

SEXUAL SATISFACTION AND MARITAL WELL-BEING IN THE FIRST YEARS OF MARRIAGE

Donna H. Henderson-King & Joseph Veroff

University of Michigan

We consider the importance of sexual satisfaction in the first years of marriage. First, we examine how husbands' and wives' feelings of affirmation and tension in their marriage relate to levels of sexual satisfaction. Further, we explore the relationship between sexual satisfaction and four dimensions of marital well-being: competence, control, equity and happiness. Data from a longitudinal study of black and white couples were analysed separately by race and gender. In both the first and third years of marriage, feelings of affirmation and tension were associated with sexual satisfaction for all race and gender groups. Sexual satisfaction was related to several dimensions of marital well-being, though not always in the expected direction, and the patterns differed across race and gender groups. Sexual satisfaction is at least as important to wives as to husbands, but it is important to conduct separate analyses for race and gender groups.

The present research considers the role of sexual satisfaction and dissatisfaction in the first years of marriage. First, it examines the association between the theoretically critical affective experience in the relationship and sexual feelings in marriage. Specifically, do feelings of being affirmed in the relationship and, by contrast, feelings of marital tension have any bearing on the sexual experience? Secondly, the research goes on to examine the relationship between sexuality and overall marital well-being. Specifically, after controlling for feelings of affirmation and tension, is a

This research was supported in part by an NIMH grant (MH 41253). The authors acknowledge the assistance of members of the First Years of Marriage group. We also thank Abby Stewart, Fred Bryant and Eaaron Henderson-King for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article. Address correspondence to Donna Henderson-King, Women's Studies Program, 234 W. Engineering, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109, USA.

Journal of Social and Personal Relationships (SAGE, London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi), Vol. 11 (1994), 509–534

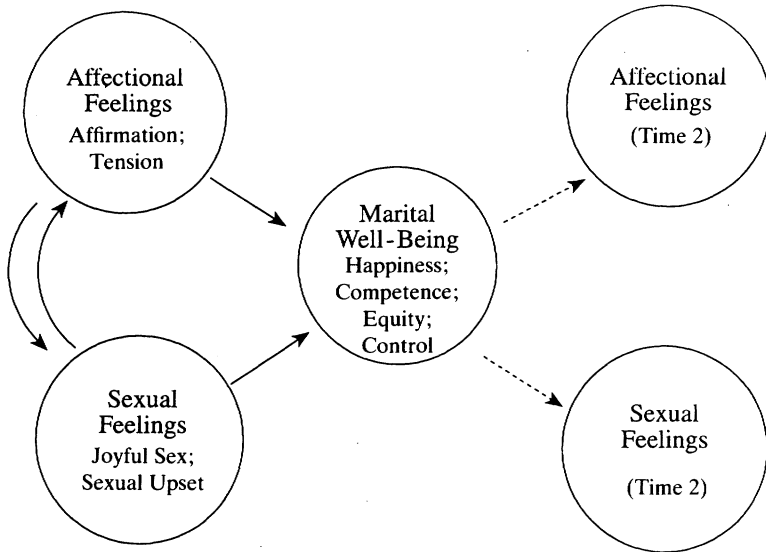
person's level of sexual satisfaction or dissatisfaction associated with marital well-being?

In the research to be presented we examine the connection between partners' feelings about their sexual relationship and two types of evaluations: affective experiences in the relationship, over and above those associated with sexual life; and overall evaluations of the marriage. The first type of evaluation focuses on more specific feelings. There are many such feelings that could be assessed: jealousy, competitiveness, admiration, caring for one's spouse, feeling affirmed by one's spouse and experiencing tension. We selected the last two, primarily because adequate assessments of these feelings were available for couples in the study, but also because they are important polar opposites of affective experiences in the relationship that have been found to be important in understanding marital harmony in general; see, in particular, Askham (1984) on feelings of affirmation, and Schaap, et al. (1988) on experiencing tension from conflicts. The second type of evaluation focuses on general evaluations of the marriage, which we think of as overall measures of marital well-being. These two levels of evaluation are not unrelated. Indeed, one would expect that the specific feelings would feed into the more general feelings.

Figure 1 is presented as a speculative overview of the way in which we see these variables operating. In general, we envision the relationship among affectional and sexual variables as reciprocal. Further, although we generally see the more specific affectional and sexual variables as feeding into marital well-being, we presume that over time marital well-being would also have some effect on the affectional and sexual climate of a marriage.

Feelings of affirmation and tension are important polar opposites of affective experience in marriage. A substantial body of research findings points to the importance of polar opposites in studying affect; people generally make independent evaluations of positive and negative affective experiences (e.g. Andrews & Withey, 1976; Bryant & Veroff, 1984). Positive and negative aspects of the marital relationship, in particular, are also evaluated independently (Argyle & Furnham, 1983; Braiker & Kelly, 1979; Orden & Bradburn, 1968); hence it is important to consider not just positive feelings of affirmation, but also the negative affective experience of tension. Further, in regard to feelings about the sexual aspect of their relationship, we wanted to tap not just positive feelings, but also any negative feelings, about marital sex;

FIGURE 1
Speculative view of causal relationships among variables



therefore, we considered both sexual satisfaction and sexual dissatisfaction.

We are also alerted to considering multiple aspects of marital well-being. Examining the same group of newlyweds who will be the subjects of the present study, Crohan & Veroff (1989) found evidence for four different dimensions of marital well-being which ought to be considered separately. Furthermore, Crohan & Veroff (1992) replicated the factor structure used as the basis of this differentiation in these same newlyweds two years later. *Marital happiness* refers to satisfaction and happiness with being married, as well as the sense of stability about the relationship. *Marital equity*, as the label suggests, concerns perceptions of fairness within the relationship. However, it includes both a person's assessment of equity in the marriage and impressions of how equitable the partner views the marriage to be. *Marital competence* refers to a person's sense of adequacy as a spouse and to feelings of guilt about any inequalities in the relationship. Finally, *marital control* refers to a sense of being able to do or say things to make the relationship better when things are not going well or especially pleasant when there are no problems. Particularly in the case of

marital equity, marital competence and marital control, these dimensions are *perceptions*, rather than observed equity, competence or control. Crohan & Veroff (1989) conclude that these dimensions of marital well-being are interrelated but distinct in their study, and that they are differentially related to other characteristics of their respondents.

The emergence of particular factors depends, of course, upon the variables which are included in the factor analysis. Other dimensions of marital well-being with different measures are certainly possible. For example, Crohan & Veroff (1989) posited a separate dimension of perceived stability or commitment in marriage, but found no evidence for it in either the first or third year of marriage. They conclude that commitment just for the sake of having a stable marriage may not emerge until couples have an extensive history together. However, perhaps a stability factor would have been seen even in the analyses of the early years of marriage, had there been more specific items related to marital commitment built into the factor analysis.

Although research on *the sexual aspect of marriage* has been criticized for its nearly singular focus on the frequency of sexual relations and physical acts (Perlman & Abramson, 1982), the literature has been slow to abandon that focus. Even when sexual satisfaction within the relationship is addressed, it is often measured in terms of, and viewed synonymously with, the frequency of sexual intercourse or orgasm, despite a demonstrated weak or non-existent relationship between frequency and satisfaction. The frequency of sexual relations, and even marked changes in frequency over time, may mean different things to different couples (Greenblat, 1983). It seems important, therefore, when trying to understand affective experiences in the marital relationship or overall feelings of marital well-being, to look beyond simple frequency toward sexual satisfaction as a predictor variable.

