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**MARITAL INSTABILITY: THE RELATIONSHIP OF GENDER
ROLE BELIEFS, NEGATIVITY, AND DISTANCING.**

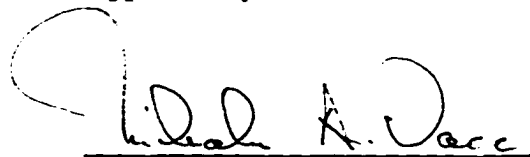
by

Douglas Edward Guilbert

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
the University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements of the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro
1997

Approved by

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nicholas A. Vacc", written over a horizontal line.

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APPROVAL PAGE

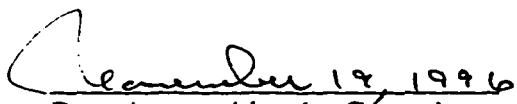
This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.


Dissertation Advisor 

Committee Members 






Date Accepted by the Committee


Date of Final Oral Examination

GUILBERT, DOUGLAS EDWARD, Ph.D., Marital Instability: The Relationship of Gender Role Beliefs, Negativity, Distancing, and Marital Instability. (1997)
Directed by Dr. Nicholas A. Vacc, 112 pp.

The study utilized a structural equation path model to test the validity of the hypothesized existence of an initiator as well as a processes that move a couple from marital stability to marital instability. The structural equation path model was constructed by joining empirically established relationships between gender role beliefs and marital instability, and negative marital interactions, distancing of the couple, and marital instability into a single model. The integrated structural equation path model tested the hypotheses that certain gender role beliefs about the equality or inequality of males and females in the marital relationship initiate more negativity than positivity; that negativity results in distancing or physical and emotional withdrawal of the couple away from each other, and that distancing leads to marital instability.

The research hypotheses were tested through the use of structural equation path models that used longitudinal survey data taken in 1980, 1983, and 1988 from a national sample of 469 white female participants and 294 white male participants. The participants' spouses were not surveyed. The results of the study, although not confirming all hypotheses, suggested that females and males experience marital

instability differently. Over a period of time, females experience marital instability primarily through negativity while males experience marital instability primarily through distancing. Discussed, are the implications for marriage counseling.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Although the divorce rate has been on the increase since 1965, it has remained relatively stable during the last decade (Martin & Bumpass, 1989; Teachman & Paasch, 1993). Current estimates suggest that the percentage of first marriages that end in separation or divorce is between 56% and 62% (Bumpass, 1990; Norton & Miller, 1992). Divorce or separation continues to be a major factor affecting many people's lives with the participants' experiences ranging from devastation to relief (Bumpass, 1990; Diedrick, 1991).

Individuals considering divorce go through a period of marital instability involving various steps as they evaluate and re-evaluate their marriage (O'Brian, 1971; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1977). This instability frequently includes a period of increasing alienation and estrangement between the partners as one or both move toward the decision to end the marriage (Kitson & Morgan, 1990). Divorced persons often report that the period of marital instability is the most distressing part of the divorce process (McLanahan & Booth, 1989; O'Brian, 1971; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1977). This distress, which is influenced by legal, social, psychological, and economic issues, may be accompanied by feelings of anger, disappointment, and hurt magnified by continued arguments with the spouse.

Marital instability negatively affects the mental and physical health of both partners (McLanahan & Booth, 1989). The negative consequences include an increased risk for psychopathology, automobile accidents, serious physical illnesses, suicide, violence, homicide, and mortality from diseases (Gottman, 1993). A nine-year epidemiological prospective study suggested that the best predictor of staying alive or dying, even when controlling for initial health or health habits, is one's marital stability (Beckman & Syme, 1978). Thus, marital instability, which sometimes is a precursor to divorce, has been an important area of study (Amato & Booth, 1995; Booth, 1991; Booth, Johnson, & Edwards, 1983; Booth, Johnson, White, & Edwards, 1985; Bumpass, 1990). However, the predominance of studies concerning marital instability have been correlational studies and have identified populations at risk for, and the consequences of marital instability (Amato, 1993; Bumpass, 1990; Kitson & Holmes, 1992; Kitson & Morgan, 1990; Teachman & Polonko, 1990). These studies show that those who marry young, attain only lower levels of education, or cohabit prior to marriage are at greater risk for marital instability than are others (Booth, Johnson, & Edwards, 1985; Kitson & Holmes, 1992).

While the major risk factors and consequences of marital instability are known, research data on the process that moves a couple from marital stability to marital instability and the ways in which counselors can work more effectively with couples experiencing marital instability are not yet available. For example, the knowledge that those who marry young may be at risk for marital instability does not

offer an operable solution for young married couples who may be proceeding toward marital instability. Further, the suggestion that couples should not marry young is not in itself a means to assist young couples experiencing marital instability. Thus, without greater understanding of factors that affect the process through which couples move from marital stability to marital instability, counselors are less able to work effectively with those experiencing marital instability.

Two factors known to affect marital instability that have been examined independently (i.e., gender role beliefs and negativity and distancing) may provide a better understanding of both the initiation and the progression toward marital instability when they are examined together. A number of studies (Amato & Booth, 1995; Huber & Spitz, 1980; Li & Caldwell, 1987; Lueptow, Guss, & Hyden, 1989; Lye & Biblarz, 1993) have found that certain gender role beliefs held by spouses affect marital instability. However, these studies do not provide adequate information on the transition from marital stability to instability that results from these beliefs. Gottman's work (1993, 1994), which consisted of a culmination of over 30 years of research, resulted in findings that supported the conclusion that certain conflictual marital interactions are apt to produce negativity and result in distancing and marital instability, but he did not identify how negativity was initiated. What is needed is a better understanding of both the initiation and the process that leads a couple toward marital instability.

Because substantial empirical data exists that suggests that both gender role beliefs and negativity and distancing lead to marital instability, it may be that gender

role beliefs initiate negativity (i.e., if A leads to C and B leads to C, then A and B may be related). If it can be shown that gender role beliefs affect negativity, a model will have been developed that identifies both an initiator as well as a process, (i.e., gender role beliefs initiate the process of negativity, negativity initiates distancing, and distancing results in marital instability). Examining the relationships between gender role beliefs, negativity, distancing, and marital instability and developing and testing such a model is the focus of this study.

Marital Instability

In this study, marital instability denotes a couple's propensity to dissolve an existing marriage even though dissolution may not be the final outcome (Booth et al., 1983). Depending on the strength of barriers and alternatives to divorce, marital instability may not lead to divorce; some marriages can remain unstable for long periods of time (Cole, 1985). An appropriate and more accurate definition of marital instability adopts the lay usage of the word "unstable" to mean "shaky" (Booth, Johnson, & White, 1984). Marital instability may be viewed as the negative pole of a continuum where stability is at the positive pole (Booth et al., 1984). Just as there are forces holding a stable marriage together, there are forces pulling an unstable marriage apart. Marital instability is operationalized in terms of specific behaviors related to an individual's feelings and thoughts about his or her propensity to remain in or to dissolve a marriage. Behaviors such as either the husband or wife seriously suggesting a divorce or talking to a family member or close friends about a divorce are indicative of marital instability.

Gender Role Beliefs

Gender role beliefs pertain to individual attitudes about the degree of equality of spouses regarding various aspects of their relationship and the maintenance of their home (Beere, Daniel, Beere, & King, 1984). The spectrum of gender role beliefs are bounded by traditional and nontraditional or egalitarian beliefs. Traditional gender role beliefs stress the conviction that there should be a dichotomy between the roles of husband as the “breadwinner” and the wife as “homemaker” along with the differential power in the relationships implied in these roles. Nontraditional or egalitarian gender role beliefs stress the expectation of equality between men and woman at home and in the work place and imply more equal power within the marital relationship. Gender role beliefs, such as the belief that a wife’s most important task is child care, reflect more traditional gender role beliefs. Alternately, the belief that the husband should share equally in house work when the wife works outside the home reflects more egalitarian gender role beliefs.

Negativity

Negativity pertains to the extent to which a couple accumulates negative feelings about a marriage as a result of negative interactions (Gottman, 1993). Gottman suggested that married couples attempt to maintain “positivity” in their relationship, but certain conflictual behaviors and resulting interactions are predictive of more negativity than positivity, and these result in more damage to the relationship than do other conflictual behaviors and interactions. Specific behavioral interactions which Gottman (1993, 1994) found to accumulate and produce more negativity were

criticism or complaints, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling (i.e., a tendency to withdraw from further conflict). Gottman noted that these behaviors are interactive and can escalate. As an example, the spouse who is criticized becomes defensive and if criticism continues, it may evoke contempt and lead to stonewalling and distancing. Accordingly, disagreements or conflictual interactions that have criticism or complaint as a central issue may lead to more negativity than positivity and to distancing by one or both partners in the marital relationship.

Distancing

Distancing is the emotional and sometimes physical withdrawal of a couple away from each other (Gottman, 1993, 1994). Gottman (1993) reported that distancing was a product of negativity in a couple's interactions. Although it begins with stonewalling, distancing is separate from negativity and includes the additional steps of "flooding" (a feeling that problems must be worked out alone), recasting the whole marriage in negative terms, loneliness, and isolation. Flooding results in one or both spouses feeling so overwhelmed by the other spouse's negativity and his or her own reaction to it that "system overload" is experienced. Under these conditions, constructive discussion becomes impossible. Flooding is at the center of distancing and may be marked by a reciprocal inability to predict a partner's affect or behavior. Behaviors by one or both spouses that reflect a decrease in shared activities (e.g., eating their main meal separately) are indicative of distancing.

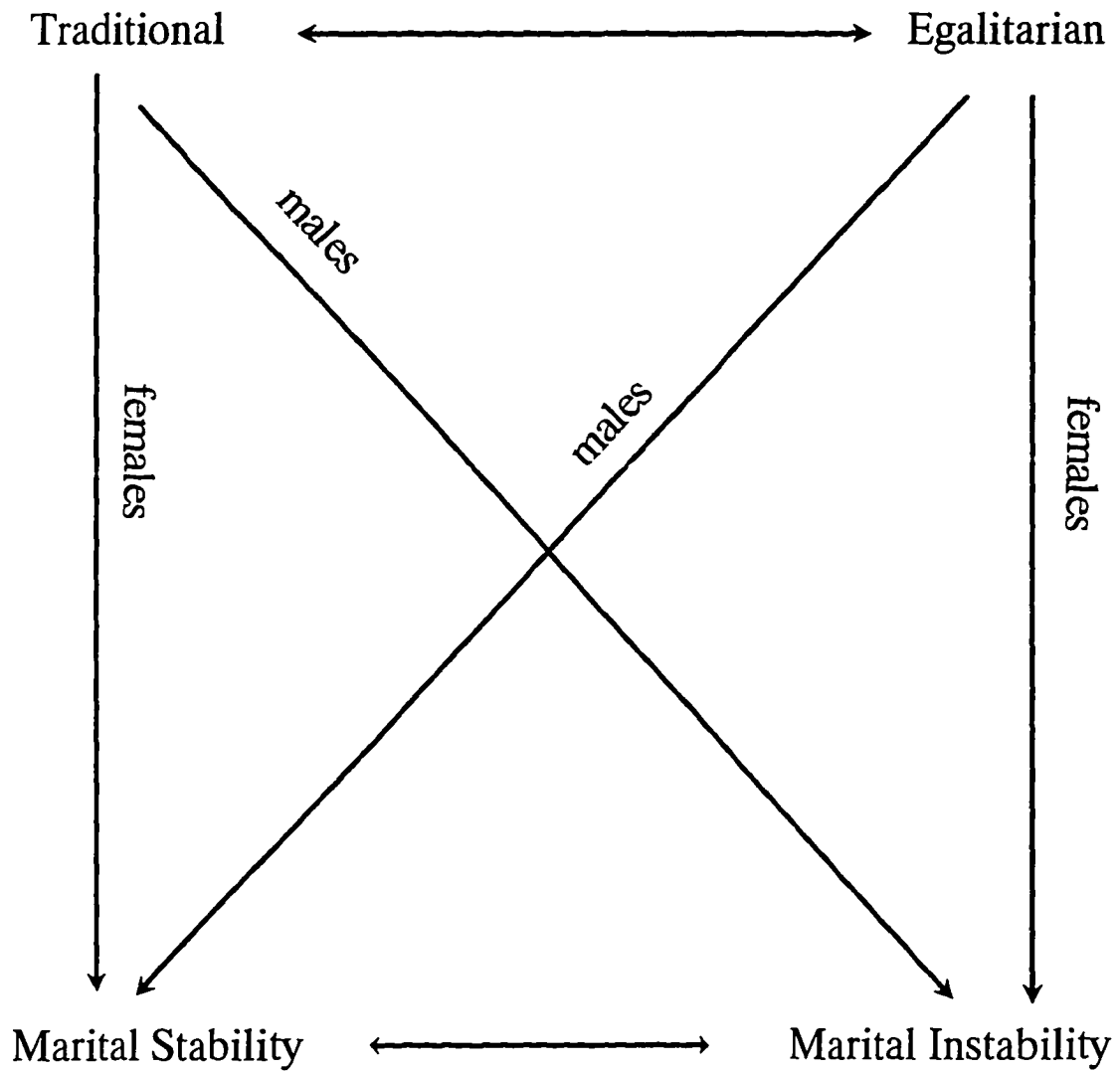
The Relationship of Gender Role Beliefs, Negativity, and Distancing to Marital Stability

Gender Role Beliefs and Marital Stability

A number of studies have examined the relationship between gender role beliefs and marital stability (Amato & Booth, 1995; Huber & Spitz, 1980; Li & Caldwell, 1987; Lueptow et al., 1989; Lye & Biblarz, 1993). These efforts support the notion that gender role beliefs are an important determinant of the level of marital stability (see Figure 1). Research examining gender role beliefs as they relate to levels of marital stability have generally found that marriages in which women hold more egalitarian views than those of their husband, or, in which men hold more traditional views than their wife's are less stable than marriages in which men hold more egalitarian views than their wives or wives hold more traditional views than their husbands (Agarwal & Srivastava, 1989; Alain & Lussier, 1988; Amato & Booth, 1995; Antill, 1983; Baucom, Notarius, Burnett, & Haefner, 1989; Li & Caldwell, 1987; Lye & Biblarz, 1993).

Although there has been a significant transformation in gender role beliefs for both men and women over the past 40 years, women have undergone more change than have men (Amato & Booth, 1995, Huber & Spitz, 1980; Li & Caldwell, 1987; Lye & Biblarz, 1993; Thornton, 1989). During this time, gender beliefs have become more egalitarian for both men and women, but with women moving more toward egalitarianism than men (Thornton, 1989). This difference in gender role

Figure 1. The Relationship Among Egalitarian and Traditional Gender Role Beliefs and Marital Instability.



beliefs between men and women may be more evident in marriages because for many women, awareness of inequities in traditional gender role beliefs occurs in that context (Amato & Booth, 1995; Gottman, 1993, 1994). Women become aware of these inequities when entering the labor force or with exposure to feminist ideas (Smith, 1985; Thornton, Arland, Duane, & Camburn, 1983). Because men are more traditional in their gender role beliefs than are women, it is likely that a woman with egalitarian gender role beliefs will marry a man with more traditional views than herself, and, therefore, may experience the inequities that can result in conflict due to the differences in gender role beliefs. The woman who holds more egalitarian gender role beliefs may have a difficult time continually yielding power to a more traditional male spouse. Alternately, a woman holding more traditional gender role beliefs may feel more comfortable in the relationship if she has less power, and, thus, may experience less conflict or greater marital stability.

Negativity and Distancing and Marital Instability

The processes of negativity and distancing is a step-wise process that commences with a couple's inability to resolve conflict. If unable to resolve conflict and maintain more positivity in the relationship than negativity, the couple moves from negativity to distancing, and then to marital instability. Gottman (1993, 1994), who viewed marriage as an ecological system consisting of negativity and positivity, argued that what must be regulated in a marriage is the balance between positivity and negativity. Gottman suggested that the couple who is able to resolve conflict and maintain positivity in their relationship is able to maintain balance. The couple who

is unable to resolve conflict and whose conflict results in more negativity than positivity, is said to be out of equilibrium.

Cascade process. According to Gottman (1993, 1994), unbalanced couples, or those who are out of equilibrium, become trapped in relationships characterized by negativity and distancing. Gottman (1993) suggested that the cascade of negativity consists of the following in order of least to most dangerous interaction: complaint/criticism, defense, contempt, and stonewalling. The cascade of distancing consists of flooding, feeling that talking things over with your spouse is useless, leading parallel lives, and feeling lonely.

Negativity cascade. With the negativity cascade, the difference between complaint and criticism is significant. The husband who complains because his wife has bought a new dress is addressing her behavior. However, if the husband tells his wife that she always does things like that or that she never thinks of anyone but herself, then he is attacking her personally or criticizing her. Gottman (1993, 1994) found that the four steps within the negativity cascade were interactive and additive. The spouse who criticizes his wife is likely to receive criticism, and the spouse who defends and becomes contemptuous is likely to express contempt. Ultimately, both spouses are involved in criticism, defensiveness, and contempt, and finally they stop responding to each other in helpful ways and move to stonewalling, the last behavior in the negativity cascade. However, it is only after the couple is entrenched in their negativity that they begin their descent through the final distancing and isolation cascade to marital instability.

Distancing cascade. Negativity becomes unmanageable when flooding begins. When flooded, individuals feel that they want the conversation to stop, to run away, or to strike back. Also, they may feel that the argument has come up “out of the blue,” or was unanticipated. The person who is flooded strives for some escape or relief by distancing (Gottman, 1994). Chronic flooding, unlike infrequent flooding, may be attended by a major shift in how one thinks about his or her spouse; a spouse may begin to react with dread to everything the partner says or may become immersed in his or her own distress-maintaining thoughts. If flooding continues, the results to the marriage are disastrous.

When flooded, one sees the marital problems as impossible to fix. This is the first step in the distancing cascade and is accompanied by a feeling that the marriage can no longer be salvaged by talking with one’s spouse. At this point, one may attempt to look for solutions alone in order to avoid certain kinds of interactions, or one may attempt to control his or her responses to heretofore bothersome jibes or criticisms. Next, the marriage may be treated more as a business arrangement than a marriage and, although the couple lives together, they connect seldom. Although officially still married, they become isolated and experience loneliness.

