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Age Differences in Marriage: Exploring Predictors of Marital Quality  
in Husband-Older, Wife-Older, and Same-Age Marriages

Brandan Eugene Wheeler

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

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School of Family Life  
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August 2010

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## ABSTRACT

### Age Differences in Marriage: Exploring Predictors of Marital Quality in Husband-Older, Wife-Older, and Same-Age Marriages

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Masters of Science

Using data from a nationally representative sample of 723 married adults, this study explored the association of age differences between spouses at the time of marriage on various aspects of marital quality years into the marriage. Four groups (full sample, husband-older, wife-older, and same-age marriages) were compared to see how marital quality was affected by age difference and several other moderating variables. Spousal interactions increased among wife-older marriages, but not among the other groups. An increased level of husband participation in household labor was linked with an increase in marital happiness and a decrease in marital problems for wife-older marriages. It also was related to a decrease in marital happiness for husband-older marriages as well as a decrease in spousal interaction for all groups except wife-older marriages, which showed no significant association to the division of household labor. Finally, a more traditional approach to gender roles among the same-age marriages was associated with a decrease in marital problems and a decrease in spousal interaction.

Keywords: Marriage, age difference, marital quality, marital happiness, spousal interaction, divorce proneness, marital problems, spousal disagreements

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Jeremy Yorgason, for all the time he has made available to discuss not only this project, but also other projects in which we have been involved. I want to thank him for helping me to finish this thesis and for his valuable insights on how I could improve it and better express myself in its writing. I would also like to thank Drs. Alan Hawkins and Jason Carroll for their willingness to assist in this project as committee members and for their insight in how to better focus the direction undertaken in this project. I would like especially to thank the various researchers at Penn State University (Drs. Alan Booth, David Johnson, Paul Amato, and others) for undertaking a time-consuming and labor intensive study of marital quality that provided a sample and the data to make this thesis possible. I would like to thank my many family members and friends who have encouraged me during this academic process, especially the encouragement and support from my parents. Finally, I would like to thank Brittany Guerra, the department secretary, for her continued diligence in reminding me of the final steps of this thesis process. Thank you, everyone, for your help!

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## **Introduction**

The prevalence of age-differentiated marriages (defined as 4 or more years' difference) is reportedly increasing (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003). Using 2000 Census data, Fields and Casper (2001) found nearly one-quarter of all marriages were made up by couples with 6 or more years' difference in age between spouses. Studies on the topic of age-differentiated marriages have used various definition of age difference between spouses. The current literature uses a range from one years' difference to as much as 25 years' difference (Barnes, 2005; Shehan, Berardo, Vera, & Carley, 1991). Such a wide range of definitions have resulted in inconsistent and inconclusive findings when addressing how age differences are associated with marital outcomes. To remedy some of these inconsistent findings, many studies have examined age differences as a categorical variable, by which participants are divided into various groups, and then the groups are compared (e.g. Krippen, Chapman, & Yu, 2010). However, such an approach makes it difficult to understand how age differences are incrementally associated with marital quality. With nearly one-quarter of all marriages being age-differentiated by 4 to 6 years, further examination of the topic of age differences in marriage is warranted.

The increase in age-differentiated marriages has been attributed to a lessening in social disapproval towards such marriages (Amato et al., 2003). However, age-differentiated marriages are just one form of heterogamous marriages that are becoming more acceptable in today's society. Heterogamy in marriage often includes age, race, religion, socioeconomic status, and sex. While such marriages are becoming more common and more acceptable, social disapprovals may still exist towards marriages wherein partners do not share commonalities such as with age. Stated differently, partners with similar backgrounds may be encouraged by family and friends to stay in or commit to homogenous relationships. If social disapproval does exist, it may create or

exacerbate problems within the marital relationship. Alternatively, family and friends of couples with age differences may lend additional support to counterbalance any perceived negative influences.

Changes in social approval have also changed the processes used in finding potential spouses. College and university settings are no longer the primary meeting grounds for many couples (Stephure, Boon, MacKinnon, & Devau, 2009). Non-traditional methods now include online dating, workplace romances, and higher prevalence of pre-marital cohabitation. However, age differences may be viewed and treated differently for each of these areas.

Because of historical social disapproval towards a young person marrying a much older spouse, the purpose of this study is to examine how age differences currently relate to marital quality in couples in which one or both spouses are less than 35 years of age. Age differences will be measured as a continuous scale to identify nuances associated with age differences and marital quality. This study will also explore group differences involving husband-older, wife-older, and same-age marriages. The purpose of this study is to explore how age differences affect couples on aspects of positive and negative marital quality, and how influential factors may moderate this association.

### **History of Age Difference in Marriage**

Vera, Berardo, and Berardo (1985) reported that age-differentiated marriages occurred more frequently among the lower classes of people, debunking a belief at the time that such marriages were more common and acceptable among the upper classes. Whether this finding is valid or not, marriages within the upper classes, such as recent celebrity marriages, often elicit more discussion and debate on the topic of age differences within marriage. Terms, such as “sugar daddies” (husbands who are substantially older) and “cougars” (wives who are



substantially older) are coined to label people who enter into such marriages. Age differences in marriage have been examined as early as the 1930s with Bossard (1933), followed by Bowerman (1956) and Glick (1957).

Prevalence rates of age-differentiated marriages have been inconclusive from the existing literature on the topic. Atkinson & Glass (1985) measured age-differentiated marriages of four years or more. They concluded that such marriages had declined steadily from 1900 to 1980, with a high of nearly 63% of marriages being age-differentiated in 1900 to a low of 30.1% in 1980. They attributed this decline to an increasing level of social objections. However, a more recent study by Amato et al. (2003) countered that age-differentiated marriages, defined as six years or more difference, had actually increased during part of this same time period, the period from the 1960s to the 1990s, particularly for older wives/younger husbands. They cited as the primary reason a “relaxation of prohibitive social attitudes toward intermarriage” (p. 2). Yet the question remains, are age-differentiated marriages increasing or decreasing in number?

The U.S. Census Bureau (2001) examined the average age gaps and percentages for all marriages in five-year increments from 1940 to 1989. They found that while the average age gap remained consistently within a range of 2.1 to 2.7 years difference for the entire time period, this average gap fluctuated from time period to time period, with the lowest age gap occurring in the period between 1985 and 1989. At the same time, the percentages of marriages in which spouses were five or more years apart also fluctuated until 1965, at which point it increased each time period from 14.7 percent in the period of 1965 to 1969 to 18.6 percent in the final period examined 1985 to 1989. Using data from the 2000 Current Population Survey, Fields and Casper (2001) reported the current percentage of age-differentiated couples (a gap of 6 or more years) was 19.6 percent for men older and 3.3% for women older, both of which were substantial

increases from the 1989 data (See Table 1). Based on these statistics, we can conclude that age-differentiated marriages have been increasing percentage-wise since about 1965.

If these statistics accurately portray the current upward trend for age-differentiated marriages, then the topic of age differences can play a potentially important role in identifying characteristics of marital quality and stability. However, even the very notion of age differences is difficult to explain and research is ambiguous as to what constitutes an age difference between spouses. Studies by Atkinson & Glass (1985), Amato et al. (2003), and the work with the most recent census (Fields & Casper, 2001; U.S. Census Bureau, 2001) used gaps of either four or six years' difference. Current literature has defined an age difference as anything between a one-year difference to a 20-year difference (Shehan et al., 1991). One study even used couples with as much as 25 years' difference between spouses (Barnes, 2005). The lack of a consistent definition in age difference has often resulted in conflicting or inconclusive results.