We would expect to find that sexual satisfaction within marriage would be positively related to overall marital satisfaction. Not surprisingly, researchers who have looked beyond frequency and have asked respondents about their feelings about sex have found evidence of a significant, positive relationship between sexual satisfaction and measures of overall marital satisfaction. Cupach & Comstock (1990), Hudson et al. (1981) and Snyder (1979) have found correlations ranging from .59 to .68 between the two. In a

sample of married and cohabiting couples, Perlman & Abramson (1982) found that overall relationship satisfaction correlated with sexual satisfaction and with the absence of sexual anxiety. We should expect, therefore, to find a positive relationship of both specific and general evaluations of the marriage to sexual satisfaction, and a negative relationship of both kinds of evaluation to experiencing problems or difficulties in marital sex.

Concerning determinants of marital evaluations, Frank & Anderson (cited in Greenberg et al., 1986) have suggested that individuals' perceptions of the quality of sexual performance is less important than the quality of feelings that accompany sexual activity. Perhaps feelings of being affirmed by one's spouse might be more important than sexual satisfaction as a determinant of marital happiness. Indeed, when correlational studies of marital satisfaction have included expressions of affection as a variable, affection has been at least as highly correlated as sexual satisfaction with marital well-being (Cupach & Comstock, 1990; Snyder, 1979). Furthermore, it may be that feelings of affirmation help set the stage for a satisfying sexual relationship. This research is designed to consider whether feelings of affirmation can predict sexual satisfaction, and further, once those feelings of affirmation are taken into account, whether sexual satisfaction itself is predictive of marital satisfaction.

There is a popular notion that, at least for women if not for men, feeling loved and cared for matters more in a relationship than does sexual satisfaction. In fact, there is some evidence that feelings of love and affection are tied more closely to sex for wives than for husbands. For example, Patton & Waring (1985), in examining several aspects of marital evaluations, found a single, general factor for wives, but two separate factors for husbands, one for marital evaluations in general, and another primarily for feelings about the sexual aspect of marriage. For wives, it appears that sex is more closely associated with other aspects of marital evaluation such as affection and compatibility than it is for husbands. Rubin's (1976, 1983) interviews also include evidence of women's greater tendency to link love and sexual relationships. However, while some of the men in her samples spoke with much ambivalence about their emotional experiences within their sexual relationships, and spoke of sometimes preferring to keep the two separate, not all of them divorced the two. However, since there is some evidence that emotional and physical intimacy are

more strongly associated for women, we expected that feelings of affirmation would be especially important predictors of sexual satisfaction for women. Furthermore, it was expected that, after controlling for affirmation, sexual satisfaction would be an important predictor of marital well-being for men but not for women.

If feelings of affirmation do indeed set the stage for romance and sex, then we might expect feelings of tension to do just the opposite. When arguments are frequent or spouses are often irritable and at odds with each other, this is likely to be reflected in a less than joyful sexual relationship. Rubin's (1976) findings suggested that women, in particular, do not move quickly from arguments to sexual relations. Both women and men spoke of women's need for a period of emotional, rather than physical, intimacy following an argument.

The *relationship between feelings about sex and marital well-being* might well differ depending on which aspect of well-being is considered. For example, sexual satisfaction and general marital competence may be highly related, since personal feelings of adequacy or inadequacy as marriage partners may be a function of the way people perceive themselves as sexual partners. Feelings of dissatisfaction with one's sex life might be reflected in low personal assessments of competence within the relationship, just as sexual satisfaction might contribute to higher levels of competence. Rubin (1976) suggests that although much attention has been paid to sexual performance pressures placed on males, changing social mores and expectations regarding female sexuality are now taking their toll on women's feelings of sexual adequacy as well. Heightened awareness of the potential of female sexuality and a focus on the importance of orgasms may have led to greater sexual enjoyment for women; however, this awareness also adds additional pressure to be more sexual and establishes a new set of criteria by which a woman may both judge herself and be judged in terms of marital competence.

In terms of control in marriage, sex might come into play as one of the things that spouses feel they can rely on to improve negative situations or to make time spent together especially pleasant, especially for men. Rubin (1976) describes how men may attempt to end an argument by making love, whereas women are more likely to seek emotional intimacy before engaging in sex. Moreover, perceptions of control may be derived from the sexual relationship

itself. If the sexual relationship is not satisfying, for example, a wife or husband may feel there is little that can be done to improve the situation. Unhappiness with the sexual relationship and a sense of futility about making it better may serve to diminish a person's overall sense of control in the marriage.

In a rather dated view of marital equity, sex was seen as one of a wife's duties in return for material support. While this view may not accurately reflect the experience of many married women and men, past or present, it is very likely that what happens in the bedrooms of married couples will be linked to their feelings about equity in the marriage. Husbands, in particular, since they are still more likely to initiate sex (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983) and are therefore more likely to have their advances rejected, may be especially vulnerable to feeling sexually under-benefited. However, either spouse may feel that they put more into their sexual relationship than they get in return and, if sex is important to them, this discrepancy will probably be reflected in their general reports of marital equity.

The fourth measure of marital well-being, marital happiness, may encompass so many aspects of the marital relationship that, unless sex is central to a wife or husband, its contribution to overall happiness will be relatively minor. Furthermore, if there is a gender difference in the importance placed upon marital sex, this may be reflected in a corresponding difference between husbands and wives in the strength of the relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction.

The present study examines the interrelationships among sexual satisfaction/dissatisfaction, feelings of affirmation and tension, and four dimensions of marital well-being. Using regression analyses it asks whether feelings of affirmation and tension predict sexual satisfaction within marriage. This research asks the following: controlling for the effects of affirmation and tension, is sexual satisfaction a predictor of each of the measures of marital well-being? These questions are addressed separately by race and gender, in both the first and third years of marriage.

It was expected that for both men and women, but particularly for women, feelings of affirmation would be related positively to sexual satisfaction and negatively to sexual dissatisfaction. Conversely, we expected that feelings of tension would be related negatively to sexual satisfaction and positively to sexual dissatisfaction.

Of primary interest were within-spouse relationships. For example, we expected to find positive relationships between wives' feelings of affirmation and wives' sexual satisfaction, and between husbands' feelings of affirmation and husbands' sexual satisfaction. However, we were also interested in the relationship between one spouse's sense of affirmation and the partner's sexual satisfaction. While these between-spouse relationships were expected to be less direct and, therefore, less strong, they were expected to be in the same direction (i.e. positive relationships between affirmation and sexual satisfaction, and negative relationships between tension and sexual satisfaction). Furthermore, given that sensitivity to others' needs and feelings has been expected of women as part of the female role, we might expect that husbands' feelings about the marriage would contribute more to women's evaluation of the sexual part of marriage than vice versa. Therefore, we anticipated that the spouse's feelings of affirmation and tension would be especially important in predicting women's sexual satisfaction.

Hypotheses concerning the role of sex in marital satisfaction were less clear. In general, reports of sexual *satisfaction* were expected to relate positively to marital competence, marital control, marital equity and, to a lesser degree, marital happiness. Negative relationships were expected between sexual *dissatisfaction* and these four dimensions of marital well-being. Once again, within-spouse relationships were of primary interest; however we also expected to find positive relationships between one spouse's reports of sexual satisfaction and the partner's marital well-being. Finally, given that caring and sex have been found to be more highly related for women than for men, it was expected that, when controlling for feelings of affirmation and tension, sexual satisfaction alone might be predictive of marital satisfaction for husbands but not for wives.

