The Relationship between Intimacy and Marital Satisfaction in Christian Couples

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

School of Behavioral Sciences
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Approved by:

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Abstract

Current literature suggests that a connection exists between intimacy and marital satisfaction; however, much of the research has only focused on non-Christian marriages and sexual intimacy. There is little research that proves how the various types of intimacy and marital satisfaction are related within Christian couples. This quantitative study examined the predictive relationship between intimacy and marital satisfaction in Christian adults. The research focused on the following main research question: (1) Do the six sub-scales of marital intimacy (emotional intimacy, social intimacy, physical intimacy, intellectual intimacy, recreational intimacy, and spiritual intimacy) collectively predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples? It was hypothesized that (1) The six sub-scales of marital intimacy (emotional intimacy, social intimacy, physical intimacy, intellectual intimacy, recreational intimacy, and spiritual intimacy) collectively predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples. Results of this study showed that the six sub-scales of intimacy collectively predicted marital satisfaction. Additionally, results showed that one of the sub-scales, emotional intimacy, individually predicted marital satisfaction.

*Keywords*: marital satisfaction, intimacy, emotional intimacy, marital conflict, communication, religiosity, social learning theory, family systems theory, cognitive behavioral therapy.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Dr. John Kenneth Amato, who has been lovingly married to my mother Gabriele for nearly fifty years, and who taught me that marriage is a lifelong journey and one that requires unconditional love, constant forgiveness, and unending grace. My father has instilled in me the desire to continue learning and has been a source of inspiration and support.
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First, and foremost, I want to thank God. It is solely through the gift of the Holy Spirit that I was able to be here. The answered prayers, the blessings along the way, and the “God-winks” encouraging me not to quit, did not go unnoticed. I am forever grateful for my life and all You have blessed me with.

To, Jonathan, Gabriella, Matthew, and Isabella, you four are my world and I love you all the way to Heaven. Even when mommy was exhausted, stressed, cranky, and frustrated, you four remained my biggest cheerleaders along the way. Thank you for the never-ending prayers, for the giggles and hugs at the perfect times, and for always supporting me. Despite all you have been through, you remain Christ-centered, loving children, and you inspire me. I hope mommy made you proud, because you four make me proud every single day.

To Anthony, your support, unconditional love, encouragement, and kindness has helped to keep me going. Thank you for being there to listen to me complain, for bringing me coffee or cannoli’s as a bribe to keep going, cheering me up with flowers at the perfect time, and for loving me no matter what. I love you so much and I am so thankful for you.

To my parents, who continue to inspire me every single day with the love they have for each other. To my mom, who is my angel here on earth, who always points me to Jesus, who never stops praying for me, you have impacted my life so much. If I end up half the woman you are, I would be happy. To all my family and friends, I am so thankful to each one of you who have supported my journey. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

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List of Abbreviations

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
Cognitive Behavioral Couple Therapy (CBCT)
Couples Relationship Education (CRE)
Differentiation of Self (DoS)
Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (EFCT)
Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS)
Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships (PAIR)
Relationship Enhancement Education and Counseling (REEC)
Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

The research topic of this study is the predictive relationship between intimacy and marital satisfaction in Christian couples. When couples have a satisfying marriage, this leads to a more positive family connection, increase mental health, longevity in the marriage, and increased connection with children (Stinson et al., 2017; Uecker, 2012). Specifically, the level of marital satisfaction can determine marital success (Randles & Avishai, 2018). Research shows that the level of intimacy, communication, and commitment within a marriage, has an impact on marital stability (Aman et al., 2019). Commitment and intimacy prove to be the strongest two indicators of marital satisfaction (Ferreira et al., 2014; Holland et al., 2016), however, couples who are involved in some type of consistent religious activity can improve their sense of well-being and overall marital satisfaction (Fraser et al., 2021) by engaging in these activities together. Research shows there are gender differences in the interpretation of marital satisfaction (Jackson et al., 2014). Women have reported having less marital satisfaction than their spouses, because women tend to be more perceptive and will likely admit to marital problems (Mitchell, 2010).

Existing literature fails to include a diverse population, more specifically, participants who identify as Christian (Aman et al., 2019; Baziar et al., 2021; Demerdjian, 2018; Holland et al., 2016). What the research did show was that there is a positive correlation between intimacy and marital satisfaction, but did not address the role of Christianity in the interpretation (Aman et al., 2019; Baziar et al., 2021; Demerdjian, 2018; Ferreira et al., 2014; Holland et al., 2016; Javadivala et al., 2019; Markman et al., 2022). This study examined the predictive relationship between intimacy and marital satisfaction among Christian adults who have been married for at least three years. By examining the relationship between intimacy and marital satisfaction,
clinicians may better understand clients’ who are in relationship distress. Pastors and church leadership may also gain a better understanding of how to help marriages at risk for divorce.

This study took a quantitative approach to examine the predictive relationship between the level of intimacy and marital satisfaction in Christian adults. The participants were obtained through a snowball sampling method and completed an online survey. This chapter will provide a historical background of the topic, introduce the problem statement, significance of the research, purpose of the study, and research questions being addressed.

Background

Marital love has existed from the beginning of time (Garland, 2012). As Garland (2012) explained, in Roman biblical times, the family was considered anyone in the household, and among the wealthy, this could mean hundreds of people that included children, servants, and slaves. The New Testament refers to the family as a household because there was no name for the nuclear unit at the time. A Hebrew household ranged between 50 and 100 people, and the only limit to the size of the household was the ability for the head to support the family (Garland, 2012). Köstenberger (2010) explained that marriage and families are institutions that are under siege in our world today, and because of this our civilization is in crisis. Today, the average household consists of three or four people living in the household (Carter & McGoldrick, 2016). Family consists not only of blood relatives, but includes those that help to define who we are as a person. What once was viewed as shameful, society today has just as many single parent households and blended households as it does the traditional family model. Marriage is no longer viewed as sacred which is apparent with the current divorce rates of 50%. Yarhouse and Sells (2017) explained that a person’s need for connection has not changed, despite how the family unit has.
The traditional marital roles for the husband and wife used to be expected. It was assumed that when you became a husband or wife, you took on a specific role for your family. For example, if you were a husband, it was your responsibility to provide for your family. It was the mother’s responsibility to care for the home and children. This design was created by God in the beginning of time in the book of Genesis. Genesis 1:26-27 states that “on the sixth day God created man in His image; in the image of God, He created him; male and female He created them.” The woman was to be a helpmate for her husband, and the husband was to care for his wife just as Jesus did the church. God created each man and woman to have different functions in a marriage, both equally as important.

Today, those roles have significantly changed. Garland (2012) asserted that the definition of family has changed as the dynamics of family have changed due to diversity, mortality rates, and changing roles in the household. Women are now viewed as equal partners to men. Women used to be portrayed as those that only take care of the children and the home, and men were expected to do the hard work (Balswick & Balswick, 2014). McGoldrick and Carter (2016) explained that 60% of women are now college graduates. This can be viewed as a positive, and a negative. Women feel societal pressure to both succeed in their careers and be full time caretakers for their families. These changes in marital roles have caused stress on marriages, leading to a decrease in marital satisfaction.

Today, the role of the man has also changed. More and more children today are growing up without their father. Research showed that a child’s closeness with their father remains meaningful in many ways (McGoldrick & Carter, 2016). The father is to set an example for their children and raise them in the way they should go, as written in Proverbs 22. A father’s role is also to be an example to their children. 2 Corinthians 3:2-3 teaches that how we live is like a
letter from God. Our children are watching our every move. Today, parents allow teachers, YouTube, social media, coaches, and the government to assist in raising their children. Many children today are growing up with one parent, both working parents, left with others to watch over them, or babysit younger siblings.

Divorce and remarriage have steadily increased throughout the last several decades in the United States. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there were over 800,000 divorces on record in 2019. The quality of marriage is also critical in fostering family development. Carter and McGoldrick (2016) explained issues that make marital adjustment more difficult. Some of these include not having jobs or resources to sustain the family, not having an education, and getting pregnant within the first year of marriage. Another area Carter and McGoldrick (2016) addressed was the partners differing in their religious background. When couples are unequally yoked, it will almost always cause tension.

Marriage is the only family relationship that people will swear is both exclusive and forever, yet it is least likely to be either of those things (McGoldrick & Carter, 2016). The authors also point out how the meaning of marriage today has drastically changed as compared to history and how the changing roles of women and men in a marriage are likely to contribute to this change. The authors go on to explain the key dimensions of marriage relationships: economics, emotional connections, power, boundaries, sexuality, childrearing, and chores/leisure activities (McGoldrick & Carter, 2016). Marriage requires that both people come to an agreement on many of these issues.

Even in the face of challenges and conflict, marriages are amazingly resilient (Balswick, 2014). The United States has one of the highest divorce rates among developed countries. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the divorce rate dropped from 2011, with approximately
6.9 divorces for every 1,000 women in 2021. There is no single cause of divorce, but one common thread is that most divorces are highly conflictive which causes increased stress on all involved. Iqbal et. al. (2021) found a connection between divorce and lower academic achievement in children. Blended families face many challenges such as bonding with new family members, supporting children that may be dealing with the grief of divorce, and communicating with ex-spouses (Lloyd-Hazlett, 2020).

Religion and spirituality continue to play a vital role in marriages and family development today. Around the world there are millions of people who need to hide their faith, but in the United States families are blessed with the freedom of religion. Through many generations, spirituality has been considered a healing force, rooted in cultural and religious customs (McGoldrick & Carter, 2016). Marriage was God’s design and can be seen throughout the Old Testament and New Testament. Marriages can grow in faith together by being engaged in service (Garland, 2012). By serving together, couples create close relationships with others in their community, who often become part of a family.