To address previous inconsistencies, researchers have tried to categorize age differences by placing participants into specific groups. Heaton (2002), for example, divided participants into one of four groups: (1) husbands older than 5 years, (2) husbands between 2-4 years older, (3) husbands between 0-2 years older, and (4) all wives older than their husbands. Using these categories, Heaton observed that marriages in which husbands were older than their wives were more stable, yet age differences themselves were not viewed as leading to more or less marital dissolution. Various researchers have also used similar categorization techniques (e.g., Chan & Halpin, 2003; Lehrer, 2008; Vera et al., 1985), which certainly have value in identifying differences between the varying groups, yet such techniques do not identify at what point, or even if, age differences become an important factor in marital quality and stability.

Realizing that using age differences as a continuous scale may have some value, Lehmiller & Agnew (2008) used it during their post-analysis, in which they divided their participants into two groups, women-older or women-younger, and compared these groups using age-differences. They were not able to observe any differences in outcomes, such as satisfaction or commitment, when using a continuous scale of age differences until the age gap became sizable (for them, this gap was ten years, which also coincided with the original age difference they selected for finding their study participants). One concern of the nature of this study by Lehmiller and Agnew is that it did not include married women. The women were defined as being within a romantic relationship, which could include a dating, cohabiting, or marital relationship. A recent study by Krippen et al. (2010) measured age difference as a categorical variable. When asked why they did not measure age differences as a continuous scale, Krippen responded that they were looking for the hazard ratios created by age differences (R. Krippen, personal communication, February 19, 2010). By using a categorical variable, they were able to compare groups by these hazard ratios. Krippen also indicated using age differences as a continuous variable would require a transformation of the scale that would have made the results more difficult to explain.

In addition to the inconsistencies in the defining and measurement of age differences, the existing literature is often dated in regards to current relevance. The 1980s provided over thirty different studies related to the topic, many of which are still cited by more current research. Yet times and attitudes have changed drastically in regards to marriage, mate selection, and homogamy as a whole. Marital homogamy is still regarded as an important factor for long-term marital stability (e.g., Krippen et al., 2010), but people's criteria for potential mates are changing as well as their methods in finding such a mate. These changes come, in part, because of the

changing demography, as well as the changes in dating behaviors. The impact of age-differentiation on marriage is not fully understood, yet researchers may find that age differences are viewed differently when comparing marriage partners *versus* dating or cohabiting partners. Another important factor is the age at which partners engage in an age-differentiated relationship, with ramifications being much greater when a couple is young (late teens or early twenties) *versus* substantially older (50s or 60s). A review of the changes in demographics and dating behaviors will help to clarify.

### **Changes in Current Marital Trends**

The current divorce rates have added singles to the already sizable pool of eligible people looking for marriage partners. Remarriages have also been cited historically of increasing the likelihood for couples to enter into an age-differentiated marriage (e.g., Atkinson & Glass, 1985). Fields and Casper (2001) reported that nearly 25 percent of all marriages were between spouses six or more years apart in age. One concern with this statistical information is that these marriages were not categorized by first marriages or higher-order marriages. Not only do higher-order marriages experience more age-differentiated marriages, but also age-differentiation is cited as a reason for the later divorces of these remarriages (Booth & Edwards, 1992). The U.S. Census Bureau (2001) compared the average age gap and percentages for remarriages from the period of 1960 to 1989. From 1965, the percentage of couples greater than five years apart ranged from a low of 37.1 percent in the period of 1965 to 1969 to a high of 41.6 percent in the period of 1975 to 1979. The percentage during the last time period, 1985 to 1989 had dropped but was still at a level of 39.5 percent (see Table 1).

In addition to the divorce rates adding to the pools of eligible singles, Choo and Siaw (2006), using 1990 census data, observed women were outnumbering men in the general

population of the United States. This assessment was confirmed also using 2000 census data (Fields & Casper, 2001). By outnumbering the men, women find themselves facing a smaller pool of eligible men from which to find a suitable marriage partner. Add to this deficit the fact that more divorced men remarry than do divorced women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001), women find themselves with even fewer available options. Bytheway (1981) observed that most people married at normally acceptable ages (defined by the average age at marriage for that population). However, for people who did not marry during normally accepted ages, they tended to continue associating with other non-married, younger people. Such associations could lead to an increased likelihood of marrying someone substantially younger. Bytheway further noted that some older nonmarried singles might begin to feel uncomfortable associating with a younger set of people. Such discomfort may develop because of a fear that an increased age difference could lead to potential marital problems. This marriage squeeze (Carter & Glick, 1970) or cycle of “surfeits and deficits” (Wheeler & Gunter, 1987, p. 412) promote the likelihood of marrying a partner who is more heterogamous in age, race, religion, or previous marital status (Bitter, 1986; Lichter, 1990), particularly in cases of older women marrying younger men (Wheeler & Gunter, 1987).

For many, the age at first marriage is also being pushed back to later ages (reported as 25.1 for women and 26.8 for men, Fields & Casper, 2001). Amato et al. (2003) has opined that as the marriage age for first marriages is being pushed back, such delays may lead to more stable unions. However, by delaying marriage, many people are changing the means by which they find a marital partner. For many married couples, spouses were found during the college setting, where larger numbers of potential mates exist (Stephure et al., 2009). By delaying marriage into the mid to late 20’s, finding a marital partner at college is increasingly unlikely, unless young single adults remain within college settings, without attending college. Many people are

choosing to find potential mates through other non-traditional means, such as online dating and workplace romances.

While nearly 25% of all singles having tried online dating (Online Dating Magazine, 2004), not all online daters are interested in using the internet to find potential marriage partners (Stephure et al., 2009). However, Stephure et al. observed the older the online dater becomes the more likely the internet will be used to find a potential marriage partner, because it allows for greater screening and selection. Bargh, McKenna, and Fitzsimmons (2002) found online dating helped many people to reveal more easily their true selves. By revealing their true selves a relationship was established more quickly and strongly, even without physically meeting until a later time (McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002). Although Rosen, Cheever, Cummings, and Felt (2008) found that age was one of the most important aspects of an online profile, they did not elaborate as to what age means to the online dater. Unfortunately, no research has been performed examining age differences within online dating, so it is difficult to ascertain whether age differences influence mate selection for online daters.

Another area involving age differences that needs further exploration is that of workplace romances. Dating a superior may increase the possibility of entering an age-differentiated relationship, yet no research exists that examines this possibility. The study of workplace romances is an understudied area in general but particularly among the social sciences (Pierce, Byrne, & Aguinis, 1996). However, many work organizations have had to address the issue of workplace romances because of their frequent occurrence. Some organizations frown upon or discourage workplace romances, even establishing policies that prohibit them (Stephure et al., 2009). Despite such policies, workplace romances often occur, in part, because of the amount of time people spend at work and in the presence of co-workers (Wilson, Filosa, & Fennel, 2003).

Even modern media may encourage office romances through popular television shows like *The Office*. These television characters often cause people to cheer for the success of or to bemoan an office relationship. However, workplace romances can be a concern for business management. Wilson et al. (2003) reported of a 1998 survey by the Society for Human Resource Management that found over half of office relationships resulted in marriage. However, one-fourth resulted in complaints of favoritism, one-fourth in sexual harassment claims, or one-fourth in decreases in productivity. While these concerns are legitimate for management, the controlling of workplace romances also may infringe upon issues of privacy for the employees themselves, so caution is needed when implementing policies against workplace romances (Wilson et al., 2003).