Most research in this area has focused solely on white couples. If other ethnic and racial groups have been included in the sample, they typically have been too few in number to run statistical analyses separately by race. This study had a large enough sample of black couples to allow for separate analyses by race. While we had no reason to believe that relationships among the variables of interest would be different for black and white couples, we felt it was important to run separate analyses and so add to knowledge about black marriages.

Method

Data are from the first- and third-year waves of the Early Years of Marriage Study (Veroff et al., 1993), a 4-year longitudinal study of newly married couples. Couples were randomly selected from among those who had filed for marriage licenses at the Wayne County Clerk's Office from April through June of 1986. Of those couples who had filed for marriage licenses, all black couples and a randomly selected group of white couples were invited to participate. The response rate for couples in which both spouses agreed to participate was 65 percent; of the 373 couples who agreed to participate 199 were black and 174 were white. No couples in which the age of the wives were greater than 35 was included in the sample. At the time of the first interview the mean age was 24.5 for wives and 26.5 for husbands. None of the couples had been previously married. At some time between the fifth and eighth month of their marriage, spouses were interviewed extensively, both separately and together. In both the first and third years of marriage, they were asked to respond separately to a questionnaire that was administered by a same-race interviewer, and it is data from these questionnaires on which the present study is based.

Oggin (1989) and Oggin & Veroff (1990) have performed factor analyses on questionnaire items dealing with spouses' evaluations of their sexual interactions and the affective aspects of their marital relationship. Oggin performed such analyses separately for men and women, and Oggin & Veroff further divided these analyses by race. Results were somewhat divergent for the four race \times gender groups. Evaluations about the sexual relationship loaded on the same factor as evaluations of more general affective relationship for some groups and not for all groups; positive and negative evaluations were on distinct factors for some groups but not for all groups. Consequently we decided to maintain a distinction between positive and negative evaluations of sexual interactions as well as positive and negative evaluations of relationship feelings, since for certain groups these distinctions may be particularly meaningful.

Thus we used one scale that reflected the feeling that sex was joyful and exciting (Joyful Sex); another that reflected the frequency of feeling upset about sex (Sexual Upset); a third that reflected the feelings of affirmation in the relationship, including feeling good about oneself in the relationship and being cared for and valued by one's spouse (Affirmation); and, a fourth which reflected the frequency of irritation and tension about arguing (Tension). Indices were formed separately within the race-gender groups for each year using standardized variables. See Table 1 for a complete list of the items used for each scale and the associated Cronbach alpha coefficients.

Scores for the four dimensions of marital well-being were arrived at separately for each spouse for both the first and third years of marriage. (For a thorough description of the scales comprising marital happiness, equity, competence and control, see Crohan & Veroff, 1989.) The 6-item marital happiness scale seems to tap marital commitment as well as general marital happiness. Prototypical items in this scale ask how often in the past few months a respondent had considered leaving their spouse, and how happy and satisfied they were with their marriage. The marital equity scale consists of two items. One asks 'Considering how much each of you puts into your marriage, who would you say gets more out of being married — you, your spouse or both about equal?' The other asks how the respondent thinks the spouse would answer the question. Competence is measured by two items as

TABLE 1
Items used in Affirmation, Tension, Joyful Sex and Sexual Upset indices*

Affirmation (for years one and three respectively)

($\alpha = .80, .86$ (black women); $.78, .86$ (black men); $.70, .78$ (white women); $.70, .81$ (white men))

1. Feel that your (wife/husband) felt especially caring toward you?
2. Feel that your (wife/husband) was someone you could count on in times of trouble?
3. Feel that your (wife/husband) made your life especially interesting and exciting?
4. Feel that your (wife/husband) made you feel good about having your own ideas and ways of doing things?
5. Feel pleased that you were thought of as a couple?
6. Feel your (wife/husband) made you feel good about the kind of person you are?

Tension

($\alpha = .66, .72$ (black women); $.62, .72$ (black men); $.68, .74$ (white women); $.69, .65$ (white men))

1. Feel irritated or resentful about things your (wife/husband) did or didn't do?
2. Feel tense from fighting, arguing or disagreeing with your (wife/husband)?

Joyful Sex

($\alpha = .87, .95$ (black women); $.89, .92$ (black men); $.83, .94$ (white women); $.90, .96$ (white men))

1. Feel that your sexual life together was joyful and exciting?
2. Feel that your (wife/husband) felt your sexual life together was joyful and exciting?

Sexual Upset

($\alpha = .82, .90$ (black women); $.81, .83$ (black men); $.86, .85$ (white women); $.90, .87$ (white men))

1. Feel upset about how you and your (wife/husband) were getting along in the sexual part of your relationship?
 2. Feel that your (wife/husband) was upset about how the two of you were getting along in the sexual part of your relationship?
-

* Following the initial stem 'During the past month how often did you . . .', participants were asked to respond to each of the listed items on a 4-point scale: often, sometimes, rarely or never.

well. One asks about the frequency with which the respondents felt they were not as good a spouse as they would like to have been, and the other asks about guilt feelings in connection with equity within the relationship. Finally, two items are also used to measure control. One item is as follows: 'Everyone experiences times when things between themselves and their spouse are not going as well as they would like. When such times come up for you, how often do you feel that you can do or say something to make things better?' The other item is similar but asks how often the respondents felt they could do something to make things especially pleasant when there were no problems. All items, except those used to measure marital equity, employ a 4-point scale, and final scores for each scale were computed by adding scores on each item and dividing by the total number of items in the scale. For marital equity, responses to each question were coded as either equitable or inequitable before they were combined to form an index. Correlation matrices for the sexual, affectional and marital well-being measures are presented in Tables 2 through 5.

While measures such as marital happiness (which is composed of 6 items) demonstrated strong reliabilities across both years of marriage, reliabilities for some of the 2-item scales are problematic. In particular, reliabilities fell below .50 in year one for marital equity for black women, and marital control for black men; however,

TABLE 2
Correlations among affectional, sexual and marital well-being measures for black women and men, Year 1

	Affirmation	Tension	Joyful Sex	Sexual Upset	Happiness	Competence	Equity	Control
Affirmation	1.00	-.46	.36	-.24	.71	.31	.23	.28
Tension	-.33	1.00	-.20	.41	-.51	-.33	-.09	-.18
Joyful Sex	.57	-.22	1.00	-.38	.29	.14	.12	.22
Sexual Upset	-.23	.42	-.27	1.00	-.27	-.33	-.10	-.22
Happiness	.54	-.46	.39	-.24	1.00	.27	.22	.35
Competence	.22	-.34	.24	-.24	.32	1.00	.09	.19
Equity	.25	-.15	.18	-.09	.32	.16	1.00	.18
Control	.33	-.14	.19	.02	.35	.11	.19	1.00

Note. Values for men are in italics in the lower half of the table; values for women are in the upper half.

TABLE 3
Correlations among affectional, sexual and marital well-being measures for white women and men, Year 1

	Affirmation	Tension	Joyful Sex	Sexual Upset	Happiness	Competence	Equity	Control
Affirmation	1.00	-.42	.42	-.24	.55	.13	.11	.39
Tension	-.30	1.00	-.18	.37	-.47	-.27	-.01	-.22
Joyful Sex	.46	-.11	1.00	-.54	.31	.14	.06	.21
Sexual Upset	-.30	.40	-.45	1.00	-.19	-.27	.03	-.09
Happiness	.53	-.43	.39	-.33	1.00	.23	.26	.36
Competence	.20	-.38	.17	-.26	.26	1.00	.10	.15
Equity	.30	-.21	.21	-.19	.43	.28	1.00	.18
Control	.08	-.13	.18	-.25	.19	-.03	.07	1.00

Note. Values for men are in italics in the lower half of the table; values for women are in the upper half.