Cognitive behavioral theory, family systems theory, and social learning theory are critical to the study of marriages. These theories apply to the study of marital satisfaction because they provide foundational tools when working with couples, individuals, and families. Behaviors are learned from observation. When younger generations are observing negative relational behaviors, this can lead to a lack of knowledge in what contributes to a successful marriage (Randles & Avishai, 2018). Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), Cognitive behavioral couple therapy (CBCT), Couple Relationship Education (CRE), and Emotionally-Focused Couples Therapy (EFCT) are a few of the therapeutic modalities that counselors incorporate while helping couples in relationship distress. All these therapeutic modalities are based on research
and theory derived from cognitive behavioral theory, family systems theory, and social learning theory.

**Problem Statement**

The problem investigated in this study is the rapid decline in marital stability among Christian couples. Christians believe that marriage is a covenant relationship that belongs to God, and research has shown that a decline in marital satisfaction usually happens early on in marriage (Margelisch et al., 2017) with almost half of first-time marriages ending in divorce within the first 10 years (Hook et al., 2011). Couples that consider themselves to have a successful marriage, also have marital stability (Mitchell, 2010). When there is good communication in a marriage, couples reported marital satisfaction (Epstein et al., 2016). In addition, gender differences, communication style, and conflict resolution strategies all factor into a successful marriage (Ariyo & Mgbeokwii, 2019; Boerner et al., 2014; Fraser et al., 2021; Langeslag & Surti, 2022; Sarac & Sanberk, 2021). Additionally, more attention needs to be given to marital intimacy in Christian marriages and how each type of intimacy effects marital satisfaction. Intimacy in marriage is mostly viewed as sexual intimacy, which only addresses one aspect of intimacy. Marital intimacy encompasses emotional, social, physical, intellectual, recreational, and spiritual aspects that both spouses view differently (Schaefer & Olson, 1981). Since most research on marital satisfaction has focused on non-Christian couples, a need exists for further research regarding the relationship between intimacy and marital satisfaction in Christian couples. With successful completion of this study, practitioners may be able to better help couples in relationship distress by considering the various types of intimacy affecting their clients’ relationships and guiding couples to create meaningful change within their marriage.
**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this quantitative correlational predictive study is to examine the predictive relationship between intimacy and marital satisfaction in Christian couples in Northeastern United States. At this stage in the research, marital satisfaction is understood as an important component to a healthy marriage (Randles & Avishai, 2018). Marital satisfaction, the criterion variable, and the six sub-scales of intimacy, the predictor variables, were evaluated for Christian adults in this research study.

Insufficient research has focused on gender differences as it relates to marital satisfaction (Boerner et al., 2014; Langeslag & Surti, 2022), intimacy in marriage (Layner et al., 2016; Sarac & Sanberk, 2021), and inadequate research has focused on the relationship between marital satisfaction and spiritual intimacy (Jacobi, 2017). Research is also needed to determine the relationship between the six sub-scales of intimacy and marital satisfaction in Christian couples, since most research has focused on secular marriages (Ariyo & Mgbeokwii, 2019; Boerner et al., 2014; Fraser et al., 2021).

**Significance of the Study**

Divorce does not just impact the couple, but includes anyone who was close to the couple, especially children and extended families. Research on how intimacy affects the level of marital satisfaction has been limited to couples with no religious affiliation. The ability to openly speak about intimacy in your marriage is a healthy process. Many Christians’ view this topic as shameful, but God did not intend for it to be this way. From a young age, boys are encouraged to feel positive about their bodies, while for girls that is not the case (McGoldrick & Carter, 2016). Because of this mindset, issues with body image carry over to other parts of adulthood, mainly marital relationships. Sexuality values, behaviors, and health are important components of
individual well-being (Russel, 2020). Understanding how intimacy affects the level of marital satisfaction may assist couples who are in relationship distress (Schaefer & Olson, 1981). With successful completion of this study, marital counselors, pastors, and family educators may be able to consider the various types of intimacy affecting their clients’ relationships and provide clients the opportunity to focus on creating change in these areas.

**Research Question(s)**

The purpose of this quantitative correlational predictive research study was to examine the predictive relationship between intimacy and marital satisfaction in Christian couples who have been married for a minimum of three years. Participants were obtained using a snowball sampling method, and responding participants participated in the research study through an online survey. The research questions for this study are:

RQ1: Do the six sub-scales of marital intimacy (emotional intimacy, social intimacy, physical intimacy, intellectual intimacy, recreational intimacy, and spiritual intimacy) collectively predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples?

H10: The six sub-scales of marital intimacy (emotional intimacy, social intimacy, physical intimacy, intellectual intimacy, recreational intimacy, and spiritual intimacy) collectively do not predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples.

H1a: The six sub-scales of marital intimacy (emotional intimacy, social intimacy, physical intimacy, intellectual intimacy, recreational intimacy, and spiritual intimacy) collectively predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples.

RQ2: Does emotional intimacy predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples?

H20: Emotional intimacy does not predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples.

RQ3: Does social intimacy predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples?
H3₀: Social intimacy does not predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples.

RQ4: Does physical intimacy predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples?
H4₀: Physical intimacy does not predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples.
H4ₐ: Physical intimacy predicts marital satisfaction in Christian couples.

RQ5: Does intellectual intimacy predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples?
H5₀: Intellectual intimacy does not predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples.

RQ6: Does recreational intimacy predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples?
H6₀: Recreational intimacy does not predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples.
H6ₐ: Recreational intimacy predicts marital satisfaction in Christian couples.

RQ7: Does spiritual intimacy predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples?
H7₀: Spiritual intimacy does not predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples.
H7ₐ: Spiritual intimacy predicts marital satisfaction in Christian couples.

Definitions

1. Christian- A man, woman, or child who professes belief in Jesus, maintains a personal relationship with him, and follows his teachings (Felkey, 2016).

2. Marital satisfaction – A mental state that reflects an individual’s experience in marriage where expectations and needs are being met, creating a state of satisfaction (Aman et al., 2019).
3. **Marital intimacy** – the quality of a relationship in which both partners represent feelings of trust and emotional closeness towards one another, and are able to communicate openly (Kardan-Souraki et al., 2016; Timmerman, 1991).

4. **Physical intimacy** - physical contact including hugging, holding hands and non-sexual touching between spouses, and sexual intimacy involves the desire for sexual satisfaction (Bagarozzi, 2001).

5. **Emotional intimacy** - sharing both positive and negative emotions with one’s spouse (Bagarozzi, 2001).

6. **Spiritual intimacy** - spouses expressing thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about religion and the relationship with God with each other (Bagarozzi, 2001).

**Summary**

Research shows that a decline in marital satisfaction usually happens early on in marriage (Margelisch et al., 2017) with almost half of first-time marriages ending in divorce within the first 10 years (Hook et al., 2011). Ninety percent of marriages are performed by church leaders or pastors, yet there is an alarming fifty percent divorce rate (Wright, 1992). A couple’s level of intimacy significantly influences marital satisfaction and fosters a deeper connection with one another (Park & Harris, 2022). The purpose of this study was to quantitatively examine the predictive relationship between intimacy and marital satisfaction in Christian couples that have been married a minimum of three years. The present study hypothesized that there was a predictive relationship between the six sub-scales of intimacy in a marriage relationship and marital satisfaction. The following chapter outlines scholarly research through a literature review, highlighting studies that have focused on intimacy and marital satisfaction.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Overview

Over the past several decades, marital research has focused on what qualities lead to fulfillment and longevity. As divorce rates are increasing, it is important to study and analyze what leads to a successful marriage and marital satisfaction by looking at various factors. Couples that consider themselves to have a successful marriage, also have marital stability (Mitchell, 2010). Research has shown that a decline in marital satisfaction usually happens early on in marriage (Margelisch et al., 2017) with almost half of first-time marriages ending in divorce within the first ten years (Hook et al., 2011). Findings show that when there is good communication in a marriage, couples reported marital satisfaction (Epstein et al., 2016). In addition, gender differences, marital conflict, intimacy, and religiosity all factor into a successful marriage (Ariyo & Mgbeokwii, 2019; Boerner et al., 2014; Fraser et al., 2021; Langeslag & Surti, 2022; Sarac & Sanberk, 2021).

Marital intimacy goes beyond sexual intimacy and refers to the feelings of closeness a couple experience. This research seeks to understand the predictive relationship between intimacy and marital satisfaction in Christian couples. The primary hypothesis for this study is that the six sub-scales of marital intimacy (emotional intimacy, social intimacy, physical intimacy, intellectual intimacy, recreational intimacy, and spiritual intimacy) collectively predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples. Given the limited research on intimacy and marital satisfaction, and that most research on marital satisfaction has focused on non-Christian couples, a need exists for further research regarding the predictive relationship between intimacy and marital satisfaction in Christian couples. This chapter will provide the theoretical framework and related literature for which the study is based.
**Conceptual or Theoretical Framework**

Cognitive behavioral theories, family systems theory, and social learning theory are all theories of counseling and psychotherapy that provide the backbone when working with individuals, couples, and families. Behavioral therapies use specific strategies and interventions that help cease maladaptive behaviors and learn new adaptive behaviors. Clinicians have various intervention strategies that can be useful in treating couples. One of the most common issues couples go to counseling for involve past hurts that have never been processed and the interventions of Family Systems Theory can help facilitate the process of forgiving past hurts (Gurman, 2015). Lastly, Social Learning Theory seeks to understand the interaction of cognitive, behavioral, and environmental impacts on a person’s behavior (Seligman & Reichenberg, 2014). Clinicians use many strategies to reflect an understanding of social learning, including self-efficacy (Seligman & Reichenberg, 2014).

