

What is Good Spousal Support? Examining Support Delivery and Outcomes

by

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Abstract

Support from others is critical to both mental and physical health, and for married individuals, the spouse is the most important support provider. Although spousal support is known to be important, researchers have yet to come to a consensus concerning what actually constitutes good spousal support. The present study sought to understand the components of good spousal support and the context in which that support occurred. The study also examined the link between good spousal support and marital quality. Finally, the study identified who actually provided good support and the role that perspective taking played in spousal support provision. Participants included 57 happily married couples with two young children. Self-reports of perspective taking, marital quality, and support satisfaction were measured. Additionally, each couple completed a 20-minute marital support task that was coded on seven support behaviors of interest. Regression analyses revealed that the more sensitive the support provided by husbands, the more that both wives and husbands reported being satisfied with their spouses' support provision. Further, husbands' reported levels of marital quality were highly associated with their own supportive behaviors. Husbands reported more love and maintenance, and less ambivalence when they were sensitive in their support provision. Moreover, when wives were satisfied with husbands' support, husbands reported more marital quality. Implications of these findings and suggestions for future studies are discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

Human beings are inherently social creatures who benefit from relationships with other people (Orth-Gomer, 2009). Connecting with others by sharing the intimate details of our lives has implications for our well-being (Cutrona, 1996). Specifically, when people are able to share their problems with another person, they are more likely to enjoy better mental and physical health (Kulik & Mahler, 1989; Sarason & Sarason, 2009), from lower levels of stress and depression (Dehle, Larsen, & Landers, 2001) to faster recovery from illness (Strazdis & Broom, 2007). In fact, some have suggested that the most promising interventions to improve well-being are those that focus on strengthening individuals' social supports (Krieger, 2001). Not surprisingly, given the clear benefits of social support, researchers have sought to understand *how* support benefits individuals.

Although receiving support is important for individual well-being, it appears that support from certain persons is more beneficial than support from others. For married individuals, the spouse is the most important support provider (Dakof & Taylor, 1990). Friends, family, or coworkers outside the marriage, cannot compensate for the lack of support from one's spouse (Brown & Harris, 1978). Thus, it appears that the marital relationship provides individuals with a unique and irreplaceable source of support. Underscoring the importance of this spousal support, research has found numerous mental and physical health benefits for individuals in a supportive marital relationship. For example, individuals with higher rates of spousal support have lower levels of stress, fewer symptoms of depression, and higher self-esteem (Dehle et al., 2001; Rauer, 2005).

Regarding physical health, Kulik and Mahler (1989) found that couples with more marital support complain less about their health than couples in less supportive relationships. Further, couples with greater spousal support have been found to have more success when trying to quit smoking or drinking excessive alcohol (Sobell, Sobell, Toneatto, & Leo, 1993).

In addition to the physical and mental benefits of spousal support, researchers have also linked spousal support to the quality of the marital relationship itself. For example, spouses who report higher levels of marital support are more maritally satisfied (Acitelli & Antonucci, 1994; Revenson & Majerovitz, 1990). Perhaps explaining this finding, researchers have argued that spousal support increases intimacy levels in married couples (Johnson, Hobfoll, & Zalcberg-Linetzy, 1993). Husbands and wives who feel supported are more likely to share intimate details about themselves and their feelings about their relationship with their spouse. Not surprisingly, in light of the benefits of marital support, lack of partner support is frequently cited as a significant cause of relationship dissatisfaction (Baxter, 1986). Thus, the presence of a spouse does not guarantee marital satisfaction. Instead, these findings suggest that although spousal support is critical to individual and marital well-being, not all spouses are equally adept at providing this support.

Because spousal support has clear links to physical health, mental health, and marital quality, researchers have spent decades attempting to identify, measure, and define good marital support. This research has generally taken two different approaches: one relying on individuals' own perceptions of support (self-report) and the other relying on trained observers' perceptions of support. To date, most research examining marital

support has focused on peoples' own perceptions of support, or self-report measures. In support of this approach, Acitelli and Antonucci (1994) reported that the amount of support a spouse *perceives* is more related to adjustment to stress than the actual support received. However, self-report measures may not capture the full experience of marital support because individuals may have difficulty remembering past experiences and explaining them in an unbiased manner (Verhofstadt, Buysse, & Ickles, 2007). Nevertheless, social scientists have found that self-report measures offer an invaluable way to access the perceptions of both partners.

Those favoring observational data to measure spousal support make the compelling argument that an outsider's unbiased perspective can shed important insight on the dynamics of support in a relationship. They argue that this outside perspective is essential, due to the fact that outside observers tend to be more adept at identifying supportive behavior than those within the romantic relationship (Verhofstadt et al., 2007). Others have found that observational measures do reveal similar findings to self-reports, but provide greater detail. Overall, researchers have found that including outside observation of marital interaction brings a unique depth and important perspective to the study.

It would thus appear that the use of both self-report and observational data is critical to understand the way that marital support unfolds in a relationship. Melby, Ge, Conger and Warner (1995) found that both insider (self or spouse) and outsider (trained observer) assessments of behaviors provided researchers with the fullest understanding of the spousal support construct. Moreover, Frosch, Manglesdorf, and McHale (1998) stated that observational measures can be used to validate outcomes reported by the couple.

Even though a growing body of evidence suggests that combining the two approaches may be the best way to gain a clear understanding of marital support, most researchers continue to use only one approach in their study of spousal support.

Perhaps as a result of these disparate methodological approaches, researchers have not yet come to a consensus concerning what good support is. Whereas researchers utilizing self-report measures have defined good support as the ability to gratify a person's basic needs by a significant other (Kaplan, Cassel, & Gore, 1977), researchers using observational methods have defined good support as the ability of spouses to help each other cope with personal difficulties, and provide daily support to one another (Verhofstadt, et al., 2007). Without knowing what good support is, it is not surprising that the field has struggled to identify what makes people better able to provide this good support to their spouse. In light of these gaps in the previous literature, the current study will attempt to understand not only what good support looks like, but to also explain how predisposing individual characteristics and normative stressful events are related to the ability to provide good spousal support. To accomplish this goal, I will utilize both observational and self-report methods of assessing support in a sample of happily married couples with young children. This sample is ideal for studying marital support as happily married couples are most likely to demonstrate marital support (Acitelli & Antonucci, 1994; Revenson & Majerovitz, 1990). Further, it is a timely developmental period in the couples' lives, as support from the spouse is especially important in couples with young children (Deater-Deckard & Scarr, 1996; Greenberger & O'Neil, 1993). Thus, the present study will not only be able to identify good support, but also who is most likely to demonstrate good support and when.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

To better understand how spousal support affects the marital relationship, it is important to consider theoretical models that have sought to understand how and why marriages develop and change over time. One of the most well-respected and oft-cited models predicting marital change is the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation (VSA) model from Karney and Bradbury (1995). The product of a meta-analysis of over 100 longitudinal studies about marriage, the VSA model (see Figure 1 below) builds upon the strengths of attachment theory, social exchange theory, and crisis theory to analyze how the quality and stability of marriage change over time. The VSA model describes three constructs which directly contribute to marital quality and marital stability: enduring vulnerabilities, stressful events, and adaptive processes.

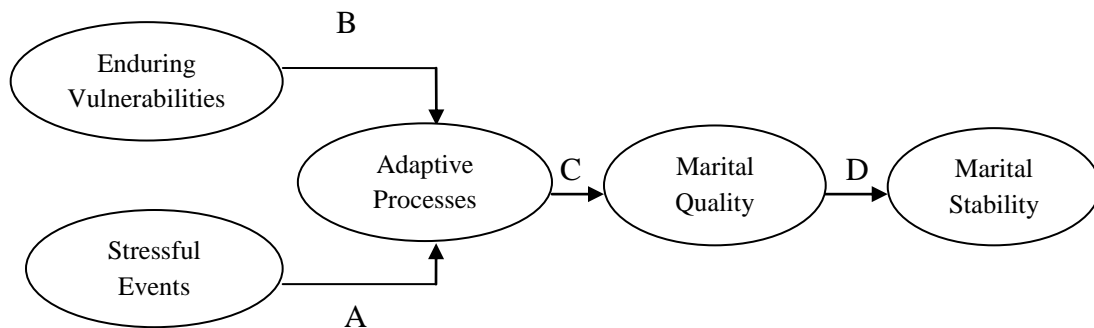


Figure 1: The Vulnerability-Stress Adaptation model of Marriage (Karney & Bradbury, 1995)

The first key component of the VSA model is that of enduring vulnerabilities, or the personal characteristics that an individual brings to a relationship. The individual characteristics that are carried into the relationship affect the way that a couple will interact, settle conflict, and deal with stressful life situations (Johnson & Booth, 1998). One of the key personal characteristics of interest to the current study is that of perspective taking. The ability of one spouse to put himself or herself in the place of the other is a trait that is brought into the marriage, and is likely developed over time in the familial and social context of the individual. Spousal perspective taking has been linked to the other important components of this study, including support and marital outcomes (Stets, 1993). More specifically, Stets (1993) reported that the inability to take the perspective of someone else is related to more frequent conflict in relationships and to less supportive behaviors. A model that attempts to understand marital outcomes should thus consider the personal histories, experiences, and personalities that each spouse brings to the relationship (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

The second key component of the VSA model is that of stressful events. Because context plays an important role in couple interaction, it should be considered a crucial factor in analyzing spouses' behavior toward one another (Frosch et al., 1998). Nearly every couple will pass through stressful life events that may include unexpected accidents, financial strain, health problems, employment challenges, etc. Wiens and Boss (2006) explained that an understanding of how of the couple adapts to such stressful events is critical in examining marital outcomes because major stressors seem to strengthen some families and negatively affect others. To understand the way that couples might adapt to stressful events, I sought to examine a normative stressor that

nearly every married couple will face in their relationship – the presence of children. The addition of children to a family affects both the individual functioning of spouses and the marital subsystem (Rossi, 1968). More specifically, children have been linked to higher levels of distress in a marriage, which often results in less positive affect between spouses (Frosch et al., 1998). Waite and Lillard (1991) found that children have the paradoxical effect of increasing stability of marriage, while decreasing its quality. Perhaps explaining the decline in quality, couples with two children are much more likely to experience marital distress and depression than parents with only one child (Richmond, 2005). Parents, in this case, may feel less supported due to obstacles such as time constraints. To understand marital support, it therefore seems crucial to examine the way that couples deal with a normative and relatively chronic stressor, such as the presence of multiple children in the home.

The third component of the VSA model theorized to contribute to marital outcomes is adaptive processes. Adaptive processes include all of the ways that partners behave toward one another, including conflict resolution, provision of support, and daily communication patterns (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). These adaptive processes are believed to mediate the effects of personal characteristics and stressful context on the relationship quality (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). This means that the adaptability of a couple acts as a filter through which personal characteristics and stressful events are passed. In other words, a couple's ability to adapt will determine how much of an impact personal characteristics and stressful context have on relationship quality. Adaptability suggests that couples work together to overcome challenges related to personal characteristics or stressful events. Therefore, marital support would seem to be a key part

of the adaptive processes construct of the VSA model. Because support is what I am addressing in my study, I will examine in greater detail how marital support interacts with personal characteristics and stressful events to influence the marital relationship.

The fourth component of the VSA model is relationship quality. Marital quality has been examined and defined in a number of ways. Scholars agree, however, that marital quality is best captured by judgments of overall marital quality, as well as specific behaviors and interactional patterns (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000). Although most research examining the marital relationship has relied primarily on self-report assessments (Verhofstadt et al., 2007), Frosch et al. (1998) argued that self-report measures should not be used in place of observational assessments because each measure might tap unique dimensions of the marital relationship, including overall quality. Fincham and Bradbury (1987) reported that close examination of the literature on this subject reveals that studying marital quality as a global construct is the pervasive tendency in the field. One reason for adopting the global assessment view of marital quality is that it is more likely than self-reports of specific behaviors to represent a final common pathway through which marital adjustment is expressed (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987). More specifically, a global view of quality allows researchers to examine the marital relationship from multiple points of view, including insider and outsider perspectives. Taking this approach presents social scientists the opportunity to more fully understand which relationship factors contribute to overall marital quality, which is consistent with the way the VSA model conceptualizes marital quality (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

Others have taken a different approach to marital quality. For example, in developing their relationship quality scale, Braiker and Kelley (1979) focused on four key areas to determine what constitutes relationship quality: love, maintenance, ambivalence, and conflict. They stated that by assessing each of these four areas, that they were able to gain the most comprehensive picture of relationship quality. On the other hand, Karney and Bradbury (1995) claimed that personal characteristics and stressful context are filtered through the couple's ability to adapt to unique challenges, which is ultimately related to overall quality. The VSA model provides researchers with a unique view of factors affecting marital quality – that the effects personal characteristics and stressful context on marital quality are *completely* mediated by adaptive processes. This is quite a firm stance and indicates that the *only* way that personal characteristics and stressful context influence marital quality is through adaptive processes. Although not all social scientists completely agree with this firm stance, most admit that the VSA model provides researchers with a useful outline for future consideration of marital quality. In my study, I will use the VSA model to determine how spouses' perspective taking and the presence of children are filtered through marital support, and how this relates to overall marital quality.

