wives were slightly more likely to be a racial minority (t = -2.28, $p < .05$), and husbands reported a higher income (t = 5.99, $p < .001$). Table 1 shows means, standard deviations, Cronbach's Alphas (if applicable), response ranges, and t-values of each variable. I also tested correlations between all study variables. For readability, only Wave 1 and Wave 3 variables are shown in Table 2.

Measurement Models

As mentioned, 12 separate measurement models were estimated to obtain factor scores for the main constructs of interest (perceived marital power, attachment insecurity, and marital quality). Each of the 12 models had adequate model fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Kline, 2016) as the CFI of each model was .93 or higher and the RMSEA was .08 or lower. Factor scores were extracted and the scales were utilized as observed variables in the SEM models.

Structural Equation Models

Waves 1, 3, 5. The model for Waves 1,3,5 fit the data well (Chi-square (50) = 163.84, $p < .001$, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .03). In order to achieve this adequate model fit, the model required AR2 pathways from HQ1→HQ5 and WQ1→WQ5. These pathways were based on having the highest modification index values (Kline, 2016; Little, 2013). The variables predicted a moderate level of variance for each dependent variable (WP3 = .56; HP3 = .58; WP5 = .55; HP5 = .61; WQ3 = .30; HQ3 = .40; HQ5 = .55; WQ5 = .47; HI3 = .43; WI3 = .41; HI5 = .44; WI5 = .49).

The most consistent influence was actor effects of perceiving shared power in the marriage. Husbands' reports of shared power were consistently associated his own higher marital

quality (HP1→HQ3: β = .28, $p < .001$; HP3→HQ5: β = .18, $p < .001$) and wives' reports of shared power were consistently associated with her own higher marital quality (WP1→WQ3: β = .22, $p < .001$; WP3→WQ5: β = .20, $p < .001$). There also was some evidence of actor effects from husbands' report of shared power to attachment insecurity from Wave 1 to Wave 3 (HP1→HI3: β = -.37, $p < .001$) but not from Wave 3 to Wave 5 (HP3→HI5: β = -.08, $p = .020$). Similarly, wives' report of shared power was associated with her own report of attachment insecurity from Wave 1 to Wave 3 (WP1→WI3: β = -.17, $p < .001$), but not from Wave 3 to Wave 5 (WP3→WI5: β = -.08, $p = .16$).

Some evidence of partner effects was found, as wives' report of shared power was related to husbands' higher marital quality from Wave 3 to Wave 5 (WP3→HQ5: β = .13, $p < .01$). Also, husbands' report of shared power was related to lower wives' attachment insecurity at both waves (HP1→WI3: β = -.12, $p = .03$; HP3→WI5: β = -.16, $p < .01$). The only evidence of bidirectionality was a small effect of husbands' higher attachment insecurity being linked to wives' higher report of shared power from Wave 3 to Wave 5 (HI3→WI5: β = .12, $p = .03$).

The only significant associations with controls are as follows: (Husband income→HQ3: β = .11, $p = .04$; Wife age→WQ3: β = .18, $p = .02$; Marital Length→WQ3: β = -.13, $p = .03$; Marital Length→HI3: β = .13, $p < .01$; Marital Length→WI3: β = .12, $p = .03$; Marital Length→WP3: β = -.11, $p = .01$; Husband Income→HI5: β = -.11, $p = .02$). See Figure 1 for full results of outcomes of interest (including stability coefficients).

Indirect effects. Perhaps the most noteworthy findings are that reports of shared power at Wave 1 had significant indirect actor effects on higher marital quality for husbands (HP1→HP3→HQ5: β = .13, $p < .01$; HP1→HQ3→HQ5: β = .06, $p = .04$) and wives (WP1→WP3→WQ5: β = .13, $p < .01$), as well as lower attachment insecurity for husbands

(HP1→HI3→HI5: β = -.19, $p < .001$) and wives (WP1→WI3→WI5: (β = -.09, $p < .01$). Also of note are some partner effects, such as husbands' report of shared power being related to higher marital quality for their wives (HP1→WP3→WQ5: β = .06, $p = .01$), as well as lower attachment insecurity for their wives (HP1→HP3→WI5: β = -.11, $p = .02$). Additionally, wives' report of shared power was related to higher marital quality for their husbands (WP1→WP3→HQ5: β = .09, $p = .01$). There was also one small indirect effect that consisted of two partner effects (HP1→WP3→HQ5: β = .03, $p = .04$). The only indirect effect on power was actually husbands' report of shared power having an indirect positive association with their wives' report of shared power (HP1→WP3→WP5: β = .16, $p < .001$). Attachment insecurity and marital quality from either spouse had no indirect effect on either spouses' report of shared power. Overall, these results suggest that reporting shared power has a clear directional influence on the actor, and a somewhat less clear directional influence on the partner. Little evidence was found for bidirectionality.