**Cognitive Behavioral Theories**

Taking a cognitive approach to marital therapy helps couples focus on strengthening many areas within the relationship that could be harmful such as infidelity, conflict, and divorce (Baziar et al., 2021). Cognitive behavioral theory connects what is observed in research to practical modalities that change couples’ behaviors (Archuleta et al., 2022). Many counselors have success using this theoretical model with clients who have suffered from infidelity, and using this model when helping couples with domestic violence. When faced with life stressors, couples often turn to Couple Relationship Education (CRE) programs for guidance. CRE programs are developed based on research and theory from social learning theory and cognitive behavioral theory perspectives, however there are considerations that need to be accounted for in order to achieve change (Markman et al., 2022). To be more effective, current CRE programs
need to consider broader content, briefer interventions, distressed couples, lower income couples, online CRE programs, and local community CRE programs (Markman et al., 2022). Couples often seek therapy for lack of intimacy, and the use of therapeutic modalities that are based on cognitive behavioral theory, has proven to significantly increase marital intimacy by defining and solving problems that arise in marital relationships (Baziar et al., 2021; Yoo et al., 2014).

Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy (CBCT) incorporates three constructs to therapy: behavioral couple therapy, cognitive therapy, and basic research on information processing (Gurman et al., 2015). It is primarily used to assist couples who are in relationship distress. Many counselors use this modality with couples that have suffered from infidelity, and when helping couples with domestic violence. The use of cognitive-behavioral techniques in a therapeutic setting, can increase marital intimacy and the stability of the marriage by promoting communication, conflict resolution, and empathetic response skills (Kardan-Souraki et al., 2016).

Family Systems Theory

Families shape and influence development and behavior patterns in children from an early age. General systems theory was first adopted by biologist Ludwig von Bertalaffy in the late 1920’s to understand the organizational system of living organisms, which proved that no one existed in isolation (Seligman & Reichenberg, 2014). Later adopted by family therapists, family systems theory focuses on multiple causes of dysfunction. Introduced by Dr. Murray Bowen, an approach to family systems theory suggests that families are systems of interconnected individuals, and that individuals cannot be understood in isolation from this system (Cowan & Cowan, 2022). Multigenerational family therapy follows the following eight basic concepts: triangles, differentiation of self (DoS), nuclear family emotional process, family projection process, multigenerational transmission process, emotional cutoff, sibling position,
and societal emotional process (Bowen, 1993). Differentiation of self (DoS) can be defined as the degree to which an individual is able to balance emotional functioning and intimacy in relationships (Bowen, 1993). An individual’s level of DoS is positively correlated to their marital quality and satisfaction (Mozas-Alonso et al., 2022). According to a research study conducted by Mozas-Alonso et al. (2022), higher levels of DoS predicted higher levels of marital satisfaction.

Emotionally-Focused Couple Therapy (EFCT) is an integration of an experiential and Gestalt model approach (Gurman et al., 2015). This model falls within the Family Systems Theory model, focusing on new patterns and breaking destructive cycles. Greenburgh et al. (2010) noted that forgiveness involves emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects, and that processing past hurts to completion are crucial to forgiveness. Many counselors use this model in an attempt to break negative cycles so that newer, positive patterns can occur.

**Social Learning Theory**

Developed by Albert Bandura in 1986, social learning theory, also known as social cognitive theory, emphasized that most human behavior is learned and modified through observation, imitation, and modeling. Social learning theory emphasizes that people do not operate autonomously, rather that human behavior is a product of intrapersonal, behavioral, and environmental factors (Bandura, 2006). Bandura’s social learning theory highlights the human capacity for self-regulation (Lent et al., 1996). According to Johnson and Bradbury (2015), “Social learning theory rests on the premise that when positive or adaptive interpersonal behaviors are reinforced and when negative or dysfunctional behaviors are ignored or punished, relationship quality improves” (p. 19). Marital therapy which seeks to modify behavior, was derived from social learning theory, which theorizes that couples modify each other’s behaviors through various rewards and punishments that follow a specific behavior (Johnson & Bradbury,
Bandura claimed that observing someone that a person admires take on a challenge, can ease fears and help one perform the task (Seligman & Reichenberg, 2014). Social learning theory suggests that human behavior is motivated and regulated by self-efficacy and personal goals (Archuleta et al., 2022). When a person can self-regulate, patterns can be identified that can lead to corrective action by modifying those behaviors (Archuleta et al., 2022). Tan (2011) suggests that though social learning theory has focused primarily on symbolic processes such as observational learning and modeling, social learning theory has greatly influenced behavioral therapy through the development of the self-efficacy theory.

**Related Literature**

The related literature section provides scholarly literature that supports topics surrounding marital satisfaction and intimacy, and addresses gaps in the research. The following literature explores the influences of marital satisfaction including marital communication and marital conflict. The related literature also examines the role of gender as it relates to marital satisfaction and intimacy. Additionally, the related literature explores the various sub-scales of intimacy and the relationship, if any, to marital satisfaction.

**Marital Satisfaction**

Marital satisfaction is an important component to a healthy marriage and can be described as an individual’s contentment in marriage (Kayabol & Sumer, 2020; Randles & Avishai, 2018). Not surprisingly, much research has been done in recent decades to understand the intricacies of a successful marriage. During the last several decades, the institution of marriage has drastically changed, with Americans shown to marry later in life (Ruggles, 2015). According to the United States Census Bureau’s 2021 press release, the average age of first-time marriages increased by two years for both men and women. Additionally, research shows that
young adults are more likely to give up marriage altogether despite marriage being correlated with positive health outcomes (Curtin & Sutton, 2020). With divorce rates continuing to rise, there seems to be a tangible connection between increased divorce rates and low marital satisfaction (Abreu-Afonso et al., 2021).

What does it really mean to be satisfied or content in a marriage? For some, it may mean the absence of conflict, or living a life free of financial worries, even possibly a marriage that is physically intimate on a regular basis. The problem with this, is that oftentimes one partner may feel satisfied, while the other may not. In his book, Sacred Marriage, Gary Thomas (2015) discusses marriage as a means to develop a deeper relationship with God, asking the difficult question “What if God designed marriage to make us holy more than to make us happy” (p 11). Thomas (2015) stresses the importance of viewing oneself through the lens of “we” rather than “I”. Mark 10: 8-9 declares, “and the two will become one flesh. So, they are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate” (NIV). Christian couples facing marital distress have an abundance of resources to turn to for help, including counselors, church ministries, marriage retreats, Christian books and videos, and more (Kostenberger, 2010). Despite the past of opportunity couples have to learn, grow, and improve, there continues to be a decline in marital satisfaction leading to the breakdown of the marital unit.

Research has shown that a decline in marital satisfaction usually happens early on in marriage (Margelisch et al., 2017) with almost half of first-time marriages ending in divorce within the first 10 years (Hook et al., 2011). Marital satisfaction is so powerful that there are cases where infertility and sexual dysfunction issues have been resolved by simply nurturing the relationship (Masoumi et al., 2017) and increasing the feeling of “connection” where self and other overlap (Prause et al., 2021). The mental and emotional well-being of each partner depends
on individual solitude within the relationship (Zhang & Li, 2021). A quantitative study of 129 participants examined the relationship between intimacy, commitment, love, religion, and relationship satisfaction (Cassepp-Borges, 2021). Results of the study showed a positive correlation between love and compatibility of religion to the success of the relationship (Cassepp-Borges, 2021). In addition, findings showed the longer the relationship lasted, participants reported an increase in satisfaction, intimacy and commitment (Cassepp-Borges, 2021).

Though marital counseling continues to be the most popular method of improving relationship quality, there are other ways to improve closeness in a relationship that do not involve techniques such as talking. Prause et al. (2021) sought to determine if relationship closeness promotes desirable health outcomes. Results of this study found a positive correlation between partner intimate touch and marital closeness, such as kissing and cuddling (Prause et al., 2021). In addition, research found that though talk therapy remains the preferred method used to positively affect the relationship, other methods for improving relationships such as touch, meditation, or sexual stimulation have been identified (Prause et al., 2021). On the contrary, a past study found no evidence that that interactions between the different types of intimacy could predict satisfaction, therefore new research should focus the relationship between intimacy and marital satisfaction (Tolstedt & Stokes, 1983). Because there is a positive correlation between empathy and marital satisfaction, marriage counselors should focus on cultivating empathy to strengthen the marriage relationship (Goddard et al., 2012). In a study conducted by Dillon et al. (2015), researchers found that marital kindness between spouses played an integral role in marital satisfaction, specifically being kind to one another during conflict and moderating one’s own needs.
Marital Satisfaction Influences

There are numerous variables that directly impact the perceived marital satisfaction within a relationship including lack of communication, gender differences, marital conflict, and lack of intimacy. Strong communication, intrinsic motivation, and being professionally and academically active had the most impact in increasing marital satisfaction (Abreu-Afonso et al., 2021). Research has found that when there is good communication in a marriage, couples reported marital satisfaction (Epstein et al., 2016). In addition, gender differences, the style in which couples communicate, and conflict resolution strategies all factor into a successful marriage (Ariyo & Mgbeokwii, 2019; Boerner et al., 2014; Fraser et al., 2021; Langeslag & Surti, 2022; Sarac & Sanberk, 2021).