To fully comprehend how the above-described constructs affect marriage, I will examine their interactions with each other. As pointed out by Karney and Bradbury (1995), a spouse's marital quality will change as a function of accumulated experiences related to behavioral exchanges in the marriage. Furthermore, although adaptation to personal differences and stressful events will affect overall marital functioning, there are also important interactions between these variables that moderate their impact on marital

quality (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Moreover, each variable that affects a close relationship does so through its influence on ongoing interaction (Kelley, Berscheid, Christensen, Harvey, Huston, Levinger, McClintock, Peplau, & Peterson, 1983). This suggests that in order to understand how personal characteristics and stressful events relate to marital adaptation and marital quality, we should also examine how they affect each other. The first of these interactions that will be addressed is the effect that stressful events have on adaptive processes (see Path A in Figure 1). As part of their double ABCX model, McCubbin and Patterson (1982) stated that when individuals face stressful events, other minor stressors (such as taking care of children or completing daily household chores) can contribute to what they referred to as a *stress pile-up*. When this occurs, the adaptation ability of the couple is challenged, and thus, relationship quality is negatively impacted (Rauer, Karney, Garvan, & Hou, 2008). For example, Conger, Reuter, and Elder (1999) reported that economic stress increases risk for emotional distress, which, in turn, increases risk for marital conflict and decreases the likelihood of marital support. A more normative stressor that most families face is the presence of children in the home. The added stress of having children was found to be related to fewer exchanges of positive spousal affect, and less ability to cooperate and meet life's simple demands, such as cooking and cleaning (Anderson, 2002). The results of these studies and others indicate that stressors coming from outside the marital relationship influence the way couples handle challenges within the relationship (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

The second interaction that will be discussed is that of personal characteristics and adaptive processes (see Path B). Spouses' abilities to adapt under stress and provide

support to one another are related to the personal characteristics they bring to the relationship (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). A number of studies have shown that the traits that spouses bring to the marriage affect the adaptability of the couple. For example, Quigley and Leonard (1999) found that women who did not drink who married heavy drinkers were far more likely to experience marital violence than any other group, especially at times of conflict. This suggests that personal habits and traits are related to adaptability and conflict resolution in a marriage. Moreover, Carnelley, Pietromonaco, and Jaffe (1994) stated that insecure attachment style was related to more preoccupied, anxious, and avoidant behavior in romantic relationships. Pertinent to my study, Shih, Wang, Trahan Butcher, and Stotzer (2009) found that perspective taking improves attitudes through the induction of empathy, which is related to support provision and flexibility in times of distress. All in all, these results suggest that the personal characteristics of each spouse are related to the way that spouses will treat one another, and as a result, marital outcomes (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

The third interaction is between adaptive processes and marital quality (see Path C). Bradbury and Fincham (1991) argued that the way that spouses interpret a problem-solving interaction after it has occurred is related to reports of marital satisfaction. Those couples who were able to resolve the conflict were more likely to report higher levels of satisfaction. These findings suggest that the way that couples adapt to stress is an important variable that contributes to marital outcomes. A better understanding of couples' adaptive processes has also contributed to researchers concluding that the quantity of stressful events or arguments that a couple experiences is not always related to marital outcomes (Gottman, 1999). The adaptability of a couple in those moments is

often a better measure. Indeed, a marriage can remain fulfilling even when high levels of conflict and negativity are exchanged (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Perhaps explaining this counterintuitive finding, Gottman (1999) discussed the fact that repair attempts after conflict are related to better marital outcomes even in couples with very high rates of conflict. These couples, if successful at these adaptive processes, may report the same rates of marital satisfaction as those who do not report high levels of conflict. Overall, though, researchers have concluded that there is a consistent link between behaviors exchanged in problem-solving discussions and marital satisfaction over time (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

Additionally, the marital support research also discusses the relationship between the adaptive process of support provision and marital outcomes. For example, spouses who report higher levels of marital support also report being more maritally satisfied (Acitelli & Antonucci, 1994; Revenson & Majerovitz, 1990; Julien & Markman, 1991; Sutor & Pillemer, 1994). Acitelli (1996) explained that this is related to the fact that when a spouse feels supported, he or she feels important and cared for. When a person feels that his or her needs are important to the partner, it is more likely that reports of relationship satisfaction will be higher. Perhaps also related to this finding, spousal support has been linked to increased levels of intimacy in married couples (Johnson et al., 1993). Lemieux and Hale (2002) stated that couples who are emotionally intimate, or report feeling close and connected to their spouse, tended to have higher rates of marital satisfaction. Individuals who felt connected to and supported by their spouse reported that one reason for greater satisfaction was that their spouse supported them through personal difficulties by providing both instrumental and emotional support (Pasch & Bradbury,

1998). Clearly, supportive behaviors can be associated with higher rates of marital satisfaction. On the other hand, however, lack of partner support is frequently cited as a significant reason for relationship dissatisfaction (Baxter, 1986).

The final interaction between VSA model constructs that will be discussed in this study is the relationship between marital quality and marital stability (see Path D). In their discussion of the VSA model, Bradbury and Karney (1995) claimed that repeated failures in adaptation often lead to a decline in marital quality, which increases the probability of marital instability. On the other hand, partners who feel supported report higher marital satisfaction and increased stability (Sanchez & Ganger, 2000). Gigy and Kelly (1993) conducted a study that asked divorcing men and women to identify the reasons for terminating their marriage. They found that the most common responses were all related to marital satisfaction – unmet emotional needs, growing apart, boredom, and high rates of conflict. In summary, social scientists have found that the way couples feel about their relationship affects their decision to stay in it or not. These findings suggest that marital quality has an important impact on marital stability over time.

Although the VSA model does provide a helpful understanding of marriage over time, it also has its limitations. As stated by Karney and Bradbury (1995), the model exclusively focuses on marital quality as the solitary factor through which everything that could affect marital stability is filtered. In addition to marital satisfaction, other variables, such as financial security (Poduska & Allred, 1990) also directly contribute to marital stability. It is certainly possible for a couple to be satisfied in their marriage, yet end the union due to extreme financial strain. The opposite side of the coin may also be true in that couples often remain married despite extreme marital dissatisfaction. As mentioned

above, Waite and Lillard (1991) found that the presence of children may cause people to stay married in spite of their extreme unhappiness in the relationship. Couples often claim that they “just stayed together for the kids”. The same argument may be made for the effect of religion on marital stability. Many couples remain married even when unhappy in the relationship because of religious proscriptions against divorce (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993). After considering these findings, it may be argued that the VSA model may be limited in claiming that marital quality is the only factor which *directly* influences marital stability.

Moreover, the model fails to distinguish between acute and chronic stressors, which may affect marriage in different ways (Monroe & Simons, 1991). Indeed, acute stressors such as traffic or stress over work deadlines likely affect marriage differently than chronic stressors such as major illnesses or raising a disabled child. Chronic stressors and daily hassles are distinct types of stressors with unique contributions to psychological distress, which impacts relationship functioning (Serido, Almeida, and Wethington, 2004). Chronic stressors tend to exacerbate the impacts of daily hassles across domains, specifically for family (Serido et al., 2004).

The VSA model is also limited in that it does not describe the differences between spouses in their experience of stress, vulnerability, or marital quality. Neff and Karney (2005) claimed that wives were more supportive of husbands in times of stress, while husbands displayed both support and negativity during these times. A better understanding of how each spouse experiences stress vulnerability and marital quality would add to this model. Finally, the VSA model is generally used to highlight the negative interactions and processes that occur within marriage. The term “enduring

vulnerabilities,” itself, suggests that negative traits are carried into the relationship by each partner. By focusing exclusively on the “vulnerabilities” that individuals bring, researchers may have overlooked the effect that positive characteristics brought into the marriage have on marital quality and stability. A better understanding of the enduring positive traits would add significantly to the current VSA model, and would contribute more to our understanding of the marital relationship. However, the VSA model is still a useful framework because it focuses on the interaction between stress and vulnerability, and their effect on adaptive processes. Accordingly, the model accounts for both change and stability in marital satisfaction, as well as when changes are most likely to occur (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). The first of the contributing factors proposed to account for change in the marriage is that of enduring vulnerabilities, or personal characteristics brought by the spouse into the marriage, such as perspective taking.

Enduring Vulnerabilities: Spousal Perspective Taking

Studies have shown that perspective taking increases relationship satisfaction (Davis & Oathout, 1987) and marital adjustment (Long & Andrews, 1990). But why is this so? First, it is important to define perspective taking. According to Bernstein and Davis (1982), it is imaginatively adopting another’s point of view and then acting in a manner that conveys understanding of that viewpoint. In a marriage, this would mean that a husband would be able to say that, although he may disagree with his wife’s stance, he understands where she is coming from, and it makes sense to him why she would feel that way (and vice versa). Such behavior is related to more empathy and acceptance of differences in others (Shih et al., 2009). This may be due to the fact that mentally considering another’s viewpoint allows spouses to process how that different viewpoint

makes sense, thus fostering more understanding. Similarly, Hooker, Verosky, Germine, Knight, and D'Esposito (2009) claim that empathy in relationships is related to one's cognitive ability to think as other's think.

Researchers have sought to understand how the ability to take the perspective of another is related to interaction between two individuals in both non-romantic and romantic relationships. First, Drolet, Larrick, and Morris (1998) investigated how perspective taking affects negotiation patterns in non-romantic dyads. They reported that the simple task of reflecting on another's perspective is likely to induce more accurate judgments of others' wants and desires. They also reported that if the relationship between the dyad is not a negative one (meaning that the two persons have no open dislike for one another) that perspective taking is related to more empathy for the other, and actually affects decisions made by each individual that are more favorable for the partner. Second, Stets (1993) investigated perspective taking between dating partners and found that the lack of perspective taking in a relationship is related to more conflict and more desire to control the dating partner. Stets (1993) went on to explain that perspective taking leads to more consideration of the other's desires and accordingly, more empathy and less self-centered behavior. Therefore, perspective taking seems to be a trait that serves to increase positive interaction in both romantic and non-romantic relationships alike.

Franzoi, Davis, and Young (1985) agreed that perspective taking was a fundamental social skill necessary for the formation of normal social attachments, both romantic and non-romantic. Others, such as Turner (1978) have stated that perspective taking is crucial for proper social relationships because it includes the anticipation of

others' behavior, which allows one to take others' actions into account before one's own behavior occurs. Supporting this finding, Franzoi and colleagues (1985) concluded that, due to their better social skills and less abrasive social style, perspective takers experience better overall relationships with others. Conversely, Davis (1983) found that low perspective taking was associated with social anxiety, arrogance, and inconsiderate social style.

Gender differences in perspective taking. Researchers have found noteworthy gender differences in the perspective taking literature, in that men and women differ in their ability to take another's perspective. Davis and Oathout (1987) found that women take the perspective of their partners more frequently than do men. Long and Andrews (1990) further found that wives scored significantly higher on measures of perspective taking, and that husbands' ratings of their wives' perspective taking abilities were much higher than wives' ratings of husbands'. These findings indicate that wives may be more adept at understanding the opinions of their spouse and taking them into consideration. Gottman (1999) supported this viewpoint by stating that wives were much more likely than husbands to accept influence from their spouse. Accepting influence suggests that a partner is willing to act based upon the consideration of the spouse's thoughts, feelings, or opinions (Gottman, 1999). On the whole, women were much more likely to go through this process before acting. Interestingly, Gottman (1999) found that in marriages in which husbands physically abused wives, husbands *almost never* accepted any kind of influence from the wives, suggesting that a lack of perspective taking may be related to negative marital processes.

Although many social scientists have found gender differences in perspective taking, research is lacking concerning why these differences exist. The roots of perspective taking differences in men and women may be related to different emotional socialization earlier in life. Rauer and Volling (2005) reported that, as children, males and females are socialized to deal with emotions differently. For example, Garside and Klimes-Dougan (2002) found that fathers tended to punish boys for showing negative emotions, such as fear and sadness, while rewarding girls for showing the same emotions. This is related to perspective taking in that women likely make more attempts to understand negative emotions, rather than viewing them as something inherently harmful. They also tend to be more empathic, which is directly related to the ability to take another's perspective (Hooker et al., 2009; Stets, 1993). Because young boys tend to be punished for showing negative emotions, men may be less empathic when their wives display emotions such as fear or sadness. Generally speaking, although men are raised to believe that such emotions are unacceptable and should be replaced, women are more likely to express such emotions because they are rewarded. Because women are generally socialized to be better suited at dealing with negative emotions, they will likely have also developed better perspective taking skills, and more empathy for negative emotional expressiveness. Overall, in light of Rauer and Volling's (2005) reports on emotional socialization, it seems logical that men would be observed to be less empathic toward negative emotions than women.

For example, consider a boy who was punished as a child for being fearful of riding a roller coaster. The same boy may grow up and become angry with his wife for not wanting to ride a roller coaster because he has been taught that this is not a proper

emotion for such a situation. He is less likely to take the perspective of his wife and show empathy or understanding about her fear than she would be. Therefore, this man's childhood emotional socialization is likely related to a limited ability to take the perspective of his wife. In contrast, she has been socialized to talk about and deal with emotional issues, which may be an advantage that she has over her husband in social functioning (Rauer & Volling, 2005).

Another possible explanation for the gender differences in perspective taking is that of affective empathy, which Eisenberg and Lennon (1983) described as the ability to match emotions appropriately and show sympathetic responding. They reported that the traditional female stereotype (more nurturing and interpersonally oriented than males) has brought about social expectations that push women to facilitate interpersonal harmony within the family unit. Eisenberg and Lennon (1983) also found that women were much more likely to report that they were, indeed, empathic toward others than were men. As mentioned previously, empathy is directly related to perspective taking (Shih et al., 2009) as those who are more empathic can more easily see another's point of view. Thus, traditional attitudes about the roles of men and women in the family, which is certainly related to the emotional socialization process explained by Rauer and Volling (2005), may also be a factor that results in the differences often found in perspective taking.

The gender differences observed in perspective taking ability are very much related to marital outcomes for both spouses. Rizkalla, Wertheim, and Hodgson (2008) found that greater perspective taking was associated with higher levels of forgiveness and problem solving abilities. Couples who take each other's perspective are more likely to have positive interactions due to higher levels of forgiveness, and therefore will more

likely be supportive in their relationships. Also, Rizkalla et al. (2008) found that perspective taking promoted problem solving in that it was related to more yielding conflict style, which resulted in spouses being less rigid and more open when discussing marital problems.

Although wives have been shown to be more adept at perspective taking, interesting findings have revealed that the husband's perspective taking abilities may be more critical in the marriage. Hatch (2009) found that wives' marital satisfaction was positively associated with *their husbands'* empathic perspective taking. In contrast, husbands' marital satisfaction was explained by *their own* empathic perspective taking, relationship expectations, and other related factors. In other words, both husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction was related to only the husband's ability to take the perspective of his spouse. Gottman (1999) reported similar findings. He found that the best marital outcomes, including higher rates of stability and satisfaction, were observed when husbands accepted influence from wives at high rates. He concluded that wives' acceptance of influence had little, if anything, to do with marital outcomes. Moreover, Rauer and Volling (2005) found that, despite the fact that wives may be better equipped to deal with negative emotions, husband's emotional expressivity was much more important to both husbands' and wives' marital quality. Studies suggest that within the marital relationship, it is the way that husbands deal with emotional expression and perspective taking that is most related to marital outcomes. In the current study, to truly come to understand what good support is in my sample, I must consider how perspective taking impacts marital outcomes when the added stressor of children is present in the family.

Stressful Events: Children and Marriage

As pointed out by Karney and Bradbury (1995), stressful events in a couple's life should be accounted for when studying marital outcomes. The context in which couples live plays a crucial role in couple relations and thus must also be considered a vital factor in analyzing spouses' behaviors toward one another (Frosch et al., 1998). As Karney and Bradbury (1995) claimed that marital support is the filter through which stressful events must pass in order to affect marital outcomes, it is important to understand how stressors affect spousal support. Because the addition of children to a family affects not only the individual functioning of spouses and the marital subsystem (Cowan & Cowan, 1988), but is also linked to higher levels of distress in a marriage (Frosch et al., 1998), support from the spouse is especially important for predicting marital satisfaction in couples with young children (Deater-Deckard & Scarr, 1996; Greenberg & O'Neil, 1993). The addition of children to a family places added strain on the couple and is related to more marital tension (Frosch et al., 1998). Thus, in my study the presence of children in the home will serve as the stressful context described by Karney and Bradbury (1995) in the VSA model.

As a perpetual stressor on the couple's relationship, the presence of children in the home has been linked to the time in a couple's marriage when marital satisfaction is lowest, especially while children are young (Burr, 1970; Lupri & Frideres, 1981). However, despite the fact that marital satisfaction might be the lowest when children are in the home, some researchers claim that this is when marital stability is the highest (Cherlin, 1977). This may be due to the fact that children tend to have a stabilizing influence on the marriage. When children are in the home, demands on parents are high,

and they often collaborate and depend upon one another, which may make them less likely to end the marriage (Rauer, 2007; Kapinus & Johnson, 2003). It is this type of supportive behavior that, according to Karney and Bradbury (2005), determines how the stress brought on by children affects marital satisfaction. Therefore, because the couples in this sample are happily married, it is important to examine how their supportive behaviors produce positive marital outcomes despite their children likely being a continual source of stress.