Waves 3-5. The model for Waves 3-5 also fit the data well (Chi-square (48) = 119.78, $p < .001$, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .03). In order to achieve this adequate model fit, the model required the following AR2 pathways: HI3→HI5, WI3→WI5, HQ3→HQ5, and WQ3→WQ5. The variables predicted a moderate level of variance (R^2) for each dependent variable (WP4 = .64; HP4 = .63; WP5 = .67; HP5 = .72; WQ4 = .45; HQ4 = .50; HQ5 = .61; WQ5 = .48; HI4 = .54; WI4 = .60; HI5 = .56; WI5 = .60).

Again, the most consistent influence was actor effects of reporting shared power in the marriage. Husbands' reports of shared marital power was consistently associated with his own higher marital quality (HP3→HQ4: β = .27, $p < .001$; HP4→HQ5: β = .19, $p < .001$) and wives' reports of shared power was consistently associated with her own higher marital quality

(WP3→WQ4: β = .22, $p < .001$; WP4→WQ5: β = .16, $p < .01$). There also was some evidence of actor effects from husbands' report of shared power to attachment insecurity from Wave 3 to Wave 4 (HP3→HI4: β = -.20, $p < .001$) but not from Wave 4 to Wave 5 (HP4→HI5: β = -.03, $p = .50$). However, wives' report of shared power was associated with her own report of attachment insecurity at both waves (WP3→WI4: β = -.10, $p < .05$; WP4→WI5: β = -.11, $p = .03$).

Some evidence of partner effects was found, as husbands' report of shared power was related to higher wives' marital quality at both waves (HP3→WQ4: β = .16, $p < .001$; HP4→WQ5: β = .13, $p = .01$). Wives' report of shared power was also related to husbands' higher marital quality at both waves (WP3→HQ4: β = .12, $p = .02$; WP4→HQ5: β = .11, $p = .02$). Finally, husbands' report of shared power was related to lower wives' attachment insecurity from Wave 3 to Wave 4 (HP3→WI4: β = -.13, $p = .01$). The only evidence of bidirectionality was a small association of wives' higher attachment insecurity being linked to wives' lower report of shared power from Wave 3 to Wave 4 (WI3→WP4: β = -.13, $p = .01$).

The only significant associations with controls were as follows: (Husband income→HI4: β = -10, $p = .02$; Husband Age→WI4: β = -.11, $p < .05$; Wife Age→WP4: β = .11, $p = .04$; Husband Age→WP4: β = -.12, $p = .02$; Wife Income→HQ5: β = .09, $p = .01$; Husband Education→WI5: β = -.10, $p = .02$). See Figure 2 for full model results (including stability coefficients).

Indirect effects. Perhaps the most noteworthy findings are that reports of shared power at Wave 1 had significant indirect actor effects on higher marital quality for husbands (HP3→HP4→HQ5: β = .15, $p < .001$; HP3→HQ4→HQ5: β = .15, $p < .001$) and wives (WP3→WP4→WQ5: β = .12, $p = .01$), as well as lower attachment insecurity for husbands

(HP3→HI4→HI5: β = -.10, $p < .01$), but not for wives. Also of note are a couple partner effects, such as husbands' report of shared power being related to higher marital quality for their wives (HP3→HP4→WQ5: β = .11, $p = .01$; HP3→HQ4→WQ5: β = .06, $p = .04$), as well as lower attachment insecurity for their wives (HP3→WI4→WI5: β = -.06, $p = .04$). Additionally, wives' report of shared power was indirectly related to higher marital quality for their husbands (WP3→WP4→HQ5: β = .08, $p = .02$). The only indirect effect on reports of shared power was wives' feelings of insecurity indirectly leading to a lower feeling of shared power (WI3→WP4→WP5: β = -.08, $p = .04$). Attachment insecurity and marital quality from either spouse had no other indirect effects on either spouse's report of shared power. Like the previous model, the overall model suggests that reporting shared power has a clear directional influence on the actor, and a somewhat less clear directional influence on the partner. Again, little evidence was found for bidirectionality.

Discussion

This study is likely one of the most rigorous methodologically designed studies exploring the directional influence of perceived power in a marriage. The results provide strong support that perception of marital power plays a crucial role in relational well-being over time.