Finding a balance between work life and home life is imperative to the success of any relationship. Worley and Shelton (2020) examined the effects of work-family conflict (WFC) on marital satisfaction in 633 married participants and found that when a spouses’ work interfered with family time, this predicted a negative association with marital quality. Likewise, when family time interfered with a spouses’ work engagements, this also predicted a negative association with marital quality (Worley & Shelton, 2020). Similarly, supporting literature (Minnotte et al., 2013; Yoo, 2022) that sought to understand how work-family conflict and gender ideology relate to marital satisfaction, supported Worley and Shelton’s (2020) results, suggesting that husband’s work-family conflict was associated with decreased marital satisfaction. Yoo (2022) concluded that gender role ideology indirectly affected the relationship between work-family conflict and marital satisfaction.

The success of a marriage depends on the personality traits and life events of the individuals (Solomon & Jackson, 2014), including mental health issues like social anxiety.
(Montesi et al., 2013). Montesi (2013) investigated the correlation between anxiety and overall relationship satisfaction. The assumption was that anxious people feel overall less satisfied than non-anxious people in a relationship (Montesi et al., 2013). Findings of this study showed that partners who reported higher social anxiety also reported having an increased fear of intimacy, lower satisfaction with open communication, and lower physical satisfaction (Montesi et al., 2013). The study proved that being able to openly communicate with one’s spouse is important for the development of intimacy (Montesi et al., 2013). Likewise, Boiman-Meshita and Littman-Ovadia (2021) examined an intervention on 134 couples and its effectiveness on marital satisfaction. Results of the study found that a simple couple intervention called Three Good Things, decreased couple burnout, increased intimacy through various changes, and couples focused more attention on the positive aspects of their relationship. Participants who were cooperative and fully engaged reported an increase in marital intimacy, likely due to the positive atmosphere that the intervention created (Boiman-Meshita & Littman-Ovadia, 2021). This study was limited to Jewish participants and the study procedure only represented couples who were fully cooperative. Additional research is needed to determine if this simple intervention would be effective for a more diverse sample.

Preconceived notions of the role of the man and expectations of masculinity (Demerdjian, 2018) can be just as much of an issue in a relationship as something like sexual dysfunction (Ferreira et al., 2012), or even infidelity (Nik et al., 2021). Demerdjian (2018) sought to establish a connection between physical intimacy and marital satisfaction. Findings of the study could not connect overall physical intimacy and marital satisfaction; therefore, additional research is needed to connect this domain of intimacy with overall marital satisfaction (Demerdjian, 2018). Research has shown that lower income couples have a lower level of marital satisfaction,
however in a study conducted by Jackson et al. (2017), findings suggest that there was no correlation between income and satisfaction level. There is also limited research regarding the influence of marital decision making in the family and how that affects marital satisfaction. A recent study by Zhongwu Li (2022) studied the relationship between decision-making power in a family and women’s marital satisfaction. Results of the study showed a negative correlation between the two especially when marriages “operated outside of traditional norms to become family decision-makers”, marital satisfaction greatly declined (Li, 2022). This study mainly focused on women’s marital satisfaction and did not account for the men’s’ perspective.

A Christian marriage is built on love, not control. Not abiding by the biblical roles of husband and wife often contributes to marital conflict. Research has shown that the family unit is strengthened in marriages where husbands were viewed as the head of the family (Yang, 2020). Ephesians 5 makes it clear that the husband is the head of the household (NIV). Scripture goes on to say, that wives should submit to their husbands, which is often taken out of context in secular society. Today, many believe that a wife’s submission means they are a slave to their spouse, with no voice or opinion in the marriage. Submission should be mutual between both partners and requires selflessness and respect towards one another. A supporting study of 41 participants sought to understand how the marital role of husband and wife contributed to marital conflict (Ali et al., 2022). Results of the study showed that fulfilling marital role expectations was a factor to a successful marriage (Ali et al., 2022). Additionally, findings highlighted the importance of the husband and wife’s role in the marriage, noting that a “husband is expected to be the breadwinner and to provide for the material needs of the family” whereas a “wife is expected to manage the household” (p. 19). This literature directly supports biblical scripture and God’s design for marriages.
Marital Communication and Conflict Resolution

Conflict is expected in any relationship so it is no surprise that conflict resolution and marital communication have been studied for many years. The majority of marital conflict can be mapped to unmet expectations, often expectations that the other spouse is not even aware of due to a lack of communication. Marriages today face unrealistic expectations partly due to the reliance on media, which often portrays marriage in an idealistic romantic manner, where couples are expecting to have the “happily ever after” they always envisioned (Lacey et al., 2017; Vaterlaus et al., 2017). Research shows that couples who communicate in a positive manner and show regular appreciation towards one another have higher marital satisfaction (Kayabol & Sumer, 2020).

Communication is pivotal to any relationship, but even more so in marriage. A couple’s ability to positively communicate with each other can lead to better marital quality. Lavner et al. (2016) sought to understand communication patterns of couples who experience marital satisfaction. The authors examined whether the relationship between communication and marital satisfaction varies depending on type of communication (positive communication, negative communication, and effective communication). Second, they examined reciprocal associations between spouses’ own satisfaction and communication (Lavner et al., 2016). This study analyzed data from 431 young couples having been married three years or less through a marital satisfaction questionnaire and concluded that more satisfied spouses showed more positive, less negative, and more effective communication. The authors also noted that poor communication is a common reason why couples seek therapy and has the most damaging impact on relationships (Lavner et al., 2016).
Abreu-Afonso et al. (2021) explored the role of communication patterns and marital satisfaction in 331 participants. Results of the study found that communication, cohesion and flexibility, and motivation, are variables that contribute to marital satisfaction, each playing its own contributing role (Abreu-Afonso et al., 2021). In addition, the study supported earlier research that both positive and negative communication in couples predict marital satisfaction (Abreu-Afonso et al., 2021). Findings of this study noted that motivation played a key role in overall marital satisfaction, especially intrinsic motivation which drives the individual to maintain the overall quality of the relationship (Abreu-Afonso et al., 2021).

Conflict can bring about many emotions, especially during high stress events in a marriage, and regulating one’s emotions during marital conflict can play an integral role in the outcome. Gross (1998) defines emotion regulation as “the way in which individuals influence the emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions” (p. 275). Gross’s (1998) process model of emotion regulation is a framework used to explain how people regulate their own emotions. Frye et al., (2020) examined if emotion regulation moderated the relationship between marital conflict and marital satisfaction in 219 married couples and found showed emotion regulation moderated the relationship between marital conflict and marital satisfaction, especially among wives. Likewise, couples who impulsively responded to stress towards their spouse had lower levels of marital satisfaction and higher levels of verbal aggression and marital conflict (Lavner et al., 2017).

How we communicate and solve conflict is just as important as the conflict itself. Research has stressed the importance of couples receiving proper conflict management strategies and coping skills prior to the start of marriage (Frye et al., 2020). Additional research examined the relationship between conflict resolution strategies and marital satisfaction and noted a
significant association between constructive conflict resolution strategies and increased marital satisfaction (Stinson et al., 2017). Sarac and Sanberk (2021) sought to understand how positive and negative interactions between couples predicted marital satisfaction. The study consisted of 25 heterosexual couples who had been married for at least two years and showed that couples can affect each other’s behaviors during interactions, such as bringing a positive solution to a problem which decreases the level of criticism (Sarac & Sanberk, 2021). In addition, findings showed that a destructive communication style negatively impacted marital satisfaction (Sarac & Sanberk, 2021). This supports earlier research that spouses who have positive feelings towards communication in their relationship, and in turn communicate more, feel more satisfied with their marriage (Yoo et al., 2014).

In the midst of conflict, it can be difficult for couples to feel positive emotions towards one another. Langeslag and Surti (2022) found that feelings towards one’s spouse increases when surrounded by photos of their spouse, which leads to an increase in marital satisfaction. This quantitative study sought to understand whether positively reappraising the spouse increases infatuation and marital satisfaction (Langeslag & Surti, 2022). The authors also studied whether people’s perceptions about love up-regulation corresponds with actual love up-regulation feasibility (Langeslag & Surti, 2022). McNulty et al. (2013) noted that when spouses exhibited positive attitudes, they were less likely to experience a decline in marital satisfaction, and likewise, when a spouse exhibited negative attitudes towards one another, this predicted negative changes in marital satisfaction.

Marital relationships in later adulthood are more pleasant than marriages that are still in the earlier stages (Kulik et al., 2016), which may be attributed to the ability to control one’s emotions during conflict. Kulik et al., (2016) found that individuals who are not satisfied in their
marriages were less likely to participate in marital counseling and openly talking about their problems. Communication is not just words that a person speaks. Couples need to be more aware of their body posture, eye contact, tone of voice, and their facial expressions (Eggerichs, 2004). Active listening plays a big role in how one communicates. Active listening requires empathy, and understanding, listening calmly to the other person without judgement (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). If one partner is not feeling heard, the way in which they communicate will change, and the marital tension will negatively impact the stability of the marriage. A 16-year longitudinal study by Manalel et al. (2019) studied the effects of marital tension on marital satisfaction and revealed a positive correlation between marital tension and decreased marital satisfaction, particularly when experienced by both spouses. Furthermore, the study showed that couples who reported marital tension in their first year of marriage negatively influenced marital satisfaction over time, noting that premarital and marital interventions should be aimed at improving tension and helping couples develop strategies to resolve conflict (Manalel et al., 2019).

There are many things that can disrupt and undermine the communication process. When families are driven out of their comfort zone, they have the potential to push further away from each other (Thomas, 2015). Proverbs 15:1 says, “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (NIV). Vazhappilly and Reyes (2018) investigated if Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (EFCT) increased couple communication and marital satisfaction. Findings of the study showed a statistically significant increase in marital communication and satisfaction among participants in the experimental group (Vazhappilly & Reyes, 2018). A similar study by Alipour et al. (2020) sought to determine the effect of communication skills training on marital satisfaction using a couple focused approach and found a statistically significant increase in marital satisfaction among couples who were provided communication training (Alipour et al.,
Research also showed that levels of depression and anxiety significantly decreased in participants who completed communication skills training likely due to reduced marital conflicts (Alipour et al., 2020).