Because the presence of children in this study represents the “stressful events” construct of the VSA model, it is important to understand how children strain the marriage. The relationship between marriage and children is certainly bidirectional, as each affects the other in significant ways (Belsky, 1981). However, although marriage certainly does affect children (Emery, 1982), for the purposes of this study, I will focus on the less studied direction of how children affect marriage. Two opposing views dominate the literature (Belsky, 1990). The positive view of children suggests that they originate from spousal love and serve as a sense of mutual pleasure that enhances the marriage. The negative view sees children as a strain on the marriage, a barrier to intimacy, and a source of marital conflict. Belsky (1990) found that research tends to support the negative view of children, as many studies found that children’s presence and marital quality tended to be inversely related.

MacDermid, Huston, and McHale (1990), for example, found that the marital relationship was greatly stressed by the addition of a child. They reported that across the transition, household division of labor becomes more traditional, spousal leisure activities become less frequent, feelings of love decrease, and overall satisfaction within the

marriage declines. Spousal support has been shown play an important role in each of these factors. For example, Pina and Bengston (1993) found that women felt less supported by their husbands when household division of labor was unequal. Therefore, when a child is born and division of labor becomes more traditional, wives' feeling less supported is likely an important contributing factor to the observed decline in marital satisfaction. Moreover, spousal support has been linked to higher levels of intimacy in married couples (Johnson et al., 1993). Thus, when the wife feels less supported after the birth of a child, it is not surprising that intimacy rates plummet, and overall marital satisfaction declines (Baxter, 1986).

In an attempt to understand the overall decline in marital satisfaction when children are present, Belsky (1986) considered the challenges invoked upon the marital relationship during the transition to parenthood. He cited four reasons for the falling off of marital happiness during this time. The first is that the physical burden of caring for an infant puts tremendous strain on the marriage. With a child come added bills, sore backs, and sleepless nights. Children require tremendous amounts of time and energy, which are often siphoned off of the marital relationship. When parents are more fatigued, they become more agitated not only with their children, but also with one another. This makes them less likely to provide the supportive behavior that the VSA model emphasizes as a critical positive adaptive process. The decline in support related to parental weariness likely contributes to lower marital satisfaction.

The second reason children adversely affect marital satisfaction is the strain on the marital relationship. The presence of an infant limits both time for couple outings (MacDermid et al., 1990) and frequency of sexual intercourse between spouses (Call,

Sprecher, & Schwartz, 1995). Family life changes significantly, as the child becomes the focal point, and the marriage often takes a back seat. Spouses may feel less support from one another when it comes to marital issues, because so much time is taken up by the needs of children. Moreover, as the baby becomes a source of competition for the time, attention, and emotional energy of each spouse, the other may feel neglected and become agitated with the decrease in attention. Neff and Karney (2005) found that when spouses experience agitation or stress, husbands will often actually react negatively when the wife is agitated, resulting in less support and lower marital satisfaction (Neff & Karney, 2005).

The third reason suggested concerning marital satisfaction decline and children is emotional costs related to doubts over competence and responsibilities of parenthood (Belsky, 1986). Because children do not come with an instruction manual, parents are often left feeling incompetent and overwhelmed, especially after the birth of the first child. Parents feeling incompetent may turn to differing outside sources such as their own parents, friends, or religious leaders. However, turning to others for support in such instances may actually be harmful to the marriage. Helms, Crouter, and McHale (2003) found that when married couples turn to others outside the marriage for support and exclude one another in this process, marital satisfaction declines. Each source of support may offer helpful but conflicting advice, which may lead to more marital disagreements. Furthermore, disagreements over responsibilities may also occur due to the transition to more traditional household division of labor that accompanies childbirth (MacDermid et al., 1990).

Finally, personal confinement is the fourth problem experienced by new parents (Belsky, 1986). With couples tending to take on more traditional gender roles after

childbirth, the husband is likely to spend more time working, and the wife's time alone with the child at home increases. Wives may feel especially isolated from their husbands as they spend increasing amounts of time within the walls of their home caring for the newborn. Consistent with this school of thought, Houseknecht (1979) reported that women with children are less likely to engage in outside interests, to exchange stimulating ideas, and to work on a project with their spouse. The lack of time that spouses spend together, combined with the return to traditional gender roles, presents fewer opportunities for spouses to demonstrate supportive behavior. Once again, as supportive behavior drops because of stresses invoked by the presence of children, marital satisfaction rates are found to be lower (Julien & Markman, 1991).

Despite Belsky's (1986) reasons for children contributing to marital satisfaction decline, their presence appears to have the opposite effect on marital stability. As mentioned previously, children tend to make marriages more stable, regardless of marital satisfaction (Waite & Lillard, 1991). Rankin and Maneker (1985) studied a sample of couples who obtained a divorce in 1977. Children contributed to marital stability by delaying divorce, even among those who would eventually join the divorcing population. Within the 1977 divorce group, 50% of people without children divorced within 5 years of marriage, and only 12.2% of couples with one or more children did so. Thus, children appear to contribute to marital stability, but why? Facts such as these provide little insight into the actual processes that might explain such findings.

One explanation that has been explored is that the presence of children places barriers to divorce, such as the perceived influence that divorce has on children (Belsky, 1981). As mentioned above, many couples simply stay together "for the sake of the

children”. Others such as Cherlin (1977) claim that economic factors are chiefly responsible for the effect of children on marital stability. Advocates of this stance claim that young children prevent marital dissolution not because they enhance love between spouses, but because child care for young children may be too time-consuming and expensive for one spouse to handle alone. Regardless of the reason that children have a positive effect on marital stability, one thing is certain – the presence of children greatly affects the context in which married couples live. By examining how couples support one another through this stressful time period, we may come to better understand how couples can be happy while children are in the home.

Adaptive Processes: Support in Marriage

Social support. Numerous studies have identified social support as a key factor in individual well-being (Strazdins & Broom, 2007; Coyne & DeLongis, 1986). But why is support such a critical component of peoples’ happiness? Lowenthal and Haven (1968) found that simply having someone to confide in or talk to about problems is related to better mental health and higher morale. They argued that the opportunity to share problems with others somehow lightens the burden that individuals feel. Those who do share their problems and receive social support enjoy increased happiness, pride, love, and belonging (Strazdins & Broom, 2007). Moreover, the support they receive serves as a protective factor against the harmful physical and mental effects of stress (Kim, Sherman, & Taylor, 2008). Also, those who receive support are more likely to recover from illness, have improved immune functioning, and enjoy better mental health (Sarason & Sarason, 2009). Indeed, it appears that the benefits of social support contribute significantly to peoples’ happiness.

Although support is clearly a central element of individual well-being, social scientists have debated over how to operationalize this construct. Exactly what is social support? Despite the fact that precise descriptions differ, nearly every definition of social support is based on the assumption that individuals must rely on other people to meet certain needs. For example, Cutrona (1996) first defined social support as “the fulfillment by others of basic, ongoing requirements for well-being” (p. 3). Kaplan, Cassel, and Gore (1977) defined social support as “the gratification of a person’s basic needs (approval, esteem, succor, etc.) by significant others” (p. 50). Each definition suggests that social support requires one person helping someone else fulfill a basic need.

Support in marriage. For married persons, the most likely individual to fulfill basic needs is the spouse. Spousal support is the key component of the VSA model for this study because it is what directly contributes to marital quality. However, before examining the how support contributes to marital quality, it is important that the spousal support, itself, is understood. Verhofstadt et al. (2007) described social support in marriage as the way spouses help each other cope with personal challenges. Gardner and Cutrona (2004) elaborated further as they defined spousal support as “verbal communication or behavior that is responsive to another’s needs, and serves the functions of comfort, encouragement, reassurance of caring, and/or the promotion of effective problem solving through information or tangible assistance” (p. 495). Essentially, this means that supportive spouses express encouragement and love or provide physical help with challenges. Spousal support is unique from other kinds of social support in that it appears to be more intimate and includes reassurance of love and caring about the individual (Gardner & Cutrona, 2004).

The oft-cited benefits of spousal support are many for the marital relationship. Neff and Karney (2005) stated that spousal support is a key element of marital well-being, perhaps because spouses who report higher levels of marital support also report being more maritally satisfied (Acitelli & Antonucci, 1994; Revenson & Majerovitz, 1990; Julien & Markman, 1991; Suito & Pillemer, 1994). Spouses who feel supported are much more likely to claim that they have a happy marriage. This may be due to the fact that they are able to tackle challenges together or that when each spouse has a challenge, he or she feels able to turn to the other for assistance. Additionally, spousal support has been linked to increased levels of intimacy in married couples (Johnson et al., 1993). This comes as no surprise as spouses who cooperate and encourage one another are more likely to share intimate time because they feel cared for and supported. On the other hand, lack of spousal support has also been examined and found to be frequently cited as a reason for relationship dissatisfaction (Baxter, 1986).

Gender differences in spousal support. Despite the fact that marital support is important for both spouses, research has shown that men and women differ in the support they provide. According to Verhofstadt et al. (2007), men more often provide instrumental support (e.g. behavioral assistance or practical support), whereas women tend to provide emotional support (e.g. expressions of concern, empathy, or caring). These findings may be based on the socialization process discussed earlier (Garside & Klimes-Dougan, 2002) in which women were more likely to be rewarded for emotional expression. Another possibility is that men and women are simply providing the type of support that they themselves want to receive. Acitelli and Antonucci (1994) found that women prefer emotional support from their husbands, and are also more likely to provide

this type of support. Spouses appear to desire the type of support that they are good at providing, and vice versa.

Beyond the type of support provided, the amount of support and effectiveness of that support provided by both husbands and wives has also been examined. For example, Cutrona (1996) stated that wives have been described as providing their partners with more support than husbands, and the support provided by wives (expressive or emotional) appears more likely to promote coping and well-being. Her findings suggest that, on average, women provide better support, and more of it, than do their husbands. Cutrona's (1996) findings have contributed to the widely accepted conclusion within the spousal support literature that a "support gap" exists in marital relationships, such that men receive more support and more helpful support than do women. However, Neff and Karney (2005) argued, based on their observational and diary data collected from married couples, that husbands and wives did not differ on the amount of support provided, but rather differed on the timing of that support.

Perhaps the timing of the support given is the critical difference between husbands' and wives' support provision. Neff and Karney (2005) reported that women may be more likely than men to provide support at critical times when partners are experiencing pressure or anxiety. This finding becomes relevant when considering that women's more expressive type of support is better for coping with challenges and dealing with stressors (Cutrona, 1996). Furthermore, although wives provided better support on days that their husbands experienced greater stress, husbands displayed both support and negativity on days that wives were stressed (Neff & Karney, 2005). Therefore, it appears

that husbands may react negatively to wives' stress, and provide lower levels of support at critical times.

Measuring spousal support. In addition to the previously mentioned criticism of the “support gap” hypothesis, Verhofstadt et al. (2007) suggested that differences in the amount of support provided by husbands and wives may be attributed to the way that support is measured. They pointed out that the little observational research that has been done in the area of marital support has found few gender differences in support behaviors. Indeed, Pasch, Bradbury, and Davila (1997) used observational methods to observe spousal support behavior and found very few differences. The small differences found were that wives tended to show more negative affect when soliciting support, and husbands showed more negative affect when providing support. Overall, these findings openly challenge the marital “support gap” hypothesis, and suggest that the differences found in support may be attributed to the difference between using self-report and observational methods.

Currently, research addressing gender differences in support has relied primarily on self-report methods. This can be problematic due to the fact that motivation may bias the reports of spouses who attempt to recall and interpret past experiences into current, overall impressions (Verhofstadt et al., 2007, p. 269). For example, Christensen and Nies (1980) found that spouses can be unreliable reporters of events in their relationship, particularly when the events are interactional in nature. Perhaps the key to solving the support measure problem comes from Melby, Ge, Conger and Warner (1995). They found that it is essential to have both insider (self or spouse) and outsider (trained observer) assessments of behaviors such as warmth and support in marriage in order to

allow for direct comparisons and more reliable results. Using both self-report and observational measures would allow researchers to gain different perspectives on the same topic, allowing for more explanation and possibly better understanding of support. Finally, Frosch et al., (1998) suggested using both measures, as each likely taps a unique dimension of the marital relationship. Specifically, they stated that although spouses tend to be accurate reporters of marital satisfaction and positive marital interactions, they are poor reporters of marital conflict. This suggests that self-report measures would gain an accurate picture of marital quality, and observational measures would serve to enhance researchers' understanding of negative attributes of marriage. It seems evident that using both self-report and observational measures is the best way to gain the clearest understanding of spousal support.

Identifying good support. Although accurately measuring support has been a significant challenge for researchers, it seems that they have had no problem identifying the types of support provided. One of the problems with the existing literature on spousal support is the oversaturation of focus on the types of support (instrumental vs. expressive) that men and women provide. Study after study discusses how men provide instrumental support and women provide expressive support (Antonucci & Akiyama, 2004; Cutrona, 1996; Verhofstadt et al., 2007). That men and women differ in the types of support that they typically provide has almost become somewhat of an accepted fact in the social sciences. Accordingly, there exists a need to focus on other factors related to spousal support that will help researchers understand what actually constitutes good support. For instance, what are the specific components of support that differentiate a happily married couple from an unhappy couple?

A small number of studies have begun to identify specific elements of support that seem to be important to the marital relationship. Neff and Karney (2005) pointed out that the timing of the support is an important aspect to consider. Perhaps the amount and type of support do not matter so much as if the support is provided at the moment that it is most needed. Others, such as Cutrona (1996) have posited suggestions for ensuring that support attempts in a marriage are successful. She first pointed out that factors such as tone of voice and nonverbal cues should convey an accurate understanding of the problem by the support provider. Also, the type of support provided should match the type of support desired in order for it to be most effective. Therefore, based on what is known about gender differences, perhaps a husband would be providing better support to his disheartened wife by showing empathic concern, rather than tangible assistance. Cutrona (1996) also commented on the timing of support provision, but took a slightly different angle than previously discussed. She claimed that support that is provided spontaneously is more highly valued than support that is provided only after a specific request. This may be true because it reflects that the spouse has noticed the hardship facing his or her mate, and has taken time to consider ways to deal with it.

Although the above-mentioned elements of spousal support are important, one study, conducted by Frosch et al. (1998) seems to clearly point out important specific interactional components that are vital in providing good support. They found that when having couples complete an interactional task, that it was important to measure certain domains of interactional context including enjoyment, positive and negative affect, engagement, and irritation. They found that particular pieces of the interaction such as positive affect and continual engagement were related to better support provision. This, in

turn, was related to better marital outcomes, and suggests the importance of understanding the specific context and delivery of marital support. In general, although it appears that the literature provides a few insights concerning spousal support, on the whole, a clear picture of what actually makes up good support is still lacking.

The Current Study

There are a number of limitations in the current literature concerning factors and outcomes related to spousal support. Despite the fact that social scientists know the importance of support in marriage, the construct itself remains somewhat ambiguous. Although support has been studied for decades, researchers still have yet to truly grasp what constitutes good support. Moreover, regardless of the fact that many studies have been conducted which identify the types of support provided by husbands and wives (Verhofstadt et al., 2007), we still do not have a clear understanding of the context in which spouses provide support.