The most consistent finding across each wave of both structural models was that one's own report of shared power in the relationship was related to reporting a higher quality marriage in subsequent years. This was shown both directly and indirectly, as the first wave of reporting higher shared power influenced marital quality through a variety of pathways over the years. This finding is consistent with previous findings suggesting an association between marital power and marital quality (Brezsnyak & Whisman, 2004; Bulanda, 2011; Kulik, 2004), though contrasts a previous study suggesting no directional influence from perceiving a power

discrepancy in a marriage to marital quality over time (LeBaron et al., 2014). The contrast in these results is likely due to the previous study's small sample (67 participants) likely giving the authors insufficient statistical power to detect a finding. Furthermore, the previous study had a time lag of 15 years, likely providing too wide of a timing interval to detect such a finding, as several confluencing factors could appear during that time (Little, 2013).

Some evidence existed for other effects as well, as one's own perception of shared power in the marriage was inconsistently linked to one's own lower attachment insecurity in subsequent years. This lines up with previous theoretical (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2012) and empirical (Oka et al., 2016) work suggesting that perception of power and attachment insecurity are intercorrelated, but adds to previous research by showing a directional influence as well (albeit inconsistently). The inconsistency of this finding is interesting and lacks an easy explanation. Perhaps, perception of power is simply less important for attachment insecurity than for marital quality. However, part of the explanation may be that actor effects predicting attachment insecurity were clearly the highest from Wave 1 to Wave 3, where the stability coefficients for attachment insecurity were also the lowest (Little, 2013). For some reason, it appears that attachment insecurity became more stable in later waves of this sample, giving it lower variance to be predicted by perception of shared power. Also worth noting is that indirect effects existed for higher perception of shared power predicting attachment insecurity over time (i.e., HP1→HI3→HI5; WP1→WI3→WI5; HP1→HP3→WI5; HP3→HI4→HI5; HP3→WI4→WI5). This could suggest that somewhat earlier patterns of power perception in the marriage can influence attachment insecurity both directly and indirectly into the future. Though that influence tends to dwindle insofar that attachment insecurity is stable.

This study also provides evidence that feeling shared power in the relationship can have a directional influence on the partner's marital quality and attachment insecurity. This supports previous cross-sectional research showing a connection between perceived shared power partner effects and attachment insecurity (Oka et al., 2016), but builds on it by adding a longitudinal component. Partner effects tended to be small and were somewhat inconsistent as to where they resided (for example, few partner effects were found in the bi-yearly model). Yet, the model for Waves 3-5 consistently showed that if one partner reported shared power in the relationship, their partner in the subsequent wave would report higher marital quality. The indirect effects also showed support for the possibility of partner effects; between the bi-yearly and yearly models there were five indirect partner effects on marital quality (i.e., WP1→WP3→HQ5; HP1→WP3→WQ5; WP3→WP4→HQ5; HP3→HP4→WQ5; HP3→HQ4→WQ5) and two indirect partner effects on attachment insecurity (i.e., HP1→HP3→WI5; HP3→WI4→WI5).

Although partner effects were somewhat inconsistent, they provided evidence that there appears to be nothing beneficial in a partner believing he or she is subordinate in the marriage (Brown & Lewis, 2004). Evidence supported the idea that it is beneficial for husbands and wives to both report a relationship of shared power, possibly signaling a joint pursuit of mutual, shared power. This could support the recent theoretical assertion by Fishbane (2011) who suggested that true relational empowerment comes with a "power with" approach, where both spouses seek to mutually enable each other's sense of power. More evidence seems to be accumulating that marital power is not to be seen as a single spectrum, where one partner is vying for greater influence than the other (e.g., Fishbane, 2011; Knudson-Martin, 2013; Oka et al., 2016). Rather, each partner has his or her own perception of marital power, where one, both, or neither partner might feel empowered in the relationship. The ideal relationship seems built upon a feeling of

mutual influence, rather than one or the other feeling that someone in the relationship has a higher level of power (Fishbane, 2011; Knudson-Martin, 2013).