Although caution is needed in regards to policies surrounding workplace romances, Horan & Chorry (2009) observed that caution is also needed from those involved in workplace romances, as peer relations can be damaged by dating a superior. In addition, they observed that such damaged peer relations can result in additional organizational consequences, such as decreases in productivity and strained feelings of teamwork. Women are also often treated more harshly as a result of a workplace romance, particularly if dating a superior. However, this area of workplace romances, and particularly how age-differences are intermingled, is needed.

As the existing literature has identified changes in current demographic trends and mate selection processes, studies have addressed age differences and marital quality, albeit resulting in inconsistent findings. For example, Vera et al. (1985) reported that couples within age-differentiated marriages did not report poorer marital quality. However, other studies have identified such marriages as having poorer marital quality (e.g., Booth & Edwards, 1992; Cowan, 1984, Heaton, 2002). These inconsistent findings may be indicative of various aspects of marital quality, being influenced in distinct ways by age differences among spouses. For some of these

areas, existing literature has examined this relationship. However, other areas have not yet been addressed in detail. This study will focus on aspect of positive marital quality (marital happiness and spousal interaction) and negative marital quality (marital instability, marital problems, and spousal disagreements).

### **Positive Marital Quality**

Positive marital quality is an integral part of measuring the overall state of a marital relationship. While the use of marital happiness scales has its detractors (e.g., Fowers, 2000), numerous studies have used this measurement to examine the overall marital state (e.g. Booth, Johnson, Amato, & Rogers, 2000; Glenn & Weaver, 1978). Studies have reported that couples within age-differentiated marriages did not experience the same level of marital happiness as did couples within age-similar marriages (Booth & Edwards, 1992; Heaton, 2002). However, Cowan (1984) and Groot and Van Den Brink (2002) found age-differentiated couples reporting being happier with husband-older marriages than when the wife was older. Spousal interaction also has been used to gauge the level of positive marital quality, and has been associated with age differences in marriage. Proulx, Caron & Logue (2006), in their study of older women married to younger men, found that half of their couples identified having different interests as being a problem. Having different interests may lead couples to drift apart, resulting in an increase in marital instability or divorce proneness. In support of this idea, Amato et al. (2003) found that couples in heterogamous relationships experienced less spousal interaction than couples who were more homogenous. Thus, couples with age differences may be associated with lower positive marital interactions.



## Negative Marital Quality

Age differences in marriage may be related to aspects of negative marital quality such as instability, problems, and disagreements. Although Groot and Van Den Brink (2002) did not find an increase in marital instability due to age differences, Booth and Edwards (1992), Heaton (2002), and Krippen et al. (2010) all found age-differentiated couples exhibited a greater propensity towards divorce proneness than did couples more similarly aged. Furthermore, Bumpass and Sweet (1972) reported higher than expected rates of divorce or separation in which age differences were large, particularly when wives were older than husbands. Bumpass and Sweet (1972) explained age differences may promote more marital instability for three reasons: (1) value consensus may decrease as age differences increase, (2) age differences may cause an imbalance in the power structure, particularly if the wife is older than the husband, and (3) broad age differences may be a result of personal characteristics that are not conducive to long-term marital stability.

Regarding marital problems, several authors have suggested that age differences are likely linked to greater marital problems due to social disapproval, as well as potential caregiving and financial issues (Bytheway, 1981; Hancock, Stuchbury, & Tomassini, 2003; Proulx et al., 2006). Other studies have failed to find significant associations between age differences and negative outcomes (Barnes, 2005; Vera et al., 1985). However, those studies did not include older couples, and so further research is needed to examine trends into later life.

While conflict in marriage is extensively studied, little research has examined marital conflict as it relates to couples in age-differentiated marriages. One researcher has speculated that from theoretical grounds heterogamous relationships were more prone to marital conflict, particularly as a result of social disapproval (Udry, 1974). Likewise, Proulx et al. (2006)

observed that age differences were likely to affect disagreements in areas such as power struggles, interests, or fertility. Thus like marital problems, disagreements may be related to age differences, yet research has not been able to conclusively determine this association.

### **Additional Influential Factors Related to Age Differences and Marital Quality**

Gender of the older partner in age-differentiated marriages may moderate the link between age differences and marital quality. Whether the older partner is male or female can influence gender roles, equality or power differentials in the relationship, and the division of household chores. Regarding gender roles, research suggests that which spouse is older influences how male and female partners carry out their roles in the relationship (Rogler & Procidano, 1989). For example, McWherter (1993) observed that older women with younger husbands reported more relaxed gender roles than similar-aged couples or husband-older marriages.

As with gender roles, age differences can affect the equality and power structure within a relationship. Years spent together in marriage can help couples to develop and refine a power structure which they both can support. However, together, age differences within marriage may hinder the development of a balanced power structure, particularly among women-older marriages (Vera et al., 1985). This power imbalance may be a result that the older spouses have been found to be more dominant and powerful than the younger spouses (Blood & Wolfe, 1960). Older women have been found also to be more independent, successful, and dominating than younger women (Bieber, 1972). At the same time, younger wives have been described as being less assertive towards their husbands (Presser, 1975), while younger husbands have been viewed as being more inhibitive about working and more insecure in general. Marriages in which the power structures are more traditional (e.g., more husband dominance in decision making) have

been shown to result in lower marital quality (Amato et al., 2003). As a result, some older wives may be more willing to share power with their younger husbands (McWherter, 1993) rather than to face marital instability (Presser, 1975). Regarding the division of household labor, Blood and Wolfe (1960) suggested that older men may be less inclined to work together with their wives on mundane household tasks, and more likely to assist with independent tasks. Rogler and Procidano (1989) found that younger spouses, who were similar in age, were more likely to share in household chores. In summary, when husbands are older than the wife, or vice versa, gender roles, levels of equality in the relationship, and the division of household chores are likely to be influenced.

Age at the time of marriage, and number of years married have been linked to marital quality, and are important to consider in relation to age differences. Regarding age at marriage, age differences may be more important for younger couples than for older ones. For example, a 19-year-old woman marrying a much older man may result in far different outcomes than for a 35-year-old woman to marry a man of the same age difference. Regarding years married, the longer a couple has been together the greater the likelihood of stability in that relationship. While research has observed that marital quality declines the longer marriages endure (Umberson, Williams, Powers, Lius, & Needham, 2006; VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001), other research has shown that marriages of longer length experience more positive and less negative interactions (Carstensen, Gottman, & Levenson, 1995). To capture marital experiences during normative marrying years among a fairly homogenous group regarding length of marriage, the current study focused on couples wherein one spouse was 35 years old or younger.

## **Research Questions**

Because the literature on age differences in marriage has demonstrated inconsistent and inconclusive findings, the research questions for this study are broad in scope, in the hopes of finding patterns that will shed additional light on the topic. The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. Using age differences as a continuous variable, what are the associations between age differences and marital quality?
2. What group differences in marital quality can be found between husband-older, wife-older, and same-age marriages?
3. How are other influential factors (gender roles, division of household chores, husband dominance in decision making, age at marriage, and length of marriage) associated with marital quality?
4. What group differences in these influential factors can be found between husband-older, wife-older, and same-age marriages?

## **Method**

### **Sample**

Using the cross-sectional comparison group data from the nationally representative study entitled, “Marital Instability Over the Life Course” (Booth et al., 2000), 723 respondents were examined for a variety of factors regarding marital quality. This cross-sectional comparison group data was selected because it provided information for a select group of participants: couples in which one or both spouses were younger than 35 years of age. Only the early waves of the longitudinal study would allow for this selection. However, such data would not be as applicable and representative of current marital trends. All 723 respondents were a part of intact

first marriages, with one or both spouses being 35 years of age or less. This age group was selected because it more closely represents today's normative marrying ages (17-35). Divorced couples were removed from this study, in part, because of a lack of responses to questions regarding current marital quality. Of these participants, 48% of respondents were female with an average age of 30 for all participants. The average age at marriage was nearly 24 years for all participants. The average length of marriages was 6.5 years. Additionally, 87% of participants had completed a bachelor's degree. Of these participants, 432 marriages were husband-older, 175 marriages were wife-older, and 116 marriages were same-age, as classified by both partners being the same age in years at the time data was collected. Although this particular sample came from a nationally representative study, this final sample does not reflect a nationally representative sample, particularly as nearly 90% of its participants had completed a bachelor's degree.