Thus, according to Gottman (1993), marital instability is a process that begins with conflictual interactions and an attendant inability to maintain positivity, moves through both negativity and distancing behaviors, and can terminate with divorce. Gottman’s model of negativity and distancing suggests that couples who eventually divorce may remain unhappily married for a period of time, seriously consider

divorce, and then actually separate and divorce, thereby indicating that marital instability can be of significantly long and painful duration.

Integrating Gender Role Beliefs, Negativity, Distancing,
and Marital Instability

A model is needed which integrates gender role beliefs, negativity, distancing, and marital instability, and identifies both the initiation and the process of marital instability. The integration of gender role beliefs, negativity, distancing, and marital instability is based on the assumption that the conflicts that result from certain gender role beliefs held by husbands and wives lead to the complaints that initiate negativity. Complaints as a source of conflictual interactions arising from certain gender role beliefs have been suggested by Kitson and Holmes (1992). They found that persons struggling with their marriages most often cited complaints as reasons for marital difficulties, and that the highest frequency of complaints involved gender role beliefs. Findings from their five-year longitudinal study, indicated that men were significantly more apt to complain about conflict over household roles, and women were more apt to complain about lack of authority within the relationship. Men's complaints about household roles may represent the response of the more traditional male to the desires from the more egalitarian wife for a more conforming distribution of labor. Alternately, women's complaints about their lack of authority may be the response of a more egalitarian woman to a power-wielding traditional man. Thus, there is a basis for the proposition that complaints resulting from conflictual interactions brought

about by certain gender role beliefs are among the same complaints that initiate negativity.

The Importance of the Study

The high divorce rate among Americans and its consequences for both partners make marital instability a relevant topic of study for professional counselors.

Although much is known about the correlates and consequences of divorce, less is known about its initiation or the process that moves a couple from marital stability to marital instability. Without knowledge of the initiation or the processes that lead to marital instability, counselors are less able to effectively work with couples who are experiencing marital instability. Needed, is a model that identifies both the initiation of and the process that leads to marital instability. The way in which gender role beliefs translate into negativity, distancing, and marital instability is central to such a model.

If it is found that specific gender role beliefs initiate the process of negativity and distancing and lead to marital instability, then counselors working with couples who are contemplating marriage or experiencing marital instability will have the benefit of understanding a fuller spectrum of precursors and processes that lead to marital instability. As a consequence, counselors will be in a better position to prepare couples for marriage and to assist married couples who are having relationship difficulties.

Purpose of the Study

The primary goal of this study is to develop and test a model that offers a more comprehensive view of the initiation of and the processes that lead a couple from marital stability to instability than has previously been accomplished. Confirmation that certain gender role beliefs initiate negativity and distancing, and that negativity and distancing are processes that lead to marital instability will significantly enhance counselors' understanding of the initiation of marital instability and the processes that move a couple from marital stability to marital instability. This greater understanding will allow counselors to more effectively address the symptoms arising from the process events. A secondary goal of this study is to assess the conceptualized model over a period of time. Because it has been suggested that marital instability evolves over a period of time (Amato & Booth, 1995; Gottman, 1993, 1994), one would expect that negativity and distancing also evolve over a period of time.

Need for the Study

The relationship between gender role beliefs and levels of marital stability has been well established. Similarly, the relationship among negativity, distancing, and marital stability, as formulated by Gottman (1993), has been shown to exist. What has not been determined is whether negativity and distancing are initiated by gender role beliefs and, therefore, affect the relationship between gender role beliefs and marital instability. Understanding that certain gender role beliefs can lead to

negativity, distancing, and marital instability would be important in providing couples with information about the possible consequences of their beliefs.

While risks for and consequences of marital instability have been identified, there is less understanding of the processes of marital instability. Understanding that certain gender role beliefs may lead to negativity, distancing, and marital instability would be of value to professional counselors who work with those who are experiencing marital instability. Levels of negativity and distancing might be used to approximate marital instability. A counselor who has knowledge that a couple is in the process of distancing could suggest a course of action that would be quite different from that suggested for a couple experiencing negativity.

What is needed in order to assist couples who face marital instability is the identification of risks and warning symptoms, and an understanding of the process of marital instability. Knowledge that certain gender role beliefs may interact negatively and initiate negativity and distancing as precursors to marital instability can provide information that is helpful in averting and addressing the processes of marital instability.

Statement of the Problem

This study has two goals: to examine the validity of the empirically established relationship between gender role beliefs and marital instability, and negativity, distancing, and marital instability, and to determine the validity of the posited integrated model which suggests that certain gender role beliefs lead to

negativity, distancing, and marital instability. Specifically, this study will answer the following research questions:

1. Do married males who hold egalitarian gender role beliefs have higher levels of marital stability than males who have traditional gender role beliefs?
2. Do married females who hold egalitarian gender role beliefs have lower levels of marital stability than married females who have traditional gender role beliefs?
3. To what degree do gender role beliefs relate to levels of negativity for both males and females?
4. To what degree do levels of negativity relate to levels of distancing for both males and females?
5. To what degree do levels of distancing relate to marital stability for both males and females?

Definition of Terms

This research includes a number of variables that necessitate definition in order to ensure clarity. They are defined in the following paragraphs.

Gender role beliefs pertain to beliefs about the equality or inequality of a husband and wife regarding various aspects of their relationship to each other and to the maintenance of their home (Beere et al., 1984).

Negativity is a measure of the extent to which a couple accumulates negative feelings about a marriage as a result of the accumulation of negative interactions

(Gottman, 1993). It refers to the degree of criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and withdrawal about and from the marriage (Gottman, 1993).

Distancing describes the emotional and sometimes physical withdrawal of the couple away from each other (Gottman, 1993, 1994).

Marital stability is a measure of an intact couple's propensity to dissolve an existing marriage even though dissolution may not be the final outcome (Booth, et al., 1983; Lye & Biblarz, 1993; Booth et al., 1985).

Summary and Overview of the Remaining Chapters

The percentage of marriages that end in divorce is between 56% and 62% (Bumpass, 1990; Norton & Miller, 1992). While divorce has been characterized as a highly disruptive life event, divorced persons often report that marital instability, the period of time preceding divorce, is the most distressing part of the divorce process. Research examining marital instability has been unsuccessful in identifying either the initiators or the processes of marital instability. Until more is known about the processes that leads to marital instability, professional counselors are limited in working effectively with those experiencing marital instability.

This study examines a new relationship between gender role beliefs, negativity, distancing, and marital instability which, if confirmed, will assist in the understanding of the process of marital instability. The established relationships between gender role beliefs and marital instability and between Gottman's negativity and distancing cascades and marital instability are joined to create a conceptual model

that speculates that gender role beliefs initiate the negativity and distancing lead to marital instability.

The study is presented in five chapters to include an introduction to the problem, a review of the relevant literature, and an explanation of the methodology employed in the investigation, the results of the study, and a discussion of the results. Chapter one established the rationale and merits of the study. Chapter two presents a review of related literature and discusses the relationships posited in chapter one. Chapter three discusses the methodology used in the study and provides information about the longitudinal data base, a description of the subjects, and the data analysis to be employed. Chapter four presents the results of the study, and chapter five includes a discussion of the findings and direction for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter II discusses gender role beliefs, negativity, distancing, and marital instability. Also, the chapter includes a discussion of the relationships between gender role beliefs and marital stability, between negativity, distancing, and marital instability, and between gender role beliefs and negativity and distancing.

Gender Role Beliefs

Gender role beliefs pertain to the degree of equality of spouses regarding various aspects of their relationship and the maintenance of their home (Beere et al., 1984). They range from egalitarian to traditional gender role beliefs. The degree of egalitarianism or traditionality is defined by the strength of individual beliefs with regard to the equity in roles that husbands and wives should adopt within the marital domain. Agreement with roles suggesting more equality are considered to reflect more egalitarian views, while agreement with roles stressing more inequality are considered to be more traditional.

A Historical Prospective

Traditional gender role beliefs have stressed gender inequality between men and women and have been defined by occupation and by parenthood (Hicks & Platt, 1970). Gender has tended to define an individual's status in this society (Hare-Mustin, 1988). Traditional gender role beliefs stress the distinction between the

husband as breadwinner and the wife as homemaker and the difference in power relations suggested by the dichotomy (Hare-Mustin, 1988). Nontraditional or egalitarian gender role beliefs stress equality between men and women at home and in the work place and imply more equal power within the marital relationship.

Traditional gender beliefs are the product of the separation of work and family that occurred with the industrial revolution (Pleck, 1987). Following the industrial revolution, there was a shift from the agricultural society in which men and women worked at home, or the “little factory” (Bernard, 1981). Men’s work moved from the home to factories and became equated with paid labor. Thus, men became providers of the family needs (Lipman-Blumen, 1984). Wives remained at home and took care of the children and household matters; women’s work came to be viewed as non-paid child care and homemaking. The separation of work and family resulted in the traditional gender beliefs epitomized by separate and unequal spheres for men and women (Bernard, 1981).

The reconstruction of the 1960’s, the feminist movement of the three decades beginning in the 1950’s, and the economic downturn of the 1970’s brought into question the traditional separation of work and family (LaRosa, 1992; Losh-Hesselbart, 1988). The counter culture of the 1960’s assaulted the establishment and with it the roles of men and women; it de-emphasized gender differences and men’s traditional provider role. Early feminists lauded the benefits of gender conciliation, and psychologists, who had previously supported gender differentiation, began promoting a healthy, non-gendered lifestyle (Stearns, 1990). The separation initiated

by the industrial revolution that served to embed maleness and femaleness within the separate spheres of work and family began to close (Hare-Mustin, 1988). Women entering the paid labor market, and competing with men, challenged the traditional societal definitions of femininity and masculinity and the traditional view that gender roles within marriage around gender were both beneficial and inevitable (Lipman-Blumen, 1984). Women began examining the traditional domains of work and family as well as other institutions and attempted to obtain a more complete and critical understanding of the ways in which these institutions affected their lives. The examination of women's relative positions in work and family resulted in women becoming significantly more egalitarian in their gender role beliefs (Hare-Mustin, 1988; Thornton, 1989; Thornton et al., 1983).

Notwithstanding feminist energy, commitment, and progress toward a more egalitarian society, many of today's males received early socialization that has resulted in traditional gender role beliefs (Levant, et al., 1992; Nelson, 1993). Men continue to be raised to be aggressive and to compete through childhood and adult games (Chodorow, 1989). From the beginning school years through high school and college, boys receive injunctions to excel, be number one, play the game (Crites & Fitzgerald, 1978), and search for glory (Roe, 1956). These injunctions foster self reliance, aggression, and a hierarchical frame of reference regarding other men and women. These characteristics remain stable in contemporary males (Crites & Fitzgerald, 1978; Ganong & Coleman, 1992; Levant, Hirsh, Celentano, Cozza, Hill, MacEachern, Marty, & Schnedeker, 1992).

Contemporary Gender Role Beliefs

Using data from an 18-year longitudinal study of women, Thornton et al. (1983) found a trend toward more egalitarian conceptions of women's roles throughout the last three decades. Although there was a flattening of trends in the 1980's, Thornton and associates (1983) discovered that there was a general weakening of the inculcated imperative to maintain separate roles for men and women. Whereas both men and women's gender role beliefs had become more egalitarian, men's gender role beliefs remained more traditional relative to the gender role beliefs of women.

Gender role beliefs are an important determinant of marital instability (Amato & Booth, 1995). In contemporary marriages, perceived equity within the marriage is consequential to the stability of a marriage (Thompson, 1991). Because egalitarian and traditional gender role beliefs are separated by equity, gender role beliefs are a primary pathway of influence on the outcome of marital stability (Benin & Agostinelli, 1988; Blair, 1993; Guelzow, Bird, & Koball, 1991; Sutor, 1991). Equity in marriages is defined as the perception of fairness in marital roles, and it includes both affective and task roles. For wives, marital instability is related to the degree to which her husband accommodates her career (Rachlin 1987). More accommodating husbands result in less marital instability. For a husband, marital stability is related to his ability to adjust to his wife's desire for accommodation. Greater adjustment to the wife's desires results in less marital instability. Thus, the attainment of equity is important to marital stability for women, while the adjustment

to a wife's desire for accommodation is important to marital stability for men (Guelzow et al., 1991).

As wives become less traditional in their gender beliefs, they may perceive that they are disadvantaged or exploited and become less satisfied with their mate. They may desire more decision-making power and press their husbands to do more housework or participate more in child care (Benin & Agostinelli, 1988; Blair, 1993; Guelzow et al., 1991). The more traditional husband may be less satisfied by a more assertive wife and feel threatened (Hochschild, 1989). However, husbands who are more egalitarian may be less threatened and even applaud their wives' endeavors and successes. Whereas the non-supportive behavior exhibited by more traditional husbands may result in conflict and lower levels of marital stability, the supportive behavior exhibited by more egalitarian husbands may actually be rewarded, resulting in decreased levels of conflict and increased marital stability.

Negativity

Marital conflict is at the root of negativity (Gottman, 1993). Utilizing an observational system called the Rapid Couples Interaction Scoring System (RCISS), Gottman charted the accumulated positivity minus the negativity of a couple's conflictual interaction and separated couples into "regulated" and "nonregulated" categories. Regulated couples were those couples whose interactions had more positivity than negativity while the non-regulated couples exhibited more negativity than positivity. Gottman (1993) found that over a period of time the two groups had significantly different trajectories toward marital instability. The nonregulated couples

were more apt to have seriously considered divorce and to be unhappily married for a long period of time. Discriminant analysis of the data accumulated for positive and negative interactions indicated that both contributed to the prediction of marital stability, but the ratio between them was the best overall discriminator of marital stability, i.e., larger ratios predicted increased marital instability.

Gottman (1993) found that some behaviors are more predictive of marital instability than others and that they are different for husbands and wives. For husbands, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling (i.e., withdrawing from further interaction) were predictive of marital instability. For wives, contempt and disgust were most predictive of marital instability. This was substantiated by Ekman and Friesen's Emotion Facial Action Coding System (EMFACS) (1978). They found that of the behaviors that predicted marital instability, wives' expression of contempt and disgust were particularly meaningful. A wife's expressions of disgust correlated 0.51 ($p < .001$) with the time period in which the couple was to separate (Ekman & Friesen, 1978).

Gottman (1993) proposed a structural model that supported a process cascade in which complaint and criticism lead to defensiveness, this, in turn, leads to contempt, and contempt leads to stonewalling. The model suggested that the four behaviors of criticism or complaint, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling were particularly damaging to marital stability.

Gottman (1993) also found that certain behaviors were more characteristic of males and that other behaviors were more characteristic of females. Males were more

reactive to arguments and were more likely to engage in self talk that kept them aggravated, than were females. Males flooded or strived for escape or relief more easily than did females and were less able to soothe themselves (Gottman, 1994). Males' vulnerability to flooding (i.e., feeling overwhelmed) causes them to withdraw from the relationship more quickly than females. If walking away from an argument, a male might say, " I don't have to take this," or "Why can't she just leave it alone?" (Gottman, 1994, p. 72). Similarly, a wife's criticism can lead to the male comment, " When she comes after me like that she might as well be physically hitting me," (Gottman, 1994, p. 73).

The process cascade that moves from complaint and criticism to defensiveness then contempt to stonewalling or withdrawal, usually begins with a wife's complaint or criticism; behavior that is more common in women (Gottman, 1994). When criticized, men may become defensive and may feel flooded or overwhelmed if criticism continues. A husband's withdrawal can be mistaken for rejection of a wife's point of view and may cause her to more aggressively engage her husband in order to continue the discussion. An increase in intensity in her attempts to communicate may be accompanied by what Gottman (1993) termed "kitchen-sinking," or bringing up past and present complaints, mixing them together with contempt and sarcasm. This can lead to contempt on the part of both the husband and wife that, in turn, can lead to a stonewalling on the part of the husband and the wife (Gottman, 1993). Hence, a wife's criticism can lead to a husband's flooding and withdrawal, to a wife's increased attempts to communicate, to a wife's kitchen-sinking, to both a husband's

and wife's defensiveness and contempt, and to the couple's stonewalling. Gottman (1993) viewed a husband's stonewalling as the final and most serious step in the negativity cascade, since it moves a couple into a "withdraw and demand cycle" where a wife's demands for more emotional engagement causes a husband to withdraw even more. This pattern moves a couple from the negativity cascade to the distancing cascade.

Distancing

Distancing may be conceptualized as a consequence of behaviors that lead to marital instability. Just as negativity represents escalating disagreement, distancing represents an escalation in separation. With distancing in a marriage, all efforts aimed at resolution have failed, problems remain unresolved, and the marriage is in serious trouble. The distancing couple is caught in a trough of dissatisfaction, issues mount, and dissatisfaction grows. Gottman (1994) suggested that at the center of this dissatisfaction is flooding. If flooding cannot be stopped, the results for the marriage can be disastrous. Flooding initiates the distancing and isolation cascade.

The distancing cascade is comprised of four stages that couples experience in their withdrawal from the marriage (Gottman, 1994). These are flooding, magnifying the severity of the problems, separating from one's spouse emotionally if not physically, and loneliness. When flooded, one sees the problems as so severe that they are impossible to fix, and is overwhelmed by them. One may think that the problems run deep, or have doubts as to whether it is possible to reconcile differences (Gottman, 1994b). The second stage is marked by the feeling that talking things over

with one's spouse is a waste of time. Here, spouses believe their marriage is troubled, and feel hopeless about being able to salvage it, and begin to end communications. This may be accompanied by thoughts such as "talking things over with my spouse just seems to make things worse," and "I'd rather work out the marital problems by myself." The third stage is marked by the couple living increasingly separate lives; i.e., the couple rarely connects. At this point, the couple may have certain thoughts, such as "Sometimes it seems we are roommates rather than a married couple," and "We seem to do a lot more things separately." The fourth stage, loneliness, is marked by a feeling isolation and a belief that there is little benefit from being married. This may be the most painful stage of distancing because a relationship that is supposed to offer love and companionship presents isolation and loneliness. This stage may include thoughts such as "Marriage is a lot lonelier than I thought it would be," and "I feel very restless and sad even when we are together." Gottman (1994b) suggested that without professional help, the marriage is over for people who reach the fourth stage.