Surprisingly, in the overall picture, little evidence was found for bidirectionality. In other words, the perception of power dynamics taking place in the relationship is likely to influence one's report of marital quality and attachment insecurity, but there is little evidence that reports of marital quality and attachment insecurity influence one's perception of power dynamics in the marriage. There was one theoretically plausible direct effect from wife's attachment insecurity to her own report of shared power in her relationship. This also appeared as a small indirect effect (WI3→WP4→WP5). Again, since attachment insecurity tends to color the lens through which individuals perceive their relationships (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2012) it makes sense that someone who feels insecure in the relationship may be more likely to interpret certain actions by their partner as seizing power. In both models, one potential reason for the lack of bidirectionality was that overall, perception of power had stronger stability coefficients than marital quality and attachment insecurity, meaning that there was less variance to be predicted by alternative variables. Perhaps marital quality and attachment insecurity had less stability over time because they were based more on an affective state rather than processes occurring in the relationship. Additional research would be helpful in gaining greater confidence for whether there truly is a lack of bidirectionality between perceived marital power and the other main constructs. But as it stands, these results suggest that marital power patterns could be an important root driving overall relational success, as opposed to a fruit from high marital quality or attachment insecurity.

One unexpected finding was that husbands' higher insecurity leading to higher shared power reported among the wives. Someone may use this to suggest that wives actually feel more

power in their relationship if the husband feels insecure. But that seems highly inconsistent with the remainder of the findings. Considering that the zero-order correlation showed a negative correlation of -.40 between husbands' insecurity at Wave 3 and Wives shared power at Wave 5, a reversal of signs, and minimal strength of prediction likely indicate the finding is spurious. This may be due to the relatively complicated model with high interrelating constructs (Knaeble & Dutter, 2015). Furthermore, the wives' and husbands' reports of shared power had a moderate positive correlation, ~.30 at each wave. This suggests a tendency to agree with each other on the state of shared power in the relationship, but also suggests some inconsistencies in the way they see things which could be worthy of additional research.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although the study had considerable strengths such as longitudinal data and using both partner's reports on the constructs, there were some limitations. One limitation is generalizability of these results. The study took place in one region of the United States, with middle age couples. It would be worthwhile to gain a more representative sample to see if these results replicate. Interesting to note is that perception of power appears to persist in its directional influence even during the middle years of a marriage. It would perhaps be valuable to obtain a sample of younger couples to better understand when and how patterns of marital power might become more deeply entrenched in the marriage. It would also be valuable to obtain cross-cultural samples to assess how power dynamics play a role in marriage in regions with various levels of gender egalitarianism. Expectations surrounding shared partnership or dominance in the relationship might inform the extent someone is happy with sharing marital power as opposed to dominating or being dominated.

Some research has conceptualized both perception of power and attachment insecurity as multidimensional constructs. Based upon differing research questions, it may make sense to evaluate specific aspects of each type of construct. I believe my decision to use the Marital Power Index as a composite scale was justifiable based upon my research question and the fact that it has been used as a composite scale in a previous, similar study (Oka et al., 2016). However, some research has suggested that this marital power scale can be broken down into subscales for processes and outcome (Bogue et al., 2008). While our research focus was less concerned with parceling out the influence of different aspects of marital power, other researchers may find that distinction applicable based on their research question. For example, perhaps couple communication patterns might be more closely related to marital power processes than marital power outcomes. There also may be some interesting questions to answer from the perception of marital power outcomes research. While items for perceiving a partner to have power in the domain of childcare or in the domain of finance may be under the overall umbrella of marital power research, some researchers may be interested in assessing whether some differences might exist in these domains. Particularly in light of traditional gender norms of husbands typically having greater responsibility over finances and wives typically having more responsibility with childcare, there may be some differences worth evaluating in these power domains (Wanic & Kulik, 2011). For example, Tichenor (2005) has outlined domestic labor/childcare division, patterns of financial management, decision-making practices, and conflict resolution strategies as four domains of marital power. Finally, it is important to consider that the measure of marital power focused on the degree to which someone felt a partner had more power in the relationship as opposed to feeling shared influence. It could be interesting to

explore the effect someone feeling they have greater influence than their partner, to see whether that also is related to suboptimal outcomes.

Furthermore, attachment insecurity can be broken down into measures for anxious and avoidant attachment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016), though I did not do so in this particular study for the sake of parsimony. I was more interested in how power might relate to overall feelings of insecurity rather than specific subsets of insecurity. I believe this was justifiable for this initial inquiry, as many researchers have combined anxious and avoidant attachment scales based on their research question (e.g., Oka et al., 2016). Still, it may be worthwhile to explore in greater depth how dynamics of perceived marital power interrelates with these subdimensions of attachment insecurity.