Factors like communication, intimacy, and finances can be responsible for increased dissatisfaction in the relationship and result in higher rates of divorce. As communication and expressions of intimacy decline in a relationship, there will be demonstrable degradation in the overall satisfaction of the participants in the relationship (Ariyo & Mgbeokwii, 2019; Stinson et al., 2017). Ariyo and Mgbeokwii (2019), sought to define a link between companionship between couples and long-term satisfaction and solvency of the relationship. Results of the study indicated that the 240 participants were happier in their marriage when they considered their spouse to be their closest companion (Ariyo & Mgbeokwii, 2019). This supports earlier research that encouragement of one’s spouse, in the form of verbal cues and communication (Tolstedt & Stokes, 1983) are crucial to the continual functionality of a marriage, whereas women seem to be better equipped for this (Greef et al., 2001).

Stress is unavoidable in any relationship and often impedes communication. Good communication skills are critical for any couple to successfully handle stressors that will inevitably arise during their relationship (Williams et al., 2011). Ouseph and Bance (2022) examined the impact of marital stress on marital satisfaction and found a significant negative correlation between stress and marital satisfaction (Ouseph & Bance, 2022). Stress was found to be harmful to couples’ marital satisfaction. Additionally, results showed a positive correlation between the quality of communication in a marriage and marital satisfaction (Ouseph & Bance, 2022). Previous studies on the relationship between stress, communication, and marital satisfaction supported these findings (Li et al., 2018; Odebode et al., 2019; Vazhappilly & Reyes,
A quantitative study with almost 3000 participants, sought to understand the relationship between a mothers’ parental stress and marital satisfaction, and the moderating effect of empathy (Dong et al., 2022). Results of this study show that mothers’ parental stress led to a decrease in marital satisfaction due to an increase in conflict. Additionally, findings showed that the husbands’ empathy played a significant role in marital satisfaction whereas husbands who showed greater empathy towards their wife lead to a decrease in depression and marital conflict, thus increasing marital satisfaction.

While literature fully supports the relationship between communication and marital satisfaction, conflict resolution within a marriage also plays an equal role. When it comes to conflict resolution, research showed husbands tend to avoid conflict more than wives, and similarly, wives were found less likely to compromise than their husbands (Gbadamosi et al., 2014). Shifaw (2022) examined the relationship between marital satisfaction and conflict resolution. Results of this study showed that marriages that were able to efficaciously resolve conflict, experienced greater marital satisfaction, and was even higher in couples who reported better communication in their marriages (Shifaw, 2022). While the findings of this study are helpful for family therapists, a drawback to this study was that the data was obtained from a sample in a non-Western culture. Additional research should be done to include Christian couples in the United States to determine similar results. Marital counselors should prioritize communication and conflict resolution strategies in order to help couples develop the skills needed for a satisfying marriage.

**Gender Differences**

Gender differences are a significant factor in marital satisfaction. Research has found that there is a statistical difference between men and women and how they view their overall marital
satisfaction through the lens of differing religious identities (Fraser et al., 2021). It is reported that males experience greater levels of passion, intimacy and commitment (Sumter et al., 2013; Yoo & Joo, 2021), but both men and women experience a decline of these elements over time (Lee & McKinnish, 2018). Though the level of marital satisfaction in women is reportedly less than men, women are more likely to attend marital counseling and follow the advice given (Abdekhodaie, 2021) and there is a significant difference between a male and female’s perspective of intimacy (Greef et al., 2001). However, conflicting research has shown there is no statistical difference between men and women in the areas of emotional intimacy, sexual fulfillment, or individual well-being (Fraser et al., 2021). Males overall have reported stronger feelings of love, passion, and commitment in comparison to women though there was no statistical difference in the relationship between love and marital satisfaction between genders (Yoo & Joo, 2021). Abdekhodaie (2021) sought to examine if providing intervention to women only would lead to an increase in marital satisfaction. The study compared two intervention groups consisting of eight women in each, with each group receiving either Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) or Existential Therapy (ET) (Abdekhodaie, 2021). Results of the study showed that both CBT and ET interventions significantly improved the level of marital satisfaction in women. Abdekhodaie (2021) noted that the increase in marital satisfaction was likely due to the women’s perspective towards themselves, their marriage, and their spouse. In addition, Abdekhodaie (2021) found that there was no significant difference between post treatment data and the 2-month follow-up data, therefore results showed that the women in treatment were considered stable and able to maintain the outcome of the therapy. Additional research is needed including men using the same intervention techniques to determine the efficacy of the therapeutic modality.
Men are not always aware of a women’s intimacy needs and the role they play in fulfilling those needs (Javadivala et al., 2019) and clinicians have found that at the root of marital issues is a lack of intimacy which can lead to decreased marital satisfaction (Ramezani et al., 2021). Yoo and Joo (2021) examined the link between the perception of love, passion, commitment, and marital satisfaction between genders. The study found that the three components of love (intimacy, commitment, and passion) are positively associated with marital satisfaction, however no distinguishable connection was found between genders except men reported a higher perception of love than women (Yoo & Joo, 2021). Results of the study also showed that love played an important role in strengthening marital quality, and both men and women feel intimate love in their marriage (Yoo & Joo, 2021). Women report less marital satisfaction then men, however, it was found that men struggle with understanding their wives’ needs (Jackson et al., 2014). Greef et al. (2001) found that men were significantly less satisfied with sexual intimacy and recreational aspects of the relationship than women. The research also found that there is a greater difference between a women’s perspective of social intimacy than that of the men, and women showed a greater discrepancy between their experience with sexual intimacy than men. A significantly positive correlation was found between the experience of intimacy and marital satisfaction (Greef et al., 2001).

It has been found that higher levels of global marital satisfaction exist more among men than women (Boerner et al., 2014). Gender differences in marital satisfaction documented elsewhere did not exist uniformly across all positive and negative characteristics and there are strong gender differences with men offering more consistent positive assessments (Boerner et al., 2014). Females exhibit more positive verbal and non-verbal behaviors than males (Sarac & Sanberk, 2021) and also show an increase in emotional reactivity (Mozas-Alonso et al., 2022).
Men and women differ on how they cope with their emotions, communicate, and resolve the issues that will inevitably present themselves in any relationship (Abreu-Afonso et al., 2021). Research shows there is a difference in how men and women react to the absence of their partner; however, the overall satisfaction of the relationship was found to increase since being alone increased the mental and emotional well-being of each partner (Zhang & Li, 2021). Zhang and Li (2021) examined how the amount of a spouse’s alone time was related to marital satisfaction and determined that the mental and emotional well-being of each spouse depended on individual time alone (Zhang & Li, 2021). Supporting gender differentiation does not support marital quality, likewise, when husbands’ share in household chores and child care, female spouses’ marital satisfaction increases (Loscocco & Walzer, 2013). Insufficient research has examined the role of gender as it relates to the relationship of intimacy and marital satisfaction (Lee & McKinnish, 2018; Sarac & Sanberk, 2021; Yoo & Joo, 2021). Given the potential for more conservative gender roles in the Christian community, an assumption in this study is that more traditional gender roles would be correlated with higher marital satisfaction.

**Marital Intimacy**

The term intimacy refers to the quality of a relationship in which both partners represent feelings of trust and emotional closeness towards one another, and are able to communicate openly (Kardan-Souraki et al., 2016; Timmerman, 1991). The association between intimacy and marital satisfaction remains unclear, however the relationship between the two generally refers to a marital couple’s sense of closeness with one another (Yoo et al., 2014). In today’s society, the term intimacy is vastly referred to in a sexual context. While sexual intimacy is an important part of a marriage, it is not the only type of intimacy that should be considered. There are several factors of intimacy that should be assessed when counseling a couple in marital distress:
emotional, social, physical/sexual, intellectual, recreational, and spiritual. Experts argue that sexual intimacy and emotional intimacy are intertwined, specifically stating that lack of one or both is one of the main causes of divorce (Kardan-Souraki et al., 2016).

There are many variables that will drive marital intimacy, some of which are issues that are deeply rooted within the individuals. Lyvers et al. (2021) investigated the connection between various mediation models and their effect on those diagnosed with alexithymia (the fear of intimacy), attachment security, and mood variables. The study found that there was an overall connection between fear of intimacy and the overall dissatisfaction of the marriage (Lyvers et al., 2021). Fear of intimacy can be something deep rooted that a partner brings into the relationship themselves, yet becomes an issue for both partners (Lyvers et al., 2021). Authors of this study demonstrated the benefits of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) in the treatment of those with alexithymia (Lyvers et al., 2021). A similar study examined the relationship between alexithymia on marital conflict in 342 female participants (Ramezani et al., 2022). Findings showed a significant relationship between alexithymia and marital conflict, noting that alexithymia may be a risk factor for marriages (Ramezani et al., 2022).