Marital Quality and Instability

Although divorce has been characterized as a highly disruptive life event, the literature examining divorce suggests that marital instability may be more distressing than divorce per se (Gottman, 1993; O'Brian, 1971; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1977). The increasing alienation and estrangement between the partners prior to divorce are influenced by legal, social, psychological, and economic issues and may be accompanied by feelings of anger, disappointment, and hurt magnified by continued

arguments between the spouses. Thus, individuals who eventually divorce may feel relief despite experiencing a major life disruption (Diedrick, 1991).

Marital instability may be a better measure of a couple's angst than the actual act of divorce (Booth & White, 1980; Edwards, Johnson, & Booth, 1987). Studies examining marital instability have shown that it has negative effects on the mental and physical health of both partners. Persons reporting higher levels of marital instability have increased risks for psychopathology, physical illnesses, suicide, violence, homicide, and mortality from diseases (Gottman, 1993). Thus, marital instability may be a more important area of study than divorce, if alleviating the distress associated with divorce is of concern.

Studies exploring precursors to divorce have predominantly utilized measures of marital quality rather than marital stability or instability. In fact, marital quality has been used more or less interchangeably with marital stability (Booth et al., 1983). Although related, they are distinct concepts that refer to different phenomena. The differences and similarities of these two constructs are important considerations both in their application and in understanding the relationships examined in this study.

Marital Quality

Historically important to the construct of marital quality was the emergence in the 1960's of the concept of "companionship marriage." Marriage was conceptualized as a means to meet personal needs rather than a societal responsibility or a social obligation as in the institutional marriage (Hicks & Platt, 1970). In the companionship marriage, the affective and communitive aspects of the marriage are a

couple's satisfaction, adjustment, and happiness, all of which are included in the construct of marital quality (Booth et al., 1983).

Marital quality is strongly influenced by the communicative aspects of the marriage (Booth et al., 1983) and represents a continuous and cumulative evaluation of the marriage in terms of an individual's satisfaction, adjustment, and happiness with the marriage (Johnson, White, Edwards, & Booth, 1986). Cole (1985) noted that marital quality may be viewed as a continuum upon which married partners place the results of their subjective evaluations of their marriage at a given point in time. Confirming this notion, Goodwin (1992) found that the single item from the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (Spanier, 1976), "All things considered, how happy are you in your marriage," correlated highly with the total scores on the entire scale. This item, while assessing only a single attitudinal variable, was found to be useful in providing a thumbnail sketch of the quality of a marital relationship.

Marital quality has been measured utilizing all or some of the subscales within the DAS (Glenn, 1990). The four subscales assess the degree to which a couple agrees on matters important to the relationship (consensus), the degree to which a partner is satisfied with the relationship (satisfaction), the degree to which the couple engages in activities together (cohesion), and the degree to which a partner is satisfied with the expression of sex and affection in the relationship (affection). Thus, marital quality has been conceptualized as a function of happiness, dyadic consensus, satisfaction, cohesion, and affection reported by individual spouses.

Amato and Booth (1995) assessed “perceived marital quality” somewhat differently than other researchers. They incorporated the dimensions of happiness, amount of time spent together, disagreements, problems, and divorce proneness (marital instability) in assessing marital quality. The use of both marital quality and marital instability as a reflection of marital quality may be problematic: this is a point that will be discussed later in this chapter.

Marital quality has been operationalized with some, all, or combinations of consensus, cohesion, satisfaction, affection, happiness, time spent together, disagreements, problems, and even divorce proneness, although the latter was used in only one study. The most constant use of the variables for assessing marital quality suggests a conceptualization of marital quality that provides a continuous evaluation of the marriage in terms of an individual’s satisfaction, adjustment, and happiness with the marriage (Johnson et al., 1986). In contrast to marital stability, marital quality does not usually reflect either an individual’s or a couple’s feelings, cognitions, or actions about or towards divorce which gained importance as divorce rates rose.

Marital Instability

Marital instability is a measure of a couple’s propensity to dissolve an existing marriage even though divorce may not be the final outcome (Booth et al., 1983). An unstable marriage is a “shaky” marriage (Booth et al., 1984; Gottman, 1990). Booth et al. (1983) conceptualized marital stability in terms of how one feels about his or her marriage, what one might think about doing as a result of one’s feelings, and what has actually been done about the way one feels and thinks. A single cognitive

measure of marital instability that has been used in much of the research: “Has the thought of getting a divorce ever crossed your mind,” (Booth & White, 1980; Campbell, Converse, & Rogers, 1976; Huber & Spitz, 1980)?” In a study conducted by Booth and White (1980), one-fourth to one-third of all married respondents answered “yes” to this question, indicating that the majority of married persons had not contemplated divorce at any time during their marriage (Booth & White, 1980).

Booth et al. (1983) suggested that the single question, “whether the thought of getting a divorce has ever crossed your mind,” was inappropriate. They argued that thinking of divorce at some time may indicate that the marriage has not always been stable, but it does not necessarily mean that one is experiencing marital instability. Marital instability infers a difficult and emotionally draining decision and action process (Lye & Biblarz, 1993).

Booth and White (1980) developed measures to assess marital instability. The scale consisted of 40 cognitive and behavioral items that include a series of thoughts and actions relevant to divorce: (a) thinking about divorce, (b) talking with spouse about getting a job, going to school, trial separation, etc, without ever talking about divorce, (c) talking with friends and/or family about the possibility of divorce, (d) meeting with clergy or professional counselors about the possible termination of the marriage, (e) consulting an attorney, (e) physically separating from spouse, and (f) going to court. These items denote affective and cognitive states and related actions that are precursors to terminating a relationship even though divorce may not occur.

The Relationship Between Marital Quality and Marital Stability

Marital quality and marital stability are highly correlated (Lewis & Spanier, 1979). Generally, higher quality marriages are more stable. This correlation was supported by Booth et al. (1984) who found, in a study of 1,364 married persons, that the strongest predictor for divorce occurs in couples who perceived their marriage as being low in quality. Individuals who reported their marriages as “pretty good” or “not to good” were more likely to be considering divorce than were couples who reported that their marriages were “very good.”

Although marital quality and marital stability are highly correlated, they are distinctly different constructs (Glenn, 1990). Over a period of time, marital quality and marital stability assume varying relationships to each other. The quality of a couple’s marriage follows a U-shaped curve (Olson, 1983). Marital quality is highest immediately following marriage, decreases with the birth of the first child, and then increases again after the children leave the nest (Olson, 1983), although it may never return to its golden beginning quality (White & Booth, 1991).

In contrast to marital quality, couples who remain married experience a continuous increase in marital stability from the early to the later years of marriage. Stability is lowest in the early years and highest in the later years (Booth & White, 1980). Nevertheless, although marital stability increases and the probability of divorce declines with the couple’s age and marital longevity, there is a decrease in marital quality (White & Booth, 1991). Thus, although marital quality and marital stability are highly correlated, the correlation is selective with regard to the longevity

of the marriage. Marital quality and stability are negatively correlated early in a marriage, positively correlated after the children leave the home, and negatively correlated in the later years.

White and Booth (1991) suggested an explanation for the non-linear relationship between marital quality and marital stability. As a result of their longitudinal study of 1,341 married couples, they found that barriers to divorce become higher and alternatives to marriage become lower as individuals become older. Hence, depending on the strength of barriers and absence of alternatives, some couples remain in marriages of low quality for long periods of time (Morgan & Rindfuss, 1984). Cole (1985) found that economic dependence, external pressures applied to keep the marriage intact, longevity of the marriage, and the lack of perceived or real alternatives can serve to keep even a marriage of low quality intact. Alternately, economic independence and the absence of children may facilitate consideration of the termination of a marriage of higher quality (Booth & White, 1980). Using longitudinal data from a panel of married, white, urban couples from 16 areas, Udry (1981) observed that the presence or absence of marital alternatives appeared to be a better predictor of marital disruption than was marital quality. Thus, the level of marital quality necessary to produce divorce generally depends on the barriers and alternatives at all stages of life (White & Booth, 1991). Also, the threshold of deterioration of marital quality necessary to prompt marital instability increases with growing barriers and reduced alternatives.

Marital Quality and Marital Stability in the Current Study

Both marital quality and marital stability have been used in studies examining marital instability (Aida & Falbo, 1991; Amato & Booth, 1995; Antill, 1983; Baucom et al., 1989; Booth et al., 1983; Booth, Johnson, White, & Edwards, 1992; Li & Caldwell, 1987; Lye & Biblarz, 1993). Logically, marital quality and marital instability intervene in the thoughts of ending a bad marriage. However, measures of marital quality are subject to short-term fluctuations, whereas measures of marital instability are more stable and are better predictors of an individual's propensity to divorce (Glenn & Weaver, 1978). Things do not always go well even in "good" marriages, and it may not be unusual for marital partners to believe that their marriage is of poor quality from time to time. Even if marital quality remains relatively low, the presence of barriers and the lack of alternatives may force the partners to negotiate an acceptable relationship (Booth et. al., 1985). Individuals who experience marital instability, however, are involved in investigating or negotiating a means to terminate the marriage even though termination may not occur.

Of concern to this researcher is the use of the composite measures of marital quality and marital instability as the dependent variable in the relationship between gender role beliefs and marital quality (Amato & Booth, 1995). Over the lifespan, marital quality and marital instability follow different patterns. Early in a marriage, marital quality generally is high but marital stability is low. In the mid-years and before the children leave the home, marital quality generally decreases while marital stability generally increases. After the children leave the home, marital quality and

marital stability generally increase, but marital quality does not return to the same level as during the early years of marriage. In contrast, marital stability continues to increase after the children leave the home (Glenn & Weaver, 1978). Consequently, the composite of both marital quality and marital stability as measures of the quality or stability of a marriage may provide results that tend to cancel each other out in the early, middle, and late periods of a marriage, and may, therefore, provide an inaccurate picture of the quality or stability of a marriage.

The Relationship of Gender Role Beliefs and Marital Instability

Both gender role identity and gender role beliefs have been used in studies relating gender to marital instability. However, because gender role identity and gender role beliefs refer to very different constructs, but have sometimes been used interchangeably, research results have been confounded. Gender role identity refers to the degree to which a person identifies with societal rather than personal definitions of masculinity and femininity (Basow, 1992), whereas gender role beliefs refer to the beliefs about the quality or inequality of husbands and wives regarding various aspects of their relationship to each other and to the maintenance of their home (Beere et al., 1984). Studies relating gender role identity to marital stability have found that when partners in a marriage pose greater levels of femininity than masculinity they experience more marital stability than when they possess more masculinity than femininity (Alain & Lussier, 1988; Agarwal & Srivastava, 1989; Antill, 1983; Baucom et al., 1989; Juni & Grimm, 1994). The literature examining relationships between gender role beliefs and marital instability, however, suggests that marital

relationships in which a wife holds more egalitarian than traditional gender role beliefs will experience higher levels of marital instability (Amato, 1993; Levant et al., 1992; Lye & Biblarz, 1993). Thus, if femininity and egalitarianism are viewed as synonymous, there is a contradiction in research results (i.e., for women, femininity is associated with marital stability, but egalitarianism is associated with marital instability). Gender role identities are not synonymous with egalitarianism and gender role beliefs are distinctly different from gender role identity in their prediction of marital instability.

Gender Role Identity and Marital Instability

The construct of gender role identity has been operationalized utilizing both short and long forms of the Sex Role Inventory (SRI) (Bem, 1974). The masculine scale of the instrument measures masculinity by the degree of agreement with statements such as “defends own beliefs,” “Is assertive,” “Has a strong personality,” and “makes decisions easily.” The feminine scale measures femininity by the degree of agreement with terms such as, “cheerful,” “affectionate,” “Loyal,” and “sensitive to the needs of others.” According to the SRI, individuals who defend their own beliefs, are assertive, and have a strong personality, are considered to be more masculine than those who are cheerful, affectionate, or loyal. More masculine gender role identities correlate with more marital instability, and more feminine gender role identity correlates with more marital stability (Agarwal & Srivastava, 1989; Alain & Lussier, 1988; Antill, 1983; Baucom et al., 1989; Juni & Grimm, 1994). These results suggest that individuals who defend their own beliefs, are assertive, have

strong personalities, and make decisions easily, are more difficult to get along with than individuals who are cheerful, affectionate, loyal, and sensitive to the needs of others. This suggests that rather than personal gender beliefs being at the root of marital instability, it is the degree to which spouses possess the characteristic traits that society assigns to masculinity and femininity; i.e., assertive, strong willed, and opinionated people are not as successful in marriage as are cheerful, affectionate, and loyal people.

Gender Role Beliefs and Marital Instability

Gender role beliefs are a more representative indicator of a couple's propensity for marital instability than are gender role identities. Studies confirm the importance of individual gender role beliefs as well as the interaction of those beliefs to the instability of a marriage (Amato & Booth, 1995; Gottman, 1993, 1994; Huber & Spitz, 1980; Li & Caldwell, 1987; Lueptow et al., 1989; Lye & Biblarz, 1993). These studies have found that the likelihood of marital instability increases when wives are more egalitarian than their husbands, and decreases when husbands are more egalitarian than their wives.

Utilizing a 1978 national random sample, Huber and Spitz (1980) examined the gender role beliefs of individuals who were thinking about divorce. Six hundred and eighty married couples were surveyed by telephone. The main dependent variable was the response to the question, "Has the thought of getting a divorce from your husband/wife ever crossed your mind?" The main independent variable of gender role beliefs was measured by agreement or disagreement with two statements:

“A married woman should be able to have a job even if it is not always convenient for her family.” and “By nature, women are happiest when they are making a home and caring for children.” The study concluded that as wives gain work experience and become more egalitarian in their housework attitudes, thoughts of divorce increase. Similarly, husbands’ thoughts of divorce increase with their wife’s work experience and as their wife’s egalitarian housework attitudes increase.

Li and Caldwell (1987) concluded that gender role beliefs and a couple’s congruence and incongruence in gender role beliefs are important to marital instability. The study utilized 73 white married couples who were between the ages of 26 and 33 years, were from mixed professional backgrounds, and lived within a moderately sized midwestern university community. Because an important hypothesis of this study concerned the congruence or incongruence of a partner’s gender role beliefs relative to those of his or her partner, efforts were made to recruit from sources that would yield spouses with varying egalitarian and traditional orientations. Gender role beliefs were operationalized via the Sex-Role Egalitarianism Scale (SRE), and the measure of marital stability was obtained by utilizing the Spanier (1976) Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAD) through the use of the overall adjustment score which has been shown to discriminate between distressed and nondistressed couples (Margolin & Wampold, 1981). Results of the study supported the hypothesis that the relationship between gender role beliefs and measures of marital instability are a function of both the magnitude and the direction of the spouses’ gender role beliefs. The greater the incongruence of a wife being more egalitarian than her

husband, the greater the probability of marital instability. In contrast, the more egalitarian a husband relative to a wife, the lower the probability of marital instability.

Lueptow et al. (1989) examined two hypothesis: married women with traditional gender role beliefs will experience lower levels of marital instability than women with more egalitarian gender role beliefs, and divorced or separated women will have more egalitarian gender role beliefs than divorced men or than married women or men. The sample for this study was drawn from a population of white males and females from the a national social survey taken during the eight years between 1978 and 1986. Gender role beliefs were operationalized by the degree of agreement or disagreement with questions involving orientations concerning the suitability of women for president, statements supporting women earning money in business or industry regardless of their husband's income, and agreement or disagreement with traditional women's roles such as a wife's primary job being a homemaker. Marital stability, operationalized by asking the single question, "Taking things all together, how would you describe your marriage?" Regression analysis of the data supported both hypotheses: Women's more egalitarian gender role beliefs are positively related to marital instability, and egalitarian women are over-represented among separated/divorced populations.

Lye and Biblarz (1993) utilized the 1987-1988 National Survey of Families and Households to examine the relationship between the gender role beliefs and family attitudes of husband and wife and indicators of marital stability. Data were collected

from individuals who were not couples. Data were obtained from 1437 male respondents and between 1,480 female respondents. The respondents consisted of currently married men and women aged 60 or under consisting of Whites, Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, single parents, persons with step-children, cohabitating persons, and recently married persons. Bivariate associations between marital stability and family attitudes and gender role beliefs indicated that both male and female respondents who espoused positive attitudes toward nontraditional family behaviors or who disagreed that it is better to marry than to go through life unmarried, had a more favorable view of life outside of marriage, reported having more disagreements, evaluated the overall stability of the marriage as lower, and were more likely to anticipate the ultimate breakup of the marriage. The bivariate association between attitudes towards the household division of labor and measures of marital stability showed the same patterns as other studies under review; when a husband has egalitarian gender role beliefs, marital instability is decreased, but when a wife has egalitarian gender role beliefs, marital instability increases. For both men and women, the frequency of disagreement is influenced by the extent to which partners share similar attitudes toward the division of housework.

Amato and Booth (1995) examined how gender role beliefs were related to reported changes in composites of marital quality and marital stability, utilizing data collected in the Study of Marital Instability Over the Life Course (Booth, Johnson, White, & Edwards, 1992). A national sample of 2,033 married persons were interviewed by telephone in 1980, 1983, and 1988. Their spouses were not

interviewed. Respondents were 55 years of age or younger in 1980. The structural equation model utilized measures of composites of marital quality and marital stability and gender role beliefs. The composite of marital quality and marital stability was operationalized by a measure of marital happiness, marital disagreements, marital problems, and marital instability. The problematic nature of using both marital quality and marital stability in the same variable has already been discussed. Gender role beliefs were assessed using seven questions in which respondents were asked about their agreement with statements regarding men's and women's work and family roles. Findings from this study suggest that when women adopt more egalitarian gender role beliefs, composites of marital quality and marital stability decline, but when men adopt more egalitarian gender role beliefs, the composite measures show increases in marital quality and marital stability. There was no evidence that the composites had a reciprocal effect on gender role beliefs, (i.e., marital quality and marital stability do not affect gender role beliefs even over an eight year period of time).

In summary, a review of the relevant literature concerning the relationship of gender role and marital instability suggests that egalitarian wives are more likely to experience marital instability than are egalitarian husbands. Further, because women are generally more egalitarian than men, the relationship of gender role beliefs and marital instability need not depend on a couple's congruency or incongruency (i.e., it is not necessary to know whether an egalitarian woman is married to a traditional or egalitarian man).