Also, a cross-lagged model where the variables are averaged across all levels is merely a first step in understanding the potential importance of perceived power over time. Another possible future direction is to look at interactions between both spouses reports of marital power. The combined evidence of fairly consistent actor effects and occasional partner effects suggests the benefits of both partners mutually helping each other feel empowered in the relationship. However, this potentially synchronous pattern may be supported further by delving deeper into the interactions of both spouses' perception of marital power over time. It could also be beneficial to conduct person level analyses, allowing statistics to identify specific couple types based on various power dynamics in a relationship and assess the longitudinal influence of those dynamics.

Conclusion

This study is likely one of the most definitive, methodologically rigorous study showing the longitudinal influence of perceived power in marriage. The results provide evidence that

equal partnership, built upon a mutual degree of power, is a crucial component to marital well-being over time. It appears that the ideal relationship is not where either wife or husband has greater power than her or his spouse (Fishbane, 2011; Knudson-Martin, 2013). Rather, both partners should be responsible for helping his or her spouse feel mutual influence in the relationship; both should feel their opinions are valid; both should be responsible for final decisions made.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Gender Differences

Variable	Husbands			Wives				
	M	*SD*	α	*M*	*SD*	*a*	Response Range	t Values
Shared Power								
Wave 1	3.74	.66	.92	4.05	.63	.91	1-5	6.02***
Wave 3	3.77	.69	.93	4.06	.64	.92	1-5	5.12***
Wave 4	3.72	.70	.92	4.01	.68	.92	1-5	4.95***
Wave 5	3.71	.73	.93	3.96	.72	.93	1-5	4.01***
Marital Quality								
Wave 1	5.18	.91	.96	5.15	.06	.97	1-6	.37
Wave 3	4.96	1.00	.97	4.91	1.15	.98	1-6	.50
Wave 4	4.91	.98	.97	4.80	1.10	.97	1-6	1.34
Wave 5	4.85	1.02	.97	4.77	1.09	.97	1-6	.90
Attachment Insecurity								
Wave 1	2.27	1.04	.84	2.05	.99	.84	1-7	2.68**
Wave 3	2.32	1.04	.85	2.21	1.08	.84	1-7	1.21
Wave 4	2.39	.06	.83	2.25	1.12	.89	1-7	1.50
Wave 5	2.41	1.13	.87	2.29	1.17	.88	107	1.21
Controls								
Age	45.39	5.97		43.44	5.42	--	27-62	4.27***
Race (Minority)	.12	.33		.19	.39	--	0-1	-2.28*
Education	4.89	1.49		4.69	1.40	--	1-7	1.72
Income	5.99	2.32		3.52	2.28	--	1-12	12.88***
Relationship Length	--	--		17.85	5.21	--	2-40	--

Note. Relationship length does not have values for husbands because only the wives' report was used in analyses. *$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 2

Bivariate Correlations for all variables

	Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1.	WP1	--														
2.	HP1	.36*	--													
3.	WQ1	.53*	.45*	--												
4.	HQ1	.37*	.62*	.49*	--											
5.	WI1	-.65*	-.39*	-.62*	-.44*	--										
6.	HI1	-.40*	-.69*	-.54*	-.64*	.50*	--									
7.	W Age	.01	.03	-.07	-.09	.02	-.03	--								
8.	H Age	-.05	-.01	-.08	-.05	.02	.01	.73*	--							
9.	W Race	.07	-.04	.09	.04	-.03	.02	-.18*	-.04	--						
10.	H Race	-.05	-.06	-.04	.04	.07	.02	-.14*	-.09	.47*	--					
11.	W Edu	.14*	.08	.01	-.03	.02	-.11	.34*	.24*	-.14*	-.13*	--				
12.	H Edu	.13*	.09	.05	.03	-.08	-.08	.21*	.14*	-.09	-.13*	.47*	--			
13.	W Inc	.01	.01	.05	.06	-.06	-.01	.17*	.15*	.01	-.01	.17*	.09	--		
14.	H Inc	.06	.09	.13*	.16*	-.07	-.15*	.13*	-.00	-.18*	-.13*	.19*	.35*	.01	--	
15.	Length	.01	.08	-.01	-.02	.03	-.05	.52*	.45*	-.11*	-.12*	.13*	.16*	.11	.15*	--

Note. W = Wife; H = Husband; P = Shared Marital Power; I = Attachment Insecurity; Q = Marital Quality; Inc = Income; Edu = Education; Length = Relationship Length. Numbers following abbreviations indicate the wave that was used. *$p < .05$