A study is needed which examines both the predisposing factors related to support provision and the influence of stressful context on spousal support. Context should include the broad idea of events and stressors occurring in the lives of the couple, as well as the more specific interactional context in which support may or may not occur. We also need a study which allows us to gather both insider (self-report) and outsider (observational) perspectives on spousal support. Furthermore, the study should include how good support is delivered from one spouse to another in a way that is beneficial to both parties. Such a study would provide a clearer understanding of what constitutes good marital support, and when that support is provided. It would also offer an explanation for

who provides such support and the significant pieces of support delivery that make it successful.

Accordingly, the current study furthers the existing literature in that it addresses the above-mentioned gaps in that literature. Whereas other studies have largely overlooked predisposing characteristics related to spousal support, the current study posits that perspective taking ability is related to marital support, and ultimately to marital quality. Next, although research has shown that the presence of children is related to lower marital quality (Belsky, 1990), the current study considers how children affect spouses' ability to support one another during stressful times. Additionally, the majority of previous studies have chosen to use self-report measures to study marital support; only a handful of others have chosen to observe marital support (Verhofstadt et al., 2007). The current study aims to combine these two methodologies, gleaning unique perspectives on marital support from each method. Overall, this study attempts to finally gain true understanding of what constitutes good support in marriage, and also who is most likely to demonstrate this good support. To accomplish this, I identified several questions that will be addressed in this study.

Research question 1a. What is good spousal support based on observations of support and on subjects' reports of satisfaction with support provided? In order to contribute to the existing literature on spousal support, it is necessary to identify what good support truly is. By observing spouses providing support, and considering spouses' reports of support satisfaction, I will be able to gain a much better understanding of what constitutes good marital support. I hypothesize that the individuals observed to be

responsive, sensitive, and supportive (rating highly on the support/sensitivity domain of the support task) will be those whose spouses are most satisfied with support provision.

Research question 1b. What is the specific interactional context in which good support occurs? Analyzing the specific setting in which good support typically occurs will provide major clues as to how good support is delivered. I will examine the other six observable behaviors from the marital support task (e.g., fun/enjoyment, individual positive affect, irritation/antagonism) to determine particular interactional skills related to good marital support. An enhanced understanding of the specific context in which good support is delivered will provide clinicians with detailed information concerning skills to focus upon in therapy. Based on Cutrona's (1996) work on marital support, I hypothesize that spouses who make the concerns of their partner seem important and are actively engaged as the spouse outlines stressors will be more likely to provide good support. Based on Frosch et al.'s (1998) study, I further hypothesize that spouses who rate highly on levels of fun/enjoyment and on positive affect during the marital support task will provide better support than those who are rated lower in these domains, and higher in more negative domains (e.g. irritation).

Research question 2. How is good support linked to marital quality? Because researchers have found that marital support is closely linked to marital quality (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), it is important to further investigate what aspects of marital quality are most affected by support. I will examine how each of Braiker and Kelley's (1979) four components of marital quality (e.g., love, ambivalence) are related to spousal support. I hypothesize that spouses who receive good support (as identified by answering questions

1a and 1b) will report more love and maintenance, and less ambivalence and conflict on the marital quality scale.

Research question 3. Who is actually providing good marital support? An understanding of who is providing good support will allow me to contribute to the existing literature that addresses marital relationships. This knowledge will prove beneficial in clinical settings addressing marital concerns. By knowing who is providing good support, clinicians and researchers alike will be able to focus on strengthening support skills of those failing to deliver it, thus, strengthening the marriage. Based on the current literature, I hypothesize that women will be found to provide better support than men (Cutrona, 1996). Because men have been observed to take the perspective of their partners less frequently than women (Davis & Oathout, 1987), I hypothesize that I, too, will be able to establish gender differences in this sample. Having established the gender difference in perspective taking, I will examine how this trait is linked to self-reports of support satisfaction, and then determine if this link is mediated by observed behaviors from the support task.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 58 married couples were recruited to participate in the study. The study was conducted in the Midwestern region of the United States as part of the larger Marriage and Child Development Study (PI: Brenda Volling), which examined the effects of marital love on sibling relationships in early childhood. Families were recruited from birth records, newspaper advertisements, church bulletins, daycares, and preschools. In order to be eligible for the study, the couple had to meet the following criteria: a) identify themselves as happily married, b) consent to participation from both spouses, c) have a 2-year-old child, and d) have another child in preschool or elementary school. Of the couples in the study, 54 husbands and 56 wives were White. Husbands' modal annual income was between \$70,000 and 80,000, and wives' income was less than \$10,000. Each individual in the sample completed at least some college, with 23 husbands earning a Master's degree or higher, and 25 wives earning a Master's degree or higher. Couples were married for an average of 8.7 years, and the older siblings had an average age of 4.8 years. The final sample size of couples who completed the support task was 57.

Procedure

Data were collected from families that came into the lab on two separate occasions, one focusing on the couple interaction, and the other on family interaction (including parent-child and sibling relations). During the first visit, information such as the couple's demographics (e.g. years married, education level, age, etc.) was gathered.

For the purposes of the current study, the first visit was more relevant than the second, as couples completed a 20-minute love interview, a 15-minute problem solving task, and a 20-minute support task, which is the basis of the current study. These tasks were videotaped and later coded in order to examine marital functioning of parents with young children. Throughout the lab visit, blood pressure was also measured to determine the physical health of the married couple. At the end of the visit, the couple received a packet of questionnaires that assessed both marital and individual characteristics that was to be completed and returned at the second visit. The second visit consisted of tasks such as family free play, sibling cooperation, sibling jealousy, sibling sharing, and children's love interview. In order to compensate families for their participation in the study, at the end of the second visit each couple was given \$50 and each child received a small toy.

Measures

Perspective taking. Couples were asked to complete Stets (1993) Perspective Taking Scale, which measured each spouse's ability to take the perspective of the other. The 5-item scale ranged from 1 = *never* to 5 = *very often* (e.g. "I have difficulty seeing my partner's viewpoint in an argument".) The scale was found to be reliable for both husbands ($\alpha = .79$) and wives ($\alpha = .64$).

Marital quality. Overall marital quality in the relationship was measured using Braiker and Kelly's (1979) Relationship Questionnaire. The 25-item scale includes four subscales which were completed by the couples. First, responses to the love subscale, which measured feelings of belonging, closeness, and attachment to the spouse (e.g., "To what extent did you have a sense of belonging with your spouse?") ranged from 1 = *not at all* to 9 = *very much*. Reliability for father's love was $\alpha = .82$ and for mother's love

was $\alpha = .83$. Next, responses to the maintenance subscale, which measured communication between partners designed to increase satisfaction (e.g., “How much did you tell your spouse about what you wanted or needed from the relationship?”) ranged from 1 = *not at all* to 9 = *very much*. Reliability for father’s maintenance was $\alpha = .66$ and for mother’s maintenance was $\alpha = .62$. Third, responses to the ambivalence subscale, which measured feelings of confusion about the partner and anxiety about increased commitment (e.g., “How confused were you about your feelings toward your spouse?”) ranged from 1 = *not at all* to 9 = *extremely*. Reliability for father’s ambivalence was $\alpha = .74$ and for mother’s ambivalence was $\alpha = .84$. Finally, responses to the conflict/negativity subscale, which measured the amount of overt conflict in the relationship (e.g., “How often did you and your spouse argue with one another?”) ranged from 1 = *very infrequently* to 9 = *very frequently*. Reliability for father’s conflict/negativity was $\alpha = .79$ and for mother’s conflict/negativity was $\alpha = .75$.

Support satisfaction. Spouses were asked to complete the Support Satisfaction Scale, which was used to measure spouses’ satisfaction with the support provided during the support task (e.g., “My spouse was sensitive to my feelings,” “My spouse did not take my problems seriously,” “My spouse showed respect for my capabilities and talents”). Responses to the 21-item questionnaire ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*. Cronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = .89$ for husbands and $\alpha = .84$ for wives.

Marital support task. A 20-minute marital support task was completed and videotaped to be coded as observational data. The support task used in this study was developed by Cutrona, Hessling, and Suhr (1997) in an attempt to better understand the

influences of personality on marital support. Couples were informed that this task would be divided into two 10-minute sessions in which each would have a turn playing the speaker and listener roles. The order of which spouse spoke first was counterbalanced in that couples with an odd ID number began with the husband speaking and even ID numbers began with the wife. The speaker was told to describe any issue that he or she had been struggling with that may be a cause of stress. It could be something going on now or something happening soon that was worrisome. The speaker could choose to talk about whatever issue he or she wished with two restrictions: (1) it was asked that the speaker not chose a situation that the couple had argued about in the past, and (2) it not be a situation that the speaker blamed the spouse for. In the listener role, it was simply asked that he or she listen to the partner and respond normally, as if having the conversation at home. The couple was then left alone in the room to begin the task. After 10 minutes, the couple was told to switch roles, at which time the new speaker began discussing his or her new topic. Couples were given a few minutes before the task began to think about possible discussion topics.

Marital support. These interactions were later coded by trained observers on seven topics of interest, with each spouse and task coded separately and by different coders (see Appendix B). Scores ranged from 1 to 7, with interpretations of numbers varying slightly from scale to scale. First, sensitivity/support was observed, which referred to listening to the partner, perceiving and interpreting feelings and signals accurately, and responding appropriately. A score of 1 (“*very minimal*”) indicated little regard/consideration for the other. These individuals were not responsive to the desires or comments of the other. A score of 4 (“*moderate*”) reflected showing moderate

responsiveness and support, in which comments or needs were responded to fairly often. A score of 7 (“*very high*”) denoted excellent responsiveness, sensitivity and support. Each spouse was attentive and responsive to the desires and actions of the other. Interrater reliability for sensitivity/support was $r = .67, p < .01$.

Second, engagement/interpersonal involvement was observed, which tapped the interpersonal involvement and the persistence of partner directed behaviors. A score of 1 (“*very low*”) in this domain indicated indifference, ignoring, flat affect, and very minimal engagement. A score of 4 (“*moderate*”) indicated moderate engagement in which the spouses appeared to be going through the motions of completing the task, although they were engaged. A score of 7 (“*very high*”) in this domain indicated that both partners were highly engaged, including extensive visual regard and talking, eagerness to maintain interaction, and few lulls in active engagement. Interrater reliability for engagement/interpersonal involvement was $r = .74, p < .01$.

Third, coders observed balance/reciprocity, which assessed the relative contributions of each partner to the interaction. Included were dimensions such as control, turn-taking, and equity. A score of 1 (“*very low*”) indicated interaction characterized by dominance of one partner over the other. A score of 4 (“*moderate*”) indicated that spouses were fairly consistent in including the other partner, particularly through the solicitation of opinions and response. However, one partner was primarily responsible for discussion progression. A score of 7 (“*very high*”) revealed a couple seemingly in complete synchrony, in which turn-taking was smooth and both partners contributed equally to the interaction without dominating. Interrater reliability was $r = .67, p < .01$.

Fourth, fun/enjoyment was observed the degree to which the dyad demonstrated enjoyment of interaction and joint activity. Ratings focused on the tone of interaction (i.e., neutral, enthusiastic) and affective signs (e.g., sighing, indications of boredom, laughing, smiling). A score of 1 (“*very low*”) pointed out no evidence of pleasure, and that the pair never had fun or enjoyed the interaction, although interaction may have occurred. A “*moderate*” score of 4 indicated that the couple did not mind being together and may have enjoyed it at times, with interaction being pleasant overall, though not really enjoyable. A score of 7 (“*very high*”) indicated that the pair showed enjoyment in their interaction and marked exuberance or delight. Mutual smiling and/or laughing must have occurred to obtain this score. Interrater reliability was $r = .72, p < .01$.

Fifth, irritation/antagonism was observed. This scale tapped how couples handled disagreements. Observers looked for hurtful comments, derision, scornful criticism, and negative tone of voice. A score of 1 (“*none*”) indicated no instances or irritation, antagonism, anger or hostility. Interaction was positive or neutral. A score of 4 (“*moderate*”) indicated that instances of irritation or mild antagonism such as mocking, criticizing, or making negative faces at each other are scattered throughout. A score of 7 (“*very marked*”) indicated pervasive or extreme irritation, antagonism, negative tone, anger or hostility that was personally-directed. Interrater reliability for irritation/antagonism was $r = .89, p < .01$.

Sixth, individual positive affect was scored, looking at each individual’s expression of positive affect towards or in response to the other partner’s behaviors. Two scores were given, one for each spouse. A score of 1 (“*very low*”) indicated no positive affect, smiling, or laughter, and no enjoyment from the interaction. A “*moderate*” score

of 4 indicated low level of enjoyment or positive affect, though these displays were not intense or prolonged. A score of 7 (“*very high*”) revealed frequent and intense positive affect consistently throughout the interaction. The individual thoroughly enjoyed the interaction, smiling and laughing throughout. Interrater reliability for individual positive affect was $r = .88, p < .01$ for husband positive affect, and $r = .91, p < .01$ for wife positive affect.

Finally, individual negative affect was observed. Unlike the irritation/antagonism scale, which looks at the couple as a unit, this scale considers the individual's expression of negative affect toward the other. Observers looked for frowning, rolling eyes, averted gazes, etc. One score was given for the husband and another for the wife. A score of 1 (“*very low*”) indicated no negative affect. A “*moderate*” score of 4 denoted periodically expressed negative affect that did not disrupt the flow of interaction. A score of 7 (“*very high*”) indicated extreme displays of negative affect, meaning that the individual appeared very angry or sad toward the other. The overall tone toward the spouse was very negative and marked by intense frowning and angry facial expressions that affected the flow of interaction. Interrater reliability for husbands' negative affect was $r = .99, p < .01$ and for wives' negative affect was $r = .95, p < .01$.

Proposed Analyses

Because of the relatively small size of the sample in this study, I plan to examine whether I can reduce the number of variables of interest. To do so, I will first conduct preliminary correlations to see if the nine coding dimensions of the marital support task are closely related (i.e., positive affect and fun). Next, to further validate these correlations, I will conduct factor analyses to see if there are a few broad underlying

dimensions that best capture what is going on in the support task. For example, I might find that positive affect, fun, and engagement tap into an overall dimension representing positivity.

Next, I will examine the descriptive statistics of the variables of interest (i.e., mean, standard deviation, range, skewness). Describing these statistics will allow me to better understand the characteristics of this unique sample. Because of the expected gender differences in many of the variables of interest, I will also run paired *t*-tests to examine preliminary gender differences.

To address research question 1a, I will examine the relationship between the observations of support with spouses' ratings of how well they felt supported using correlational analyses. This will be done using both spouses' reports. Correlations across spouses for both observed and self-reported support will help to better understand what constitutes good spousal support. To examine research question 1b, and investigate the context in which good support occurs, I will run preliminary correlations between the support measures and the other six observed behaviors. I will next conduct regressions with self-reports from each spouse as the dependent variable and observational variables as the independent variables to determine which domains of the support task contribute most to each spouse's report of support satisfaction. This will allow me to know which of the observational variables (e.g., fun/enjoyment, individual positive affect, balance/reciprocity) are truly important for spouses to feel supported.