## **Measures**

Following the lead of Johnson, White, Edwards, and Booth's (1986) study on dimensions of marital quality, five dimensions were selected as the crux of this study. These five areas of marital quality have been used frequently in research on marital relationships (e.g., Amato et al., 2003). They have also been validated for not only cross-sectional studies but also for panel studies in measuring distinct yet correlated components of marital quality (Johnson, 1995). These five dimensions have been divided into positive marital quality (marital happiness and spousal interaction) and negative marital quality (divorce proneness, marital problems, and spousal disagreements).

**Marital Happiness.** Of these five dimensions of marital quality, two scales measured the positive nature of marital quality, while the remaining three scales measured the negative nature

of marital quality. Marital happiness is a measurement of 11 items examining global assessments of love, agreement, and happiness within the relationship, as well as personal satisfaction towards the marriage. Some items were reverse coded so that higher scores represent greater marital happiness. Because the variable measuring the feelings of love for the spouse originally included five potential responses, this variable was recoded so that the range of responses fell within a range of three potential answers, as shared by the other variables within the scale. Scores were then summed to provide an overall score, creating a range of 13.00 to 33.00 ( $M = 28.44$ ,  $SD = 4.31$ , Cronbach's Alpha = .89).

**Spousal Interaction.** The second area of positive marital quality is spousal interaction. Spousal interaction was measured with five items examining the amount of time spouses spend together in common activities, such as eating meals, shopping, or visiting friends together. Items were reverse coded so that higher scores represent higher amounts of spousal interaction. These items were then summed, creating a range of 5.00 to 20.00 ( $M = 15.08$ ,  $SD = 3.17$ , Cronbach's Alpha = .68).

**Divorce Proneness.** The aspects of negative marital quality include divorce proneness, marital problems, and spousal disagreements. The first scale measured is divorce proneness, a broad measure examining 27 items looking at the frequency and timing of indicators that divorce may be forthcoming. These measures included thinking the marriage may be in trouble, talking to friends, family, or others about the possibility of divorcing, separating, or filing a petition for divorce. Although Johnson et al. (1986) developed a 5-item abbreviated version of this divorce proneness scale, the decision was made to use the full 27-item scale as recommended by the primary investigators' codebook for the "Marital Instability Over the Life Course" study (Booth, Amato, Rogers, & Johnson, 2001). All 27 questions were reverse coded so that higher scores

represented greater divorce proneness. These variables were then summed together. Because this summed score was positively skewed, the natural logarithm was used to create a final score, creating a range between 0.30 and 1.76 ( $M = 1.14$ ,  $SD = 0.24$ , Cronbach's Alpha = .85).

**Marital Problems.** The scale for marital problems consisted of 13 items examining the existence of many common marital problems, such as anger, jealousy, domineering behaviors, or even an extreme problem such as infidelity. If the problem existed in the relationship for either or both spouses, responses were coded as 1. If the problem was nonexistent within the relationship, responses were coded as 0. These problems were summed together for a final score. Higher scores were indicative of higher levels of marital problems, creating a range between 0 and 12.00 ( $M = 2.90$ ,  $SD = 2.77$ , Cronbach's Alpha = .79).

**Spousal Disagreements.** The final measure of the aspects of negative marital quality is spousal disagreements, a scale consisting of 4 items, which measures the amount of arguments, quarrels, or abuse that occurs within the relationship. Following the scale construction procedures outlined by Booth and colleagues (2001), three steps were taken. First, two of the four items were reverse coded so that higher scores reflected higher levels of spousal disagreement. Second, the item in the scale related to quarrels was recoded so that responses indicated whether or not a quarrel occurred within the previous two months ("yes" coded as 1, "no" coded as 0). Last, "a regression equation was developed, based on scales created in 1980, 1983, and 1992, and then the created scale was rounded" (p. 547). This final scale score ranged from 0 to 12.00 ( $M = 3.90$ ,  $SD = 2.26$ , Cronbach's Alpha = 0.46).

**Age differences between spouses.** The age difference between spouses was created by subtracting the age of the spouse from the age of the respondent. By taking this approach, some of the age differences resulted in a negative number. These numbers were then recoded so that

all numbers were positive representing absolute differences. The range of age differences was 0 to 27.00 ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = 2.00$ ).

**Sex role scale.** The sex role scale consists of seven questions, which measure the roles performed by the husband and wife and, specifically, feelings about the wife working outside of the home and the role the husband takes in raising the children. Four questions were recoded so that higher scores reflect a more traditional view of sex roles. These scores were then summed together and rounded to create a final score with a range of 7.00 to 28.00 ( $M = 15.55$ ,  $SD = 3.24$ , Cronbach's alpha = .67).

**Husband dominance in decision making.** The husband dominance in decision making scale included two questions addressing whether couples had decisions where one spouse or the other had the final word, and a third question addressing whether one, the other, or both most often made the final decision. Six types of spousal dominance were identified, and used to create a variable that represented these categories. In the created variable, higher scores indicated higher levels of husband dominance in the decision-making process (if the wife made all of the decisions without input from the husband the variable was coded as 1; If the husband made all of the decisions without input from the wife, the variable was coded as 6;  $M = 3.20$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ , Cronbach's alpha = .54).

**Division of household chores.** Division of household chores is a single question asking the amount of household chores performed by each spouse. Responses are based on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = "Husband does all" to 5 = "Husband does none". For the purpose of this study, it was determined to identify if the division of household chores was more traditional (e.g., the wife performed more household labors) or less traditional (e.g., the husband performed more household labors). To accomplish this identification, scores were recoded so that higher



scores represented less traditional divisions (e.g., higher husband involvement) in household chores, creating a range between 1.00 and 5.00 ( $M = 3.61$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ).

**Age at first marriage.** Age at first marriage was assessed using one question asking the respondent at what age he or she first married. This age at first marriage ranged from 14.00 to 39.00 ( $M = 21.00$ ,  $SD = 3.40$ ).

**Years married to current spouse.** Years married to current spouse was assessed with a single question asking how long (in years) the respondent had been married to his or her current spouse, offering a range between 0 and 20.00 ( $M = 6.54$ ,  $SD = 4.36$ ).

**Spouse older.** Because of the likelihood of differing outcomes dependent upon the gender of the older spouse, one additional variable was created to identify which spouse is older. Husband-older marriages were coded as 1 ( $N = 432$ ); wife-older marriages were coded as -1 ( $N = 175$ ); and same-age marriages were coded as 0 ( $N = 116$ ).

## **Analysis**

Using SPSS 17.0, zero-order correlations were computed between each of the variables of interest. Because differences were expected based on which spouse was older, four correlation coefficients were computed, featuring (1) a full sample, (2) a subsample of husband-older marriages, (3) a subsample of wife-older marriages, and (4) a subsample of same-age marriages.

Next, multiple linear regression was conducted predicting each of the marital quality variables (marital happiness, spousal interaction, marital instability, marital problems, and spousal disagreements). Predictor variables included age differences between spouses, gender roles, division of household chores, husband dominance in decision making, years married, and age at marriage.