TABLE 4
Correlations among affectional, sexual and marital well-being measures for black women and men, Year 3

	Affirmation	Tension	Joyful Sex	Sexual Upset	Happiness	Competence	Equity	Control
Affirmation	1.00	-.56	.63	-.29	.65	.27	.42	.54
Tension	-.49	1.00	-.40	.44	-.46	-.21	-.23	-.32
Joyful Sex	.54	-.28	1.00	-.62	.54	.21	.15	.52
Sexual Upset	-.32	.45	-.51	1.00	-.36	-.12	-.16	-.31
Happiness	.69	-.53	.37	-.31	1.00	.21	.37	.56
Competence	.26	-.25	.17	-.17	.43	1.00	.13	.10
Equity	.32	-.13	.08	-.03	.35	.25	1.00	.24
Control	.48	-.34	.25	-.17	.55	.31	.12	1.00

Note. Values for men are in italics in the lower half of the table; values for women are in the upper half.

TABLE 5
Correlations among affectional, sexual and marital well-being measures for white women and men, Year 3

	Affirmation	Tension	Joyful Sex	Sexual Upset	Happiness	Competence	Equity	Control
Affirmation	1.00	-.54	.46	-.31	.64	.22	.27	.36
Tension	-.33	1.00	-.25	.36	-.60	-.29	-.14	-.17
Joyful Sex	.38	-.25	1.00	-.62	.24	.13	.23	.16
Sexual Upset	-.25	.45	-.62	1.00	-.28	-.17	-.07	-.04
Happiness	.41	-.55	.18	-.20	1.00	.33	.26	.26
Competence	.26	-.28	.11	-.15	.34	1.00	.04	.00
Equity	.13	-.22	.04	-.11	.26	.43	1.00	.04
Control	.16	-.21	.27	-.28	.30	.11	.00	1.00

Note. Values for men are in italics in the lower half of the table; values for women are in the upper half.

for the third year of marriage these reliabilities improved. The measure of marital competence demonstrated weaker reliabilities, with values of less than .50 in year one for black men, and in year three for black women and white men. We need to be especially cautious in interpreting results involving these measures. In particular, since low reliabilities reduce the likelihood of finding significant relationships, we should be cautious about making too much of intergroup comparisons in cases where the lack of significant findings for one group may be due, at least in part, to low reliabilities for that group's measure of marital well-being. Further development of the marital competence measure, in particular, is clearly necessary. Assessments of the dimensions of marital control, competence and equity could all be markedly improved through refinement of the current scales and the inclusion of several additional parallel items (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). However, given the relatively large sample sizes in this study, the reliability issue is less serious than it might otherwise be. Thorndike et al. (1991) make the case that although dealing with individuals or small groups may demand highly reliable measures, with groups of this size, measures with relatively low reliability can still be useful and accurate in drawing conclusions about such groups.

Multiple regression analyses were used to examine the relationships among predictor and dependent variables. All of these analyses also entered three demographic variables in the regression models as independent predictors — household income, length of cohabitation prior to marriage and the presence of children in the home. Previous research has found evidence of relationships between SES (e.g. Rubin, 1976), the length of time that partners have been together (e.g. Greenblat, 1983) and reports of sexual attitudes and activity and, since our respondents varied a great deal on these factors, it was important to account for their effects. We decided not to enter these hierarchically since the latter procedure conservatively deals with shared variance between each of these variables and the sexual satisfaction, affective and well-being variables.

As for the presence of children, there are at least two reasons we might expect this to be a factor in a couple's sexual life. Children make demands of parents' time and energy, while simultaneously making inroads on their privacy, although Greenblat (1983) found that having children per se was not significantly related to the decline in frequency of sexual activity. However, respondents with children did attribute their decline in activity to the arrival and demands of children. Therefore, because people themselves see a relationship between parenthood and sexuality,

we felt that the presence of children should be included as a control variable in the examination of sexual satisfaction.

Results and discussion

Year one

Race and gender differences. In the first year of marriage there were few race-related differences in this sample. Black couples more often had children present in the home ($F(1, 371) = 44.35, p < .001$) and had cohabited for a longer period of time than had white couples ($F(1, 371) = 13.71, p < .001$). Black husbands reported higher levels of Joyful Sex than did white husbands ($F(1, 370) = 6.85, p < .01$). Black wives' reports of Joyful Sex were marginally higher than those of white wives ($F(1, 368) = 3.04, p = .08$). No differences were found on spouses' reports of Affirmation or Tension or on any measure of well-being. There were no gender differences on marital well-being, feelings of Affirmation or Tension, Joyful Sex or Sexual Upset.

Predicting sexual satisfaction. We want to stress from the outset that these data are correlational and that the direction of causation among these variables cannot be unequivocally determined. While we use the terminology of predictor and dependent variables, we do not mean to argue that the affectional aspect of marriage causes sexual satisfaction or that sexual satisfaction causes marital well-being. The relationship between sex and affection, in particular, would seem to be so reciprocal that the question of causation appears futile. In fact, cross-lagged correlations indicate that across time the direction of causation appears to flow both ways. There is no significant difference in correlations between (a) sex at Time 1 and Affirmation or Tension at Time 2 and (b) Affirmation or Tension at Time 1 and sex at Time 2. In accordance with an intuitive approach to the question, this lack of statistical significance indicates a continuous feedback loop operating between these two variables.

Regression analyses were run to examine the relationship between sexual satisfaction and feelings of Affirmation and Tension. Affirmation was positively related to Joyful Sex for black wives ($\beta = .36, p < .001$), black husbands ($\beta = .55, p < .001$), white wives ($\beta = .41, p < .001$) and white husbands ($\beta = .46, p < .001$). Further, Tension was positively related to levels of Sexual Upset for black wives ($\beta = .37, p < .001$), black husbands ($\beta = .37, p < .001$), white wives ($\beta = .36, p < .001$) and white husbands ($\beta = .35, p < .001$). In no case was Tension a significant predictor of Joyful Sex, and only for white husbands was Affirmation negatively related to Sexual Upset ($\beta = -.18, p < .01$).

Predictions that the connection between feelings of Affirmation and Tension and sexual satisfaction would be especially important for women were not borne out. The pattern of relationships among these variables is similar for wives and husbands. If anything, the connection is even more apparent for white men, since only in their case is there a significant link between the lack of Affirmation and Sexual Upset.

Although positive aspects of feelings about the relationship and sexuality within marriage were highly related, as were negative aspects of feelings and sexuality, there was little crossover between positive and negative domains. While we expected that some crossover would occur, these results are consistent with findings referred to earlier, that people tend to make independent evaluations of positive and negative affective experiences.