To address research question 2, which asks how good support is linked to marital quality, I will examine preliminary correlations between observed variables, self-reported support satisfaction, and the four dimensions of marital quality. I will then examine

regressions with the four dimensions of marital quality as the dependent variables in my regression analyses. The regression analyses will reveal the unique contributions of the support variables to marital quality. For example, I may regress the love dimension of marital quality on positive affect, balance/reciprocity, and fun/enjoyment in order to understand the unique contributors to spouses' love to one another. Perhaps I will find that only fun/enjoyment is truly important to the love domain of marital quality. Also, unique predictors of each dimension may differ, which would be important for clinicians in order to focus on contributors to certain aspects of marital quality, such as love or ambivalence.

Finally, in order to answer research question 3, concerning who is actually providing good support, I will first establish the link between perspective taking and self-reported support satisfaction by examining correlations between these variables. Upon establishing this link, I will examine a mediational model to determine whether the links between perspective taking and self-reports of support satisfaction are driven by what was observed in the support task. I will determine if the path of the relationship between perspective taking and support satisfaction is mediated by observed behaviors. The effects of perspective taking on self-reports of support satisfaction may be mediated by observed domains from the support task such as engagement or positive affect. In other words, perhaps spouses who are good at perspective taking are the ones who are highly engaged and show high amounts of positive affect, resulting in their spouse's greater support satisfaction.

RESULTS

Data Reduction

To determine how closely related the nine dimensions of the marital support task were, I conducted correlational analyses and factor analyses for both the husband support provision task and the wife support provision task. I found that several correlations existed among these dimensions (see Table 1). Looking first at when husbands provided support, husband positive affect was significantly positively correlated with wife positive affect, meaning that as husbands provided support, more husband positive affect was associated with more wife positive affect. Also, husband negative affect was significantly positively correlated with wife negative affect, indicating that more observed husband negative affect equaled more observed wife negative affect. Next, balance was significantly positively correlated with both husband negative affect and engagement. This meant that the more balance that was observed, the more husband negative affect and the more engagement were also observed. Sensitive support provided by husbands was significantly negatively correlated with wife negative affect, meaning that the more sensitive support observed, the less wife negative affect observed. Also, fun/enjoyment was significantly positively correlated with wife positive affect, husband positive affect and sensitive support. Therefore, when more fun/enjoyment was observed, more wife positive affect, husband positive affect, and sensitive support were also observed. Finally, irritation was significantly positively correlated with wife negative affect, husband

negative affect, and balance. Thus, more observed irritation equaled more observed wife negative affect, more observed husband negative affect, and more balance.

Looking next at when wives provided support, wife positive affect was significantly positively correlated with husband positive affect and fun/enjoyment. This indicated that more observed wife positive affect was associated with more observed husband positive affect and fun/enjoyment. Husband positive affect was significantly positively correlated with fun/enjoyment, meaning that the more observed husband positive affect, the more observed fun/enjoyment. Next, wife negative affect was significantly positively correlated with balance and irritation, and significantly negatively correlated with sensitive support. Therefore, more observed wife negative affect was related to more observed balance and irritation, and less observed sensitive support. Husband negative affect was significantly positively correlated with irritation and marginally positively correlated with fun/enjoyment. This meant that more observed husband negative affect was related to more observed irritation, and, somewhat surprisingly, to more fun/enjoyment. Next, balance was significantly positively correlated with irritation, meaning that more observed balance was associated with more observed irritation. Finally, sensitive support provision by wives was significantly negatively correlated with irritation, meaning that more observed wife sensitive support was related to less irritation.

To determine whether these significant associations represented underlying dimensions, I next conducted factor analyses. I conducted a principal components analysis and found three components had an eigenvalue greater than one, which is a typical cutoff for including a component (Chandler & Gallagher, 1996). The first

component accounted for 33% of the variance for wives and 31% of the variance for husbands. The second component accounted for 23% of the variance for wives and 24% for husbands. Finally, the third component accounted for 13% of the variance for both wives and husbands. Therefore, the components accounted for 70% of the variance in wives and 68% of the variance for husbands in the nine items.

To identify distinct components, a rotated matrix was next examined. Once again, three components had an eigenvalue greater than one. The first component, which had an eigenvalue of 2.79 for wives and 3.01 for husbands, accounted for 24% of the variance for wives and 26% of the variance for husbands (all loadings were above .80); the second component, which had an eigenvalue of 2.19 for wives and 2.10 for husbands, accounted for 22% of the variance for wives and 31% of the variance for husbands (all loadings were above .38); and the third component, which had an eigenvalue of 1.14 for wives and 1.16 for husbands, accounted for 20% of the variance in wives and 13% of the variance in husbands. The third component was not included in the present analyses for the following reasons: for both husbands and wives the eigenvalue was below 1.20 (narrowly above the cutoff of 1.00), it only accounted for only half of the variance that the other two components did, and examination of the scree plot revealed that the first two components best represented the data. Additionally, the third component was not consistent across spouses, as were the first and second components. For wives, it included engagement, irritation, balance, husband negative affect and sensitive support, whereas it included only engagement and balance for husbands. Thus, only the first and second components were included in the analyses.

The first component, which I called positivity, included the following items: wife positive affect, husband positive affect, and fun/enjoyment. The second component, which I called negativity, included the following items: wife negative affect, husband negative affect, and irritation. Items of these two components were averaged together to create subscales. Alpha for wife problem positivity was .80, for husband problem positivity was .83, for wife problem negativity was .73, and for husband problem negativity was .88. As the other three items (engagement, balance, and support/sensitivity) did not load well on these two components, they were left to be analyzed as separate variables. Thus, the support task variables for both the husband and wife support provision tasks included in my analyses were positivity, negativity, engagement, balance, and sensitivity.

Descriptive Statistics

I next examined the descriptive statistics of the variables of interest and, because gender differences were expected in many of the variables, I ran paired *t*-tests to examine preliminary gender differences. I first examined the means, ranges, standard deviations, and skewness statistics of the observational behaviors from the support task (see Table 2). The low means and high positive skewness statistics for negativity in both tasks show this sample to be very low on negativity, which is likely a result of the sample requirement that the couple self-identify as happily married. To note, sensitivity was the only observational variable for which paired *t*-tests revealed significant differences between husband and wife, such that wives' provision of sensitive support was higher than husbands' (see Table 2).

I next examined the means, ranges, standard deviations, and skewness statistics of the self-reported variables from my study (see Table 3). Paired *t*-tests revealed significant differences between husband and wife on the marital love, marital ambivalence, and perspective taking variables. Examination of mean scores indicated that wives' love and perspective taking were higher than husbands', and husbands' ambivalence was higher than wives'. Therefore, wives tended to report more love and perspective taking abilities, and husbands tended to report more ambivalence about their relationship.

Research Question 1a: Determining the Makeup of Good Spousal Support

To address the nature of good spousal support based on the observations of support and on subjects' reports of satisfaction with the support provided, I next examined correlations across spouses for both the observed and the self-reported support variables (see Table 4). Wives' sensitivity of support provision was not significantly correlated with either their own self-reported support satisfaction, or with their husbands' reported support satisfaction. However, husbands' sensitivity of support provision was significantly positively correlated with both husbands' and wives' reported support satisfaction, meaning that the more sensitive the support provided by husbands, the more that both husbands and wives reported being satisfied with their spouses' support provision.

Research Question 1b: Examining the Context in Which Good Support Occurs

To examine the interactional context in which good support occurred, I investigated the relationship between the spouses' reports of support satisfaction and the other four observed behaviors. Wives' support satisfaction was significantly negatively correlated with negativity when husbands provided support, indicating that the more

negativity observed while husbands provided support, the less support satisfaction indicated by wives. Positivity, engagement, and balance on both husband support provision and wife support provision tasks were unrelated to wives' reported support satisfaction, as was negativity when wives provided support. Next, husbands' support satisfaction was significantly negatively correlated with negativity when husbands provided support, meaning that the more negativity observed while husbands provided support, the less support satisfaction reported by husbands. Again, positivity, engagement, and balance on both husband and wife tasks were unrelated to husbands' reported support satisfaction, as was negativity when wives provided support. It is noteworthy to mention that husbands' own satisfaction was significantly related to behaviors that took place when they were providing support.

Having examined the correlations between the support measures and the other observed behaviors, I examined regressions with self-reports from each spouse as the dependent variable and observational variables as the independent variables in order to determine which domains of the support task contributed most to each spouse's report of support satisfaction. First, Table 5 shows the results of the hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting wives' support satisfaction. Regression analyses indicated that Model 1, which included only the behaviors when husbands provided support, was significant. Results from Model 1 revealed that only husbands' observed level of sensitivity in their support provision was significantly associated with wives' self-reports of support satisfaction. More sensitivity provided by husbands was related to higher reports of support satisfaction by wives. Including the behaviors as wives provided support on Model 2 did not explain additional variance. Overall, these findings revealed

that although the way that wives support their husbands was unrelated to their own support satisfaction, husbands' provision of sensitive support was significantly related to wives' reports of support satisfaction.

Next, Table 6 shows the results of the hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting husbands' support satisfaction. Model 1, which included only the behaviors when wives provided support, was not significant, indicating that wives' behaviors when wives provided support were not significantly associated with husbands' reports of support satisfaction. However, including behaviors from as husbands provided support (Model 2) explained a significant amount of variance in husbands' reports of support satisfaction. Husbands' provision of sensitive support was significantly related to their own support satisfaction. Although other factors were found to be marginally significant (i.e., negativity as wives provided support, positivity and negativity as husbands provided support), only husbands' support sensitivity emerged as a significant predictor of husbands' support satisfaction.

Research Question 2: Examining the Link Between Good Spousal Support and Marital Quality

To address the link between good support and marital quality, I first examined correlations (see Table 4) between the observed support variables, self-reported support satisfaction, and the four dimensions of marital quality (love, conflict, ambivalence, and maintenance). First, I investigated how the support variables were related to wives' marital quality. I found no evidence linking marital support to any of the four indicators of marital quality for wives. For husbands, the correlations revealed a different story. Both wives' and husbands' support satisfaction were significantly correlated with

husbands' reports of love, meaning that when both husbands and wives reported more satisfaction with the support provided, husbands reported greater love. Also, balance, as husbands provided support, was marginally negatively correlated with husbands' love, indicating that more balance when husbands provided support was associated with less reported love by husbands. Second, husbands' provision of sensitive support and wives' support satisfaction were both negatively correlated with his reports of conflict. Thus, husbands who provided less sensitive support and whose wives were less satisfied with their support reported greater conflict. Third, negativity, as husbands provided support, was significantly positively correlated with husbands' reports of ambivalence, meaning that when more negativity was observed as husbands provided support, more ambivalence was reported by husbands. Additionally, both husbands' provision of sensitive support and wives' support satisfaction were negatively correlated with husbands' ambivalence, indicating that husbands who provided less sensitive support and whose wives were less satisfied with their support reported greater ambivalence. Finally, both engagement when husbands provided support and husbands' support satisfaction were significantly positively correlated with husbands' reports of maintenance. Therefore, husbands who were more engaged when they provided support and whose own reports of support satisfaction were higher reported greater efforts to maintain the marriage.

To examine the unique contributions of the support variables to marital quality, I next examined regressions with the four dimensions of marital quality as the dependent variables in the regression analyses. For wives, Model 1 included only the husband support provision task behaviors. Model 2 added to this the wife support provision task

behaviors. Model 3 added both wife and husband self-reported support satisfaction (see Table 7). Hierarchical regression analyses revealed that only Model 3 was significant for wives ambivalence, with lower levels of wives' support satisfaction related to greater ambivalence.

For husbands, Model 1 included only the wife support provision task behaviors. Model 2 added to this the husband support provision task behaviors. Model 3 added both wife and husband self-reported support satisfaction (see Tables 8-11). Regression analyses revealed that support was associated with all four dimensions of husbands' marital quality. For husbands' love (see Table 8), both Models 2 and 3 explained a significant amount of variance. First, less balance and more husband sensitivity when husbands provided support was significantly related to higher reports of love for husbands. This meant that when more balance was observed as husbands provided support, and when husbands provided more sensitive support, husband love was greater. Additionally, Model 2 revealed that more spousal engagement when husbands provided support was marginally positively related to husbands' love, meaning that when couples were more engaged as husbands provided support, husbands reported greater love. Next, Model 3 revealed that less balance as husbands provided support was related to greater husband love. Moreover, for husbands, higher levels of wives' support satisfaction were related to greater love.

Table 9 shows the analyses for variables predicting husbands' conflict. Model 1 was not significant, and because the *R*-square statistic was not significant for Model 2, I was unable to interpret its results. However, Model 3 explained a significant amount of

variance and revealed that when wives were less satisfied with husbands' support provision, husbands reported more conflict.

Table 10 shows the analyses for variables' predicting husbands' ambivalence. Only Models 2 and 3 explained a significant amount of variance. Model 2 showed that more balance when husbands provided support was related to greater reported ambivalence. Also, Model 2 revealed that husbands who provided less sensitive support reported greater ambivalence. Model 3 revealed that more balance when husbands provided support and lower levels of wives' support satisfaction were both related to greater husband ambivalence. Therefore, husbands who had more balanced conversations as they provided support, and those who had wives who were not satisfied with their husbands' support, reported more ambivalence.

Finally, Table 11 shows the analyses for variables predicting husbands' maintenance. Only Model 2 was significant and revealed that less positivity when husbands provided support was related to greater maintenance. This meant that husbands who were observed to be less positive while providing support reported greater maintenance. Additionally, more engagement and more husband sensitivity when husbands provided support were related to greater husband maintenance.

Research Question 3: Uncovering Who Provides Good Spousal Support

To address who is actually providing good support, I first established the link between perspective taking and self-reported support satisfaction by examining correlations between these variables (see Table 4). Husbands' perspective taking ability was significantly correlated with wives' support satisfaction. However, wives perspective taking ability was not significantly correlated with husbands' support satisfaction. I next

examined a mediational model using hierarchical regression analyses to determine whether the link between husbands' perspective taking and wives' support satisfaction was explained by what was observed in the marital support task (see Table 12). I found that higher levels of wives' support satisfaction were significantly related to higher levels of husbands' perspective taking, but that the addition of the husband support provision task behaviors did not explain any additional variance. This failed to support the mediational model, as husband perspective taking remained significant in the second model.

DISCUSSION

Studies have shown that support from others is critical to both mental and physical health (Sarason & Sarason, 2009), and that the spouse is the most important support provider for married individuals (Dakof & Taylor, 1990). Although spousal support is known to be important, researchers have yet to come to a consensus concerning what actually constitutes good spousal support. Researchers may struggle with this because they have not considered Melby et al.'s (1995) findings, which state that both self-report and observational assessments are necessary to capture the fullest understanding of spousal support. The current study, however, included both methodological techniques in an attempt to understand the components of good spousal support and the context in which that support occurs. The study also examined the link between good spousal support and marital quality. Finally, the study identified who actually provided good support and the role that perspective taking played in spousal support provision.