## Results

The results of the correlation coefficients showed a consistent relationship between the marital quality variables (see Tables 2 and 3). The positive marital quality variables had a positive relationship with each other and a negative relationship to the negative marital quality variables. The negative marital quality variables also had a positive relationship with each other. While the relationship between the marital quality variables were expected based on the existent literature, the other variables indicated less consistency. Among the predictor variables, division of household chores, sex roles, years married, and age at marriage were modestly correlated with some dimensions of marital quality among at least one of the subsample groups. The predictor variable of most interest, age difference, did not have much association with most of the marital quality variables. However, it did show some relationship with marital problems and spousal disagreements among couples where the wife is older than the husband.

The results of the multiple linear regression models were separated by each comparison group (full sample, husband-older marriages, wife-older marriages, and same-age marriages) and are presented in Table 4.

### **Positive Marital Quality**

Multiple linear regression was used to evaluate how age differences were associated with marital happiness and marital interaction among each of the four comparison groups (see Table 4). This analysis found that age differences were not associated with marital happiness for any of the groups. Regarding marital interaction, age differences were found to be statistically significant for the wife-older marriages ( $B = .17$ ,  $se = .07$ ,  $P < .05$ ), but not for any of the remaining three comparison groups. With each year of increase in age difference, spousal interactions increased among wife-older marriages by around  $1/20^{\text{th}}$  of a standard deviation.

Regression was used also to evaluate how the other predictor variables were associated with marital happiness and marital interaction (see Table 4). For the full sample, the regression model showed a change of  $F(6, 591) = 1.079, p < .38, R^2 = .01$ . Thus, none of the predictor variables were significantly related to marital happiness. For the husband-older subgroup, the model showed a change of  $F(6, 339) = 1.961, P < .10, R^2 = .03$ . The only predictor variable that was significantly related to marital happiness in this model was the division of household chores. Specifically, as the husband's participation in household chores increased by one unit, the level of marital happiness decreased by around  $1/8^{\text{th}}$  of a standard deviation ( $B = -.60$ , standard error (SE) =  $.29, P < .05$ ). For the wife-older subgroup, the model showed a change of  $F(6, 148) = 3.263, P < .01, R^2 = .12$ . The division of household chores ( $B = 1.58, se = .48, P < .001$ ) and the years married ( $B = -.31, se = .09, P < .001$ ) were both significantly related to marital happiness. As the husband's participation in household chores increased by one unit, the marital happiness also increased by about  $1/3$  of a standard deviation. However, for each year longer a couple was married to each other, the level of marital happiness decreased by around  $1/12^{\text{th}}$  of a standard deviation. Finally, for the same-age subgroup, the model showed a change of  $F(5, 91) = 1.21, P < .35, R^2 = .06$ . None of the predictor variables in this model were significantly related to marital happiness.

Regarding control variables predicting marital interaction in the full sample, the model showed a change of  $F(6, 607) = 3.721, P < .01, R^2 = .03$ . Division of household chores ( $B = -.46, se = .16, P < .01$ ) and years married ( $B = -.07, se = .03, P < .05$ ) were both significantly related to spousal interaction. As husband's level of participation in household chores increased by one unit, spousal interactions decreased by around  $1/7^{\text{th}}$  of a standard deviation. Also, the longer a couple was married by each year, less interaction occurred by about  $1/50^{\text{th}}$  of a standard

deviation. For the husband-older subgroup, the model showed a change of  $F(6, 354) = 3.138, P < .01, R^2 = .05$ . The division of household chores ( $B = -.47, se = .20, P < .05$ ) was again significantly related to spousal interaction. As the husband's level of participation increased by one unit, spousal interaction decreased by around  $1/7^{\text{th}}$  of a standard deviation. For the wife-older subgroup, the model showed a change of  $F(6, 148) = 3.276, P < .01, R^2 = .12$ . Years married ( $B = -.26, se = .07, P < .001$ ) and age at marriage ( $B = -.21, se = .08, P < .01$ ) were significantly related to spousal interaction. With an increase of each year married, spousal interaction decreased by around  $1/12^{\text{th}}$  of a standard deviation. With an increase of each year at marriage, spousal interaction decreased by  $1/15^{\text{th}}$  of a standard deviation. For the same-age subgroup, the model showed a change of  $F(5, 92) = 2.787, P < .05, R^2 = .13$ . Sex roles ( $B = -.24, se = .10, P < .05$ ) and division of household chores ( $B = -1.13, se = .44, P < .05$ ) were both significantly related to spousal interaction. As gender roles increased by one unit, spousal interaction decreased by around  $1/15^{\text{th}}$  of a standard deviation. As husband's participation in household chores increased by one unit, the level of spousal interaction decreased by around  $1/3$  of a standard deviation.

### **Negative Marital Quality**

Multiple linear regression was used to evaluate how age differences were associated with divorce proneness, marital problems, and spousal disagreements among each of the four comparison groups (see Table 5). This analysis found that age differences were not associated with any of the marital quality outcomes for any of the groups.

Regarding divorce proneness in the full sample, the model showed a change of  $F(6, 607) = 1.751, P < .15, R^2 = .01$ . However, none of the variables were significantly related to divorce proneness. For the husband-older subgroup, the model showed a change of  $F(6, 354) = .821, P <$

.56,  $R^2 = .01$ . None of the predictor variables were significantly related to divorce proneness. For the wife-older subgroup, the model showed a change of  $F(6, 148) = 3.155, P < .01, R^2 = .11$ . Years married ( $B = -.02, se = .00, P < .001$ ) was the only predictor variable that was significantly related to divorce proneness. As the years married increased by each year, the likelihood of divorce proneness increased by  $1/10^{\text{th}}$  of a standard deviation. For the same-age subgroup, the model showed a change of  $F(5, 92) = 1.729, P < .15, R^2 = .09$ . Age at marriage was the only predictor variable that was significantly related to divorce proneness ( $B = -.02, se = .01, P < .01$ ). As the age at marriage increased by each year, divorce proneness decreased by around  $1/12^{\text{th}}$  of a standard deviation.

Regarding marital problems in the full sample, the model showed a change of  $F(6, 593) = 3.091, P < .01, R^2 = .02$ . Age at marriage was the only predictor variable that was significantly related to marital problems ( $B = -.12, se = .03, P < .001$ ). As the age at marriage increased by each year, marital problems decreased by around  $1/25^{\text{th}}$  of a standard deviation. For the husband-older subgroup, the model showed a change of  $F(6, 343) = 1.545, P < .17, R^2 = .03$ . Age at marriage was significantly related to marital problems ( $B = -.11, se = .04, P < .01$ ), showing that as the age at marriage increased by each year, marital problems decreased by around  $1/25^{\text{th}}$  of a standard deviation. For the wife-older subgroup, the model showed a change of  $F(6, 147) = 3.036, P < .01, R^2 = .11$ . Division of household chores was significantly related to marital problems ( $B = -.80, se = .29, P < .01$ ), showing that with a per unit increase in the level of husband's participation in household chores, marital problems decreased by around  $1/3$  of a standard deviation. For the same-age subgroup, the model showed a change of  $F(5, 90) = 1.725, P < .15, R^2 = .09$ . Years married ( $B = -.21, se = .09, P < .05$ ) and age at marriage ( $B = -.19, se = .09, P < .05$ ) were both significantly related to marital problems. As the years married increased

per year, marital problems decreased by around  $1/12^{\text{th}}$  of a standard deviation. As age at marriage increased, a decrease in marital problems by around  $1/16^{\text{th}}$  of a standard deviation occurred.