Table 3

All significant indirect effects from both SEM models

Waves 1, 3, 5	β	SE	Waves 3-5	β	SE
IE on Shared Power			IE on Shared Power		
HP1→HP3→HP5	.50***	.05	HP3→HP4→HP5	.38***	.06
HP1→WP3→WP5	.16***	.04	WP3→WP4→WP5	.42***	.05
WP1→WP3→WP5	.45***	.05	WI3→WP4→WP5	.08*	.05
IE on Marital Quality			IE on Marital Quality		
HP1→WP3→HQ5	.03*	.02	HP3→HP4→HQ5	.15***	.04
HP1→HP3→HQ5	.13**	.05	HP3→HQ4→HQ5	.15***	.05
HP1→HQ3→HQ5	.06*	.03	WP3→WP4→HQ5	.08*	.03
WP1→WP3→HQ5	.09*	.04	HQ3→HQ4→HQ5	.21***	.06
HP1→WP3→WQ5	.06*	.02	HP3→HP4→WQ5	.11*	.05
WP1→WP3→WQ5	.13**	.04	HP3→HQ4→WQ5	.06*	.03
IE on Attachment Insecurity			WP3→WP4→WQ5	.12*	.05
HP1→HI3→HI5	-.19***	.04	HQ3→HQ4→WQ5	.08*	.03
HI1→HI3→HI5	-.15***	.04	WQ3→WQ4→WQ5	.12*	.05
HP1→HP3→WI5	-.11*	.05	IE on Attachment Insecurity		
WP1→WI3→WI5	-.09**	.04	HP3→HI4→HI5	-.10**	.03
WI1→WI3→WI5	-.22***	.05	HI3→HI4→HI5	-.25***	.06
			HP3→WI4→WI5	-.06*	.03
			WI3→WI4→WI5	-.24***	.07

Note. H = Husband; W = Wife; P = Shared Marital Power; I = Attachment Insecurity; Q = Marital Quality; IE = Indirect Effect. Numbers following abbreviations indicate the Wave that was used. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