The results of the current study revealed that the more sensitive the support provided by husbands, the more that both wives and husbands reported being satisfied with their spouses' support provision. Further, husbands' reported levels of marital quality were highly associated with their own supportive behaviors. Husbands reported more love and maintenance, and less ambivalence when they were sensitive in their support provision. Moreover, when wives were satisfied with husbands' support, husbands reported more marital quality.

Husbands as Support Providers: The Critical Piece

In an attempt to understand support delivery and related outcomes, the current study found that the way that husbands supported their wives proved to be the crucial factor in this study. Inspection of the context in which good support occurred revealed that husbands' support was critical to both wives' and husbands' reported support satisfaction. Consistent with previous findings (Cutrona, 1996), only husbands' observed level of sensitivity was significantly associated with wives' self-reports of support satisfaction. Perhaps more interesting were the findings for husbands' support satisfaction. Wives' support provision behaviors were not significantly associated with husbands' reports of support satisfaction. However, husbands' ability to provide sensitive support was significantly related to husbands' own reports of support satisfaction. This meant that husbands reported feeling satisfied with the support they received when they, themselves, provided more sensitive support. These findings reveal that, although wives' behavior was not significantly linked to either spouse's support satisfaction, husbands' provision of sensitive support was the critical factor related to both spouses feeling satisfied with the support they received.

Further, husbands' support provision was also the vital component related to marital quality for husbands. Regression analyses examining the unique contributions of the support behaviors to marital quality revealed that wives' reports of the four dimensions of marital quality were unrelated to what either spouse did as they provided or received support. This finding is somewhat contradictory to results reported by other researchers who found that spouses who report higher levels of marital support enjoy better marital quality (Acitelli & Antonucci, 1994; Revenson & Majerovitz, 1990). In

fact, the only variable that was significantly related to any of the four dimensions of marital quality for wives was wives' support satisfaction. Less satisfied wives reported more marital ambivalence. Perhaps this was related to the above-mentioned finding that wives with lower levels of support satisfaction were those whose husbands provided less sensitive support. Husbands' lack of sensitivity may have been indirectly related to greater ambivalence for wives.

In contrast to the findings for wives' reports of marital quality, husbands' reports of marital quality were significantly associated with behaviors during the support task. Less balance and more husband sensitivity were related to greater love. Additionally, husbands reported more love when they were observed to be more sensitive and more engaged, which again highlights the importance of their own support provision when considering their marital outcomes. No evidence was found that what wives did as they provided support was significantly related to husbands' reports of marital quality. This was quite surprising, given that many researchers have long argued that husbands benefit from receiving instrumental support (Acitelli & Antonucci, 1994) or from receiving support at the proper time (Cutrona, 1996; Neff and Karney, 2005). However, the results of the current study suggest that it is the act of providing support which is most beneficial to husbands' marital outcomes.

Only a small number of studies have examined the benefits of support provision to the provider. For example, Brown, Nesse, Vinokur, and Smith (2003) examined a sample of older married adults in the Detroit metropolitan area and found that providing support was more beneficial than receiving it. They found that mortality was significantly reduced for individuals who reported providing support to others. Moreover, receiving

support had no effect on mortality once support provision was taken into consideration. The findings of the current study align with those of Brown et al. (2003) in that husbands greatly benefitted from providing good support. Such results suggest that support provision has important consequences for marital functioning for husbands. Future studies should consider support provision as a key predictor of marital outcomes for both spouses. Because the literature is somewhat saturated with studies examining the benefits of receiving support, the next step seems to be further examination of the benefits of providing support for both spouses. Researchers may uncover more unique benefits related to support provision, such as better mental or physical health.

Similar findings occurred for the other dimensions of husbands' marital quality, with husbands' own behaviors as they provided support being related to their own reports of marital quality. For example, husbands who provided more sensitive support reported less ambivalence and greater maintenance. Perhaps this was due to the fact that husbands who enjoy greater marital quality tend to be more sensitive because they are happier in their marriage. Their high level of marital quality may, in fact, lead to more sensitive behavior. Future research should examine the direction of these effects in order to determine whether greater marital quality leads to more sensitive behavior or vice versa. Moreover, higher reports of wives' support satisfaction were related to husbands feeling more love, less conflict, and less ambivalence. Therefore, when wives were happy with husbands' support, husbands reported greater marital quality. Once again, husbands' behavior was what was critical to both spouses being satisfied with support and also with husbands' marital quality.

Balance during the support task was also significantly related to husbands' marital quality. Greater balance as husbands provided support was related to less love and more ambivalence. Thus, husbands reported better marital quality when less balance was observed in the support task. These findings contradict those found by some researchers who have argued that balance in spousal communication leads to positive marital outcomes. For example, Miller, Corrales, and Wackman (1975) stated that when a husband and wife contribute an equally high level of input in their communication patterns, or an equal level of accuracy or understanding, the marital system orients itself toward vitality and growth. In other words, they argued that a marriage benefits from husbands and wives consistently contributing equally to marital conversations.

Perhaps Miller et al.'s (1975) findings are valid for some couple communication, but not in the unique situation of one spouse eliciting support from the other. The current study's findings concerning balance may be related to husbands' ability to listen without interruption as wives elicit support. Accordingly, Pasupathi, Carstensen, Levenson, and Gottman (1999) pointed out that the presence of emotionally positive listening (positive emotional facial expressions and the presence of emotional cues such as frequent eye contact and nodding) was related to positive conflict resolution outcomes. Perhaps couples benefit more during stressful times from their partner practicing listening techniques, rather than contributing equally to the conversation. Future studies should be more specific in their examination of interactional contexts in which balance is related to positive marital outcomes. Perhaps balanced conversations are positive only in specific situations, such as conversations about children or finances. Further, this may only be the case for certain couples.

Perspective Taking – Important but not Explanatory

Studies have shown that perspective taking increases relationship satisfaction (Davis & Oathout, 1987) and marital adjustment (Long & Andrews, 1990). In line with these findings, I found that husbands' perspective taking was highly related to wives' support satisfaction. Husbands who were better able to take another's perspective had wives who were significantly more satisfied with the support husbands provided. This finding confirmed Stets' (1993) conclusion that perspective taking leads to more consideration of the other's desires and accordingly, more empathy and concern for satisfying others. Wives' perspective taking, however, was not related to husbands' support satisfaction. Karney and Gauer (2010) provided further insight as they examined cognitive complexity (the complexity of an individual's perceptions and beliefs) and marital interaction among newlyweds. They found that spouses displaying less cognitive complexity had a greater impact on marital problem solving effectiveness than spouses with more cognitive complexity. In other words, the spouse who had more limited cognitive perceptions and beliefs was more likely to shape problem solving effectiveness. This may be related to the findings of the current study and others (Davis & Oathout, 1987), which have found that wives' were more likely to take the perspective of their spouse. The fact that wives are better at perspective taking may suggest that wives typically display higher cognitive complexity. For this reason, husbands' lower perspective taking abilities may be more important to marital outcomes. The same idea may be true when considering the importance of husbands' support. Because husbands have lower cognitive complexity, their support provision may have a greater impact on marital outcomes. It appears that the room for improvement lies heavily with husbands.

This supports the previous discussion of husbands' behavior as the critical piece for positive marital outcomes.

The link between perspective taking and support satisfaction was also examined to determine if it was mediated by observed behaviors from the support task. Regressions revealed that such a mediational relationship did not exist. Nevertheless, as discussed above, perspective taking was related to support satisfaction. Husbands' perspective taking ability was significantly correlated with wives' support satisfaction. Additionally, both wives' and husbands' perspective taking abilities were significantly related to positive reports of marital quality for both spouses. These findings support the work of Shih et al. (2009) and others who have found that perspective taking ability is related to positive relationship outcomes.

Strengths

My confidence in the findings of this study is augmented by its methodological strengths and design. First, the use of both self-report and observational measures, as recommended by Melby et al. (1995), allowed me to incorporate both insider and outsider perspectives of supportive behaviors. Spouses' own reports of perspective taking, support satisfaction, and marital quality were compared to observational ratings of spousal support to determine the effectiveness of support provided. The use of both types of measures provided a more complete understanding of what good support looks like for both husbands and wives. The inclusion of observational measures was especially important as many studies fail to include observations of spousal support. Had the observational measure not been included, the study would have failed to capture its most

significant finding – that husbands’ sensitive support provision was the critical component related to both spouses’ marital outcomes.

Next, the examination of happily married couples with children served as a strength of the study. Use of this sample allowed me to consider the types of behaviors typically enacted by spouses who live in a relatively stressful environment, yet still maintain overall satisfaction in their marital relationship. As family stress produced by the presence of children has been shown to be related to decreases in marital functioning (Anderson, 2002), it was important to find out how these couples remained happy in their marriages. It appears that the ability of the husband to provide sensitive support may have been a significant contributing factor to maintaining a high level of satisfaction with support provision during stressful times. Although this sample was a strength of the study in certain regards, its limitations will also be addressed in the next section.

A final strength of the study was the observation of multiple behaviors during the support task, which provided insight as to how good support is delivered. Observing several different behaviors during the task provided a broader understanding of what actually occurred as spouses attempted to support one another. Cutrona (1996) stated that such an enhanced investigation of the specific context in which good support occurs would be invaluable to clinicians who seek to understand which specific support skills should be focused on in therapy. Had the study focused solely on positivity, negativity, or sensitivity, important results regarding balance and engagement would not have been discovered. For example, the study would not have identified that more balance was related to less husband marital quality, or that more engagement was related to more

husband marital quality. The observation of multiple behaviors during the support task was, indeed, an important strength of the study.

Limitations

Despite these strengths, there were several limitations to the current study. The final sample size was relatively small and was mostly comprised of highly educated, White, middle-class couples. Future research should examine how support behaviors are related to marital outcomes in more diverse samples. For example, studies have shown that African American families tend to be more matriarchal (Jarrett, 1994), and thus, support provision from the husband may not be as critical in this population, as wives have more influence in the family.

Furthermore, the fact that only spouses with young children were examined in this study was a potential limitation. Although this study examined spousal support during stressful life circumstances, other life cycle stages may have revealed unique marital stressors. For instance, Hiedemann, Suhomlinova, and O'Rand (1998) emphasized that the marriage is significantly strained during the empty nest phase of life. Examination of couples at other unique family life cycle stages may have provided more information about how married couples support one another through times of distress. Perhaps examination of marital interaction in the empty nest phase would have revealed that husbands provided better support or were more adept at perspective taking later in the marriage. Such an investigation would add to what is already known about marital support while couples have young children, and may suggest that support changes over time. Nevertheless, because the presence of young children in the home has been well-

researched as a significant stressor on the marriage (Cowan & Cowan, 1988; Frosch et al., 1998), the sample used in the current study was appropriate for its purposes.

A further limitation of the study may have been completion of the support task within the laboratory setting. A naturalistic study, in which data were collected in the homes of the families, quite possibly would have revealed a more natural view of how spouses support one another (Firestone, 1987). On the other hand, although such a naturalistic design may have provided more in depth understanding about typical support patterns, the use of the marital support task in the laboratory provided a more efficient way to collect marital support data. Rather than travelling to each couples' home, a more naturalistic view may also have been gained by the addition of daily diaries (Neff & Karney, 2005), which have proven to be highly effective in assessing both stress and spousal support in married couples.

A final limitation of the current study may have been its somewhat limited scope of support examination. The inclusion of other aspects of support may have supplemented the current study's findings. For example, both Cutrona (1996) and Neff and Karney (2005) stated that the timing of support delivery is a critical factor for understanding the ways that spouses support one another. Cutrona (1996) added that spontaneously provided support is more beneficial than support that is only provided after it is requested. Examination of timing of support may have added to the findings of this study by revealing that spontaneously provided support, or perhaps support that is provided at critical stressful moments, is more beneficial to spouses. Also, the more narrow scope of support examination used in this study may have been a limitation as other researchers have taken a broader approach to the support construct. For example,

Cutrona and Russell (1990) identified five types of support which should be considered when investigating spousal support (informational, emotional, esteem, tangible, and network support). Considering each of these types of support may have added to the findings of the current study by revealing that spouses benefit from providing different types of support. For example, perhaps husbands benefit more from tangible support provision and wives from emotional support provision.

Implications for Future Research

The finding that it is largely husbands' support that is critical for both wives' and husbands' marital quality has important implications for future research. Perhaps more studies should focus on understanding predisposing factors that are predictive of husbands providing good support to their wives. The fact that previous researchers have found that wives provide their partners with better and more support than husbands (Cutrona, 1996) indicates an even greater need to further understand factors related to husbands' support provision. Although Neff and Karney (2005) disagreed with Cutrona (1996), arguing that husbands and wives do not differ on the amount of support provided, but rather on the timing of that support, the current study suggests that future research should move away from examining the differences between husbands' and wives' marital support provision. Rather, because I found that husbands' support was more critical to marital quality than wives', social scientists should investigate factors that are related to husbands providing good support. Such information would be especially helpful to clinicians seeking to develop appropriate support interventions for married couples in therapy. For example, Dehle et al. (2001) stated that spouses benefit significantly in therapy when expectations about specific support behaviors are discussed. Therefore,

more knowledge about how husbands typically provide support may aid clinicians as they work with couples on specific support behaviors in therapy.

Although the current study emphasized the importance of helping husbands provide good support, clinicians should also be aware of the findings of Brock and Lawrence (2009), who found that receiving more or less support than what is desired can negatively affect marital outcomes. They also claimed that overprovision (providing too much support) was more detrimental to the relationship than underprovision. Although the current study found that husbands' support is most critical to marital quality, clinicians should consider that too much husband support may be detrimental. Future studies should thus focus on discovering the threshold at which support from husbands (and wives) ceases to be helpful to the relationship. The overall high levels of support satisfaction found in the present study's sample may suggest that spouses in this study were adept at providing appropriate levels of support. Along these lines, Brock and Lawrence (2009) concluded that their results supported the basic premise of optimal matching theory (Cutrona & Russell, 1990) in that support should match the circumstances being faced by an individual in order to be optimal. Based on the findings of the current study, perhaps future research should also seek to determine how husbands can best match their wives' needs through appropriate support provision.

Finally, future research should consider the consequences of spouses turning outside of their marriage for support. Because couples do not live in isolation from the rest of the world, researchers examining spousal support and marital outcomes should account for the social network in which couples are embedded (Birditt & Antonucci, 2007). Within this network, spouses often identify a confidant to whom they disclose

information about marital concerns or conflicts (Julien, Tremblay, Belanger, Dube, Begin, & Bouthillier, 2000; Tschann, 1988). When this confidant is not the spouse, marital quality is often negatively affected (Lee, 1988). The current study suggests that husbands and wives enjoy improved marital quality when husbands provide good support. Perhaps those husbands who provide good support are those who are more likely to be chosen by wives as their trusted confidants.