When faced with marital distress and lack of intimacy, many couples seek professional help through counseling. Literature shows that Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (Lyvers et al., 2021), the PREPARE/ENRICH program (Javadivala et al., 2019), and Gottman couples therapy (Davoodvandi et al., 2018) have all been used as an effective treatment modality for couples experiencing a decline in marital intimacy. Relationship enhancement education and counseling (REEC) through the PREPARE/ENRICH program, significantly improved marital intimacy in thirty-two marital couples (Javadivala et al., 2019). To assess couples, the study used the Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationship (PAIR) prior to the intervention and then again
at the completion of the intervention (Javadivala et al., 2019). Results show that REEC increased each domain of intimacy for both men and women, with a statistically significant increase in physical intimacy (Javadivala et al., 2019). This study included couples from Iran, who identified as Muslim. Further research is needed to evaluate Christian couples and the relationship between intimacy and marital satisfaction. Nik et al. (2021) evaluated the effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) on marital intimacy. Participants of the study were women in Isfahan who were involved in a marriage where the husband committed adultery (Nik et al., 2021). Participants went through a set of counseling sessions aimed at healing the betrayed spouse as well as the dissatisfaction in the marital relationship (Nik et al., 2021). Findings of this study showed a significant improvement on marital intimacy and quality of life in women through ACT; however, ACT did not affect anxiety (Nik et al., 2021). Participants mostly identified with the Muslim religion; therefore, further research is needed to identify the relationship that religion had on this study and broaden the sample to include women and men of other religions.

Based on the Sound Relationship House Theory, Gottman couples therapy was developed in the 1980’s by Dr. John Gottman and Dr. Julie Schwartz Gottman (Gurman et al., 2015). One of the goals of Gottman couples therapy is “to disarm conflicting verbal communication and increase intimacy, respect, and affection” (Gurman et al., 2015). Davoodvandi et al. (2018) examined the effectiveness of the Gottman couple therapy in a semi-experimental study with 16 married couples and found that Gottman couple therapy increased and deepened marital intimacy and improved marital satisfaction (Davoodvandi et al., 2018). Given the small sample size and fact that all participants were of a similar cultural background, additional research should be done with an increased and more diverse population.
Research has found that guided conversations are effective in promoting intimacy in couples that may be struggling (Ramezani et al., 2021). Ramezani et al. (2021) studied 32 couples, split between the control group and experimental group. Couples participating in the experimental group received eight 90-minute sessions of Theory of Mind (ToM) training (Ramezani et al., 2021). The results also showed improvement in scores for the following intimacy subscales: emotional, psychological, sexual, and intellectual. While the results of the study provided clinicians with another tool to help struggling marriages, the study had several gaps that can be addressed in this study (Ramezani et al., 2021). The study only included couples that were living together, but not necessarily married. In addition, the study did not account for spiritual intimacy or religiosity in any way (Ramezani et al., 2021). Additional research is needed in order to focus on married couples who identify as Christian to discover if there is a relationship between intimacy and marital satisfaction in Christian marriages.

The area of intimacy is validly represented by engagement, communication, and shared friendships (Moore et al., 1998). Lee et al. (2019) sought to understand how the use of communication technology and other factors contribute to marital dissatisfaction. Results of the study showed that disclosure of personal information through digital technology predicted a lower level of relationship intimacy and satisfaction in participants (Lee et al., 2019). Intimacy in a marriage can vary based on external factors, such as level of stress in the marriage relationship (Lee et al., 2021). A lack of marital intimacy can cause several mental health disorders, such as depression, sociopsychological maladjustment, and emotional disorders, and similarly, an increase of intimacy in a marriage was also shown to promote emotional well-being in spouses (Lee et al., 2021). Despite the evolution in counseling methods, couples continue to struggle finding ways to deepen the marital relationship and increase intimacy. A common factor from
the literature showed that marital couples who considered their spouse as a reliable person, reported a deeper intimate connection, emotionally, physically, and spiritually (Davoodvandi et al., 2018; Gerschwer, 2021; Lee et al., 2021). The following sections address the individual areas of marital intimacy.

**Physical and sexual intimacy**

Physical intimacy is a critical part of any relationship and can be defined as physical contact including hugging, holding hands and non-sexual touching between spouses, and sexual intimacy involves the desire for sexual satisfaction (Bagarozzi, 2001). There is a great variance to the areas people feel comfortable being physically close to someone (Prause et al., 2021) and physical intimacy can be impacted greatly by stress within the marriage, whether it be infertility (Masoumi et al., 2017), sexual dysfunction (Moore et al., 1998), or the realization that their relationship will not live up to their expectations (Greef et al., 2001). Religion also has a positive influence on marital satisfaction but studies have shown that religiosity is negatively correlated to physical intimacy (Bahnaru, 2019). The beginning signs of trouble in most marriages come from an increased lack of physical contact (Tolstedt & Stokes, 1983), yet a majority of the therapy administered to couples, centers around talk therapy (Prause et al., 2021). Ince and Isik (2022) examined the relationship between physical touch and marital satisfaction. Findings of this study showed that multiple forms of physical intimacy, including romantic touch, holding hands, and kissing, positively correlated with an increase in marital satisfaction (Ince & Isik, 2022).

There are consistent associations between emotional intimacy, frequency of sexual intimacy, and sexual well-being for both women and men (ŠTulhofer et al., 2020). The Mann-Whitney U (also called the Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test) approach was utilized to evaluate the
emotional intimacy, sexual fulfillment, individual wellbeing and overall marital satisfaction in couples that had differing religious identities (Fraser et al., 2021). Sex is often not enough to meet the intimacy needs of people (Blatterer, 2015) and any increase in sexual intimacy (Masoumi et al., 2017) and closeness (Prause et al., 2021) will enrich the couple and raise the overall satisfaction within the relationship, regardless of gender.

Physical attractiveness, and how one perceives their partner is very important to the overall success of the relationship (Demerdjian, 2018). This is not to say that desire and pleasure (Ferreira et al., 2012) are the only two components. Sexual intimacy and emotional intimacy are associated with higher levels of couple satisfaction (Dandurand & Lafontaine, 2013). Ferreira et al. (2012) sought to explore what the impact of time is on the overall level of love and desire left in a relationship. Finding of this study showed that negative changes in sexual desire towards one’s spouse negatively affected marital satisfaction and well-being (Ferreira et al., 2012). Sexually satisfied partners do not always feel emotionally close to their partner and the discrepancies between the two can affect satisfaction in the marriage (Yoo et al., 2014).

**Emotional intimacy and marital satisfaction**

Love encompasses the feeling that we have towards someone, and reflects the commitment one has to not only their spouse, but to the relationship as a whole (Yoo & Joo, 2021). Emotional intimacy is defined as sharing both positive and negative emotions with one’s spouse (Bagarozzi, 2001). Passion is one of the strongest emotions that we feel as human beings (Masoumi et al., 2017), yet it seems to get glossed over and much the research, aside from the fact that it is one of the three main pillars of Sternberg’s model (Novara et al., 2019). The decision to be with someone in a long-term relationship is one of the three pillars of what researchers have defined as “love” (Novara et al., 2019), though this can often be misconstrued
in casual erotic friendships (Blatterer, 2015). Commitment and intimacy prove to be the strongest two indicators of marital satisfaction (Ferreira et al., 2014; Holland et al., 2016). Spouses with a secure attachment have higher levels of emotional intimacy which directly associates with a positive marital attitude. For example, when a couple feels close to each other in an environment that fosters supportiveness and trust, being emotionally vulnerable towards one another will be the likely outcome (Park & Harris, 2022).

Simply being married, or together, is not an apt indicator of marital satisfaction (Nik et al., 2021), because many people can exist in relationships without physical or emotional intimacy (Ferreira et al, 2014). The three components of love (intimacy, commitment and passion) can be positively associated with marital satisfaction (Yoo & Joo, 2021). Perceptions of love and intimate relationships change greatly as you traverse the sociocultural boundaries (Yoo & Joo, 2021). Romanticism within a relationship (Dandurand & Lafontaine, 2013), shared social experiences (Kamali et al., 2020) and conscientiousness (Paetzold & Rholes, 2015) are indicators of the level of emotional intimacy within a relationship. Bashir Mirzanezhad (2020) studied the effects of problem-solving based family therapy on emotional intimacy in a marriage. Used to reduce inappropriate behaviors and expand positive behaviors, “problem-solving based family therapy includes four steps: a) Definition and formulation of the problem, b) Goal setting, c) Generation of alternative solutions, d) Solution implementation and verification” (Mirzanezhad, 2020). Problem-solving based family therapy was effective in improving emotional intimacy and marital satisfaction in couples, specifically changing communication patterns and increasing marital solidarity (Mirzanezhad, 2020).

Humans’ preference in the type and intensity of intimacy with others will change overtime (ŠTulhofer et al., 2020), a common theme throughout the research is that people will go
to great physical and emotional lengths to seek it out (Hook et al., 2003). Hook et al. (2003) found the importance of love and affection, personal validation, trust, and self-disclosure to intimacy in a relationship. Authors also found that independently these components did not affect marital satisfaction, however, when all of the components were taken as an aggregate the benefit was realized (Hook et al., 2003). The ability to communicate effectively to one another is a great indicator of the level of intimacy within a relationship, specifically a couple’s ability to problem-solve (Khodadadi et al., 2018). Communication issues can stem from larger fears of intimacy (Montesi et al., 2013). Cultivating emotional intimacy within a relationship is vital, either through simply spending more time with one another, or even through professional enrichment programs (Masoumi et al., 2017).

**Social intimacy, recreational intimacy, and marital satisfaction**

While there is ample research regarding sexual and emotional intimacy in marriages, there is limited research on the effects of social and recreational intimacy. Social intimacy refers to an individuals’ “involvement in religious organizations, social clubs, community organizations, and charity work” (Piechota et al., 2022) and recreational intimacy refers to activities a couple participates in together, whether it is taking a walk, making dinner together, or even working out at the same time (Schaefer & Olson, 1981). Research showed that couples who participated in shared activities both together and separately as part of a social group, had an increased level of marital satisfaction (Harasymchuk et al., 2020). Having common activities together can help deepen the marital relationship.