Regarding spousal disagreements in the full sample, the model showed a change of  $F(6, 602) = 2.534, P < .05, R^2 = .02$ . Sex roles ( $B = -.09, se = .03, P < .01$ ), years married ( $B = -.05, se = .02, P < .05$ ), and age at marriage ( $B = -.05, se = .02, P < .05$ ) were all significantly related to spousal disagreements. Specifically, as sex roles increased per unit, spousal disagreements decreased by around  $1/25^{\text{th}}$  of a standard deviation. As years married increase per year, spousal disagreements decreased by around  $1/50^{\text{th}}$  of a standard deviation. As age at marriage increased per year, spousal disagreements decreased by around  $1/50^{\text{th}}$  of a standard deviation. For the husband-older subgroup, the model showed a change of  $F(6, 350) = 1.825, P < .10, R^2 = .03$ . Years married was significantly related to spousal disagreements ( $B = -.08, se = .03, P < .01$ ), showing that an increase per year in years married resulted in a decrease in spousal disagreements by around  $1/30^{\text{th}}$  of a standard deviation. For the wife-older subgroup, the model showed a change of  $F(6, 148) = 1.272, P < .28, R^2 = .05$ . None of the predictor variables were significantly related to spousal disagreements. For the same-age subgroup, the model showed a change of  $F(5, 91) = 1.216, P < .31, R^2 = .06$ . Sex roles was the only predictor variable that was significantly related to spousal disagreements ( $B = -1.45, se = .07, P < .05$ ). As the sex roles increased by one unit, spousal disagreements decreased by around  $3/5^{\text{th}}$  of a standard deviation.

In summary, the results of this study showed little association between age difference and marital quality. This study did show that an increase in age differences between spouses demonstrated an increase in spousal interaction for wife-older marriages only. No other group showed a statistically significant association between age differences and marital quality. The division of household chores showed significance regarding marital happiness among the

husband-older and wife-older groups, but with opposite results. More participation by the husband showed a decrease in marital happiness for husband-older marriages, but an increase in marital happiness for wife-older marriages. An increase in husband participation in household chores also showed a decrease in spousal interaction for all groups, except for the wife-older marriages, for which no significant association was found. Finally, an increase in husband's participation in household chores showed a decrease in marital problems for the wife-older marriages. As sex roles were found to be more traditional, spousal interaction decreased among the same-age marriages while spousal disagreements decreased among the full sample and also the same-age marriages. The longer couples were married, lower marital happiness and spousal interaction and an increase in divorce proneness was found among wife-older marriages. Years married showed also a decrease in spousal interaction for the full sample, a decrease in marital problems for the same-age marriages, and a decrease in spousal disagreements among the husband-older marriages. Finally, a delayed age at marriage showed a decrease in spousal interaction among wife-older marriages, a decrease in divorce proneness and marital problems among same age marriages, and a decrease in spousal disagreements for the full sample.

## **Discussion**

Using data from a nationally representative sample of 723 married adults, this study explored the association of age differences between spouses at the time of marriage on various aspects of marital quality years into the marriage. Four groups (full sample, husband-older, wife-older, and same-age marriages) were compared to see how marital quality was associated with age difference, as moderated by gender of the older spouse, after controlling for several related variables. Little association was found between age differences and marital quality. A lack of an association between age differences and marital quality may come as a relief to couples who may

be considering entering into a marriage with a substantially older partner, yet fear that age-differentiated relationships may be less positive or more negative than age-similar marriages. The few associations that were found were dependent upon which spouse was older. Specifically, spousal interactions increased among wife-older marriages, but not among the other groups as the age difference increased. An increased level of husband participation in household labor was related to an increase in marital happiness and a decrease in marital problems for wife-older marriages. It also was related to a decrease in marital happiness for husband-older marriages as well as a decrease in spousal interaction for all groups except wife-older marriages, which showed no significant association with the division of household labor. Finally, a more traditional approach to gender roles among the same-age marriages was related to a decrease in marital problems and in spousal interaction.

The primary variable of interest, age difference between spouses, was not associated with most of the marital quality outcomes of interest. This lack of broad association is an interesting finding, suggesting that age differences, whether the husband or wife is older, may not be cause for benefit nor concern. One interpretation of this finding is that today's society is accepting of various marital experiences, and as such less attention is given to age heterogamy. Stated in different terms, it may be that other factors are much more important in predicting aspects of marital quality than age differences between the spouses. Although the general pattern was what age differences and marital quality were not associated, some findings did show minor indicators that age difference may matter.

Age did exhibit some interesting associations with one specific marital outcome: spousal interaction. Specifically, findings suggested that age differences were associated with an increase in spousal interaction when the wife was older than her husband. As the age difference increased



each year, the spousal interaction also increased. However, this association was the opposite among husband-older marriages, showing that with each year of increase in age differences, the spousal interaction decreased. Blood and Wolfe (1960) reported older husbands were less inclined to interact with their much younger wives, but existing literature also indicated wife-older marriages struggled with finding common interests (Proulx et al., 2006). This current study has supported the notion that older husbands may struggle in maintaining marital interactions, but it has called into question whether the same holds true for wife-older marriages. Heterogamy may create potential difficulties in promoting spousal interaction (Amato et al., 2003), yet some couples have shown they were able to escape the accepted patterns of increased difficulties brought on by age differences. Such examples indicate that further research is needed in order to explore how spousal interactions differ depending on which spouse is older.

This study did not find an association between age differences and divorce proneness. The existing literature has been inconsistent on whether age differences between spouses increased the likelihood of divorce (Booth & Edwards, 1992; Groot & Van Den Brink, 2002; Heaton, 2002; Krippen et al., 2010). Earlier studies used age differences as a categorical variable, and thus compared groups to each other (e.g., Heaton, 2002; Krippen et al., 2010), often showing group differences. The current study used age differences as a continuous variable in an attempt to see if age difference alone was associated with divorce proneness. No association was found between age differences and divorce proneness with any of the groups. This lack of an association may be reassuring to couples who may be concerned about entering into an age-differentiated marriage (Bytheway, 1981). This lack of an association may be helpful also to potential marriage partners, who have sought other means in finding a spouse, as a result of changes in demographics that may shrink the normally accepted pools of eligible marital

partners. While this lack of association may be reassuring to some, caution is needed in applying this finding to the entire population. Divorced couples were excluded from the current study. An examination of divorced couples from an age-differentiated marriage may show different results than were found within this current study. In addition, couples within a higher-order marriage were also excluded from this study. Higher-order marriages have demonstrated not only an increased likelihood of age-differentiated marriages (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001), but also an increased propensity for divorce (Booth & Edwards, 1992). Further study is warranted in examining how age differences are associated with divorce proneness and other marital qualities among couples who have divorced or entered into higher-order marriages.

The current study did not find an association between age differences and marital happiness. Although some research contradicts this finding (Cowan, 1984; Groot & Van Den Brink, 2002), other studies support the current finding (e.g., Barnes, 2005). However, this study did find that marital happiness among both husband-older and wife-older marriages was associated with the level of husband participation in performing household chores. An increase in husband participation showed an increase in marital happiness among wife-older marriages, but showed a decrease in marital happiness among husband-older marriages. Bumpass and Sweet (1972) noted that age differentiated marriages may experience an imbalance in the couples' power structure. One interpretation of this current finding is that women-older couples develop different household labor patterns, due to the wife holding greater power in the relationship (Rogler & Procidano, 1989). An increase in husband participation may help create greater marital happiness for wife-older marriages, but when a wife tries to exert more power in other marital arrangements, the overall marital happiness declines. An increase in marital happiness among wife-older marriages may also support the notion that a more egalitarian division of

household chores might be beneficial to marriage, but this egalitarian division of household chores may not exhibit the same benefits among husband-older marriages.