We also expected that sexual satisfaction would be predicted by spouses' feelings

TABLE 6
 Marital happiness: standardized regression coefficients using sexual, affectional and demographic measures as predictors

	Black women			Black men			White women			White men		
	Yr 1 (N = 199)	Yr 3 (N = 122)		Yr 1 (N = 199)	Yr 3 (N = 122)		Yr 1 (N = 174)	Yr 3 (N = 142)		Yr 1 (N = 174)	Yr 3 (N = 142)	
<i>Sexual</i>												
Wife Joyful Sex	.054	.195*		-.033	-.081		.140	-.062		.104	-.207*	
Husband Joyful Sex	-.106	-.101		.098	-.041		-.003	-.053		.206**	-.077	
Wife Sexual Upset	-.045	-.107		.034	-.150*		.074	-.083		.143*	.042	
Husband Sexual Upset	.031	.088		.038	.002		.015	.040		-.013	.060	
<i>Affectional</i>												
Wife Affirmation	.551***	.472***		.116	.258**		.346***	.473***		.169**	.261***	
Husband Affirmation	.153**	.018		.351***	.529***		.151*	-.063		.285***	.186**	
Wife Tension	-.194**	-.056		-.112	.051		-.260***	-.321***		-.187**	-.117	
Husband Tension	-.051	-.079		-.283***	-.188**		-.024	-.127		-.209**	-.400***	
<i>Demographic</i>												
Income	.117*	.003		.150**	.018		.123*	.040		.085	-.070	
Children	-.018	-.072		-.079	.073		-.009	.010		.023	.008	
Cohabitation	.039	.039		-.016	-.016		-.023	-.014		-.043	.047	
Adjusted R ²	.56**	.45**		.43**	.54**		.38**	.49**		.45**	.41**	

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

of Affirmation and Tension, and that this would be especially the case for women if notions about women's greater interpersonal sensitivity and responsiveness were valid. In fact, we found no evidence at all of the predictive importance of spouses' feelings, for men or women, in the first year of marriage.

Demographic variables, for the most part, were not important predictors of sexual satisfaction in year one. However, income was associated with wives' sexual dissatisfaction. It operated in different ways for black and white women; for black wives, income level was negatively related to Joy ($\beta = -.19, p < .01$), while for white wives, income was positively related to Upset ($\beta = .15, p < .05$). Higher income for a family usually entails high commitment to a career for working women. It may be that women who are in these dual career situations have higher expectations concerning sexuality and sexual satisfaction. Or, perhaps the strains of earning higher family incomes are manifested in the bedroom. If higher earnings come at the expense of longer working hours or higher levels of stress, for one or both partners, then the actual time and the quality of the time couples have to spend together may be less than optimal, and this may be reflected in the level of sexual satisfaction, especially among women for whom sexual expressiveness occurs within a general pattern of a relaxed affectional life.

The presence of children was positively related to Sexual Upset for black wives ($\beta = .15, p < .05$). This is hardly surprising; not only does the arrival of children mean that couples have less privacy and freedom to engage in sex, but as well, the strains of childcare can be more than enough to dampen the ardor of tired parents. Furthermore, the presence of children might also affect the level of tension in the relationship which, in turn, could lead to more frequent occurrences of sexual upset. Why would this relationship hold only for black wives? First, many more black women had children in the first year of marriage. For many of these women, the children present in the home were not from the men to whom they were married. Perhaps this created concern about sexual expressiveness in the presence of the children, especially during this initial stage of forming a family.

Predicting marital well-being. A second set of regression analyses was run in order to examine the relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital well-being. Husbands' and wives' Joyful Sex and Sexual Upset were used as predictor variables of the four measures of marital well-being: happiness, control, equity and competence. Results from these analyses are presented for all groups in Tables 6, 7, 8 and 9, respectively.

Husbands' and wives' Affirmation and Tension, as well as the demographic variables of income, children and cohabitation, were included as predictors. Coefficients for these variables are included in the tables; however, since the strength of these variables as predictors of marital well-being is not the question at hand, discussion will be limited primarily to the relationship between well-being and sexual satisfaction.

We expected that Joyful Sex would predict the four dimensions of marital well-being in a positive direction, and Sexual Upset would predict those same dimensions of marital well-being in a negative direction. There was some support for these hypotheses. Black men's Joyful Sex was positively related to their sense of marital competence (Table 9); and white men's Joyful Sex was positively related to happiness (Table 6). There were also negative relationships between white and black women's Sexual Upset and competence (Table 9); and between white husbands' reports of Sexual Upset and their sense of control (Table 7).

TABLE 7
Marital control: standardized regression coefficients using sexual, affectional and demographic measures as predictors

	Black women			Black men			White women			White men		
	Yr 1 (N = 199)	Yr 3 (N = 122)		Yr 1 (N = 199)	Yr 3 (N = 122)		Yr 1 (N = 174)	Yr 3 (N = 142)		Yr 1 (N = 174)	Yr 3 (N = 142)	
<i>Sexual</i>												
Wife Joyful Sex	.085	.277**		.047	-.208*		.096	.079		-.059	-.041	
Husband Joyful Sex	-.014	-.058		.037	.042		.145	-.063		.117	.207*	
Wife Sexual Upset	-.135	-.021		.018	-.132		.069	.133		-.087	.208*	
Husband Sexual Upset	-.061	-.094		.129	.007		.048	-.149		-.188*	-.149	
<i>Affectional</i>												
Wife Affirmation	.207**	.315**		-.063	.253**		.315***	.392***		.005	.170	
Husband Affirmation	.042	.125		.325***	.390***		.016	-.106		-.016	.011	
Wife Tension	.009	-.023		-.002	.189*		-.059	-.028		.141	-.046	
Husband Tension	.010	.111		-.087	-.178*		.026	.113		-.092	-.056	
<i>Demographic</i>												
Income	.035	.090		-.008	-.053		.165*	-.011		.156*	.050	
Children	.029	.017		.014	.146*		-.040	-.046		.039	.014	
Cohabitation	-.029	-.019		.095	-.142*		.010	-.106		.045	.103	
Adjusted R ²	.07**	.33**		.09**	.28**		.16**	.12**		.05	.11**	

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

TABLE 8
Marital equity: standardized regression coefficients using sexual, affectional and demographic measures as predictors

	Black women		Black men		White women		White men	
	Yr 1 (N = 199)	Yr 3 (N = 122)	Yr 1 (N = 199)	Yr 3 (N = 122)	Yr 1 (N = 174)	Yr 3 (N = 142)	Yr 1 (N = 174)	Yr 3 (N = 142)
<i>Sexual</i>								
Wife Joyful Sex	.074	-.408***	.031	-.349**	.059	.339**	.171	.020
Husband Joyful Sex	.058	.259**	.047	-.096	.265**	-.359***	.101	-.082
Wife Sexual Upset	-.060	-.277**	.016	-.125	.128	.085	.208*	.144
Husband Sexual Upset	.250**	.209**	.027	-.046	.098	-.038	.041	-.103
<i>Affectional</i>								
Wife Affirmation	.228**	.664***	-.014	.228*	.116	.154	-.033	-.014
Husband Affirmation	-.069	-.044	.194*	.357***	-.055	.085	.188*	.075
Wife Tension	.066	.115	-.055	.006	-.011	.066	-.191	-.214*
Husband Tension	-.202**	-.104	-.071	.059	.054	-.233**	-.052	-.126
<i>Demographic</i>								
Income	-.057	-.135*	.021	.037	-.027	-.090	-.056	-.051
Children	.047	.112	-.052	-.030	-.034	.096	-.034	.168*
Cohabitation	-.174*	.005	-.088	-.028	.004	-.029	.169*	-.056
Adjusted R ²	.09**	.27***	.03	.12***	.01	.15**	.11**	.05

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

TABLE 9
 Marital competence: standardized regression coefficients using sexual, affectional and demographic measures as predictors