The results of the studies reviewed are as follows. A wife's thoughts of divorce increase with her work experience and egalitarian housework attitudes, and a husband's thoughts of divorce increase with a wife's work experience and a wife's egalitarian housework attitudes (Huber & Spitz, 1980). The more egalitarian a husband relative to his wife, the greater the marital stability, while the less egalitarian a husband relative to his wife, the lower the measure of marital stability (Li & Caldwell, 1987). Nontraditional women are less happy and more likely to be separated or divorced (Lueptow et al., 1989). Both male and females who espouse positive attitudes toward nontraditional family behaviors or who disagree that it is better to marry than to go through life unmarried, report more disagreements, have a less overall evaluation of the stability of the marriage, and are more likely to anticipate the ultimate breakup of the marriage (Lye & Biblarz, 1993). Adoption of egalitarian gender role beliefs by wives results in lower marital stability, whereas adoption of egalitarian gender role beliefs by husbands results in higher measures of marital stability (Amato & Booth, 1995). Overall, the more egalitarian a wife's gender role beliefs the greater the probability that a couple will experience marital instability; however, the more egalitarian husband's gender role beliefs the more disagreement decreases and marital stability increases.

The Relationship Between Negativity and Distancing

The transition from negativity to distancing involves a step-wise, empirically confirmed process that commences with a couple's inability to resolve conflict and ends with reduced marital interaction (Gottman, 1993, 1994; Gottman & Levinson,

1992). However, what moves a couple from negativity to distancing is not clear. Gottman (1993) conceptualized the transition from negativity to distancing as stemming from an individualized negativity threshold that move one from a feeling of well-being to a feeling of non-well-being. He suggested that marital partners have a built-in "meter" that assesses the sum of the negativity in an interaction and determines if the threshold is exceeded. Thus, according to Gottman (1993), when the accumulation of negativity exceeds an individual's threshold, there is an abrupt change in the individual's perception of the interaction from an interaction that supports a sense of well-being to an interaction that constructs a sense of non-well-being. It is the shift from well being to nonwell-being that is the entry point for flooding and the beginning of distancing. Distancing is more likely if the occupation time in the nonwell-being state is long within an interaction and frequent across interactions, and if it is accompanied by chronic or acute psychological arousal (Gottman, 1990).

The Relationship Between Gender Role Beliefs and Negativity

The literature addressing gender role beliefs and marital instability does not identify the process that leads to marital instability. Gottman's (1993, 1994) findings identify specific processes that lead to marital instability, but do not identify what initiates negativity. Needed is a model which integrates the four constructs known to relate to marital instability and identifies both the initiation of and the process by which marital instability increases. The integration of gender role beliefs, negativity, distancing, and marital instability is based on the assumption that the conflicts that

result from certain gender role beliefs held by men and women in marriage lead to the complaints that initiate negativity.

Contemporary Marital Interactions

The “power of the socially shared beliefs that individuals ‘ought to’ or ‘should’ follow particular family patterns has been diminished,” (Thornton, 1989, p. 873) and has significantly affected marital interactions (Huber & Spitz, 1980). Many women no longer believe that they should or ought do most of the housework. A working wife who typically performed most of the daily care of house and children (Greenberger & O’Neil, 1993) may now see these household duties as particularly onerous and in stark contrast to the work required by her career. Women’s economic roles are changing faster than those of men (Thornton, 1989). Women’s entry into the paid labor market is similar to men’s entry during the industrial revolution (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1976, p. 295). More wives can now compare the benefits of family work and paid work, thus increasing the importance and the fairness of dual housework to the levels and fairness of being a dual family provider.

As more women enter the paid labor market, the shift in women’s self-interest necessarily impacts men’s self-interest and, therefore, may increase the importance of perceived equity in matters such as shared household labor. Wives’ thoughts of divorce increase with their work experience and egalitarian housework attitudes, and a husband’s thoughts of divorce increase with a wife’s increase in work experience and egalitarian housework attitudes (Huber & Spitz 1980). As conflictual gender-related communications patterns emerge, thoughts of divorce increase (Baucom et al., 1989).

In these gender-related conflictual interactions, a wife may say, "I can't stand that he's so damn unemotional and expects me to be the same. He lives in his head all the time, and he acts like anything that's emotional isn't worth dealing with," (Rubin, 1976, p. 115). A husband may say, "when she comes after me like that, yapping like that, she might as well be hitting me with a bat No matter what I say it's no good. I try to keep my cool and be logical, but nothing works" (Rubin, 1976, p. 115). As conflict progresses, wives push for engagement, and husbands attempt to withdraw (Finchman & Bradbury, 1988). With inadequate relationship skills the marriage, a wife's attempts to engage and resolve the issue may lead to greater conflict and distress. As husbands withdraw, wives may see their withdrawal as an indication that the problem is even more serious than imagined and press harder. Thus, a husband's withdrawal may be an even greater issue than the problems that initiated the withdrawal. A wife, seeing the problem as severe, attempts to engage and resolve the issue, while the withdrawing husband, attempting to escape from the renewed attack, withdraws further. As engagement and withdrawal escalate, frustration levels increase. Efforts aimed at resolution fail, problems remain unresolved, and the partners begin to identify their marriage as troubled.

Distressed spouses will exchange too few positive behaviors and too many negative behaviors (Gottman, 1993; Jacobson, McDonald, Follette, & Berely, 1985). As positive sentiments toward the marriage decline, partners may engage in a number of negative cognitions to explain the relationship difficulties. Experiencing more negativity than positivity and armed with negative cognition, the distressed couple

experiences a number of negative emotions, particularly anger, anxiety, and depression (Baucom et al., 1989).

Cross-sectional and longitudinal studies of husband and wife interactions have reported similarities as well as differences in the communications behavior of distressed husbands and wives (Baucom et al., 1989). Both husbands and wives in distressed relationships display more disagreement, are more critical of each other, and appear more contemptuous of each other than do couples in non-distressed marriages. In a problem-solving, high-conflict situation, the behavior of distressed wives is more negative than the behavior of distressed husbands. Wives become more negative speakers after becoming more negative listeners, are unlikely to respond positively after receiving a negative message, disagree more, and are more critical of their husbands (Gottman, 1993).

Studies of marital interactions involving relationship difficulties suggest that wives are more likely to express their negative feelings and to be more critical. Wives also are more likely to express both negativity and positivity (Noller, 1984). Husbands, on the other hand, are less responsive (Levinson & Gottman, 1983) and show a general lack of expressivity in the interaction (Balswick, 1986). Husbands and wives differ in their ability to operate within interactions high in negative affect. Husbands are likely to withdraw whereas wives are likely to engage.

Investigating a spouse's ability to "edit out" a negative remark that was perceived to illicit a negative reply, Gottman, Notarius, Gonso, and Markman (1976) found that both distressed husbands and wives and non-distressed husbands were

unable to edit and, therefore, became negative speakers after becoming negative listeners. Conversely, it was found that non-distressed wives could edit out remarks that appeared to illicit negative responses and were less likely to become negative speakers even after becoming negative listeners. Thus, although distressed wives produced more negativity than distressed husbands, non-distressed wives decreased the likelihood of long chains of negative interaction, a finding that is consistent with the notion that “it is a wife’s behavior that discriminates most sharply between distressed and non-distressed couples” (Baucom et al., 1989. p. 155).

Complaint and Criticism: The First Stage of Negativity

Complaints are among the highest ranking issues that marital partners themselves see as the reasons for troubled marriages (Gottman, 1993; Kitson & Holmes, 1992). After coding responses to the question, “what caused your marriage to break up,” Goode (1984) found that the most common complaints among men and women were “personality,” “home life,” “values,” and “authority.” Personality was a complaint when a respondent’s comment reflected the belief that the fundamental problem was one of personality (e.g., “He was emotionally immature.”). Home life reflected lack of interest in home, the children, or the marital partner. Values reflected a value conflict defined as a spouse having a strong interest in the home, but different views from his or her spouse of what was right, good, or beautiful. Authority was defined as wives not being allowed to run things in their own way or to make decisions as they chose.

Kitson and Holmes (1992) developed a second complaint code (Cleveland Code) that included contemporary marital issues and problems and items such as “lack of communication of understanding,” “joint conflict over roles,” “not sure what happened,” and “different background; incompatible.” The most frequently cited complaints according to the Cleveland Code were “lack of communication and understanding” and “joint conflicts over roles.”

Both the Codes (Goode, 1984; Kitson & Holmes, 1992) indicated that the types of complaints made by men and woman are different. Goode (1984) found that women made significantly more complaints than did men and were more likely than men to complain about personality and authority (Kitson & Holmes, 1992), whereas men were more likely to complain about their wife’s extramarital sex and relatives. When responses concerning joint conflict over roles, and internal gender role conflicts were joined, it was found that 34.3 % of men and 26.1% of women made such complaints (Kitson & Holmes, 1992). An illustration of woman’s complaints is as follows:

We owned two stores, and I had to work 7 days a week. I’m a very independent person. He wanted me to cater to him. I couldn’t do the things I wanted to do as a person (Kitson & Holmes, 1992, p. 127).

An illustration of a similar complaint from a man is as follows:

I didn’t want to break up. She never understood the world. She was longing for this freedom. She married too soon without ever being free. I couldn’t impress upon this woman about the need to do

household chores, mind the kids, and so forth. That world out there that she wants is a jungle (Kitson & Holmes, 1992, p. 128).

The high frequency of specific gender-related complaints and the nature of these complaints suggest that marital partners may be struggling with the changing roles of men and women, and that gender role beliefs can and do lead to negativity. A woman's desire for more autonomy and pursuit of personal growth may conflict with the more traditional allocation of roles within the family, thus creating conflict when marital partners are unable to reconcile their differing expectations and desires.

Summary

Although the correlates, major risk factors, and consequences of marital instability are well known, research on the processes that move a couple from marital stability to marital instability are not yet available. Two independently examined factors affecting marital instability (i.e., the relationship between gender role beliefs and marital instability and the relationship between negativity and distancing and marital instability) may provide a better understanding of both the initiation and the processes of marital instability if examined together. Together, the link between gender role beliefs, negativity, distancing, and marital instability may be both an initiator and the process that moves a couple from marital stability to instability. To join these factors together is the assumption that gender role beliefs are the source of negativity. Forming and validating the relationship between these variables is the focus of this study. The current study examines gender role beliefs, negativity, and distancing, and marital instability through a structural equation model. If it can be

substantiated that certain gender role beliefs lead to negativity, distancing, and marital instability, the model will serve to explain the development of marital instability.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents information about the data source, justification for the use of a public data, participants in the study, data collection methods, measurement of the dependent and independent variables, and the statistical procedures used for data analysis.

Research Hypothesis

This study examines the following research hypotheses:

1. Gender role beliefs, negativity, distancing, and marital instability which are each distinct dimensions, will maintain their dimensional structure throughout the longitudinal study period.
2. Females holding gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional will report higher levels of marital instability than will females holding gender role beliefs that are more traditional than egalitarian.
3. Males holding gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional will report lower levels of marital instability than will males holding gender role beliefs that are more traditional than egalitarian.
4. Females holding gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional will report higher levels of negativity than will females who hold gender role beliefs that are more traditional than egalitarian.

5. Males holding gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional will report lower levels of negativity than will males who hold gender role beliefs that are more traditional than egalitarian.
6. Higher reported levels of negativity will result in higher reported levels of distancing and marital instability for both males and females.

Data Source

This study used an existing longitudinal data base, "Marital Instability over the Life Course Study" (Booth et al. 1992). The data, which consist of numerous measures of marital instability, marital problems, marital happiness, marital interactions, and marital disagreements, were collected from a national sample of married persons. The participants were interviewed by telephone in the Fall of 1980, the Fall of 1983, and the Spring of 1988; respondents' spouses were not interviewed.

The selected data source is uniquely suited to the goals of this study. The primary goals of this study were to test the hypothesized relationships between females' and males' egalitarian and traditional gender role beliefs and negativity, and to examine the previously found relationships among male and female gender role beliefs, negativity, distancing, and marital instability over a period of time. Researchers have found that gender role beliefs can lead to marital instability (Lye & Biblarz, 1993), and negativity can lead to distancing and to marital instability (Gottman, 1993, 1994). Demonstrating the existence of this extended relationship between gender role beliefs and negativity required longitudinal data.

Examining the issues pertaining to the goals of this study in a timely manner precluded the collection of longitudinal data and thus required an existing data base. Although the selected data were collected in the last decade, and although it is likely that changes have occurred in the gender role beliefs of males and females since the data were collected (Amato & Booth, 1996), the changes are not expected to adversely effect the relevancy or the value of the results of this study. The focus of this study was on the interaction between gender beliefs of males and females, rather than on societal changes in gender role beliefs held by males and females. In sum, the availability of a longitudinal data source and its unique suitability to the goals of this study made the data base from Booth and Associates (1992) an appropriate choice for examining the research hypotheses of this investigation.

Participants

The subjects for the reported data base of Booth and Associates were selected through a clustered, random-digit dialing procedure in 1980, which resulted in 2,033 participants or 65% of those contacted. All subjects were married and 55 years of age or younger. Also, a sufficient number of young middle, and late middle-age individuals were included to allow for a broad range of analysis. Of the 35% who were not selected as participants in 1980, 18% were refusals and 17% were unable to be reached after 10 or more callbacks. The number of participants in the following interviews included 1,592 or 78% in the Fall of 1983 and 1,341 or 66% in the Spring of 1988. These rates are consistent with other studies that have used random digit dialing (Groves & Kahn, 1979). Included in this study were the 469 females and the

294 males who completed all of the study's survey questions for each of the three assessment periods, (i.e., missing measurement values were deleted list wise).

Survey Interviews

Telephone interviews were conducted from the offices of the Bureau of Sociological Research in Lincoln, Nebraska. Interviewers were required to edit their own interviews before they were reviewed by the field supervisor or one of the Bureau staff. Five percent of each interviewer's calls were verified by a second call to the respondent by the field supervisor. Verified calls determined whether the call was actually made, demographic variables had been correctly recorded, and the interviewer's manner was appropriately value-free and non-judgmental.

Measurement of Gender Role Beliefs, Negativity, Distancing and Marital Instability

Measures of gender role beliefs, negativity, distancing, and marital instability were used to test the hypotheses. The variables were assessed using measures that are consistent with those presented in the literature review.

Gender Role Beliefs

Gender role beliefs were assessed through the use of seven items from Beere et al's Egalitarian Scale (1984). The items which were used for each of the interviews (i.e., 1980, 1983, 1988) are as follows: (1) the wife's most important task is caring for children, (2) the husband should earn higher pay than the wife, (3) the husband shouldn't worry if his wife is gone overnight in connection with job, (4) if jobs are scarce, the wife shouldn't work, (5) working mothers can have just as good a

relationship with kids as can non-working mothers, (6) even if the wife works, the husband should be the breadwinner, and (7) husbands of working wives should share household chores. Participants rated each item using a Likert-type-scale with the following descriptors: 1, strongly agree; 2, agree; 3, disagree; and 4, strongly disagree. All items were coded so that higher scores indicated more egalitarian gender role beliefs. Cronbach's alpha for the females was 0.71, 1980; 0.69, 1983; and 0.71, 1988. Means for 1980, 1983, and 1988 were 2.68 ($SD = 0.46$), 2.79 ($SD = 0.40$), and 2.85 ($SD = 0.43$), respectively. Cronbach's alpha for males was 0.71 for 1980, 0.69 for 1983, and 0.71 for 1988. Means for 1980, 1983, and 1988 were 2.58 ($SD = 0.46$), 2.69 ($SD = 0.44$), and 2.73 ($SD = 0.43$), respectively; ($SD = .43$), respectively.

Negativity

Gottman (1993) conceptualized negativity as the result of conflictual interactions that escalate in frequency and severity and, over time, lead to stonewalling (Gottman, 1993, 1994). He suggested that although married couples attempt to maintain positivity, some couples exhibit more negativity than positivity. As a result, these couples have a significantly greater trajectory towards divorce. Central to negativity are complaint and criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling, all of which lead to related marital problems (Gottman, 1994). In the current study, measures of negativity represented the result or product of negativity (i.e., marital problems) rather than the process of negativity, Gottman (1994b). In this study, nine items were selected for each of the interviews (i.e., 1980, 1983,

1988): (1) disagreements with spouse, (2) serious quarrels in the last two months, (3) marital problems because one gets angry easily, (4) marital problems because one's feelings get hurt easily, (5) marital problems because one is jealous, (6) marital problems because one is domineering, (7) marital problems because one is critical, (8) marital problems because one is moody, and (9) marital problems because one does not talk to the other. Participants rated item 1 using a Likert-type-rule of 1, never; 2, rarely; 3, sometimes; 4, often; and 5, very often. Item 2 required reporting the actual number of serious quarrels. Consistent with previous researchers (Amato & Booth, 1995), participants rated items 3 through 9 using a Likert-type-rule of 1, no; 2, yes, spouse; 3, yes, self; and 4, yes, both. Higher scores for all items indicate greater intensity of marital problems and, therefore, greater negativity. Cronbach's alpha for females was .72 for 1980, .73 for 1983, and .70 for 1988. Means for 1980, 1983, and 1988 were 1.70 (SD = 0.49), 1.69 (SD = 0.51), and 1.67 (SD = 0.49), respectively. Cronbach's alpha for males was .70 for 1980, .75 for 1983, and .76 for 1988. Means for 1980, 1983, and 1988 were 1.64 (SD = 0.47), 1.63 (SD = 0.51), and 1.63 (SD = 0.52), respectively.

Distancing

Distancing is initiated by flooding (i.e., seeing the problems as so severe that they are impossible to fix and overwhelming) and progresses through the decision to attempt to work out problems alone, magnification of the severity of problems, separation from one's spouse emotionally if not physically, and loneliness. The end result is a reduction in the couple's interaction. Measures used in this study to

determine a couple's level of interaction consisted of five items selected from the distancing index scale used by Gottman (1994b). These items, which were asked in interviews (i.e., 1980, 1983, 1988) were as follows: how often couples have main meal together, how often couple goes shopping together, how often couple visits friends together, how often couple works around house together, and how often couples plays cards, see movies, etc., together. Participants rated all items using a Likert-type-scale of 1, almost always; 2, usually; 3, occasionally; and 4, never. Higher scores for all items indicate greater distancing. Cronbach's alpha for females was .64 for 1980, .77 for 1983, and .68 for 1988. Means for 1980, 1983, and 1988 were 1.85 ($SD = 0.58$), 1.96 ($SD = 0.61$), and 2.06 ($SD = 0.61$), respectively. Cronbach's alpha for males was .58 for 1983, .59 for 1983, and .61 for 1988. Means for 1980, 1983, and 1988 were 1.80 ($SD = 0.52$), 1.89 ($SD = 0.54$), and 1.98 ($SD = 0.55$), respectively.