Recent research has investigated the results of spouses choosing a confidant either inside or outside the marriage. They have identified a concept called “marriage work”, which has been described as husbands’ and wives’ routine disclosures about their marriage with others (Helms, Crouter, & McHale, 2003; Proulx, Helms, & Payne, 2004). Helms et al. (2003) found that wives were more likely to engage in marriage work with someone outside the marriage than were husbands. This may be related due to the fact that overall, wives provide better support than do husbands (Cutrona, 1996). When wives talked to their friends about their marriage, and largely excluded husbands from such talks, they reported less marital love and more ineffective marital arguing. Such outcomes are connected to the present study by considering the marital outcomes of wives eliciting support from others outside the marriage. As has been shown, husbands greatly benefit from providing sensitive support to their wives. Not only do they report more marital quality, but also feeling more satisfied with the support they receive from their spouse. Consequently, if wives turn elsewhere for support (which may be related to husbands’ poor support provision), husbands may lose the opportunity to provide sensitive support, which, in turn, would likely affect their own level of support satisfaction and marital quality. It is probable that wives often turn elsewhere when husbands are incapable of, or

choose not to provide such support. Therefore, it seems critical that future research examine ways that husbands provide good support in order to understand how to best help both husbands and wives enjoy the benefits of his support provision.

Conclusions

The results of this study have shed important light upon the way that spouses support one another and the outcomes related to that support. The more sensitive the support provided by husbands, the more that both wives and husbands reported being satisfied with their spouses' support provision. Further, husbands' reported levels of marital quality were highly associated with their own supportive behaviors. Husbands reported more love, more maintenance, and less ambivalence when they were sensitive in their support provision. Moreover, when wives were happy with husbands' support, husbands reported more marital quality. It appears that the way that husbands provided support was the critical component for both their wives' and their own marital outcomes.

In conclusion, support from others has been shown to contribute to individuals' overall well-being, and for married individuals, the spouse is the most important support provider (Dakof & Taylor, 1990). This study examined how the personal characteristic of perspective taking, and the stressor of having young children affected spouses' ability to provide good support. Overall, the results of the study point to the importance of husbands' support provision to both husband and wife marital outcomes. The implications of these findings suggest that researchers devote more time to understanding husbands' support provision, as well as factors related to husbands providing good spousal support.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Tables

Table 1.

Intercorrelations for Original Support Task Study Variables for Husbands and Wives (n=57)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Wife Pos. Affect	-	.46*	.09	.05	-.11	.11	.05	.72*	.13
2. Husband Pos. Affect	.43*	-	.07	.12	-.00	.14	.14	.65*	.12
3. Wife Neg. Affect	.02	.10	-	.61	-.02	.32*	-.36*	.14	.79*
4. Husband Neg. Affect	.19	.12	.28*	-	-.31	.22	-.17	.22†	.81*
5. Engagement	.18	.11	.13	.15	-	.09	.11	-.11	-.21
6. Balance/Reciprocity	.16	.14	.17	.54*	.34*	-	-.01	.16	.32*
7. Sensitivity/Support	.18	.23	-.40*	-.09	.09	.21	-	.12	-.26*
8. Fun/Enjoyment	.70*	.59*	-.08	.20	.24	.22	.35*	-	.21
9. Irritation	.11	.10	.55*	.69*	.02	.43*	-.18	-.02	-

Wife support provision task is shown above the diagonal and husband support provision task is shown below the diagonal.

*p < .05 †p < .10

Table 2.

Descriptive Statistics for Observational Variables

Measures	Husbands' Support Provision			Wives' Support Provision		
	M	SD	Skewness	Range	SD	Skewness
Positivity	3.18	.99	.19	1.0 – 6.0	1.18	.54
Negativity	1.44	.69	2.42	1.0 – 4.3	.69	2.89
Engagement	5.86	1.11	-.70	3.0 – 7.0	1.31	-1.00
Balance	3.83	1.22	.45	1.5 – 7.0	1.17	.12
Sensitivity*	4.37	1.45	.17	1.0 – 7.0	1.32	.04

Paired t-tests were conducted between husbands' and wives' scores for all measures. Asterisk indicates significant differences between husband and wife.

*p < .05

Table 3.
Descriptive Statistics for self-report variables

Measures	Wives					Husbands				
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	Skewness	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	Skewness		
Support Satisfaction	3.36	.41	2.4 – 4.0	-.03	3.33	.37	2.6 – 4.0	.02		
Marital Quality										
Love*	7.74	.85	5.3 – 9.0	-.98	7.45	.93	5.2 – 9.0	-.67		
Conflict	3.89	1.27	1.6 – 6.4	-.05	3.69	1.27	1.4 – 6.8	.24		
Ambivalence*	2.05	1.18	1.0 – 5.4	1.43	2.49	1.22	1.0 – 5.8	.86		
Maintenance	5.90	1.17	3.6 – 8.2	-.32	5.83	1.12	3.0 – 8.0	-.28		
Perspective Taking*	3.74	.50	2.4 – 4.8	.03	3.56	.58	2.4 – 4.8	-.04		

Paired t-tests were conducted between husbands' and wives' scores for all measures. Asterisk indicates significant differences between husband and wife.

* $p < .05$

Table 4.

Intercorrelations for Study Variables for Husbands and Wives (n=57)

Variables	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.
1. H Sup. Prov. Positivity	-												
2. H Sup. Prov. Negativity	.09	-											
3. H Sup. Prov. Engage	.21	.15	-										
4. H Sup. Prov. Balance	.21	.43*	.34*	-									
5. H Sup. Prov. Sensitivity	.31*	-.30*	.09	.21	-								
6. W Sup. Prov. Positivity	.53*	-.01	.13	.13	.20	-							
7. W Sup. Prov. Negativity	.04	.38*	.11	.33*	-.11	.17	-						
8. W Sup. Prov. Engage	-.04	-.05	.46*	.10	.14	-.09	-.18	-					
9. W Sup. Prov. Balance	.02	.15	-.11	.10	.00	.16	.32*	.09					
10. W Sup. Prov. Sensitivity	.09	-.03	-.08	.12	.28*	.18	-.30*	.11					
11. W Support Satisfaction	-.04	-.31*	.02	-.17	.34*	-.02	-.13	.17					
12. H Support Satisfaction	-.10	-.41*	.08	-.06	.55*	-.06	-.01	.09					
13. W Love	.19	-.20	.19	-.11	.26†	.17	-.21	.16					
14. H Love	-.01	-.17	.13	-.25†	.20	-.08	.12	.15					
15. W Conflict	-.13	.21	-.18	.09	-.22	-.17	.09	.09					
16. H Conflict	-.16	.15	.12	.16	-.32*	-.10	-.07	-.14					
17. W Ambivalence	-.15	.03	-.03	.16	-.14	-.19	.00	-.07					
18. H Ambivalence	.01	.28*	-.00	.21	-.39*	-.02	-.05	-.19					
19. W Maintenance	-.04	-.05	-.04	.06	.09	-.18	-.18	.21					
20. H Maintenance	-.14	.09	.41*	.10	.16	-.07	.18	.09					
21. W Perspective Taking	.04	-.27*	.05	-.19	.30	.04	-.04	.05					
22. H Perspective Taking	.00	-.01	.26†	-.03	.41*	.09	.13	.16					

*p < .05 †p < .10

Table 4.

Continued

Variables	14.	15.	16.	17.	18.	19.	20.	21.	22.
14. H Love	-								
15. W Conflict	-.35*	-							
16. H Conflict	-.50*	.38*	-						
17. W Ambivalence	-.49*	.43*	.47*	-					
18. H Ambivalence	-.69*	.38*	.63*	.43*	-				
19. W Maintenance	-.06	.20	-.04	-.15	.07	-			
20. H Maintenance	.19	.14	.38*	.15	-.03	-.05	-		
21. W Perspective Taking	.41*	-.58*	-.41*	-.44*	-.44*	.12	-.07	-	
22. H Perspective Taking	.51*	-.32	-.41*	-.52*	-.43*	-.13	.27*	.46*	-

*p < .05 †p < .10

Table 5.

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Wives' Support Satisfaction (n = 57)

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Constant	3.21	.33		3.11	.46	
H Sup. Provision Positivity	-.53	.06	-.13	-.04	.07	-.09
H Sup. Provision Negativity	-.06	.09	-.10	-.06	.10	-.11
H Sup. Provision Engagement	.04	.05	.09	.00	.06	.01
H Sup. Provision Balance	-.07	.05	-.22	-.07	.06	-.21
H Sup. Provision Sensitivity	.11	.04	.39*	.11	.05	.39
W Sup. Provision Positivity				-.01	.01	-.02
W Sup. Provision Negativity				.01	.10	.02
W Sup. Provision Engagement				.05	.05	.16
W Sup. Provision Balance				.01	.05	.04
W Sup. Provision Sensitivity				-.03	.05	-.09
<i>R</i> ²		.21*			.24	
<i>F</i> for change in <i>R</i> ²		2.72*			.32	

**p* < .05

Table 6.
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Husbands' Support Satisfaction (n = 57)

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	B
Constant	3.16	.38		3.00	.34	
W Sup. Provision Positivity	-.02	.04	-.06	-.03	.04	-.09
W Sup. Provision Negativity	.05	.08	.10	.13	.07	.24†
W Sup. Provision Engagement	.01	.04	.04	-.03	.04	-.11
W Sup. Provision Balance	-.03	.05	-.11	-.02	.04	-.07
W Sup. Provision Sensitivity	.05	.04	.18	.03	.03	.12
H Sup. Provision Positivity				-.09	.05	-.24†
H Sup. Provision Negativity				-.13	.07	-.25†
H Sup. Provision Engagement				.06	.04	.19
H Sup. Provision Balance				-.05	.04	-.16
H Sup. Provision Sensitivity				.15	.03	.59*
R^2		.04			.42*	
F for change in R^2		2.72			8.19*	

†p < .10 *p < .05

Table 7.

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Wives' Ambivalence ($n = 57$)

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Constant	2.95	1.03		2.70	1.41		5.18	2.27	
H Sup. Provision Positivity	-.16	.18	-.14	-.05	.21	-.04	-.04	.19	-.03
H Sup. Provision Negativity	-.27	.29	-.16	-.34	.31	-.20	-.34	.28	-.20
H Sup. Provision Engagement	-.08	.15	-.08	-.04	.19	-.03	-.08	.17	-.08
H Sup. Provision Balance	.33	.17	.34	.33	.18	.34	.27	.16	.27
H Sup. Provision Sensitivity	-.19	.13	-.26	-.24	.14	-.29	-.19	.16	-.23
W Sup. Provision Positivity				-.21	.17	-.21	-.20	.15	-.20
W Sup. Provision Negativity				.10	.30	.06	.03	.28	.02
W Sup. Provision Engagement				-.04	.16	-.04	.08	.15	.08
W Sup. Provision Balance				-.07	.16	-.07	-.03	.14	-.03
W Sup. Provision Sensitivity				.19	.14	.21	.13	.13	.14
W Support Satisfaction							-1.60	.42	-.55*
H Support Satisfaction							.82	.59	.25
R^2		.10			.17			.38*	
F for change in R^2		1.56			.68			7.33*	

† $p < .10$ * $p < .05$

Table 8.

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Husbands' Love ($n = 57$)

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Constant	7.03	.97		6.31	.99		2.95	1.70	
W Sup. Provision Positivity	-.06	.11	-.08	-.12	.12	-.16	-.11	.11	-.14
W Sup. Provision Negativity	.09	.21	.07	.28	.21	.27	.23	.21	.18
W Sup. Provision Engagement	.06	.11	.08	-.04	.11	-.05	-.05	.11	-.07
W Sup. Provision Balance	.11	.12	.15	.15	.11	.19	.15	.10	.19
W Sup. Provision Sensitivity	-.06	.10	-.09	-.05	.10	-.07	-.04	.10	-.05
H Sup. Provision Positivity				.01	.15	.02	.08	.14	.08
H Sup. Provision Negativity				.01	.21	.00	.09	.21	.07
H Sup. Provision Engagement				.24	.13	.29†	.21	.13	.25
H Sup. Provision Balance				-.37	.12	-.49*	-.29	.12	-.39*
H Sup. Provision Sensitivity				.23	.10	.37*	.09	.12	.14
H Support Satisfaction							.42	.45	.17
W Support Satisfaction							.67	.31	.30*
R^2		.05			.30†			.40*	
F for change in R^2		.55			3.20*			3.64*	

† $p < .10$ * $p < .05$

Table 9.

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Husbands' Conflict (n = 57)

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Constant	4.53	1.35		4.30	1.40		8.49	2.43	
W Sup. Provision Positivity	-.13	.16	-.12	-.04	.17	-.04	-.05	.16	-.05
W Sup. Provision Negativity	-.08	.29	-.04	-.37	.30	-.21	-.32	.30	-.18
W Sup. Provision Engagement	-.09	.15	-.09	-.18	.16	-.18	-.15	.16	-.15
W Sup. Provision Balance	-.03	.16	-.03	.02	.15	.02	.02	.15	.02
W Sup. Provision Sensitivity	.05	.15	.06	.13	.14	.14	.11	.14	.11
H Sup. Provision Positivity				-.19	.21	-.15	-.26	.20	-.20
H Sup. Provision Negativity				-.11	.30	-.06	-.21	.30	-.11
H Sup. Provision Engagement				.24	.19	.29	.27	.18	.24
H Sup. Provision Balance				.33	.17	.32	.24	.17	.23
H Sup. Provision Sensitivity				-.37	.14	-.42	-.19	.17	-.22
H Support Satisfaction							-.40	.64	-.12
W Support Satisfaction							-.95	.45	-.31*
R^2		.03			.27			.36*	
F for change in R^2		.28			2.90*			3.14†	

†p < .10 *p < .05

Table 10.

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Husbands' Ambivalence ($n = 57$)

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Constant	3.06	1.28		3.19	1.26		8.21	2.08	
W Sup. Provision Positivity	-.05	.15	-.05	-.03	.15	-.03	-.05	.14	-.05
W Sup. Provision Negativity	-.03	.26	-.02	-.31	.27	-.18	-.23	.25	-.14
W Sup. Provision Engagement	-.10	.14	-.10	-.05	.15	-.05	-.02	.14	-.02
W Sup. Provision Balance	-.05	.15	-.05	-.05	.14	-.05	-.05	.13	-.05
W Sup. Provision Sensitivity	.07	.14	.08	.13	.13	.15	.11	.12	.12
H Sup. Provision Positivity				.11	.19	.09	.02	.18	.02
H Sup. Provision Negativity				.04	.27	.02	-.09	.26	-.05
H Sup. Provision Engagement				-.06	.17	-.05	-.01	.16	-.01
H Sup. Provision Balance				.38	.16	.39*	.27	.15	.27†
H Sup. Provision Sensitivity				-.45	.13	-.55*	-.24	.15	-.29
H Support Satisfaction							-.58	.55	-.18
W Support Satisfaction							-1.03	.38	-.36*
R^2		.02			.33*			.47*	
<i>F</i> for change in R^2		.22			4.16*			5.61*	

† $p < .10$ * $p < .05$

Table 11.