	Black women		Black men		White women		White men	
	Yr 1 (N = 199)	Yr 3 (N = 122)	Yr 1 (N = 199)	Yr 3 (N = 122)	Yr 1 (N = 174)	Yr 3 (N = 142)	Yr 1 (N = 174)	Yr 3 (N = 142)
<i>Sexual</i>								
Wife Joyful Sex	-.103	.033	.076	.165	.001	-.012	.031	-.052
Husband Joyful Sex	-.061	-.196*	.164*	.015	.004	.130	.091	-.016
Wife Sexual Upset	-.264***	-.055	.111	.174	-.201*	-.090	.161	-.035
Husband Sexual Upset	-.075	-.094	-.068	-.050	.068	.157	-.082	-.004
<i>Affectional</i>								
Wife Affirmation	.204**	.194	-.065	.076	.010	.028	.130	.047
Husband Affirmation	.144	.070	.006	.109	-.047	.169*	-.020	.172*
Wife Tension	-.148	-.072	-.132	-.192*	-.164	-.106	-.211*	-.016
Husband Tension	.032	-.108	-.257***	-.061	-.123	-.219***	-.257	-.212*
<i>Demographic</i>								
Income	-.073	.039	.225**	.033	-.105	.174*	-.187**	-.004
Children	.051	.205**	-.038	.064	-.104	-.084	-.112	-.060
Cohabitation	.083	.092	-.003	-.074	-.002	.091	.059	.134
Adjusted R ²	.17**	.13**	.17**	.12**	.08**	.16**	.21**	.07*

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

There is also limited support for the notion that the link between sexuality and overall marital satisfaction is stronger for men. Only for white men was there a significant relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital happiness. Because happiness is a global measure of marital well-being, this might indicate that in the first year of marriage sex plays a more key role for white men than it does for other groups. Furthermore, there are more relationships among the predictor and dependent variables for white men than there are for other groups.

For women, what appears to be important in the first year of marriage is the extent to which they perceive sex as a source of upset in their marriages. Once again, the causal direction remains a question here. But the higher the level of Sexual Upset reported by a woman, the less competent she feels as a wife. While feeling good about sex does not predict how she will feel in terms of competence, feeling bad about sex is negatively related to feelings of competence. Perhaps the experience and provision of sexual enjoyment are so much an expectation in women's conception of the marital relationship that sexual satisfaction is regarded as simply normal. Sexual difficulties or upsets, on the other hand, may be unexpected and regarded as out of the ordinary and may, therefore, give rise to feelings of dissatisfaction. Also, if women are socialized to be, or at least to think of themselves, as more passive and their partners as more active during sexual interactions, then it may be that women attribute positive sexual experiences to their partners. At the same time, they may blame themselves for problems that arise in the bedroom, particularly if the problems or tensions that arise about sex have to do with husbands' complaints about the frequency of intercourse or other sexual acts. If so, we would not expect a woman's report of sexual enjoyment to be related to a sense of competence whereas we would expect any negative feelings about the sexual part of marriage to be reflected in lower feelings of competence in her role as a wife.

As for the connection between one spouse's sexual satisfaction and the other's marital well-being, there was one finding which supported our expectations. For white women, husbands' Joyful Sex was positively related to equity (Table 8). However, there were several findings in the opposite direction. For black women, husbands' reports of Sexual Upset was positively related to the wives' perceptions of equity (Table 8); and wives' reports of Sexual Upset were positively related to both happiness (Table 6) and equity for white men (Table 8).

Year three

Race and gender differences. In the third year of the study 122 black couples and 142 white couples participated. Besides the length of time spent cohabiting prior to marriage, which obviously did not change in year three, there were no significant differences between black and white couples on demographic variables, Joyful Sex, Sexual Upset, Affirmation, Tension, or any of the measures of marital well-being. Once again, there were no significant gender differences.

Predicting sexual satisfaction. As in year one, Affirmation was positively related to levels of Joyful Sex for black women ($\beta = .61, p < .001$), black husbands ($\beta = .47, p < .001$), white wives ($\beta = .41, p < .001$) and white husbands ($\beta = .34, p < .001$). Further, Tension was positively related to levels of Sexual Upset for black wives ($\beta = .35, p < .001$), black husbands ($\beta = .36, p < .001$), white wives ($\beta = .32, p < .001$) and white husbands ($\beta = .43, p < .001$). For white wives Affirmation was also a negative predictor of Sexual Upset ($\beta = -.17, p < .05$). For white husbands Tension was a negative predictor of Joyful Sex ($\beta = -.16, p < .05$). There is a good deal of

evidence that people tend to evaluate positive and negative aspects of their experience independently. However, our results indicate that by the third year of marriage for both white women and white men, the distinction between positive and negative aspects of marriage is no longer so clear. Reports of feelings and sexual satisfaction are interdependent, at least to some extent.

For white men tension and affirmation are related to sexual satisfaction even earlier in marriage. In the first year white men's Affirmation was a negative predictor of Sexual Upset. In year three this relationship was no longer significant; however, Tension was a negative predictor of Joyful Sex. This is puzzling. Perhaps in the first year of marriage white males feel a lack of affirmation in their relationships when their sex lives are less than ideal. Certainly, men do talk about sex as a sign of their partner's love for them (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). Rubin (1983) has also described men's tendency to feel that their wives would be willing to be more sexual or to perform particular sexual acts if they truly loved and cared for their husbands. This sort of association between love and sex may be especially important to men early in the relationship. Perhaps once the relationship and expectations about sexuality become established, and these men have other clear indications of love and caring, this association weakens for them. By the third year of marriage, irritations and tensions in their relationships, whether based on sexual issues or other everyday problems, seem to detract from white men's sexual enjoyment. Conversely, it may be that a less than exciting sexual life gives rise to tensions, particularly several years into the marriage when sexual patterns may be well established and there are low expectations that things will improve.

Only among black couples was there a relationship between one spouse's sexual satisfaction and their partner's feelings of Affirmation. In the third year of marriage black women's reports of Affirmation were positively related to their husbands' Joyful Sex ($\beta = .17, p < .05$), and negatively related to their husbands' Sexual Upset ($\beta = -.17, p < .05$). In other words, the more affirmation there was in the relationship, as reported by black women, the greater were their husbands' reports of Joyful Sex and the lesser were their husbands' reports of Sexual Upset. This is notable in that it is the only case in which one partner's experience of feelings in the relationship is clearly reflected in the sexual experience of the other. It would be interesting to see if other such relationships developed over time; however, to this point there is little indication that the spouse's feelings are important predictors, and no evidence that they are especially important to women.

As for the demographic predictors, once again, as in year one, a higher level of income did not bode well for wives' Joyful Sex. Income was a significant predictor of Joyful Sex in a negative direction for both black ($\beta = -.12, p < .05$) and white wives ($\beta = -.14, p < .05$). Also as in year one, the presence of children was positively related to Sexual Upset for black wives ($\beta = .17, p < .05$); in year three the presence of children became increasingly important for black couples, since it was also a significant negative predictor of husbands' Joyful Sex ($\beta = -.19, p < .01$), and a positive predictor of husbands' Sexual Upset ($\beta = .14, p < .05$). For white men the presence of children was positively related to Joyful Sex in year three ($\beta = .15, p < .05$). It is also worth noting that for black husbands Joyful Sex in year one did not significantly predict Joyful Sex in year three; for all other groups there was a significant level of consistency across the first and third years of marriage. The predictive importance of cohabitation in year three is particularly noteworthy. While the relationship between cohabitation and sexual satisfaction was not significant in

year one, this changed in year three. Cohabitation was positively related to sexual satisfaction in the third year of marriage, for black wives ($\beta = .15, p < .01$) and husbands ($\beta = .12, p < .05$) and white wives ($\beta = .15, p < .05$); this is a surprising finding and warrants further research.