Marital Instability

Measures of marital instability in this study consisted of selected items from the marital instability index scale developed by Booth, Johnson, and Edwards (1983). In this study, eight items were selected for each of the interviews (i.e., 1980, 1983, 1988): (1) how often respondent feels he or she would enjoy living apart, (2) respondent ever thought marriage was in trouble, (3) respondent ever talk to clergy or doctor about marital problems, (4) has spouse talked to others about marital problems, (5) has spouse ever thought marriage in trouble, (6) has respondent thought of divorce or separation in the past three years, (7) has spouse thought of divorce or

separation in the past three years, and (8) has respondent ever had trial separation. Participants rated item 1 using a Likert-type-rule of 1, very often; 2, often; 3, occasionally; and 4, never. Participants rated items 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 using a scale of 1 = yes and 2 = no. Participants rated item 3 using a scale of 0 = yes and 1 = no. All items were coded so that higher values indicate greater marital instability. Cronbach's alpha for females was .84 for 1980, .84 for 1983, and .83 for 1988. Means for 1980, 1983, and 1988 were 1.28 (SD = 0.30), 1.29 (SD = 0.32), and 1.30 (SD = 0.31), respectively. Cronbach's alpha for males was .84 for 1980, .84 for 1983, and .86 for 1988. Means for 1980, 1983, and 1988 were 1.25 (SD = 0.29), 1.26 (SD = 0.30), and 1.28 (SD = 0.31), respectively.

The Measures as Related to Couples

The data for use in this study were collected by interviewing married individuals; respondents' spouses were not interviewed. Responses to all of the survey questions were indicative of the what was occurring between the respondent and his or her spouse with the exception of gender role beliefs. The gender role beliefs examined the roles of a husband and wife in the marital relationship and, therefore, represented individual beliefs. Responses to the survey questions regarding negativity, distancing, and marital instability, represented the participant's perceptions of the level of negativity, distancing, or marital instability within the marital dyad. For example, levels of negativity were determined by asking questions about whether one gets angry easily, or whether one's feeling get hurt easily. The responses were viewed as representative of the respondents' perceptions of themselves and their

spouse. Similarly, questions regarding levels of distancing asked how often the couple has the main meal together, or how often the couple visits friends together. Responses indicated the respondent's perception of the amount of couple interaction rather than the interviewee's level of interaction. Measures of marital instability also applied to a respondent and his or her spouse. For example, one item asked whether the respondent had ever thought the marriage was in trouble, while another items asked the whether the respondent believed his or her spouse had ever thought the marriage was in trouble.

Although participants' spouses were not interviewed and none of the 469 female or 294 male respondents were married to each other, it was assumed that female participant responses are indicative of what would be expected of the male participant spouses' responses if they had participated in the study. Likewise, it was assumed that the male participant responses were indicative of what might be expected of the female spouses' participant responses had they participated in the study. Both the female and male participants represented the same national sample. The analyzed demographic data of female and male participants also suggested the assumed similarities held true. The participants' mean age, their age at first marriage, and education, number of children, and number of times married at the beginning of the study, represent compelling reasons to assume that even though the participants were not married to each other, they were representative of their husbands and wives.

Description of Participants

The demographics of the 469 white female participants in this study indicated that most had high-school educations, had spouses with high-school educations, were two years younger than their husbands, were married at the age of 20 years, and had one child. All remained married throughout the survey period. The survey results also indicated that almost two thirds of these females had either full or part time jobs, a majority did not cohabit prior to marriage, and the weighted average annual average annual family income was approximately \$26,000, although only 67% of the respondents reported annual income. A majority of their husbands worked full time.

The demographics for the 294 male participants indicate a similar distribution as those for the female participants. On average, male participants had slightly higher education than the female respondents (i.e., 14 years compared to 13.2), had spouses with high-school educations, were two years older than the female participants, were married at the age of 22 years, and had one child. All remained married throughout the survey period. Additionally, the analyzed data indicated that of these males, 93% had either full or part time jobs and that their families average annual income of approximately \$23,000 was slightly lower than that reported by the female respondents. Fifty four percent reported that their wives worked outside the home for pay.

Consideration of the (a) mode and mean age at first marriage (which for most participants was their only marriage), (b) participants' age in the first survey period (1980), and (c) eight-year longitudinal assessment period, lead to the general

conclusion that, for most participants the study represents a “snap-shot” of participants between their ninth and twenty-ninth years of marriage. This conclusion is based on a comparison of the range of ages at first marriage, age in 1980, and eight year study period.

Although the data base provides a full range of respondent ages and years of marriage, approximately 70% of the data, as calculated from frequency distribution tables, were reported by respondents who represent the snap-shot of participants described above. Thus, 70% of the respondents were in the beginning and/or ending years of child rearing or were experiencing or had experienced the “empty nest” periods of time during which marital stability should have been increasing (Amato & Booth, 1995; Booth & White, 1990).

The stage of marriage of the subjects studied is considered to be significant because it suggests that whereas structural equation model results will include the interaction of the selected variables in the initiation of the marital instability (i.e., characteristic of the early stages of marriage), they are also reflective of what occurs between the variables in the early-mid to mid-years of marriage or when marital stability should be increasing.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed in two phases. The first phase involved an examination of the data by females and males to determine the measurement model. In the second phase, measures determined by the measurement model were used to

estimate the standardized values for the paths examined by the hypothesized structural equation path model.

The Measurement Model

Measurement models are hypotheses about the relations between observed variables, such as survey items, and the constructs that they were designed to measure. Constructs, such as gender role beliefs, negativity, distancing, and marital instability are latent variables inferred from the self-reported items on survey questionnaires. These constructs, however, are treated as quantitative dimensions even though the dimensions being assessed are not themselves directly observable. Thus, the observable responses (i.e., answers to interview questions) may be thought of as indicators of the latent variables. As such, they lend themselves to factor analyses, a time-honored approach for validating the assumption that a latent variable can be inferred from a set of observed variables (Morris, Bergan, & Fulginiti, 1991). The measurement model concerns the relationship between observed and latent variables that are composites of multiple ratings or interview responses to survey items for each of the constructs of gender role beliefs, negativity, distancing, and marital instability. The measurement model defines the measurement items to be used in the structural equation path model (i.e., gender role beliefs, negativity, distancing, and marital instability) for both females and males for each of the three time periods in the longitudinal survey period. These measurement items were initially assessed through a factor analysis (i.e., maximum likelihood) with direct oblimin rotation.

In the current study, measurement models were developed separately for females and males because the relevant literature concerning the relationships between the variables suggested differences in the interaction of certain variables by gender. Gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional are hypothesized to increase negativity and marital instability when held by females, but decrease negativity and increase marital stability when held by males.

The ending measurement models produced four distinct factors (i.e., one for each variable) for females and males that define the items to be used to measure gender role beliefs, negativity, and distancing over the three assessments (1980, 1983, 1988). The development of the measurement models was an iterative process. Variable items initially chosen to measure gender role beliefs in 1980 were factor analyzed to determine if they loaded on a single factor. If these variable items did not load on a single factor, items which loaded on a second factor were discarded, and the process continued until all the items selected to measure gender role belief for 1980 loaded on a single factor. The 1980 items loading on a single factor were then factor analyzed using 1983 and 1988 data. If these data continued to load on a single factor for the three assessment periods, the items were considered to be stable. The process was repeated for each remaining variable until such time as each variable maintained its structure and dimensions for all three assessment periods. Following completion of this phase, all variable items for each assessment period (1980, 1983, 1988) were factor analyzed together to determine if each variable maintained its factor dimensions and structure throughout each assessment period (i.e., 1980, 1983, and

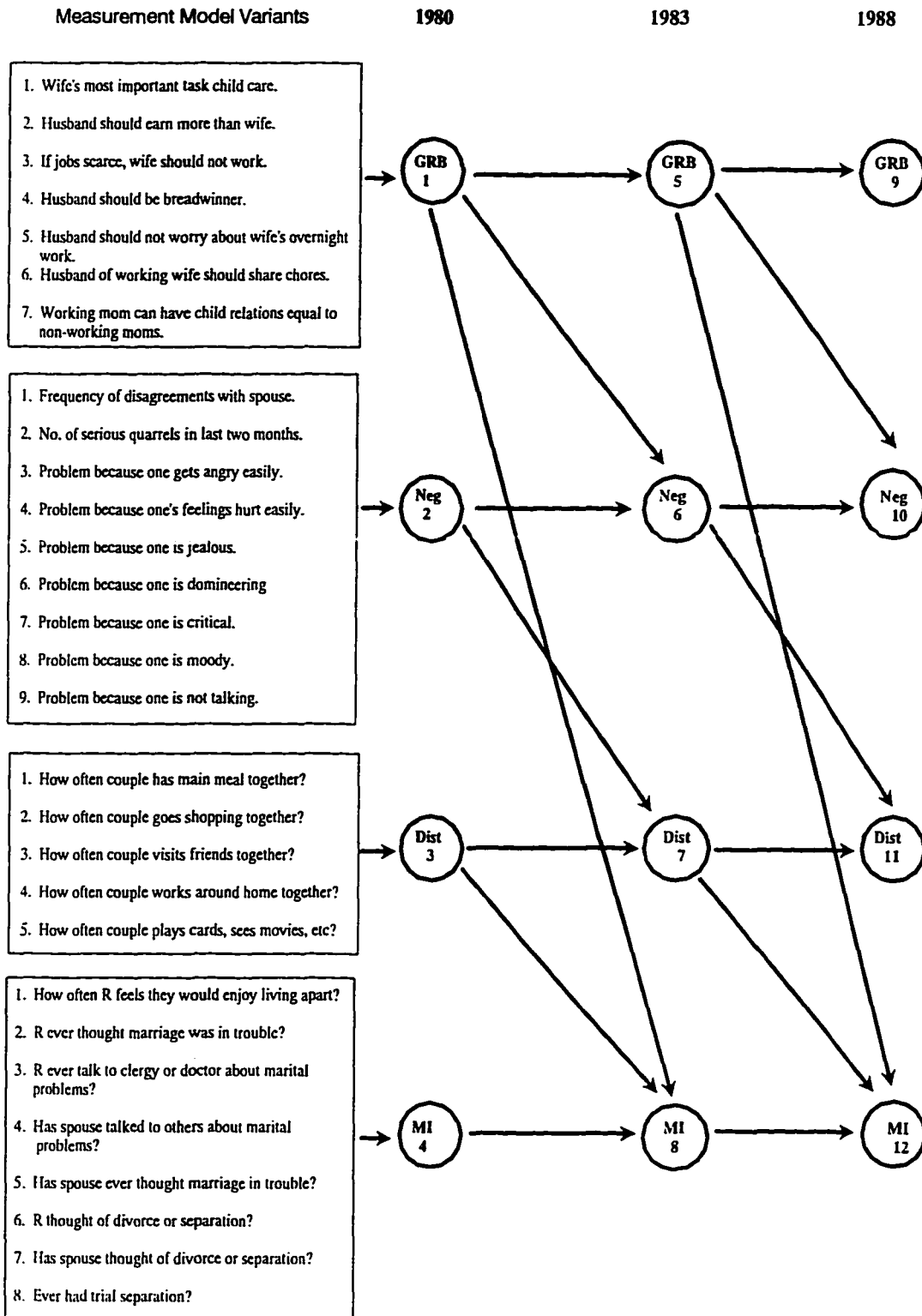
1988). If not, the entire process was reiterated until such time as it yielded a measurement model that provided a distinct factor for each variable that maintained its unique structure and dimension throughout the three assessment periods. The measurement models for females and males were developed in an identical manner, except that the respective models were developed using data from female or male participants only.

The Structural Equation Path Model

The structural equation model used the variable items defined by the measurement model to calculate the standardized estimates for the hypothesized relationships. The structural equation path model (Figure 2) depicts the model tested. The model examined the research hypotheses by (a) measuring the model stability (i.e., how well each variable related to itself over the three assessments) and (b) by examining the hypothesized relationships among the factors representing the four variables of gender role beliefs, negativity, distancing, and marital instability. More specifically, the model's stability was determined by examining paths (1,5), (2,6), (3,7), (4,8), (5,9), (6,10), (7,11), and (8,12). If each variable's relationship to itself for 1980, 1983, and 1988 was significant and consistent, the model was said to be stable (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1988).

The hypothesized relationships among the factors representing the four variables of gender role beliefs, negativity, distancing, and marital instability were examined in combination with the stability model. The paths examining the model stability and the hypothesized relationships among gender role beliefs and negativity,

Figure 2. The Hypothesized Structural Equation Path Model on the Relationship Between Gender Role Beliefs, Negativity, Distancing, and Marital Instability from 1980 to 1983 to 1988.



negativity and distancing, and distancing and marital instability for 1980, 1983, and 1988 were examined simultaneously. Specifically, paths (1,5), (5,9), (2,6), (6,10), (3,7), (7,11), (4,8), and (8,12) were examined for model stability, while examination of the relationships between the variables was made by the paths representing the hypothesized relationships between the variables. These were: marital instability in 1980 and gender role beliefs in 1983 (path 1,8), gender role beliefs at 1980 and negativity in 1983 (path 1,6), negativity and 1980 and distancing in 1983 (path 2,7), distancing in 1980 and marital instability in 1983 (path 3,8), gender role beliefs in 1983 and marital instability in 1988 (5,12), gender role beliefs in 1983 and negativity in 1988 (path 5,10), negativity in 1983 and distancing in 1988 (path 6,11), and distancing in 1983 and marital instability in 1988 (path 7,12).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the analyzed data used to test the hypotheses cited in Chapter 3. The chapter is presented in three sections. Section one reports the descriptive data concerning gender role beliefs, negativity, distancing, and marital instability, section 2 examines the measurement model variants and the structural equation path model. Section three compares the results of the analyzed data to the research hypotheses cited in Chapter 3. The measurement model results and the structural equation path model results are presented separately for females and males.

Descriptive Data Concerning Gender Role Beliefs, Negativity, Distancing, and Marital Instability

Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum values, and Figure 3 displays the 95% confidence interval for each variable by gender. Independent *t*-tests of the variable means indicated that females reported significantly more egalitarian gender role beliefs ($t = 6.6$), more negativity ($t = 3.12$), more distancing ($t = 3.28$), and more marital instability ($t = 2.5$) than did males. The critical value of $.975'_{1051} = 1.96$ was exceeded by all *t* values. In addition, the 95% confidence intervals reported in Figure 3 illustrate that the distributions representing

each variable are sufficiently broad to allow the model to effectively explain the differences among the variables examined.

Table 1

Variable Descriptives for Females and Males

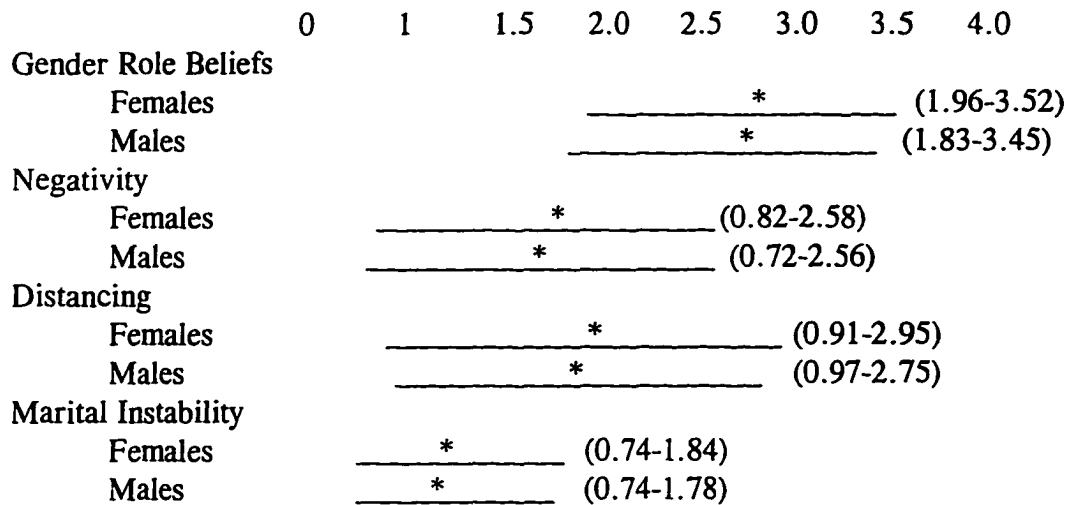
Participant Average	Mean		Standard Deviation		Minimum		Maximum	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Gender Role Beliefs								
2.70	2.74	2.64	.40	.42	1.0	1.2	4.0	4.0
Negativity								
1.68	1.70	1.64	.45	.47	1.0	1.0	3.5	3.1
Distancing								
1.91	1.93	1.86	.52	.46	1.0	1.0	3.8	3.2
Marital Instability								
1.28	1.29	1.26	.28	.27	1.0	1.0	2.2	2.2

A comparison of the arithmetic means for females and males for gender role beliefs, negativity, distancing, and marital instability (Table 2) indicates that, over the eight year period, female and male gender role beliefs became more egalitarian and levels of distancing increased for both females and males, but negativity and marital instability remained constant. Differences were significant at $p < .05$.

Measurement Models

Gender role beliefs, negativity, distancing, and marital instability were examined by gender to determine which items contribute the greatest amount of discrimination for the variables using the measurement model.

Figure 3. Standard Deviation Range Compared to Data Averages for Gender Role Beliefs, Negativity, Distancing, and Marital Instability by Gender.