In addition to increasing marital happiness among wife-older marriages, an increase in household labor by the husband showed a decrease in reports of marital problems among wife-older marriages. A decrease in marital problems may promote long-term marital stability. However, similar findings were not found among the other marital groups. Interestingly, while wife-older marriages showed lower levels of marital problems, the other groups showed lower spousal interaction as the husbands' participation in household chores increased. A decrease in spousal interaction may denote a potential problem within the marriage. Because the wife-older marriages did not exhibit similar findings, it may be that wife-older marriages face different types of marital problems than do husband-older or same-age marriages. Further research is needed to compare, more in depth, what types of problems are faced by these different groups and how these problems may affect the overall marital quality.

This current study did not find an association between age differences and spousal disagreements, although Proulx et al. (2006) observed that age differences may affect spousal disagreements, particularly regarding power struggles and interests. However, this study did find that same-aged couples reported fewer disagreements when gender roles were more traditional. Pasley, Kerpelman, and Guilbert (2001) observed that couples enter into relationships with "gendered identities" (p. 7), which offer a definition of their beliefs and expectations regarding gender and gender roles. Couples develop patterns that promote and reinforce these beliefs during the course of their relationship. Disagreements may arise when these beliefs and expectations are not congruent with actions of one or both spouses. It may be that the same-age couples within the current study exhibited more congruency with their beliefs and expectations

regarding gender roles, which was associated with less spousal disagreements. This study did not find an association between gender roles and spousal disagreements for husband-older or wife-older marriages, so it may be that unexplored variables, such as beliefs and expectations, are moderating the associations differently depending on which spouse is older. Further research is needed to explore these differences.

### **Limitations**

This study has several limitations. The first limitation is that all data came from couples within intact, first marriages. By focusing on this specific group, already divorced couples were excluded from the study. Some of these excluded couples may have been a part of age-differentiated couples that may have provided additional insight into how age differences were associated with marital quality. Previous research has shown also that higher-order marriages are more likely for an age-differentiated marriage. Such couples were excluded from this study. Additionally, participants within an intact marriage may not only view their marriages in a more positive light, but also encourage less participation from couples whose marriages were struggling at the time data was collected. One further limitation caused by selecting intact marriages is the loss of a nationally representative sample, due primarily to a much higher level of education.

Another limitation of this study is the use of chronological age as the primary variable of interest. Chronological age has its importance, but developmental age may be a better indicator of marital quality. However, developmental age is more difficult to measure as well as to analyze. Developmental age may also be more diverse based on the culture in which it is being studied.

Although not necessarily a limitation, this study focused on couples in which at least one spouse was younger than 35 years of age. This group was selected because it was felt an age-differentiation may have more long-term impact on marital quality within this group. However, this selection did limit the number of participants who could have been reviewed, as well as limited the potentiality of examining couples facing severe marital problems, such as caregiving or health problems due to old age. As a result, future research is needed at examining older couples within age-differentiated marriages, particularly those who may be facing caregiving burdens.

Future study needs to address issues of age differences in older couples, second and higher-order marriages, and cohabitation. Based on the findings of this current study, case studies may be insightful also in noting possible differences between husband-older (“sugar daddy”) and wife-older (“cougar”) marriages. Future attention is also needed in examining couples from age-differentiated marriages that have already divorced. Additional insights may be gained on the topic of age differences in marriage by examining their experiences.

### **Conclusion**

Although age differences were not found to be greatly influential in predicting either positive or negative factors of marital quality, interesting trends were observed for specific age-differentiated couple groups. Specifically, wife-older marriages experienced greater spousal interaction and higher levels of marital problems as the age difference increased. Additionally, an increase in husband participation in household chores was associated with greater marital happiness for wife-older marriages, but lowered the marital happiness in the other marital arrangements. This study adds to the literature by examining age difference as a continuous

variable, rather than trying to explore it as a categorical variable. By exploring age difference as a continuous variable, this study was able to examine the associations and nuances that arise between age differences and multiple dimensions of marital quality. Furthermore, this study presented a unique look at wife-older, husband-older, and same-age marital trends.

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## Appendices

*Table 1*

*Percentage of Married Women Compared to Husband's Age.*

Year of Marriage	Age gap (in years)	Wife more than 5 years younger than husband by percentage	Wife more than 5 years older than husband by percentage	Total Percentage
<b>First Marriages†</b>				
1940 to 1944	2.3	12.9	0.8	13.7
1945 to 1949	2.7	17.3	0.7	18.0
1950 to 1954	2.6	15.6	1.0	16.6
1955 to 1959	2.7	17.4	1.0	18.4
1960 to 1964	2.5	14.4	1.2	15.6
1965 to 1969	2.4	14.0	0.7	14.7
1970 to 1974	2.3	14.3	1.5	15.8
1975 to 1979	2.2	14.1	1.8	15.9
1980 to 1984	2.3	15.8	1.8	17.6
1985 to 1989	2.1	16.0	2.6	18.6
<b>Second Marriages‡</b>				
1960 to 1964	2.8	29.0	8.5	37.5
1965 to 1969	2.5	30.0	7.1	37.1
1970 to 1974	2.9	29.3	8.5	37.8
1975 to 1979	4.1	35.8	5.8	41.6
1980 to 1984	3.7	34.7	5.2	39.9
1985 to 1989	3.4	32.5	7	39.5
<b>All Marriages‡</b>				
2000	NA	19.6	3.3	22.9

†Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2001). Number, timing, and duration of marriages and divorces: Fall 1996. (Current Population Reports). Washington, DC: Kreider and Fields.

‡Source: Fields, J., & Casper, L. M. (2001). Current population reports: America's families and living arrangements. (June, 2001). U.S. Bureau of the Census [On-line]. Available: <http://www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/p20-537.pdf>.

Table 2

Correlation Coefficients for All Variables Using Both the Full Sample and the Same-Age Marriages.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
1. Marital Happiness Scale	1.00	<b>.53***</b>	<b>-.54***</b>	<b>-.66***</b>	<b>-.55***</b>	-.06	-.17	<b>-.19*</b>	.11	-.02	--
2. Spousal Interaction Scale	<b>.46***</b>	1.00	<b>-.31***</b>	<b>-.43***</b>	<b>-.28***</b>	<b>-.24*</b>	-.01	<b>-.34***</b>	.01	-.02	--
3. Marital Instability Scale	<b>-.54***</b>	<b>-.29***</b>	1.00	<b>-.28***</b>	<b>.47***</b>	-.08	-.02	.02	.02	<b>-.22*</b>	--
4. Marital Problems Scale	<b>-.52***</b>	<b>-.30***</b>	<b>.58***</b>	1.00	<b>.58***</b>	.11	.11	.09	-.14	-.14	--
5. Spousal Disagreements Scale	<b>-.46***</b>	<b>-.28***</b>	<b>.44***</b>	<b>.52***</b>	1.00	<b>-.21*</b>	.08	<b>.16†</b>	-.14	.10	--
6. Sex Role Scale	-.05	<b>-.07†</b>	-.02	.06	<b>-.10*</b>	1.00	.16	.110	<b>.19†</b>	<b>-.22*</b>	--
7. Husband Dominance Scale	-.01	.04	-.03	.01	-.01	<b>.19***</b>	1.00	.00	-.09	-.10	--
8. Division of Household Chores	<b>-.07†</b>	<b>-.16***</b>	.01	.01	.05	<b>.18***</b>	.01	1.00	.04	.16	--
9. Years Married	<b>-.07†</b>	<b>-.13**</b>	<b>.10**</b>	.02	-.06	<b>.08†</b>	-.03	<b>.08*</b>	1.00	<b>-.42***</b>	--
10. Age at Marriage	.05	.03	<b>-.09*</b>	<b>-.13***</b>	.03	<b>-.13**</b>	.00	<b>-.07†</b>	<b>-.42***</b>	1.00	--
11. Age Difference	-.01	-.04	.02	.04	.00	-.01	-.04	<b>0.07†</b>	.06	<b>.14***</b>	1.00

† p<.10; \* p<.05; \*\* p<.01; \*\*\* p<.001.