Predicting marital well-being. Regression analyses were also run to assess the relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital well-being in year three of these marriages. Once again, Affirmation, Tension and the demographic variables were included as predictors.

As in year one, findings from the third year of marriage indicate mixed support for our expectation that Joyful Sex would be positively related to the four dimensions of marital well-being, while Sexual Upset would be negatively related to marital well-being. First, black women's Joyful Sex was positively related to their happiness (Table 6). Regarding marital control, two findings lend support to our hypotheses. For both black women and white men, Joyful Sex was positively related to control (Table 7). In terms of marital equity, two additional findings support the hypotheses. For white women, Joyful Sex was positively related to equity (Table 8); and, for black women, Sexual Upset was negatively related to equity (Table 8). However, counter to our expectations, black women's Joyful Sex was *negatively* related to their perceptions of marital equity (Table 8).

There was less support for our expectations when we examined the relationship between one spouse's sexual satisfaction and their partner's marital well-being. Indeed, some of the results are counter-intuitive. For example, among white couples, wives' Joyful Sex was negatively related to men's happiness (Table 6). Nevertheless, several observations must be made about the set of findings concerning the spouse's sexual feelings and one's own marital well-being. First, it is interesting that a number of significant relationships between one spouse's sexual satisfaction and the other's well-being emerge by the third year of marriage, indicating that as time passes one's spouse's experience may have a greater bearing on one's own marital experience. Second, there is virtually no support here for the idea that women are more sensitive or responsive to their partner's perceptions of the marital relationship than are men. Third, the majority of significant relationships in this last set of findings ran counter to our expectations in terms of the direction of the relationships. While the significant within-spouse findings were generally in support of what we expected, the between-spouse findings were just the opposite. Clearly, something quite different is operating with the between-spouse relationships. Why one partner's reports of Sexual Joy should be negatively related to the other's marital well-being is unclear. Perhaps these unexpected findings are the outcome of interpersonal power dynamics being played out within the sexual arena.

Group summaries

Some of the findings from this study generalize across all race and sex groups. For example, for all groups there was a positive relationship between each spouse's report of Affirmation and Joyful Sex, and similarly between Tension and Sexual Upset. These relationships were significant in both year one and year three. While it is correct to say that, for all race and sex groups, sexual and affective factors of marriage are related, and that to some extent sexual satisfaction is predictive of marital well-being, it must also be recognized that these data indicate quite different patterns of relationships among particular variables across groups.

Findings specific to black women. For black women, Sexual Upset was negatively

related to competence in the first year of marriage. Black women's reports of equity were predicted by husbands' Sexual Upset. In the third year of marriage, all four indices of sexual satisfaction were significant predictors of equity; however the pattern of results concerning equity was rather puzzling. Also in the third year, Joyful Sex was a predictor of both happiness and control. Furthermore, husbands' Joyful Sex was negatively related to black women's marital competence. Overall, it appears that sexual satisfaction becomes increasingly important for black women over time; by year three it was related to all four measures of marital well-being.

Findings specific to black men. The relationship between sexual satisfaction and the affective component of marriage was somewhat stronger for black men in the third year, since, beyond the set of relationships which held for all groups, wives' Affirmation was a positive predictor of husbands' Joyful Sex and a negative predictor of husbands' Sexual Upset. Overall, wives' perceptions seem relatively important for black men. Although it was their own sense of sexual satisfaction which was positively related to competence in the first year of marriage, the only significant predictors in the third year analyses were based on wives' reports of sexual satisfaction. Wives' Sexual Upset was negatively related to happiness; and wives' Joyful Sex was negatively related to control and to equity.

Findings specific to white women. Besides the general relationship between Affirmation and Joyful Sex, among white women there was also a negative relationship between Affirmation and Sexual Upset. In terms of marital well-being, one pattern for white women was somewhat similar to that for black women: Sexual Upset was negatively related to women's feelings of competence in year one analyses, though not in year three, but we should be cautious about these results since the level of reliability on the marital competence index was particularly low for black women. In neither year one nor year three was sexual satisfaction related to marital happiness as it was for other groups. In a way, this is not surprising since white women, probably more than any other group, have been socialized to repress their sexuality and to view the pursuit of sexual satisfaction as not a central concern either within or outside of marriage. There were significant findings regarding sexual satisfaction and marital equity, but the pattern is confusing. As with black women, husbands' sexual satisfaction was related to equity in year one, but in this case, husbands' Joyful Sex was a positive predictor of wives' equity. In the third year analyses this latter relationship was a negative one, indicating that for white women the connection between sex and equity shifts from year one to year three. Joyful Sex was also related to equity for white women in year three. The results, although confusing, do suggest that white wives' judgements of marital equity are very much connected to their sexual lives.

Findings specific to white men. Beyond the general pattern of relationships concerning sexual satisfaction and the affective part of marriage, for white men in the first year of marriage, Affirmation was negatively related to Sexual Upset; and, in the third year of marriage Tension was negatively related to Sexual Joy. On marital well-being, white men were similar to black men insofar as the relative predictive importance of wives' perceptions; however, the pattern of specific relationships was quite different in the case of white men. In the first year of marriage, wives' Sexual Upset was positively related to both happiness and equity for white men, and in year three it was positively related to control. Also in year three, wives' Joyful Sex was negatively related to white men's happiness. In year one, husbands' Joyful Sex was positively related to happiness, and Sexual Upset was negatively related to control.

Third year analyses found one significant predictor of marital well-being for white men among their own reports of sexual satisfaction: husbands' Joyful Sex was positively related to their sense of marital control.

In the first year of marriage, white husbands stood out from all other groups. First, their marital happiness was positively predicted by both their own Joyful Sex and their wives' Upset, while for all other groups sexual satisfaction did not predict happiness. That husbands' marital happiness was positively related to their wives being upset about sex is completely opposite from expectations. This unexpected pattern may relate to tension about the frequency of sexual activity. Wives who report higher levels of Upset may be referring to disagreements about the frequency of sex; if these disagreements result in higher levels of sexual activity, as perceived by the husbands, this may explain why both of these predictors would be related to greater marital happiness for white men. Secondly, sexual satisfaction predicted feelings of competence in the marriage for all groups except white men. There is little reason to think that the link between sexuality and competence should be unimportant for white men, so why does the significance of this relationship not extend to them? Although the low reliability of the competence index may have contributed to the absence of significant findings in year three, this is a less likely explanation for the lack of results in year one. In fact, if the reliability of the measure was a major factor, then we would expect to find an absence of results in year one for black men rather than white men. An alternative hypothesis is that for white men, sexual satisfaction has more to do with personal enjoyment and fulfillment and less to do with learning how to please one's partner. The idea that white men's sexual satisfaction may be based more on self-interest is supported by the finding noted above that both husbands' Joyful Sex and wives' Sexual Upset are positive predictors of happiness for white husbands in the first year of marriage.

Interestingly, by the third year of marriage, the only way in which white men clearly stand out from other groups is that for them sexual satisfaction is not linked to equity. If white men were still operating largely from a position of self-interest in the third year of marriage, we might expect this to be reflected in their perceptions of marital equity. The pattern of findings related to white men may indicate that they undergo substantial changes in the first years of marriage.