Note. *female and male participant averages

Table 2

Variable Means for Both Females and Males for Each Assessment Period

	<u>Gender Role Beliefs</u>		<u>Negativity</u>		<u>Distancing</u>		<u>Marital Instability</u>	
	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males
1980	2.68	2.58	1.70	1.64	1.85	1.80	1.28	1.25
1983	2.79	2.69	1.69	1.63	1.96	1.89	1.29	1.26
1988	2.85	2.73	1.67	1.63	2.06	1.98	1.30	1.28

Females

The measurement model identified the following survey items for gender role beliefs: (1) the wife's most important task is caring for children, (2) the husband should earn higher pay than the wife, (3) the husband shouldn't worry if his wife is

gone overnight in connection with job, (5) working mothers can have just as good a relationship with kids as can non-working mothers, (6) even if the wife works, the husband should be the breadwinner, and (7) husbands of working wives should share household chores. Levels of negativity were measured by the following items: (3) marital problems because one gets angry easily, (4) marital problems because one's feelings get hurt easily, (6) marital problems because one is domineering, (7) marital problems because one is critical, (8) marital problems because one is moody, and (9) marital problems because one does not talk to the other. Levels of distancing were measured by participant responses to items: (1) how often couples have main meal together, (2) how often couple goes shopping together, (3) how often couple visits friends together, (4) how often couple works around house together, and (5) how often couples plays cards, see movies, etc., together. Levels of marital instability were measured by participant survey responses to items: (3) has respondent ever talked to clergy or doctor about marital problems, (4) has spouse talked to others about marital problems, (5) has spouse ever thought marriage in trouble, (6) has respondent thought of divorce or separation in the past three years, and (8) has respondent ever had trial separation.

Table 3 shows the 12 factors and the variants extracted for gender role beliefs, negativity, distancing, and marital instability for the 469 white females respondents for the three assessment periods of 1980, 1983, and 1988. Because each factor maintained its identity and uniqueness for each assessment period, the measurement model was accepted (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1988).

Table 3

Extracted Variants for Gender Role Beliefs, Negativity, Distancing, and Marital Instability as Applied to Females

Item Number	1908	1983	1988
Gender Role Beliefs			
Item 1	.51	.42	.48
Item 2	.69	.63	.68
Item 3	.47	.47	.52
Item 5	.51	.54	.50
Item 6	.37	.38	.40
Item 7	.72	.68	.73
Negativity			
Item 3	.62	.69	.64
Item 4	.60	.53	.61
Item 6	.43	.43	.35
Item 7	.44	.56	.50
Item 8	.58	.54	.54
Item 9	.44	.37	.39
Distancing			
Item 1	.47	.44	.44
Item 2	.41	.47	.46
Item 3	.68	.65	.70
Item 4	.45	.43	.53
Item 5	.54	.61	.56
Marital Instability			
Item 3	.74	.70	.68
Item 4	.70	.66	.68
Item 5	.68	.72	.71
Item 6	.61	.82	.60
Item 8	.50	.50	.44

Cronbach's alpha for gender role beliefs was .72 for 1980, .70 for 1983, and .72 for 1988. In order, means for 1980, 1983, and 1988 were 2.68 ($SD = 0.46$),

2.79 ($SD = 0.40$), and 2.85 ($SD = 0.43$), respectively. For negativity, the Cronbach's alpha was .70 for 1980, .71 for 1983, and .68 for 1988. In order, means for 1980, 1983, and 1988 were 1.70 ($SD = 0.49$), 1.69 ($SD = 0.51$), and 1.67 ($SD = 0.49$), respectively. Cronbach's alpha for distancing was .64 for 1980, .66 for 1983, and .68 for 1988. In order, means for 1980, 1983, and 1988 were 1.85 ($SD = 0.58$), 1.96 ($SD = 0.61$), and 2.06 ($SD = 0.61$), respectively. Cronbach's alpha for marital instability was .78 for 1980, .78 for 1983, and .75 for 1988. In order, means for 1980, 1983, and 1988 were 1.28 ($SD = 0.30$), 1.29, ($SD = 0.32$), and 1.30 ($SD = 0.31$), respectively.

Males

Item groupings identified for males by the measurement model were as follows: items 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 for gender role beliefs, items 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9 for negativity, items 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 for distancing, and items 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8 for marital instability. The model for males is substantially the same as for the female model, but the model did not remain stable unless item (7), working moms can have child relations equal to non-working moms, used for gender role beliefs was omitted. Table 4 shows the 12 factors and the variants extracted for gender role beliefs, negativity, distancing, and marital instability for the 294 male participants for the three assessment periods of 1980, 1983, and 1988. For comparison purposes, variants extracted for the female measurement model are also shown in Table 4.

Cronbach's alpha for gender role beliefs was .64 for 1980, .63 for 1983, and .65 for 1988. In order, means for 1980, 1983, and 1988 were 2.49 ($SD = 0.51$),

Table 4

Extracted Variants for Gender Role Beliefs, Negativity, Distancing, and Marital Instability as Applied to Males, with Comparative Female Variants From Table 3

Item Number	1980		1983		1988	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Gender Role Beliefs						
Item 1	.62	.51	.56	.42	.64	.48
Item 2	.55	.69	.59	.63	.62	.68
Item 3	.50	.47	.41	.47	.53	.52
Item 5	.55	.51	.68	.54	.59	.50
Item 6	.53	.37	.49	.38	.49	.40
Item 7		.72		.68		.73
Negativity						
Item 3	.62	.62	.67	.69	.63	.64
Item 4	.57	.60	.65	.53	.56	.61
Item 6	.44	.43	.54	.43	.59	.35
Item 7	.45	.44	.66	.56	.57	.50
Item 8	.59	.58	.56	.54	.68	.54
Item 9	.44	.44	.39	.37	.44	.39
Distancing						
Item 1	.33	.47	.38	.44	.52	.44
Item 2	.37	.41	.42	.47	.45	.46
Item 3	.71	.68	.70	.65	.68	.70
Item 4	.47	.45	.53	.43	.44	.53
Item 5	.49	.54	.46	.61	.44	.56
Marital Instability						
Item 3	.72	.74	.77	.70	.76	.68
Item 4	.70	.70	.76	.66	.79	.68
Item 5	.68	.68	.70	.72	.68	.71
Item 6	.50	.61	.52	.62	.52	.60
Item 8	.40	.50	.42	.50	.50	.44

2.62 (SD = 0.48), and 2.65 (SD = 0.48), respectively. Cronbach's alpha for negativity was .68 for 1980, .74 for 1983, and .78 for 1988. In order, means for 1980, 1983, and 1988 were 1.63 (SD = 0.51), 1.63 (SD = 0.52), and 1.64 (SD = 0.47), respectively. Cronbach's alpha for distancing was .58 for 1980, .59 for 1983, and .61 for 1988. In order, means for 1980, 1983, and 1988 were 1.80 (SD = 0.52), 1.89 (SD = 0.54), and 1.98 (SD = 0.55), respectively. Cronbach's alpha for marital instability was .76 for 1980, .79 for 1983, and .75 for 1988. In order, means for 1980, 1983, and 1988 were 1.25 (SD = 0.29), 1.26 (SD = 0.30), and 1.28 (SD = 0.31), respectively.

Analyses of the Variables by Gender

Females

The reported data for the items selected by the measurement model for the 469 females for the periods of 1980, 1983, and 1988 were analyzed using the hypothesized structural equation path models. Table 5 shows the main findings of the structural equation path model for females. For visual clarity, Table 5 is also presented in figure form (Figure 4). The model is stable, and the adjusted goodness of fit, although less than .90, suggests that the model supports all hypotheses as applied to females. Hypothesis 1, gender role beliefs, negativity, distancing, and marital instability are each distinct dimensions, which maintain their respective dimensional structures throughout the longitudinal study period, has been supported by the results of the measurement model's stability. The measurement model

Table 5

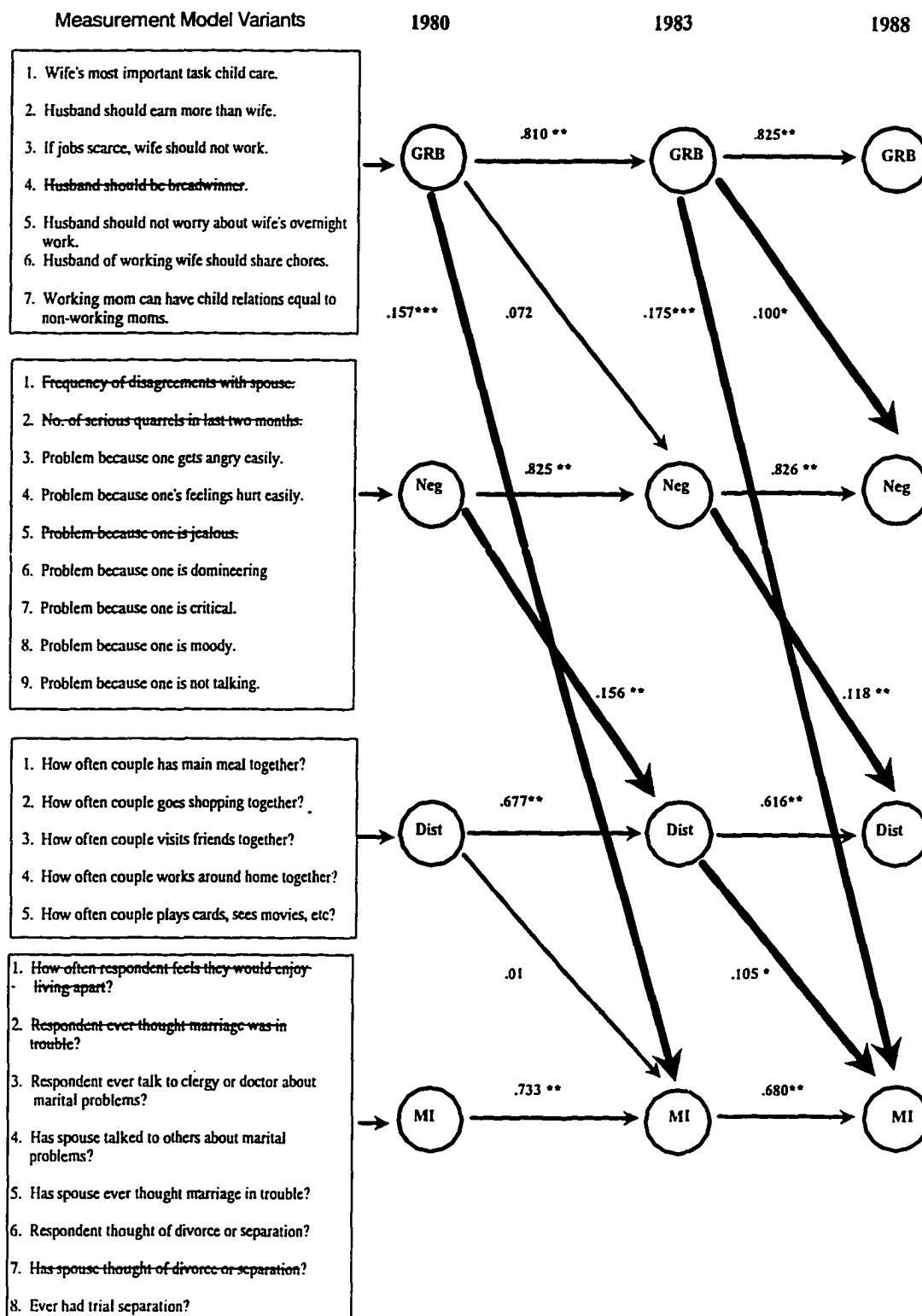
Standardized Solutions for the Relationships Among Gender Role Beliefs, Negativity, Distancing, and Marital Instability for Females

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Path	Females	
Model Stability (Standardized Solutions)				
(1)	Gender Role Beliefs (1980)	Gender Role Beliefs (1983)	1 5	.810***
(2)	Gender Role Beliefs (1983)	Gender Role Beliefs (1988)	5 9	.825***
(3)	Negativity (1980)	Negativity (1983)	2 6	.677***
(4)	Negativity (1983)	Negativity (1988)	6 10	.733***
(5)	Distancing (1980)	Distancing (1983)	3 7	.821***
(6)	Distancing (1983)	Distancing (1988)	7 11	.826***
(7)	Marital Instability (1980)	Marital Instability (1983)	4 8	.616***
(8)	Marital Instability (1983)	Marital Instability (1988)	8 12	.680***
Hypotheses Testing (Standardized Solutions)				
(9)	Gender Role Beliefs (1980)	Negativity (1983)	1 6	.072
(10)	Negativity (1980)	Distancing (1983)	2 7	.156**
(11)	Distancing (1980)	Marital Instability (1983)	3 8	.013
(12)	Gender Role Beliefs (1980)	Marital Instability (1983)	1 8	.157***
(13)	Gender Role Beliefs (1983)	Negativity (1988)	5 10	.100**
(14)	Negativity (1983)	Distancing (1988)	6 11	.118**
(15)	Distancing (1983)	Marital Instability (1988)	7 12	.105**
(16)	Gender Role Beliefs (1983)	Marital Instability (1988)	5 12	.175***
Degrees of Freedom			2013	
Chi Square			3299	
Adjusted Goodness of Fit			.812	
** $p < .05$		*** $p < .01$	(two-tailed tests)	

confirmed that each variable (i.e., gender role beliefs, negativity, distancing, and marital instability) has a unique dimension and maintained its dimensional structure throughout the three assessment periods (Table 5).

Hypothesis 2, females holding gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional will report higher levels of marital instability than females holding gender role beliefs more traditional than egalitarian is supported by paths 1, 8 and 5, 12 (standardized solutions = .157, $p < .01$, and .175, $p < .01$, respectively).

Figure 4. Structural Equation Path Model Results as Applied to Female Participants.



Hypothesis 4, females holding gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional will report higher levels of negativity than females who hold gender role beliefs that are more traditional than egalitarian is supported by path 5, 10 (standardized solution = .100, $p < .05$). Hypothesis 6, that higher reported levels of negativity will result in higher reported levels of distancing and marital instability is supported by paths 2, 7 and path 7, 12 (standardized solutions = .156, $p < .05$ and .105, $p < .05$, respectively).

Males

Table 6 shows the main findings of the structural equation path mode for the 294 male participants in this study. Table 6 is shown in Figure form in Figure 5. The model is stable, but the adjusted goodness of fit test suggests that caution should be taken in interpreting the results (AGFI = .737). The results fail to support the research hypotheses.

Hypotheses 3, males holding gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional will report lower levels of marital instability than will males holding gender role beliefs that are more traditional than egalitarian is unsupported. The standardized solution is for path 1, 8 is not significant, and the standardized solution for path 5, 12 (standardized solution = .136, $p < .05$) is positive rather than negative, indicating males holding gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional report higher rather than lower levels of marital instability as hypothesized. Hypotheses 5, males holding gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than

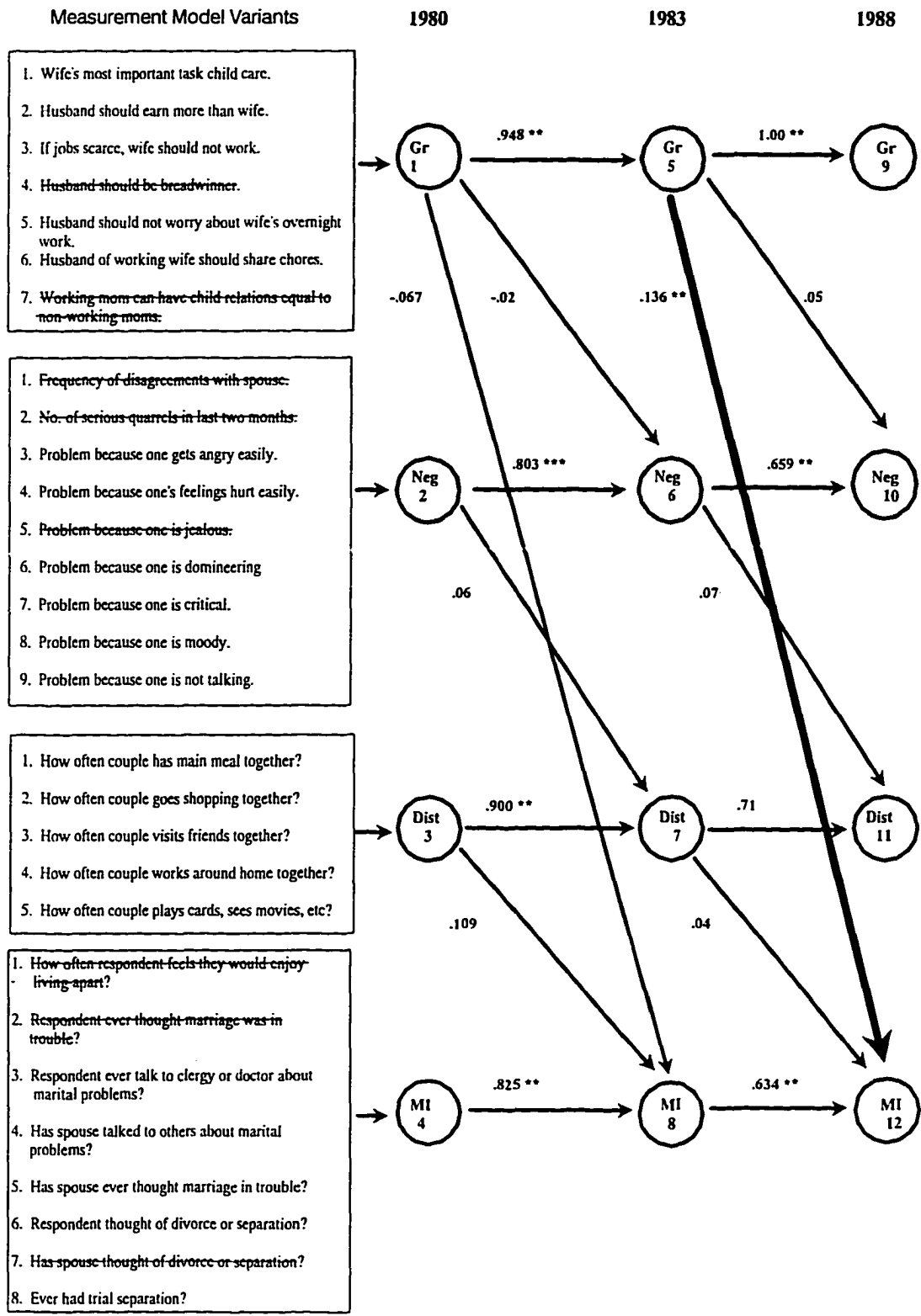
Table 6

Standardized Solutions for the Relationships Among Gender Role Beliefs, Negativity, Distancing, and Marital Instability for Males

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Path	Males	
Model Stability (Standardized Solutions)				
(1)	Gender Role Beliefs (1980)	Gender Role Beliefs (1983)	1 5	.948***
(2)	Gender Role Beliefs (1983)	Gender Role Beliefs (1988)	5 9	.803***
(3)	Negativity (1980)	Negativity (1983)	2 6	.900***
(4)	Negativity (1983)	Negativity (1988)	6 10	.825***
(5)	Distancing (1980)	Distancing (1983)	3 7	1.00***
(6)	Distancing (1983)	Distancing (1988)	7 11	.659***
(7)	Marital Instability (1980)	Marital Instability (1983)	4 8	.715***
(8)	Marital Instability (1983)	Marital Instability (1988)	8 12	.634***
Hypotheses Testing (Standardized Solutions)				
(9)	Gender Role Beliefs (1980)	Negativity (1983)	1 6	-.022
(10)	Negativity (1980)	Distancing (1983)	2 7	.066
(11)	Distancing (1980)	Marital Instability (1983)	3 8	.109
(12)	Gender Role Beliefs (1980)	Marital Instability (1983)	1 8	-.067
(13)	Gender Role Beliefs (1983)	Negativity (1988)	5 10	.057
(14)	Negativity (1983)	Distancing (1988)	6 11	.071
(15)	Distancing (1983)	Marital Instability (1988)	7 12	.048
(16)	Gender Role Beliefs (1983)	Marital Instability (1988)	5 12	.136**
Degrees of Freedom			3485	
Chi Square			1826	
Adjusted Goodness of Fit			.737	
** p < .05		*** p < .01	(two-tailed tests)	

traditional will report lower levels of negativity than will males holding gender role beliefs that are more traditional than egalitarian, is neither supported or rejected. The standardized solutions for paths 1, 6 and 5, 10, for the first and second periods respectively, are not statistically significant. Hypothesis 6, higher reported levels of negativity will result in higher reported levels of distancing and marital instability for both males and females, is unsupported. Hence, the only significant solution in the male model is the path relating gender role beliefs to marital instability in the second

Figure 5 Structural Equation Path Model Results as Applied to Male Participants



period. Males who hold gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional do not appear to experience negativity through the conflictual interactions initiated by gender role beliefs or distancing through negativity. Males, however, experience marital instability through gender role beliefs in the second period.