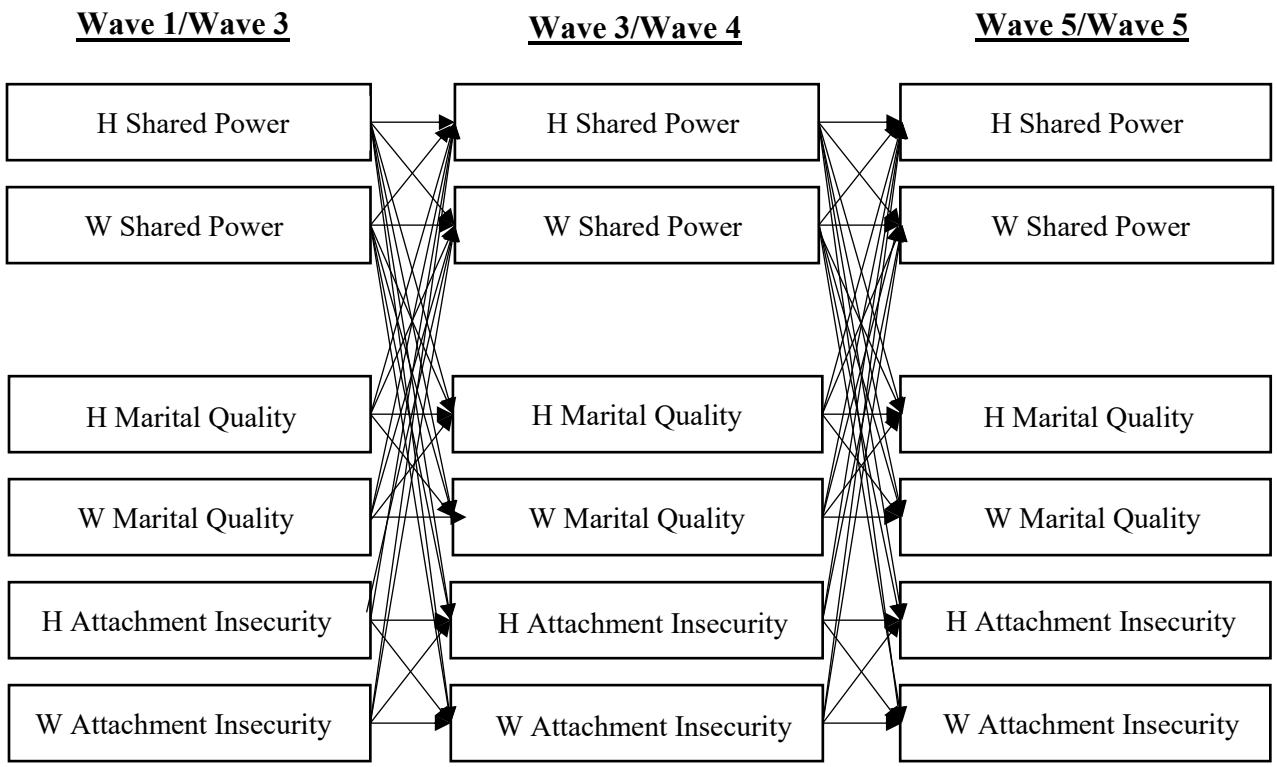

Figure 1. Hypothesized cross lagged models between variables of interest. Analyses will control for wives' report of marital length, and both spouses age, race, education, and income at each wave. This figure gives a visual representation of both bi-yearly and yearly interval models. Wave numbers before the diagonal indicate the bi-yearly interval model. Wave numbers after the diagonal indicate the yearly interval model. H = Husband; W = Wife

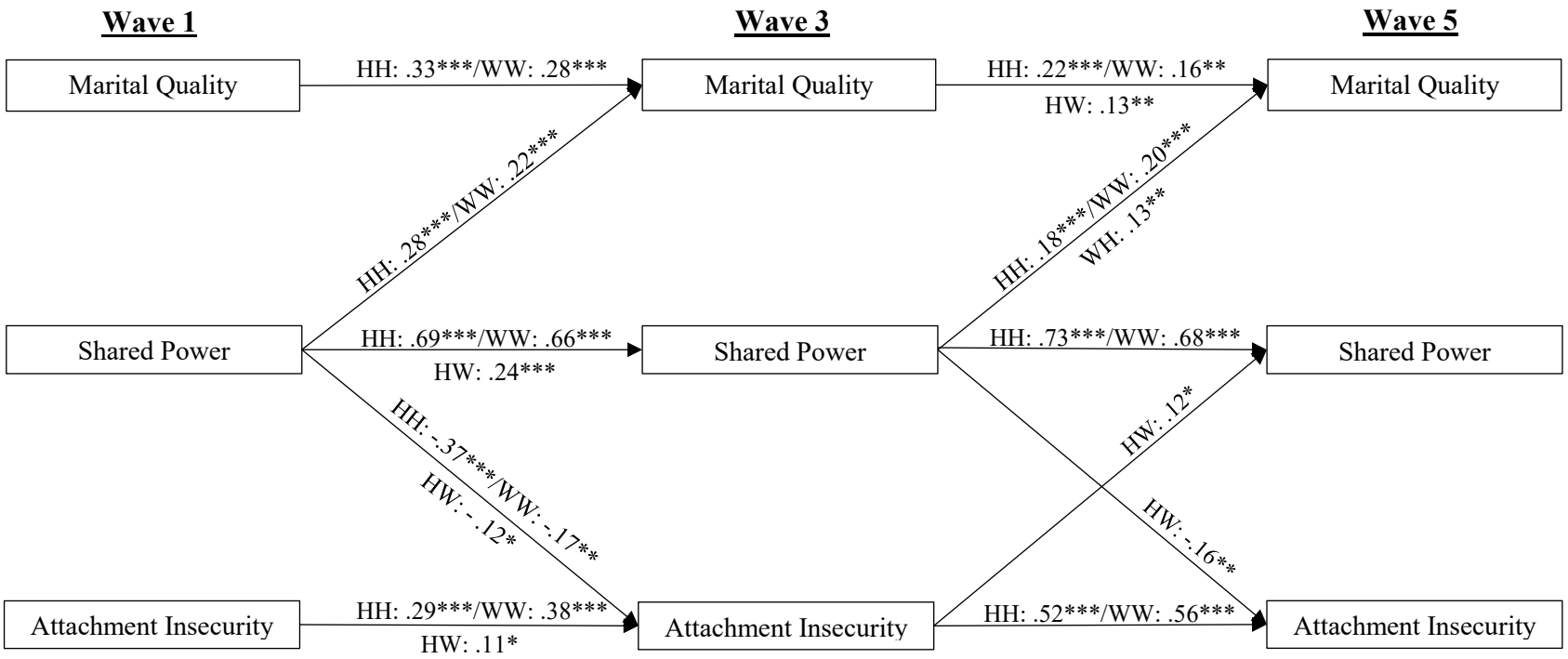

Figure 2. Cross-lagged model of shared marital power, marital quality, and attachment insecurity for Waves 1, 3, and 5. Chi-square (50) = 163.84, $p < .001$, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .03. Non-significant paths, endogenous error correlations, and AR2 pathways (HQ1-HQ5; WQ1-WQ5) are omitted from the figure for the sake of parsimony. Analyses controlled for wives' report of marital length, and both spouses age, race, education, and income at each wave. HH= Actor coefficient for husbands; WW = Actor coefficient for wives; HW = Partner coefficient for husbands' influence on wives; WH = Partner coefficient for wives' influence on husbands. All coefficients are standardized beta values. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