Perhaps white males, more than other groups, are socialized to think of sex in terms of their own satisfaction, as something to pursue exclusively for their own pleasure. Darling & Hicks (1983) found evidence that both males and females receive messages of a double standard of sexuality. For males, this means messages that focus on men's greater need for sex, greater knowledge of sex, men's use of women for sexual purposes and sex as women's marital duty. It may be that the first year of marriage, even in a happy relationship, is not enough to diminish the effect of such socialization. But perhaps over time, at least within the context of a committed relationship, white men's attitudes about sexuality do shift in the direction of greater mutuality of enjoyment.

Conclusion

The first major question for this research was whether feelings of affirmation and tension would be significant predictors of the sexual

aspect of marriage. Our findings indicate that feelings of affirmation and tension are, indeed, related to sexual satisfaction. This was the case for both women and men; in addition, the findings were consistent across race. In both the first and third years of marriage feelings of affirmation were related to joyful sexuality, and feelings of tension were related to reports of sexual upset. There was also some evidence that feelings of affirmation were negatively related to feeling sexual upset, and feelings of tension were negatively related to joyful sexuality. However, among black couples the positive and negative aspects of these dimensions of marital life remained relatively independent even into the third year of marriage.

The second major question was, after controlling for affirmation and tension, is sexual satisfaction itself predictive of marital well-being? We considered four separate dimensions of marital well-being, and found evidence both consistent with and contrary to our hypotheses. There was a relationship between sexual satisfaction and feelings of marital competence for the first year of marriage, although this did not extend to white men. There was some relationship between sexual satisfaction and having a sense of control in marriage. Although we surmised that this might be an especially important connection for men, we found a relationship for women as well. There was some indication that sexual satisfaction was related to marital happiness in either year one or year three for all groups except white women.

Marital equity emerged as a variable strongly tied to sex, particularly for women. However, the significant results regarding marital equity are inconsistent at best. There is some support for the hypothesis that sexual satisfaction is positively related to equity for women in both the first and third years of marriage. However, there is also contrary evidence; in several cases there is a negative relationship between sexual satisfaction and reports of marital equity. Furthermore, relationships among the variables are inconsistent across the years of the study. For black women the fewer significant relationships in year one could be due, in part, to the relatively low reliability of the equity index for the first year of marriage. However, that husbands' Joyful Sex is related to white women's perceptions of equity, but in opposite directions in years one and three, is more difficult to account for. Results are inconsistent when considering within-spouse as well as between-spouse associations; they differ across race; and, for example, in the case of black women,

both Joyful Sex *and* Sexual Upset are negatively related to reports of equity.

Further analyses are required to untangle the puzzle these findings present. The equity measure used in the present analyses assess only the *level* of equity reported in the marital relationship; when the relationship is inequitable it is not clear which spouse is thought to over-benefit and which to under-benefit. It is expected that, when the direction of imbalance in inequitable relationships is also taken into account, more consistent and understandable relationships between sex and marital equity would be found.

While much of past research on the role of sexuality in marriage has focused on particular physical acts, and in particular on the frequency of those acts, this research has considered the role of subjective sexual satisfaction. Our findings indicate that sexual satisfaction is, indeed, important in terms of marital well-being. This research does not support the idea that sex is more important to men's marital well-being than to women's; if anything, the fact that significant relationships between sexual satisfaction and marital well-being are more numerous for women would indicate the opposite. Nor does it support the notion that a partner's feelings about the sexual and affectional aspects of marriage play a greater role in women's marital evaluations than those of men. Finally, given some of the different patterns of relationships among different race and sex groups, future research should include large enough samples of different racial groups so that separate analyses may be conducted. Although general themes may be similar across sex and race, evidence from this research indicates that particular relationships among sex and well-being measures vary considerably depending on the group being considered.

REFERENCES

- Andrews, F.M. & Withey, S.B. (1976) *Social Indicators of Well-Being: Americans' Perceptions of Life Quality*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Argyle, M. & Furnham, A. (1983) 'Sources of Satisfaction and Conflict in Long-Term Relationships', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 45: 481-93.
- Askham, J. (1984) *Identity and Stability in Marriage*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Blumstein, P. & Schwartz, P. (1983) *American Couples: Money, Work, Sex*. New York: Morrow.
- Braiker, H.B. & Kelley, H.H. (1979) 'Conflict in the Development of Close Relationships', in R.L. Burgess & T.L. Huston (eds) *Social Exchange in Developing Relationships*. New York: Academic Press.

- Bryant, F.B. & Veroff, J. (1984) 'Dimensions of Subjective Mental Health in American Men and Women', *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 25 (June): 116-35.
- Carmines, E.G. & Zeller, R.A. (1979) *Reliability and Validity Assessment*. Sage University Papers on Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences, 07-017. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Crohan, S. & Veroff, J. (1989) 'Dimensions of Marital Well-Being among White and Black Newlyweds', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 51: 373-84.
- Crohan, S. & Veroff, J. (1992) 'Dimensions of Marital Well-Being in the Third Year of Marriage', unpublished manuscript.
- Cupach, W.R. & Comstock, J. (1990) 'Satisfaction with Sexual Communication in Marriage: Links to Sexual Satisfaction and Dyadic Adjustment', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 7: 179-86.
- Darling, C.A. & Hicks, M.W. (1983) 'Recycling Parental Sexual Methods', *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy* 9: 233-43.
- Greenberg, J.S., Bruess, C.E. & Sands, D.W. (1986) *Sexuality: Insights and Issues*. Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown.
- Greenblat, C.S. (1983) 'The Salience of Sexuality in the Early Years of Marriage', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 45: 289-99.
- Hudson, W.W., Harrison, D.F. & Crosscup, P.C. (1981) 'A Short-Form Scale to Measure Sexual Discord in Dyadic Relationships', *The Journal of Sex Research* 17: 157-74.
- Oggin, J. (1989) 'Black and White Newlyweds' Communication and Conflict: Cultural Meanings, Social Context', Doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1989. *Dissertation Abstracts International* 50: 08B.
- Oggin, J. & Veroff, J. (1990) 'Perceptions of Marital and Sexual Relations among Black and White Newlyweds', paper presented at the meeting of the Western Psychological Association (April), Los Angeles, CA.
- Orden, S. & Bradburn, N. (1968) 'Dimensions of Marriage Happiness', *American Journal of Sociology* 73: 715-31.
- Patton, D. & Waring, E.M. (1985) 'Sex and Marital Intimacy', *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 11: 176-84.
- Perlman, S.D. & Abramson, P.R. (1982) 'Sexual Satisfaction among Married and Cohabiting Individuals', *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 50: 458-60.
- Rubin, L.B. (1976) *Worlds of Pain*. New York: Basic Books.
- Rubin, L.B. (1983) *Intimate Strangers*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Schaap, C., Buunk, B. & Kerkstra, A. (1988) 'Marital Conflict Resolution', in P. Noller & M.A. Fitzpatrick (eds) *Perspectives on Marital Interaction*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Snyder, D.K. (1979) 'Multidimensional Assessment of Marital Satisfaction', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 41: 813-23.
- Thorndike, R.M., Cunningham, G.K., Thorndike, R.L. & Hagen, E.P. (1991) *Measurement and Evaluation in Psychology and Education*, 5th edn. New York: Macmillan Publishing.
- Veroff, J., Douvan, E. & Hatchett, S. (1993) 'Marital Interaction and Marital Quality in the First Year of Marriage', in W. Jones & D. Perlman (eds) *Advances in Personal Relationships*, pp. 103-37. London: Jessica Kingsley.