In sum, the structural equation results indicate that females who hold gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional, experienced increased marital instability through negativity and distancing, whereas males who hold gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional, experienced increased marital instability in the second period only (i.e., between 1983 and 1988). The results suggest that females and males experience marriage and marital instability differently. However, because of the relatively poor goodness of fit, particularly for the male model, the conclusions are tentative and will be further examined in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, SUMMARY,
AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary goal of this study was to develop and test an integrated model that joined the empirically established relationships between gender role beliefs and marital instability and Gottman's conceptualization of marital instability as a process consisting of the movement of a couple through negativity and distancing to marital instability. The outcome sought, based on a review of related literature, was confirmation that certain gender role beliefs held by females and males could lead to increased or decreased marital instability through negativity and distancing, thus providing better understanding of what initiates and moves a couple from marital stability to marital instability. The assumption which formed the basis for this investigation, partially supported by Kitson and Holmes (1992), was that certain gender role beliefs held by females and males could increase or decrease negativity, thereby increasing or decreasing distancing, and increasing or decreasing marital instability.

An examination of the analyzed data for females confirms that (a) females holding gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional experience increased marital instability, (b) increased negativity leads to increased distancing and increased marital instability, and (c) gender role beliefs held by females that are more

egalitarian than traditional lead to negativity. As applied to females, the structural equation path analysis substantiates past research results concerning the relationship between gender role beliefs and marital instability and the relationships among negativity, distancing, and marital instability, as well as this study's assumption that gender role beliefs held by females that are more egalitarian than traditional increase negativity.

However, an examination of the analyzed data for males fails to substantiate past research results concerning the relationship between gender role beliefs and marital instability and the relationships among negativity, distancing, and marital instability or this study's assumption that gender role beliefs held by males that are more egalitarian than traditional decrease negativity. As applied to males, the analyzed data indicate that males experience marital instability through gender role beliefs alone. The combined results suggest that females and males experience marriage and marital instability differently and/or that the models may not accurately present the relationships between the variables posed as indicated by their relatively poor adjusted goodness of fit.

Incremental and Summative Analyses of 1980, 1983, and 1988

In order to further examine the relationships between the variables, incremental post-hoc analyses were performed. By modifying the structural equation models to analyze the relationships over shorter periods of time, both the female and male model's adjusted goodness of fit were improved. The initial models analyzed the

posited relationships between the variables over the three assessment periods with a single analysis. The modified post-hoc models analyzed the same relationships between 1980 and 1983, 1983 and 1988, and 1980 and 1988 in three separate analyses. The modified model solutions resulted in a significant increase in adjusted goodness of fit for both the female and male models, from .73 to approximately .87 for males and from .81 to approximately .90 for females. The results of these analyses are presented in Tables 7 and 8. Figures 6 and 7 present female and male significant path analyses results for the periods 1980 and 1983, 1983 and 1988, 1980 and 1988, respectively. Figure 8 presents both the female and male data significant path analyses for the period between 1980 and 1988.

Table 7

Standardized Solutions for the Relationships Among Gender Role Beliefs, Negativity, Distancing, and Marital Instability Between 1980 and 1983, 1983 and 1988, and 1980 and 1988 for White Married Females

Interactive Variables			(1980 to 1983)	(1983 to 1988)	(1980 to 1988)
Model Stability (Standardized Solutions)					
(1)	Gender Role Beliefs	Gender Role Beliefs	.800***	.771***	.705***
(2)	Negativity	Negativity	.752***	.733***	.720***
(3)	Distancing	Distancing	.648***	.531***	.475***
(4)	Marital Instability	Marital Instability	.708***	.649***	.595***
Hypothesized Relationships (Standardized Solutions)					
(1)	Gender Role Beliefs	Negativity	.109*	.116**	.127**
(2)	Negativity	Distancing	.117**	.149**	.185**
(3)	Distancing	Marital Instability	.019	.049	-.007
(4)	Gender Role Beliefs	Marital Instability	.180***	.173***	.221***
Degrees of Freedom			866	866	866
Chi Square			1292	1197	1151
Adjusted Goodness of Fit			.904	.894	.899
** p < .05			*** p < .01		(two-tailed tests)

Table 8

Standardized Solutions for the Relationships Among Gender Role Beliefs, Negativity, Distancing, and Marital Instability Between 1980 and 1983, 1983 and 1988, and 1980 and 1988 for White Married Males

Independent Variables			(1980 to 1983)	(1983 to 1988)	(1980 to 1988)
Model Stability (Standardized Solutions)					
(1)	Gender Role Beliefs	Gender Role Beliefs	.848***	.892***	.836***
(2)	Negativity	Negativity	.641***	.530***	.670***
(3)	Distancing	Distancing	.569***	.576***	.359***
(4)	Marital Instability	Marital Instability	.678***	.568***	.507***
Hypothesized Relationships (Standardized Solutions)					
(1)	Gender Role Beliefs	Negativity	-.016	.089	.124
(2)	Negativity	Distancing	.091	.116	.107
(3)	Distancing	Marital Instability	.132**	.052	.179**
(4)	Gender Role Beliefs	Marital Instability	-.016	.091	.121
Degrees of Freedom			784	784	784
Chi Square			1107	1209	1170
Adjusted Goodness of Fit			.84	.87	.85
** $p < .05$			*** $p < .01$		(two-tailed tests)

As applied to females, the significant path model results of the periods of 1980 and 1983, 1983 and 1988, and 1980 and 1988 (Table 7 and Figures 6 and 8) indicate findings similar to the initial model, but are significant in their difference because there is no indication that females experience marital instability through distancing as was the case in the initial model (Figure 4). The results of the incremental model indicate that females reported a significant increase in marital instability through more egalitarian gender role beliefs in both incremental periods (standardized solutions = .180 $p < .001$ and .173 $p < .001$ respectively), a significant increase in negativity

Figure 6. Significant Post-Hoc Structural Equation Results for the Incremental Periods of 1980 to 1983 and 1983 to 1988 as Applied to Females.

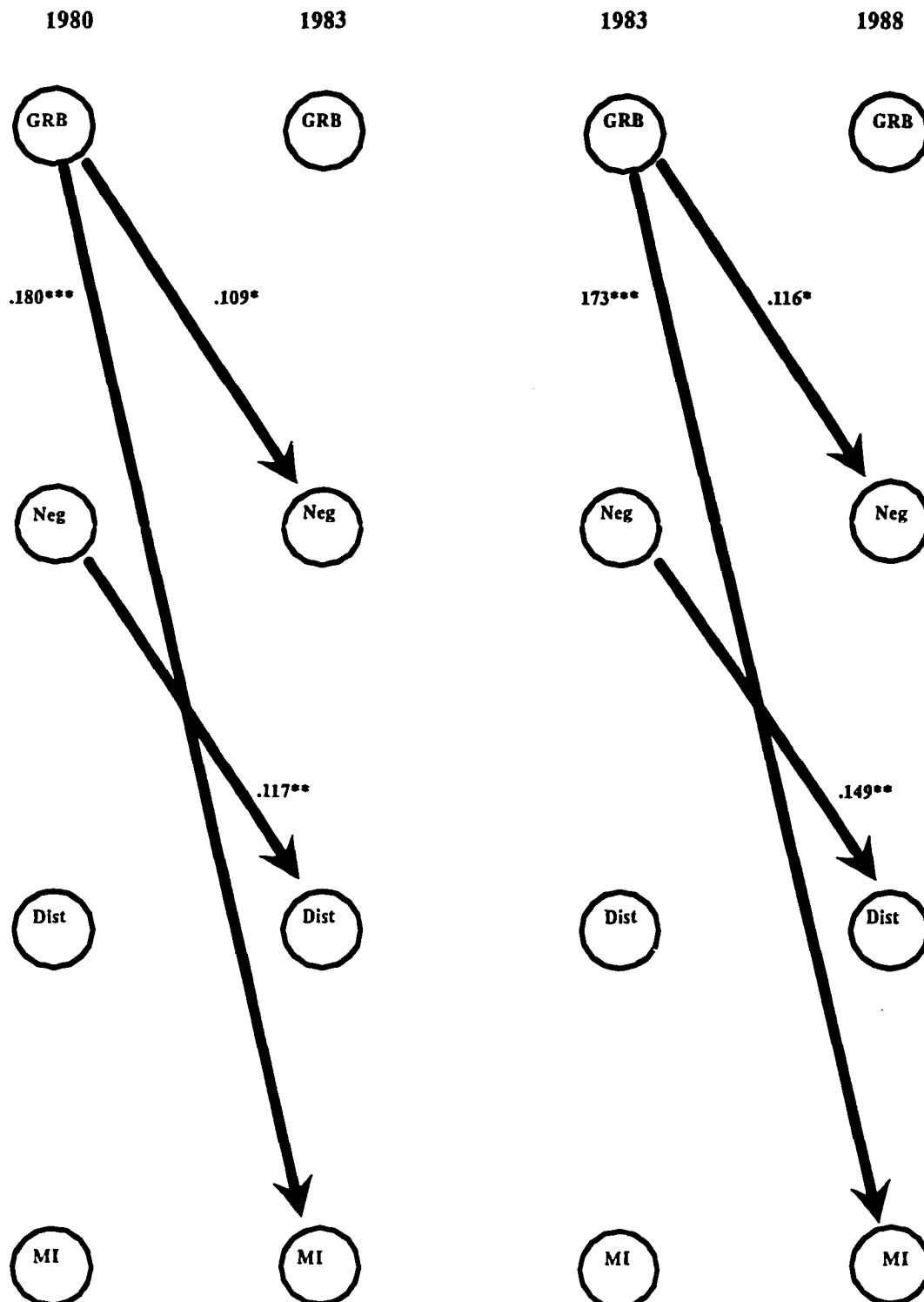


Figure 7. Significant Post-Hoc Structural Equation Results for the Incremental Periods of 1980 to 1983 and 1983 to 1988 for Males.

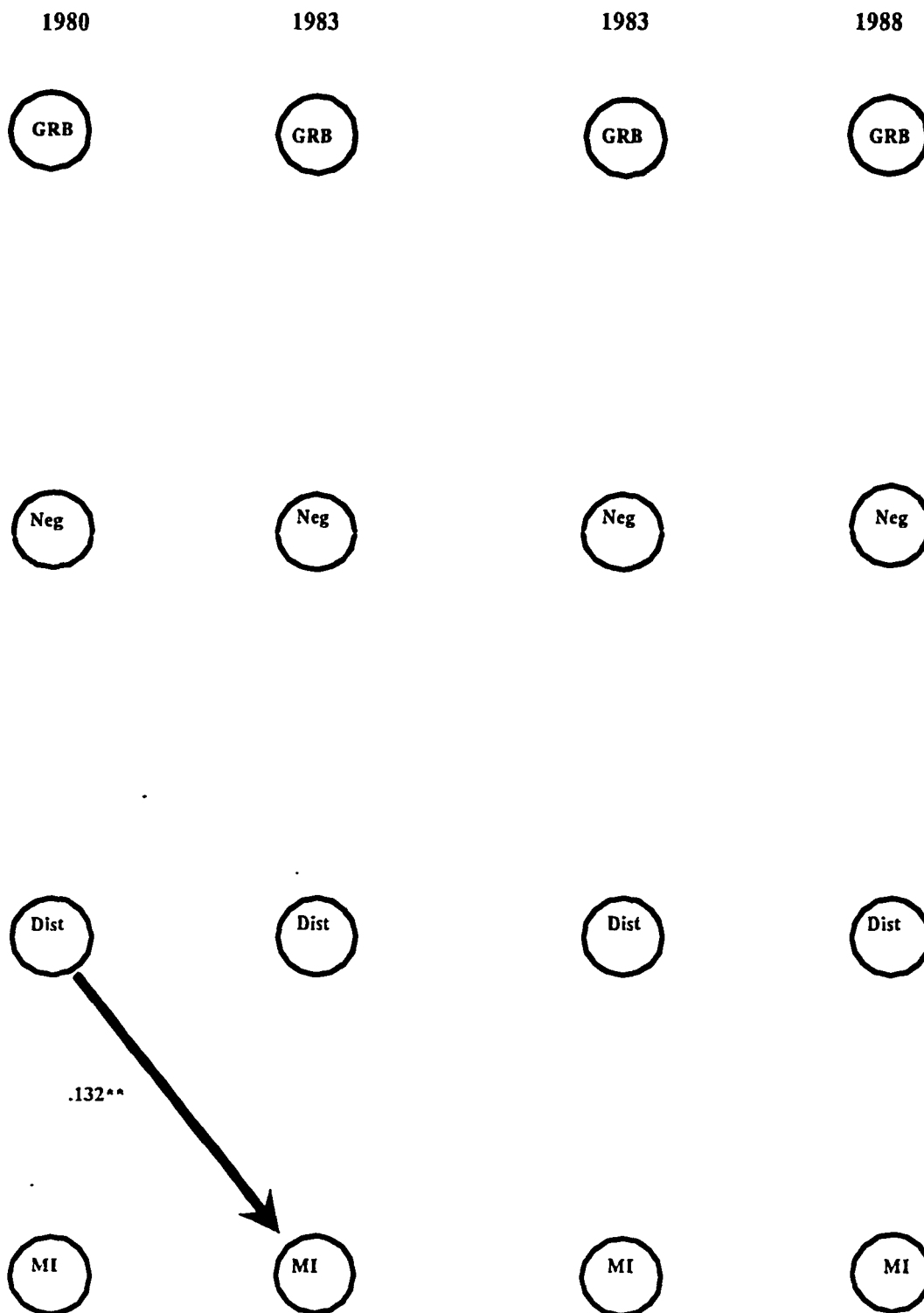
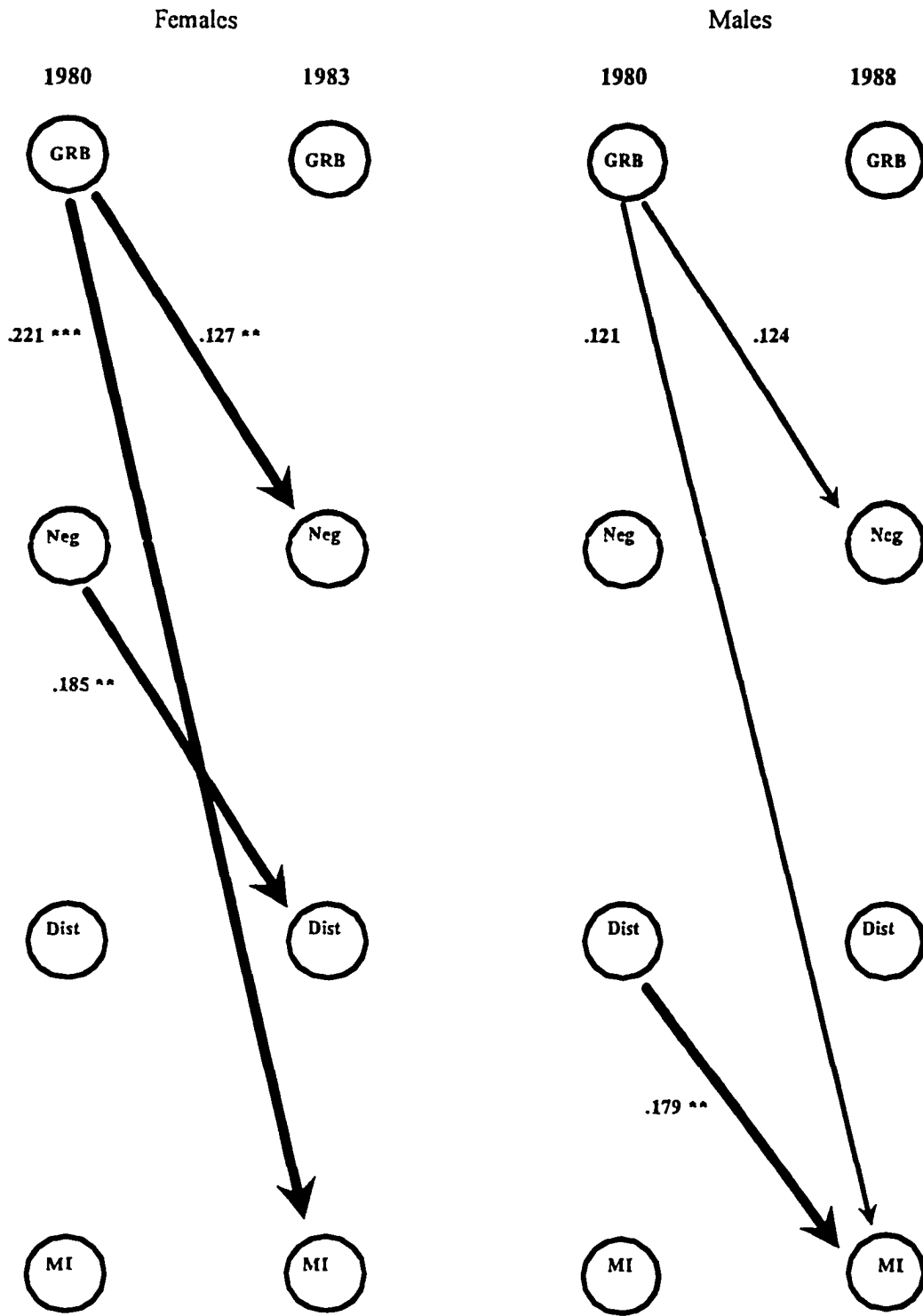


Figure 8. Significant Post-Hoc Structural Equation Results for the Incremental Periods of 1980 to 1988 for Females and Males.



through more egalitarian gender role beliefs (standardized solutions = .117 $p < .05$ and .116 $p < .05$, respectively), and higher levels of distancing through increased negativity (standardized solutions = .117 $p < .05$ and .149 $p < .05$), but did not report increased marital instability through increased distancing.