While commitment is integral in the success of any marriage or relationship (Novara et al., 2019), there needs to be a delicate balance between time spent together and time for each individual to engage in activities on their own (Zhang & Li, 2021) as well as balancing work and
home life (Minnotte et al., 2010). Relationships with other people are important for the psychological and physiological well-being of any person (Hook et al., 2003), the degree to which both men and women crave these relationships varies between the genders (Greef et al., 2001). Friendships are crucial for the success of a marriage, and while shared friendships are important (Moore et al., 1998), men especially require individual male companionship to feel most fulfilled in a relationship (Blatterer, 2015). Piechota et al. (2022) examined the relationship between social intimacy and marital satisfaction. Though results did not support the main hypothesis, as no evidence was found that participating in more social activities increased marital satisfaction, findings showed that “one spouse’s greater participation in social organizations was associated with greater marital satisfaction in the other spouse” (p. 1182). Due to the lack of robust literature on social and recreational intimacy as it relates to marital satisfaction, additional research is needed to understand this relationship.

**Spiritual intimacy and marital satisfaction**

Throughout history, religious institutions have played a vital role in marriage and family life. There is a significant relationship between spirituality and marital outcomes, which suggests that practitioners assess spirituality and religiosity when counseling married couples (Jacobi, 2017). Spiritual intimacy is defined as spouses expressing thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about religion and the relationship with God with each other (Baragozzi, 2001). Wright (1992) infers that ninety percent of marriages are performed by church leaders or pastors, yet there is an alarming fifty percent divorce rate. Religiosity and spiritual intimacy within a marriage have been found to reduce marital infidelity and increase marital satisfaction, indirectly decreasing the likelihood of divorce (Li et al., 2018). Research shows a statistically significant positive correlation between couples who were highly satisfied in their marriage and those that reported a
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTIMACY AND MARITAL SATISFACTION

strong religious faith (Sauerheber et al., 2021). These aspects should be discussed in a counseling setting to help couples remain satisfied in their marriage (Olson et al., 2015).

The role of forgiveness is vital in a marriage relationship. Couples who exhibit forgiveness in their marriages report a higher level of marital satisfaction and more meaningful relationship (Agu & Nwankwo, 2019). Research suggests that couples who reported having gratitude and forgiveness towards their spouse also reported an increase in the level of intimacy in their marriage (Vazhappilly & Reyes, 2018). Olson et al. (2015) confirmed that religiosity, prayer, and forgiveness were directly related to increased levels of marital satisfaction.

Supporting literature sought to examine what motivated families to reconcile after a typical relationship offense that most families experience and found that families religious beliefs motivated them to reconcile because of God’s love and forgiveness given freely to them (Dollahite et al., 2019). Forgiveness and self-sacrifice have been found to significantly affect marital satisfaction, with forgiveness being inherently linked to satisfaction regardless of the self-sacrifice of one’s spouse (Dollahite et al., 2019; Ghiurca & Vintila, 2019; Stafford et al., 2014; Vazhappilly & Reyes, 2018). Ghiurca and Vintila (2019) confirmed the phenomenon that there is greater marital satisfaction among married couples who place an importance on forgiveness.

Marital counselors and church leaders who are working with couples through premarital counseling or through relationship distress should consider the role that religiosity plays in marital satisfaction. Bahnaru et al. (2019) examined the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction in addition to the role that marital counseling plays in increasing marital satisfaction and results of this study showed that couples who identified as religious had greater marital satisfaction at all marriage stages. Conversely, there was a negative correlation with
marital satisfaction in couples where there was incongruence in each partner’s spirituality (Bahnaru et al., 2019). Cirhinlioglu et al. (2018) examined if religious beliefs have a direct relationship to marital quality and if spouses who do not have a secure attachment to their parents seek attachments in other places. Findings showed that women were more religious than men and had higher levels of anxious attachment, but men reported a higher marital quality than women (Cirhinlioglu et al., 2018). The study also found that marital quality was higher in the earlier years of marriage (Cirhinlioglu et al., 2018). Further investigation is needed to determine how intimacy and marital satisfaction are related in Christian couples.

Couples who are involved in some type of consistent religious activity can improve their sense of well-being and overall marital satisfaction by engaging in these activities together (Fraser et al., 2021; Li et al., 2018), though frequent church attendance is not related to overall marital satisfaction (Lister et al., 2020). Cooper et al. (2019) found that women have a greater involvement in religion than men, and that children of Christian women develop a relationship with God from their mothers more than fathers. Research suggests that a husband’s strong religious faith positively predicted their wife’s marital satisfaction (Rose et al., 2019). Li et al., (2018) found that women who attended church services at least one time per week were 47% less likely to become divorced or separated and also found evidence that regular church attendance reduced the likelihood of infidelity in the marriage. Since only women were part of this study, additional research is needed to include both husbands and wives to determine the relationship between religion and marital quality.

A higher level of spiritual intimacy is related to less frequent conflict in marriage and greater collaboration between spouses (Mahoney et al., 2021). One’s faith contributes to the overall marital satisfaction, as it is perceived as being intrinsically motivated (Abreu-Afonso et
Aman et al., (2019) sought to establish a link between individual religiosity, spirituality, and marital satisfaction using the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS) with 508 respondents and found that increased religiosity and spirituality positively correlated with an increase in marital satisfaction. The study also found that intimacy, communication, and commitment had a tremendous impact on how couples perceive their relationship and their own individual happiness (Aman et al., 2019). Spiritual intimacy (Padgett et al., 2019) within a relationship cultivates the emotional intimacy that is identified as the primary indicator of marital satisfaction (Nik et al., 2021). Padgett et al., (2019) investigated how the transition of a relationship into parenthood affects the physical and emotional aspects of a marriage. The authors sought to layout a clear case that improved communication is crucial to overall marital satisfaction (Padgett et al., 2019). Findings of this study showed that wives consistently showed higher intimacy skills than their spouses and those couples who had a greater sense of trust, attachment, emotional safety and togetherness, were better able to explore sensitive topics (Padgett et al., 2019).

Research has found that couples who reported spiritual intimacy in their marriage also reported greater collaboration, less verbal hostility, and better listening skills (Mahoney et al., 2021). A study by Mahoney et al. (2021) called *Spiritual Intimacy, Spiritual One-Upmanship, and Marital Conflict Across the Transition to Parenthood*, found that the greater spiritual intimacy in a couple led to less marital conflict. This study included only heterosexual couples, married prior to the birth of the first child, and who identified as either Christian or religiously unaffiliated, therefore further research is needed to include different types of intimacy beyond spiritual intimacy and couples throughout different stages in their marriage. Rose et al., (2019) sought to examine the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction over a three-year
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period and results of this study showed that higher levels of religiosity did not increase marital satisfaction overall (Rose et al., 2019). The study did find that there was a positive relationship between a husband’s level of religiosity and an increase in the wives’ marital satisfaction. Generalizability was a limitation for this study due to the requirements that participants have a child between the ages of 10 to 14 years old (Rose et al., 2019). Further research is needed to understand this relationship as it pertains to Christian couples at all stages in their marriage. Wilmoth and Riaz (2019) investigated the relationship between marital satisfaction and religious involvement in Protestant Christians. Results of the study showed a positive correlation between marital quality and regular church attendance. Additionally, findings showed that couples who regularly prayed together and read the Bible together reported higher marital quality scores than couples who did these activities separately. Chen and Chen (2021) examined the relationship between marriage and happiness and the role of religion. The study consisted of nearly 2000 participants who reported various religious affiliations (Chen & Chen, 2021). Results showed strong evidence that religion is a factor in the relationship between marriage and happiness. Interestingly, results strongly indicated a positive relationship for Christians, pointing out that for other religions this relationship was irrelevant. Additionally, findings showed that being married increased the chances of being happy for those who identified as Christian (Chen & Chen, 2021).

Research shows that religious commitment and religious practices increase marital satisfaction and strengthen the relationship (Aman et al., 2019; Davis et al., 2018; Lister et al., 2020). Studies have shown that increased religiosity and spirituality manifest as increased satisfaction within a marriage (Aman et al., 2019; Davis et al., 2018; Klausli, 2020) and couples who participate in shared worship at least once per week have an increased level of relationship satisfaction (Klausli, 2020; Lister et al., 2020). Fraser et al. (2021) sought to connect the
similarity between spousal Christian views and marital satisfaction. The study found that an increase in religiosity of a spouse, resulted in an increased rating of marital satisfaction (Fraser et al., 2021). Shared religious beliefs creates a system in which to help resolve marital conflict (Khodadadi et al., 2018). Khodadadi et al. (2018) sought to demonstrate the connection between the religious wife and the impact it has on problem solving and overall marital satisfaction. The study showed that there was a significant positive correlation to marital intimacy and religious attitude with problem solving (Khodadadi et al., 2018). Findings also showed that marital intimacy played a fundamental role in a successful marriage (Khodadadi et al., 2018). Additional research is needed to identify the male perspective of religious attitude and problem solving, and how this affects marital satisfaction. Holland et al., (2016) investigated the correlation between similar spiritual beliefs held within a relationship, overall marital intimacy and well-being. Findings of this study showed that having a relationship with God may improve marital intimacy and can be a strong predictor of marital intimacy (Holland et al., 2016). Davis et al. (2018) examined the relationship between marital satisfaction and religiosity in Christian women. Results of the study showed that when women feel that God is at the center of their marriage, there was an increase in marital satisfaction (Davis et al., 2018). Moreover, when spiritual intimacy was low, there was a significant negative relationship between marital satisfaction and religiosity (Davis et al., 2018). Similar to previous studies, there were only female participants of this study, limiting the male viewpoint between marital satisfaction and religiosity. 