Note: Correlation Coefficients above the diagonal are for the same-age marriages subsample; Correlation Coefficients below the diagonal are for the full sample.

Table 3

Correlation Coefficients for All Variables Using Both the Husband-Older Marriages and the Wife-Older Marriages Subsamples.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
1. Marital Happiness Scale	1.00	<b>.47***</b>	<b>-.56***</b>	<b>-.51***</b>	<b>-.39***</b>	.49	.06	<b>.21**</b>	<b>-.20**</b>	-.02	-.05
2. Spousal Interaction Scale	<b>.43***</b>	1.00	<b>-.36***</b>	<b>-.23***</b>	<b>-.22***</b>	.04	-.04	-.02	<b>-.22**</b>	-.09	.11
3. Marital Instability Scale	<b>-.54***</b>	<b>-.27***</b>	1.00	<b>.61***</b>	<b>.48***</b>	-.11	-.02	-.06	<b>.25**</b>	.01	.03
4. Marital Problems Scale	<b>-.48***</b>	<b>-.29***</b>	<b>.55***</b>	1.00	<b>.52***</b>	.08	.05	<b>-.18*</b>	<b>.16*</b>	-.09	<b>.15†</b>
5. Spousal Disagreements Scale	<b>-.48***</b>	<b>-.31***</b>	<b>.41***</b>	<b>.50***</b>	1.00	-.11	.00	-.04	.10	-.02	<b>.14†</b>
6. Sex Role Scale	<b>-.11*</b>	-.07	.04	.02	-.06	1.00	<b>.26**</b>	<b>.15†</b>	-.01	<b>-.16†</b>	-.04
7. Husband Dominance Scale	-.01	.07	-.04	-.03	-.04	<b>.17**</b>	1.00	.02	.01	<b>-.26**</b>	-.08
8. Division of Household Chores	<b>-.15**</b>	<b>-.15**</b>	.02	.06	.05	<b>.21***</b>	.02	1.00	.12	<b>.14†</b>	.06
9. Years Married	-.05	-.10	.07	.00	<b>-.10*</b>	.08	-.01	.060	1.00	<b>-.41***</b>	.06
10. Age at Marriage	.10	<b>.09†</b>	<b>-.09†</b>	<b>-.14**</b>	-.05	-.08	<b>.10*</b>	<b>-.17***</b>	<b>-.43***</b>	1.00	<b>.18*</b>
11. Age Difference	.02	-.06	.02	.01	-.01	.00	-.01	.060	.01	<b>.12*</b>	1.00

† p<.10; \* p<.05; \*\* p<.01; \*\*\* p<.001.

Note: Correlation Coefficients above the diagonal are for the wife-older marriages subsample; Correlation Coefficients below the diagonal are for the husband-older marriages subsample.

Table 4

Regressions Table for Marital Happiness, Spousal Interaction, Age Difference, and Moderating Variables.

Variable	Marital Happiness				Spousal Interaction			
	Full Sample	Husband-Older	Wife-Older	Same-Age	Full Sample	Husband-Older	Wife-Older	Same-Age
Constant	29.59 (1.78)	30.56 (2.29)	30.29 (3.78)	32.67 (4.77)	17.46 (1.28)	16.34 (1.65)	21.08 (2.67)	22.33 (3.28)
Gender/Sex Roles	-.05 (.06)	-.12 (.08)	-.01 (.10)	-.06 (.14)	-.05 (.04)	-.05 (.06)	.03 (.07)	-.24* (.10)
Husband Dominance in Decision Making	.03 (.15)	.10 (.19)	-.02 (.31)	-.33 (.39)	.12 (.11)	.21 (.14)	-.27 (.22)	.13 (.27)
Division of Household Chores	-.29 (.23)	-.60* (.29)	1.58*** (.48)	-1.25† (.64)	-.46** (.16)	-.47* (.20)	.27 (.34)	-1.13* (.44)
Years Married	-.05 (.05)	-.02 (.06)	-.31*** (.09)	.15 (.13)	-.07* (.03)	-.04 (.04)	-.26*** (.07)	.06 (.09)
Age at Marriage	.03 (.05)	.06 (.06)	-0.21† (.11)	.06 (.13)	.01 (.03)	-.04 (.04)	-.21** (.08)	.00 (.09)
Age Difference	.01 (.05)	.03 (.08)	.00 (.11)	NA	-.04 (.04)	-.11† (.06)	.17* (.07)	NA
R <sup>2</sup>	.01	.03	.12	.06	.03	.05	.12	.13
N Size	598	346	155	97	614	361	155	98

Note: Unstandardized B coefficients presented; Standard error (SE) in parenthesis. † p<.10; \* p<.05; \*\* p<.01; \*\*\* p<.001.



Table 5

Regressions Table for Divorce Proneness, Marital Problems, Spousal Disagreements, Age Difference, and Moderating Variables.

Variable	Divorce Proneness				Marital Problems				Spousal Disagreements			
	Full Sample	Husband-Older	Wife-Older	Same-Age	Full Sample	Husband-Older	Wife-Older	Same-Age	Full Sample	Husband-Older	Wife-Older	Same-Age
Constant	1.28 (.09)	1.19 (.13)	1.05 (.17)	1.65 (.24)	5.80 (1.14)	5.59 (1.50)	4.44 (2.30)	6.18 (3.23)	6.53 (.92)	6.56 (1.18)	5.31 (1.99)	5.90 (2.47)
Gender/Sex Roles	.00 (.00)	.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.03 (.04)	.01 (.05)	.06 (.06)	.08 (.09)	-.09** (.03)	-.05 (.04)	-.09 (.05)	-1.45* (.07)
Husband Dominance in Decision Making	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)	-.01 (.02)	-.01 (.10)	-.09 (.12)	.12 (.19)	.08 (.26)	-.02 (.08)	-.08 (.10)	.07 (.16)	.12 (.20)
Division of Household Chores	.00 (.00)	.00 (.02)	-.04 (.02)	0.02 (.03)	-.11 (.14)	.05 (.18)	-.80** (.29)	.22 (.44)	.09 (.12)	.06 (.15)	-.13 (.25)	.23 (.34)
Years Married	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.02*** (.00)	-.01 (.01)	-.04 (.03)	-.04 (.04)	.09 (.06)	-.21* (.09)	-.05* (.02)	-.08** (.03)	.03 (.05)	-.06 (.07)
Age at Marriage	-.01† (.00)	.00 (.00)	.01 (.01)	-.02** (.01)	-.12*** (.03)	-.11** (.04)	-.05 (.07)	-.19* (.09)	-.05* (.02)	-.06† (.03)	-.02 (.06)	-.01 (.07)
Age Difference	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.01)	NA	.05 (.04)	.02 (.04)	.12† (.06)	NA	.01 (.03)	-.01 (.04)	.09 (.05)	NA
R <sup>2</sup>	.01	.01	.11	.09	.02	.03 (.05)	.11	.09	.02	.03	.05	.06
N Size	614	361	155	98	600	350	154	96	609	357	155	97

Note: Unstandardized B coefficients presented; Standard error (SE) in parenthesis. † p<.10; \* p<.05; \*\* p<.01; \*\*\* p<.001.