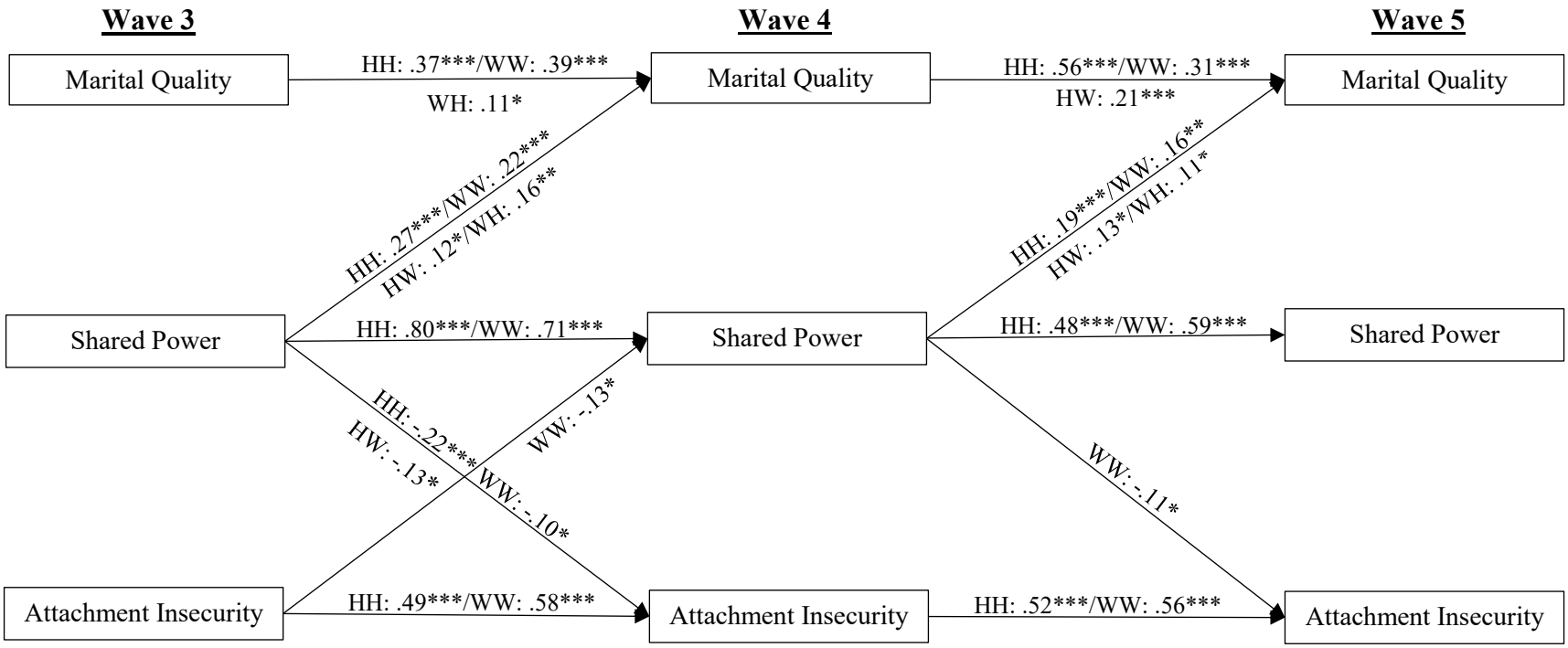

Figure 3. Cross-lagged model of shared marital power, marital quality, and attachment insecurity for Waves 3-5. Chi-square (48) = 119.78, $p < .001$, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .03. Non-significant paths, endogenous error correlations, and AR2 pathways (HI1-HI5; WI1-WI5; HP1-HP5; WP1-WP5) are omitted from the figure for the sake of parsimony. Analyses controlled for wives' report of marital length, and both spouses age, race, education, and income at each wave. HH= Actor coefficient for husbands; WW = Actor coefficient for wives; HW = Partner coefficient for husbands' influence on wives; WH = Partner coefficient for wives' influence on husbands. All coefficients are standardized beta values. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$