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Husbands' Maintenance (n = 57)

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β
Constant	4.66	1.18		3.22	1.18		2.16	2.14	
W Sup. Provision Positivity	-.11	.14	-.11	-.04	.14	-.04	-.03	.14	-.03
W Sup. Provision Negativity	.52	.25	.32	.33	.25	.21	.26	.26	.16
W Sup. Provision Engagement	.13	.13	.14	-.16	.14	-.18	-.12	.14	-.13
W Sup. Provision Balance	-.15	.14	-.15	-.06	.13	-.06	-.04	.13	-.04
W Sup. Provision Sensitivity	.12	.13	.14	.11	.12	.13	.09	.12	.10
H Sup. Provision Positivity				-.38	.17	-.33*	-.34	.18	-.29
H Sup. Provision Negativity				.28	.26	.18	.34	.26	.21
H Sup. Provision Engagement				.58	.16	.57*	.54	.16	.53
H Sup. Provision Balance				-.21	.15	-.22	-.19	.15	-.20
H Sup. Provision Sensitivity				.25	.12	.33*	.18	.15	.23
H Support Satisfaction							.68	.55	.22
W Support Satisfaction							-.33	.40	-.12
R^2		.09			.36*			.39*	
F for change in R^2		1.02			3.79*			.85	

*p < .05

Table 12.

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Wives' Support Satisfaction (n = 57)

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Constant	2.31	.32		2.69	.40	
H Perspective Taking	.29	.09	.41*	.24	.11	.33*
H Sup. Provision Positivity				-.03	.06	-.06
H Sup. Provision Negativity				-.12	.09	-.20
H Sup. Provision Engagement				-.01	.05	-.02
H Sup. Provision Balance				-.03	.06	-.10
H Sup. Provision Sensitivity				.05	.05	.19
R^2		.17*			.28	
<i>F</i> for change in R^2		10.83*			1.57	

* $p < .05$

Appendix B

Coding

1. Sensitivity/Support

Sensitivity refers to listening to the partner, perceiving and interpreting feelings and signals accurately, and responding appropriately. Consider the frequency, latency, and the appropriateness of response to the spouse. This code is more focused on the behaviors of the listener, but keep in mind it is still a dyadic code. At the highest point, quick, warm and sensitive responses are characteristic, but don't require personal expense. At the lowest point, coldness, rejection and ignoring are typical. Sensitivity/support needs to go beyond listening, as all couples are instructed to listen to one another – try to consider what optimal responding is.

1. Very minimal: There is little regard or consideration for the other. Expressed desires or comments of the other get no response, or a very delayed or a negative response, which may create distress. If one seems to enjoy creating distress in the other, score 1.

2. Low: One sees occasional but rare positive responding. More often than not, they seem oblivious to each other's needs and comments, though they may very occasionally respond to very obvious signals in a neutral or occasionally inconsiderate or defensive manner.

3. Moderately low: Responsivity is generally low. Many comments go unheeded but very clear signs of distress or need would likely receive some response. Responses may be neutral, or appropriate but delayed. There is some "coolness" here.

4. Moderate: This spouse shows moderate responsivity and support. Comments and needs are responded to fairly often, sometimes neutrally and sometimes sensitively. There is nothing blatantly insensitive; however the spouse is not particularly sensitive either.

5. Moderately high: In the context of generally high responsivity and sensitivity, these partners show brief occasions of insensitive disregard. When called for, sensitivity is more likely than not but is not a given.

6. High: This spouse lacks the consistency or harmony of 7. They may be characteristically sensitive and responsive but lack fine-tuning. There may be infrequent and minor but noticeable lapses in responding or offering support.

7. Very high: This spouse is characteristically responsive, sensitive, and supportive. Each spouse is responsive and attentive to the desires and actions of the other, especially to

dissatisfaction and distress. Needs and comments are responded to quickly and appropriately, but not at one's own personal expense.

2. Engagement/Interpersonal Involvement

Engagement taps interpersonal involvement and the persistence of partner-directed behaviors. Engagement can be positive or negative. Joint task involvement is not required to rate the extent of social involvement although it is assumed that the task will be completed. At the highest point, one or both partners are characteristically engaged and show visual regard, initiations of conversations, conversations, and learning in, etc.. At the lowest point, both spouses must show minimal partner-related behavior. For example, spouses may show no visual regard or interest in the other partner. Highly engaged pairs may show positive camaraderie or negative conflict. Look at the initiations, maintenance attempts and visual regard of the more expressive partner. Engagement is not a negative or positive evaluation of the couple – instead, focus on the connectedness of the interaction. Further, when coding engagement, due to the nature of our task, start from a 7 (as opposed to building from a 1) and then couples will go down the scale from there.

1. Very Low: This dyad is characterized by indifference, ignoring, flat affect, and very minimal engagement. One partner may withdraw completely from the task. Interest is not directed toward the other as a social partner. There may be some overtures or brief visual regard, but joint interaction is very minimal and not persistent.

2. Low: Engagement is minimal and characterized by relative indifference and little attention to the other. At least one partner may show occasional visual regard, infrequent initiations and rare re-engagement.

3. Moderately low: Some contact which is matter-of-fact and without much interest. There are repeated signs of engagement by at least one partner. Persistent visual regard, with sporadic engagement attempts and long breaks are most likely. Or the spouses are somewhat engaged for the most part, but have frequent moments when they are actively "not there."

4. Moderate: These spouses are moderately engaged, and fairly persistent at expressing this. At least one partner often looks at the other and/or attempts contact by talking to the other. Contact may be consistently on and off or fairly persistent with a large lull. Or very persistent initiations are discouraged, with no immediate attempt to maintain contact. These spouses appear to be going through the motions of completing the task, although they are engaged.

5. Moderately high: Both partners are fairly engaged although contact and/or watching may be expressed more by one than the other. Brief disengagement may be fairly frequent or a few periods of complete separation may occur. The spouses are social partners, although to a lesser extent than higher scale points.

6. High: Substantial engagement is shown, including both frequent contact and watching, but less so than in 7. Brief periods of disengagement may be evident but are punctuated by occasional visual regard.

7. Very high: The engagement of both partners is very high, including extensive visual regard and talking. There is an eagerness to maintain interaction even when conflict arises. Lulls in active engagement are very brief and infrequent.

3. Balance/Reciprocity

This scale assesses the relative contributions of each partner to the interaction. Included are dimensions such as control, turn-taking, and equity. Our task is inherently imbalanced, so take this into account when coding balance/reciprocity.

1. Very low: This couple's interaction is characterized by the dominance of one partner over the other. Each partner's contribution to the interaction is by no means equal and one partner is likely to control the interaction while rarely considering the other's perspective. One member may be so passive that she/he relinquishes power to the other. The couple appears to be in disequilibrium.

2. Low: Turn-taking is minimal and although there may be attempts to include both spouses in the interaction, it is primarily one-sided.

3. Moderately low: Some turn-taking is present and each partner makes a contribution to the interaction. One partner may control the flow of the interaction, but there are a few attempts to listen to and solicit responses or opinions from the other partner.

4. Moderate: These spouses are fairly consistent in including the other partner, particularly through the solicitation of opinions and response. Control of the interaction may shift periodically but one partner is responsible for the progress of the interaction.

5. Moderately high: Both partners appear to be initiating conversations and responses although the complexity and length of one's responses may be greater than the other. Thus, although one partner appears more dominant, there is sharing of opinions and responses.

6. High: Substantial balance is shown, including smooth turn-taking, sharing of control, and equal contributions to the interaction. Brief periods where one partner dominates the interaction may be present, but the balance is quickly restored.

7. Very high: This couple seems to be in complete synchrony. There is a readiness to share responsibility for the interaction and a willingness to listen to and include the other partner. Turn-taking is smooth and both partners contribute equally to the interaction without dominating.

4. Fun/Enjoyment

This scale assesses the degree to which the dyad demonstrates enjoyment of interaction and joint activity. Spouses who enjoy their interaction but do not show it affectively will not rate highly. Furthermore, positive affect not directed to the other partner is not scored. Ratings focus on tone of interaction (i.e., neutral, enthusiastic), and affective signs (e.g. sighs, indications of boredom, laughing, smiling). Individual laughter is significant but mutual fun/enjoyment merits higher ratings. While the gut reaction is not a perfect measure, the gist is that do you feel like this was a fun interaction? If yes, code towards the high end of the spectrum. If no or if it felt forced or dull, than code towards the low end of the spectrum.

1. Very low: There is no evidence of pleasure. Pair never has fun or enjoys interaction, although there may be joint interaction. There is no enthusiasm in the interaction. Pair does not enjoy their negative interaction. OR positive affect is directed by one partner only and is not in response to the other partner's behavior. No visual regard during expressions of positive affect.

2. Low: Pair may have glimpses of enjoyment, perhaps even brief enjoyment of their negative interaction. Overall the pair is not having fun together and/or is not enthusiastic.

3. Moderately low: There is some positiveness which is not strong or frequently displayed, and may be displayed by only one partner towards the other. Or pair is doing OK together but without real joy or enthusiasm for their shared interactions.

4. Moderate: The pair does not mind being together and may at times enjoy it. It is a pleasant interaction overall for both partners, though not really enjoyable. There are likely to be contingent expressions of affect with little visual regard.

5. Moderately high: Overall pair is satisfied with the session /interaction. They have some enjoyment throughout without particular enthusiasm, or spirit. Mutual calm enjoyment or steady pleasure is evident, perhaps with occasional moments of higher enjoyment.

6. High: Interaction is enthusiastic overall but not as pronounced as in 7. Shared positive affect and enjoyment are frequently evident. The enjoyment is more energetic than a 6, although less intense than a 7.

7. Very high: The pair is very satisfied with the interaction and activity and shows enjoyment in their interaction with some marked exuberance or delight. Mutual smiling

and/or laughter must occur to rate 7. There is consistent visual regard coupled with affective sharing.

5. Irritation/Antagonism:

This scale taps how spouses handle disagreements. In order to code this, the couples need to have a disagreement. Low scale points refer to negative affect engendered by task-related disagreements such as sharing responsibility for task completion, helping, making decisions, etc. High scale points go beyond task-related conflict and reflect personal antagonism, involving dislike and hostility. Look for hurtful comments, derision, scornful criticism and negative voice tone. Because irritation and hostility is often more subtle during the videotaped interaction, irritation should be weighted heavily. (General guide: if the comment is one you would not like to hear -- it's probably antagonistic). Also pay attention to the flow of the interaction – if a comment disrupts the interaction, code it towards the high end of the spectrum.

1. None: No instances of irritation, antagonism, anger or hostility. Interaction is positive or neutral.

2. Very mild: Very brief dissatisfaction, hostility, very mild protest or criticism made in reaction to a task-related action of the other. Joking insults or name-calling that are very short-lived and rare (e.g., "No way," coupled with laughter or smiling).

3. Mild: Infrequent but stronger display of irritation, tension, anger, or negative affect which quickly evaporates or several milder instances of irritation such as rolling eyes, turning away, sighing, facial expressions of displeasure, etc. It must be in reaction to a task-related action of the other, not an unprovoked act intended to hurt the other.

4. Moderate: Conflict is still primarily task-related, but negative reactions are stronger in form. Instances of irritation and/or mild antagonism such as mocking, criticizing, or making negative faces at each other are scattered throughout. The interaction may be mildly but only momentarily altered. Episodes may extend longer than in 3 but are still relatively short-lived. If extensive and/or more frequent, look at higher scale points.

5. Marked: Noticeable personal antagonism is evident, such as non-joking insults, namecalling, squabbling back and forth, repeated mocking, or more negative threats. Squabbling may be verbal or non-verbal (fake hits, throwing pen, etc.). Behaviors are stronger, more negative, more frequent and last longer. Interaction is somewhat disrupted. Several flare-ups may occur against a backdrop of mild negative expression. Or 1 very strong incident may occur in isolation but is intense.

6. Quite marked: Strong irritation, antagonism, and anger extended in time but not as pervasive as in 7. Instances of irritation/ antagonism are personally-directed and go

beyond task conflict (a partner may bring up unrelated areas of disagreement such as dissatisfaction with work, in-laws, etc. and use them against the other partner). Instances will be intense or extended. Interaction is disrupted but not as much as in 7.

7. Very marked: Pervasive or extreme irritation, antagonism, negative tone, anger or hostility that is personally-directed. Instances may be few but highly marked or extended. Irritation/antagonism is the hallmark of the relationship. Interaction is significantly disrupted and/or seems secondary in importance.

6. Individual Positive Affect

This scale assesses the degree to which each partner responds positively towards the other. Unlike the fun/enjoyment scale which considers the overall level experienced by the dyad, this scale looks at the individual's expression of positive affect towards or in response to the other partner's behaviors.. Dimensions include laughing, smiling, vocalizations, and signs of affection (e.g., pats, kisses, etc.). Interest is NOT coded here, rather we are looking for an overall affective state. Two scores are given; one for the wife and one for the husband.

1. Very low: The individual expresses no positive affect towards or in response to the other partner. He/she does not smile or laugh and does not seem to enjoy the interaction.

2. Low: The individual displays minimal positive affect (perhaps 1 brief display). For example, he/she may smile briefly in response to a task related behavior but the affect lacks intensity and frequency.

3. Moderately low: There may be some sign of positive affect, perhaps an occasional smile and laugh, although the individual would not be described as affectively expressive. For the most part however, the individual's attitude towards the other would not be described as positive, but rather as affectively cool.

4. Moderate: The individual expresses low-level enjoyment or positive affect towards the other although these displays are not intense or prolonged. There are frequent and somewhat prolonged lapses in the individual's positive expressions.

5. Moderately high: Frequent displays of positive affect are evident. There are several incidences of laughing, smiling, or pleasure. The individual seems really be enjoying the interaction and appears comfortable expressing enjoyment to the other partner. There are a few brief lulls (rather than lapses) in positive affect.

6. High: Extensive positive affect is shown that is both frequent and intense. The individual is enjoying the interaction and expresses it through frequent laughs, smile, etc. There may be brief periods where no or minimal positive affect is shown, but smiling and laughter quickly resumes.

7. Very high: Positive affect is consistently and continuously demonstrated and is both frequent and intense. The individual is thoroughly enjoying the interaction and laughs and smiles throughout. There are no noticeable delays or lapses in positive affect.

7. Individual Negative Affect

Unlike the irritation/antagonism scale which looks at the couple as a unit, this scale considers the individual's expression of negative affect towards the other. (Note: only code if directed towards the other!) Look for frowning, rolling eyes, anger, averted gazes, etc. Two scores are given; one for the wife and one for the husband. Consider the context of the comments - whether hostile or antagonistic as well as the tone. Also consider how the comment affects the partner.

1. Very low: The individual expresses no negative affect.

2. Low: Negative affect is minimal. There may be one instance of frowning or rolling of the eyes, for example, but it is extremely brief and lacking intensity.

3. Moderately low: One mild expression of negative affect such as a marked frown, or two brief displays that are neither intense or prolonged (e.g., the individual might say, "No, you never help with feeding" while frowning.

4. Moderate: Negative affect is expressed periodically but does not disrupt the flow of the interaction. There may be clear signs such as frowning or angry facial expressions, but they are not particularly intense.

5. Moderately high: Some signs of negative affect are expressed towards the other and they may be mildly intense. For example, there may be frowning, averted gazes, and looks of disapproval. The individual appears displeased but not necessarily hostile. Although more intense than a 4, the negative affect still does not disrupt the interaction.

6. High: Frequent signs of negative affect (e.g. a combination of negative expressions) are displayed towards the other. The individual seems irritated or angry, but the interaction is not as disrupted as in a 7.

7. Very high: Displays of negative affect are extreme. The individual appears markedly angry or sad towards the other. There is intense and frequent frowning, angry facial expressions, etc. that affect the flow of the interaction. The individual's overall tone towards the other is very negative.