As applied to males, the significant path model results of the periods of 1980 and 1983, 1983 and 1988, and 1980 and 1988 (Table 8 and Figures 7 and 8) are significantly different from those found in the initial model (Figure 5). The significant path model results for the periods 1980 and 1983, 1983 and 1988 (Table 8 and Figure 7) indicate that males report marital instability through distancing in the first period only, and do not report marital instability through gender role beliefs in either the 1980 to 1983 period or the 1983 to 1988 period as was the case in the initial model path model (Figure 5). Males who hold gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional, while initially (i.e., 1980 to 1983) experiencing marital instability through distancing, did not report any significant relationship between gender role beliefs and negativity or negativity and distancing in either period (i.e., 1980 to 1983 or 1983 to 1988). While males experience marital instability and do so through distancing, the results also suggest that, over time, males may make adjustments that result in their experiencing less distancing and less marital instability, and may, therefore, actually decrease marital instability.

Figure 8 presents the results of the post-hoc analysis of the eight-year span between the 1983 and 1988 assessment periods for both females and males. The path

analysis results of these models show results consistent with the incremental 1980 to 1983 and the 1983 to 1988 model results for both females and males. Females holding gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional experienced increased marital instability through increased negativity and increased distancing, but did not report experiencing increased marital instability through distancing. Males holding gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional experienced increased marital instability through increased distancing only. Given the consistency of and the improved goodness of fit of the post-hoc models, it is concluded that there exists a significant difference in the manner in which females and males experience marriage and marital instability.

Discussion

Important to the understanding of the differences between female and male experiences are the measurement items, the significance of the differences between the arithmetic means of the variable measures between females and males, and the majority of the participants' marital history. With the exception of gender role beliefs, measurement items required responses that indicated a participant's view of the negativity, distancing, and marital instability within the marital dyad rather than the participants' estimates of their own levels of negativity, distancing, or marital instability. For example, levels of negativity reported by female and male participants represented the individual participant's responses to questions such as whether one gets angry easily, or whether one's feelings get hurt easily. Similarly, responses to

questions regarding distancing represented the individual's responses to questions dealing with the frequency of the couple's interaction in activities such as eating their main meals and in working around the house. These responses, therefore, indicate the participant's perception of levels of negativity or distancing in the marriage rather than their personal level of negativity or distancing. Hence, female participants holding gender role beliefs that were more egalitarian than traditional who experienced marital instability, perceived marital problems and reduced couple interaction as being important to marital instability. Males holding gender role beliefs that were more egalitarian than traditional who experienced marital instability, while not perceiving gender role beliefs or negativity as problematic, did perceive decreased couple interaction or distancing as important to marital instability.

With regard to the similarities or differences between male and female responses to the measurement items, females and males reported significantly different levels of gender role beliefs, negativity, distancing, and marital instability, but reported similar patterns in the changes in the levels of these variables over the study period. Female participants perceived themselves as being significantly more egalitarian than male participants, and experienced significantly higher levels of negativity, distancing, and marital instability than did males participants. However, on an incremental basis and from year to year, both female and male participants reported increasingly egalitarian gender role beliefs, constant levels of negativity, increased distancing, and constant levels of marital instability. Thus, although female participants viewed

themselves as being more egalitarian and experiencing higher levels of negativity, distancing, and marital instability than did male participants, both females and males reported constant levels of negativity and marital instability but increased egalitarianism, and distancing over the eight year assessment period.

Of additional significance to the study's implications, is that the study's participants remained married to the same person throughout the assessment period. Additionally, 70% of the participants were between their 9th and 29th year of marriage during the period 1980 and 1988. Thus, the majority of participants were in relatively stable marriages, with many experiencing marital instability but not divorce.

Conclusions

Research Hypotheses Re-Examined

Re-examining the research hypotheses as based on the incremental structural equation results indicates that hypothesis 1, gender role beliefs, negativity, distancing, and marital instability which are each distinct dimensions, will maintain their dimensional structure throughout the longitudinal study period, is supported for both females and males. Hypothesis 2, females holding gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional will report higher levels of marital instability than will females holding gender role beliefs that are more traditional than egalitarian, is supported. Hypothesis 3, males holding gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional will report lower levels of marital instability than will males holding gender role beliefs that are more traditional than egalitarian, is unsupported.

Hypothesis 4, females holding gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional will report higher levels of negativity than will females who hold gender role beliefs that are more traditional than egalitarian, is supported. Hypothesis 5, males holding gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional will report lower levels of negativity than will males who hold gender role beliefs that are more traditional than egalitarian, is unsupported, and hypothesis 6 higher reported levels of negativity will result in higher reported levels of distancing and marital instability for both males and females, is partially supported. Females reporting higher levels of negativity also report higher levels of distancing, but did not report higher levels of marital instability through distancing. Male results indicate no significant relationship between negativity and distancing, but reported increased marital instability through increased distancing in the first period only.

Implications

Females and males in marriages of longer duration experience marriage and marital instability in different ways. For females, marital instability is experienced as a result of conflictual interactions brought about by gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than those of their husband. The study results suggest that this occurs even when females holding gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional are married to males who hold gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional. Implied is that females who are unable to satisfactorily resolve issues brought about by their more egalitarian gender role beliefs, attempt to engage their husbands in order to

reach resolution and, if unsuccessful, ultimately perceive and experience increasing negativity through increasing levels of negativity or marital problems. Also suggested, is that over a period of time the increases in negativity results in their experiencing increased distancing or less marital interaction with their husbands. Thus, females who experience marital instability perceive constant levels of negativity, distancing, and marital instability even over longer periods of time.

Males holding gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional do not initially perceive the significance of the gender related conflicts with their female partners and, therefore, do not experience negativity, or marital instability. Males experience marital instability when experiencing distancing or decreased marital interaction. Implied is that males are more sensitive to a reduction in marital interaction than they are to conflictual interactions, and that they perceive marital instability not as a result of increased negativity but as a result of experiencing increased distancing or decreased marital interaction. Also indicated, is that males are able to make adjustments in their perceptions of distancing over a period of time and may, at a given time, not perceive either negativity, distancing, or marital instability.

As applied to the marital dyad, the results suggest that in sustained martial relationships (i.e., all respondents remained married through the study period) marital partners who experience marital instability maintain a relatively constant level of marital stability. Suggested, is that this is achieved through increases in the

egalitarianism of their gender role beliefs, decreased marital interaction, and the maintenance of constant and acceptable levels of negativity and marital instability.

Although the participants' spouses were not interviewed and, therefore, the study results cannot be assumed to represent couples, the results indicate that couples in sustained marriages who experience marital instability sustain it through conflictual interactions brought about by differences in gender role beliefs, female experiences of negativity and distancing, and male sensitivity to the increased distancing or decreased couple interaction. Indicated, is that couples who experience marital instability but who are able to sustain the marriage, do so through increasing their egalitarianism, by the maintenance of acceptable levels of negativity, and by decreasing their marital interaction.

Implications for Counselors

The implications of this study, as applied to counselors involved in marriage counseling are significant. Knowledge that females and males experience marriage and marital instability differently suggests that interventions designed to increase marital stability must also be different, and that traditional counseling methodologies may be more helpful in alleviating the symptoms of marital instability than the causes. This study's results indicate that in marriages of longer duration, females who seek marital counseling may do so because they are experiencing severe negativity, while males who seek counseling may be experiencing severe separation or distancing. Traditional interventions such as those designed to allow both partners to vent without interruption,

or those which seek to teach improved communication skills or rules for arguing, may not directly address the causes of the gender related issues of negativity and distancing and may, therefore, not have lasting results. Females and males experiencing marital instability may initially respond well to traditional counseling interventions such as those that provide them with a means to freely communicate their feelings and thoughts without interruption. The free communications meet the female's prevailing need for increased verbal engagement and the male's prevailing need for increased marital interaction. However, unless the individuals involved are made aware of their gender role beliefs and the consequences of those beliefs on their marriage, the achieved reduction in negativity and distancing may be temporary.

Gender Role Beliefs. Gender role beliefs are a significant contributor to marital instability. At the center of differences in gender role beliefs are differences in the perceptions of marital role equality of females and males in marriage. Thus, in addition to more traditional counseling interventions, counselors must address female and male differences in gender role beliefs and the inequality in marital roles that are inherent in those beliefs.

Females have moved toward gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than those of males. Females who hold gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional tend to marry males who hold gender role beliefs that are more traditional than theirs. Hence, there are overall differences in female and male beliefs regarding equality in marital roles. Perceptions of equality in marital roles are relative and

depend on the individuals involved. Thompson (1991) found that married females who work for pay performed 70% to 80% of the household chores and based their perception of fairness in the distribution of household work more on what other husbands did than on what their own husbands did. If they perceived that their husband was doing less than other husbands they were dissatisfied, but if they perceived that their husband was doing as much or more than other husbands, they were satisfied. In a similar sense, Gottman (1996) suggested that the most significant predictor of marital stability was the female's perception of her ability or inability to influence her husband. Marriages in which females felt able to influence their husbands experienced less marital instability than did marriages in which females felt that they were unable to influence their husbands.

The results of this study and the relevant literature lend support to the fact that gender role beliefs and perceived equality in marital roles can significantly influence marital stability or instability; and that influence is particularly important to females. The literature suggests that the perception of equality in marital roles is relative and individually structured, and it is the marital partners themselves that must reach agreement on what constitutes fairness or equity in the marriage. Hence, the primary goal of marriage counseling may be to assist a couple in negotiating and reaching such an agreement. However, negativity and distancing must be attended to before reasonable and rationale communications can take place.

Negativity and distancing Negativity and distancing are symptoms of marital instability brought about by the female's perceived inequality in marital roles (i.e., differences in gender role beliefs) and the male's perception of reduced marital interaction. Negativity may be viewed as a primary female symptom of marital instability, while distancing, an outcome of negativity, may be viewed as a primary male symptom of marital instability. Accordingly, knowing which of the marital partners has been most instrumental in the decision to seek counseling is important. Understanding which of the partners in the most distress can assist in the developing treatment interventions. If the female was most instrumental in causing the couple to seek therapy it may be that resolving negativity takes priority, whereas, if the male was most instrumental, it may be that resolving distancing should take priority.

The time-honored technique of allowing the couple to vent their feelings to each other without interruption can assist in decreasing both negativity and distancing because both partners are free to talk about their concerns without fear of escalating negativity or distancing. The female is able to engage in verbal interaction and the male is satisfying his need for additional marital interaction. However, if the counselor is not aware of female sensitivity to negativity and male sensitivity to distancing, and/or is not aware that the male is unsure of why he is in counseling (i.e., he may not be experiencing any marital instability) or who is in most distress, gains made through hours of uninterrupted venting may be temporary or have negative consequences. Focusing on the negativity when it was the males perception of increasing distancing

that brought them to counseling may invite the female to vent and help to convince the male that counseling is a waste of time. Similarly, focusing on distancing when it was the female perception of increasing negativity that brought them to counseling may help convince the female that counseling is a waste of time.

As a result of this study, the marriage counselor's goals can be better defined. The primary goals of marriage counseling are to decrease negativity and distancing to the point that rational and reasonable negotiations will lead to agreed upon marital roles so that both parties view the relationship as equitable, thereby increasing marital stability. Focusing on the right issue with the right party takes on greater importance.

Limitations of the Study

The studies limitations are those imposed as a result of using a data base that consists of survey results that are from 8 to 16 years old, the use of participants that were primarily in their middle years of marriage and who remained married across the survey period, and as a result of biases introduced by obtaining information from participants who were willing to respond to the rather arduous survey. The historical nature of the data, although, not considered to be limiting to the development of the model, may no longer be representative of more contemporary gender role beliefs and, therefore, may also affect their influence on marital instability. If gender role beliefs held by more contemporary females and males are more closely aligned, the affect of gender role beliefs on negativity and distancing may not be as significant it was in the

past decade and, therefore, may not be as significant a contributor to marital instability as was concluded from this study.

The participants' demographics, while representing a broad range of the U.S. population, primarily consisted of participants who were in their middle-years of marriage and who had been married to the same individual across the study period. As a result, the study's findings may be limited with regard to conclusions regarding younger couples and the manner in which they move from marital stability to marital instability. For example, it may be that younger, more contemporary couples, who have more alternatives and fewer barriers to divorce than may have been the case in the last decade, move directly from negativity to divorce without moving through distancing.

Finally, this study, rather than being representative of a national sample of married men and women, is representative of a national sample of married men and women who were willing to participate in the surveys over an eight-year period. The fact that they were willing to participate in the surveys suggests that they were cooperative individuals who were interested in their marriages. Thus, it might be said that this study, rather than representing a national sample of married men and women, is representative of a national sample of cooperative married men and women who were interested in their marriages. The limitations imposed on this study as a result of the use of these participants, though suggesting some caution in the interpretation of the results, does not nullify the importance of the study. The participants, cooperative or

not, held a broad range of gender role beliefs, and experienced broad ranges of negativity, distancing, and marital instability, thereby permitting the relationships hypothesized to be tested.

Summary

The purpose of the current study was to develop and test a model that joined the empirically established relationships between gender role beliefs and marital instability and the relationships among negativity, distancing, and marital instability (Gottman, 1993) into a single model designed to provide increased understanding of what initiates and moves a couple toward marital instability. It was posited that certain gender role beliefs held by females and males would affect increases or decreases in negativity, increases or decreases in distancing, and increases or decreases in marital instability. More specifically, a review of the related literature suggested that females holding gender role beliefs that were more egalitarian than traditional would report higher levels of marital instability than would females holding gender role beliefs that were more traditional than egalitarian, and that marital instability was a process in which these more egalitarian gender role beliefs would lead to negativity, to distancing, and to marital instability. The literature also suggested that males who held gender role beliefs that were more egalitarian than traditional would report lower levels of marital instability, through decreased negativity and decreased distancing.

The results of the study's structural equation path analyses indicate that females who hold gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional move to

negativity and distancing but do not move from distancing to marital instability. The path model results suggest that males who hold gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional failed to either increase or decrease negativity or distancing, but increased marital instability as a result of increased distancing.

The combined results of the study indicate that females and males experience marital instability differently. Females who hold gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional experience increased marital instability through increased negativity and distancing. Males who hold gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than tradition experience increased marital instability through increased distancing only. Implied is that females who are unable to resolve marital role issues brought about by their more egalitarian gender role beliefs, continue to attempt to engage their husbands in order to reach resolution and, when failing to do so, ultimately perceive and experience increasing negativity. Over a period of time, the increase in negativity results in less interaction with their husbands.

Males holding gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional do not initially perceive the consequences of the gender related conflicts with their female partners and, therefore, do not experience negativity, distancing, or marital instability. Rather, males experience marital instability when experiencing decreased marital interaction. Suggested, is that males are more sensitive to a reduction in marital interaction than they are to the conflictual interactions, and that they perceive marital

instability not as a result of increased negativity, but as a result of decreased spousal interaction.

As applied to counseling, the study results and relevant literature suggest that gender role beliefs and their resulting presence or absence of perceived equality in marital roles can significantly influence marital stability or instability, and that the influence is particularly important to females. Literature suggests that the perception of equality in marital roles is relative and individually structured, and that it is the marital partners themselves who must reach agreement on what constitutes fairness or equity in the marriage. The gender related issues of negativity and distancing, viewed as an outcome of differing gender role beliefs, suggests that the primary goals of marriage counseling are to assist couples in understanding and resolving the consequences of their gender role beliefs, and to assist them in discussions aimed at defining their marital roles in a manner that is seen as fair and equitable by both parties.

Recommendations

As a result of the review of the literature and the hypotheses tested, the following recommendations are proposed. A longitudinal study should be repeated with more current longitudinal data. The data utilized in this study, although suitable for the purpose of developing a model, may reflect gender role beliefs that are no longer current. This may be important because as males increasingly move toward gender role beliefs that are more egalitarian than traditional, the dynamics of the dyadic interaction may change, thus altering the results of the interaction of variables as well

as the implications for counseling. It is also suggested that the study be performed using data obtained from younger females and males who are married to each other. The majority of the participants in this study were in their middle-years of marriage and had remained married to the same person during the study period. Choosing a younger population that would include additional representation of individuals within their first few years of marriage when marital instability is at its highest level would enhance the understanding of the initiation of marital instability. Selecting participants who are married to each other would confirm whether the interactions assumed to exist within this study, occur between married couples.

Finally, it is recommended that counseling methodologies that are consistent with the findings of this study be developed and tested. For example, it may be that counseling a couple should be initiated with a husband and wife seeing different counselors prior to joining as a couple with one or both counselors present. The initial, individual sessions might be used to explore a husband's and wife's gender role beliefs and their perceptions of the couple's negativity, distancing, and marital instability. Providing a couple with a safe environment in which to explore their beliefs and feelings, and learn new methods of relating to each other could be of substantial benefit to individuals who finds themselves experiencing negativity, distancing, and/or marital instability.

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