Research shows that marital intimacy is increased when both spouses are willing to sacrifice for one another (Kamali et al., 2020). Kamali et al. (2020) analyzed factors that drove marital intimacy in Iranian couples. The study consisted of 14 participants from Iran between the ages of 26 and 39 years old who were screened using the PAIR intimacy scale to validate they
were in an intimate relationship. Additionally, the study found that an increase in spending and allocating time for one another helped to promote marital intimacy (Kamali et al., 2020). Consistent with previous studies (Ferreira et al., 2014), the participants in this study stressed the importance of shared recreational activities within the marriage (Kamali et al., 2020). This sample size of this study was small and focused on one geographic location. Further research is needed to analyze data using diverse couples with a broader age range.

Literature supports that spiritual intimacy in a marriage is positively associated with marital satisfaction, but regular church attendance is not associated with an increase in marital satisfaction (Klausi, 2020). Though many studies report a positive correlation between religiosity and marital satisfaction, Agu and Nwankwo (2019) found no significant relationship between religious commitment and marital satisfaction. Much of the research conducted on spiritual intimacy and marital satisfaction had limited population characteristics (Agu & Nwankwo, 2019; Aman et al., 2019; Davis et al., 2018; Holland et al., 2016; Kamali et al., 2020; Lister et al., 2020; Sauerheber et al., 2021; Vazhappilly & Reyes, 2018) therefore, additional research is needed to include a more diverse population.

**Summary**

The foundation of marriage is the building block to a healthy family unit. Commitment, openness, respect, trust, intimacy, and honesty are some of the strongest predictors of a healthy marriage. With divorce rates increasing, a decrease in marital stability and a lack of marital satisfaction are common factors (Margelisch et al., 2017; Mitchell, 2010). Marital intimacy is associated with higher levels of couple satisfaction and continues to be a strong predictor of success in a marriage (Dandurand & LaFontaine, 2013; Ferreira et al, 2014; Holland et al., 2016).
Research was needed to determine the predictive relationship between of the six sub-scales of intimacy and marital satisfaction in Christian couples, since most research had focused on secular marriages (Ariyo & Mgbeokwii, 2019; Boerner et al., 2014; Fraser et al., 2021). Furthermore, research supports the claim that couples who are involved in religious activity have an increase in overall marital satisfaction and intimacy (Aman et al., 2019; Fraser et al., 2021; Nik et al., 2021; Olsen et al., 2015; Padgett et al., 2019). Men and women perceive intimacy differently, thus leading to differences in marital satisfaction. Insufficient research has focused on gender differences as it relates to marital satisfaction (Boerner et al., 2014; Langeslag & Surti, 2022) and the effects of intimacy as it relates to marital satisfaction (Layner et al., 2016; Sarac & Sanberk, 2021).

The following chapter provides an overview of the methodology used to explore the relationship between intimacy and marital satisfaction in Christian couples. By focusing on the correlation between the six sub-scales of marital intimacy and marital satisfaction, the study hoped to contribute a better understanding of this relationship and provide insights to the field of marriage and family therapy that can benefit couples in marital distress.
Chapter Three: Methods

Overview

The review of literature demonstrated the need for additional research on intimacy and marital satisfaction in Christian couples. The goal of this study was to analyze the relationship between marital intimacy and level of marital satisfaction in Christian adults. This chapter will provide a detailed description of the research utilizing the following key elements: research design, research questions, hypotheses, participants and setting, instrumentation, and procedures.

Design

The research design of this study was correlational predictive. A quantitative research approach was appropriate for this study because this approach analyzes numerical data to help draw conclusions and reveal patterns, trends, and relationships (Albers, 2017). A correlational predictive research design seeks to not only identify a relationship between two or more variables, but also predict a relationship from one variable to the other (Jackson, 2016). Marital satisfaction, the criterion variable, and the six sub-scales of intimacy, the predictor variables, were evaluated for Christian adults in this research study. This research design was appropriate for this study because it will determine the predictive relationship between the six sub-scales of intimacy and marital satisfaction in adults who have been married at least three years and identify as Christian.

Research Questions/Hypotheses

RQ1: Do the six sub-scales of marital intimacy (emotional intimacy, social intimacy, physical intimacy, intellectual intimacy, recreational intimacy, and spiritual intimacy) collectively predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples?
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H10: The six sub-scales of marital intimacy (emotional intimacy, social intimacy, physical intimacy, intellectual intimacy, recreational intimacy, and spiritual intimacy) collectively do not predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples.

H1a: The six sub-scales of marital intimacy (emotional intimacy, social intimacy, physical intimacy, intellectual intimacy, recreational intimacy, and spiritual intimacy) collectively predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples.

RQ2: Does emotional intimacy predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples?

H20: Emotional intimacy does not predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples.


RQ3: Does social intimacy predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples?


H3a: Social intimacy predicts marital satisfaction in Christian couples.

RQ4: Does physical intimacy predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples?


H4a: Physical intimacy predicts marital satisfaction in Christian couples.

RQ5: Does intellectual intimacy predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples?

H50: Intellectual intimacy does not predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples.


RQ6: Does recreational intimacy predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples?

H60: Recreational intimacy does not predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples.

H6a: Recreational intimacy predicts marital satisfaction in Christian couples.

RQ7: Does spiritual intimacy predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples?

H70: Spiritual intimacy does not predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples.
H7a: Spiritual intimacy predicts marital satisfaction in Christian couples.

**Participants and Setting**

Participants for this study were adults over the age of 18 who have been married for at least three years and who identify as Christian. Participants were obtained using a convenience/snowball sampling method, as the use of social media was an effective way to target participants. The researcher utilized social media accounts on Facebook and Instagram to recruit participants, provided information about the study, and included a link to the Google Form which included the Informed Consent Form and Survey.

The unit of analysis for this study was the Christian adult and the target sample size was 114 total participants. A target sample size of 114 was determined based on the research method and targeted analysis techniques for this correlational predictive research study (Cohen et al., 2000). Based on G*Power Calculation, a minimum of 98 individual participants were needed and 15% was added to account for attrition. Participants selected will have been married a minimum of three years and who identify as Christian. The responding participants participated in the research study through an online survey.

**Instrumentation**

Participants were asked to complete an electronic survey based on questions from three instruments that were used to collect the necessary data: the self-report questionnaire, the Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships (PAIR), and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS) (Schaefer & Olson, 1981; Schumm et al., 1983). The self-report questionnaire, created by the researcher, was used to obtain participant demographics and measure spiritual intimacy within the marriage. The PAIR was used to measure the additional five sub-scales of
intimacy within the marriage (Schaefer & Olson, 1981). The KMSS was used to measure the overall level of marital satisfaction (Schumm et al., 1983).

**Self-report Questionnaire**

A self-report questionnaire was included in the survey to each participant. The purpose of the self-report questionnaire was to collect participant demographic information such as gender, years married, marital history, and children. In addition to participant demographics, the self-report questionnaire included three questions used to measure spiritual intimacy within the marriage. The following three questions were used to assess spiritual intimacy: “I feel spiritually connected to my partner”; “My partner and I regularly pray together”; “My partner and I read the Bible together”. Participants responded to each question on a 5-point scale (1-strongly disagree to 5- strongly agree).

**Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships (PAIR)**

Developed by Schaefer and Olson in 1981, the Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationship (PAIR) is a 36-item assessment used to measure five different sub-scales in relationship intimacy. The sub-scales are: emotional intimacy, social intimacy, sexual intimacy, intellectual intimacy, and recreational intimacy. Six questions align to each of the five sub-scales (emotional, social, sexual, intellectual, and recreational), and six questions target the perception of the overall relationship, totaling thirty-six questions (Appendix D). The assessment consists of statements that include: “I am satisfied with our sex life”; “My partner has all the qualities I’ve ever wanted in a mate”; “We enjoy the same recreational activities”; “My partner listens to me when I need someone to talk to”. Participants responded to each question on a 5-point scale (1- does not describe me/my relationship at all to 5- describes me/my relationship very well). The PAIR produced a continuous interval-level
score and scoring was summed for each subscale, with higher scores indicating a higher intimacy level. An overall possible score ranged from 36 to 180, and the intimacy sub-scales ranged from 6 to 36. Validity of the PAIR was established through confirmatory (CFA) and exploratory (EFA) factor analysis (Constant et al., 2016; Schaefer & Olson, 1981). EFA validated the adequacy of the PAIR with values for Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure (KMOM) of 0.89 and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity ($p < 0.000$) (Schaefer & Olson, 1981). A subsequent CFA also demonstrated good fit ($X^2 = 266.781$, $p = .000$, $X^2/df$ ratio = 2.068, $CFI = .956$, $RMSEA = .044$ ($90\% CI [.036, .051]$) and $SRMR = .0395$ (Constant et al., 2016). The reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) for the PAIR is 0.70, with the individual sub-scales ranging from 0.82 to 0.90, confirming the internal consistency of the assessment (Javadivala et al., 2018). The PAIR has been validated as an empirical tool in additional studies.

**The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS)**

The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS) is a 3-item assessment designed to measure marital satisfaction in couples. Developed by Schumm et al. (1983) counselors use the KMSS to quickly assess a couple’s satisfaction. The assessment consists of three questions: “How satisfied are you with your marriage?”; “How satisfied are you with your wife/husband as a spouse?”; “How satisfied are you with your relationship with your wife/husband?” Participants use a 7-point scale that ranges from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 7 (very satisfied). The KMSS produces a continuous interval-level score with an overall possible score range from 3 to 21, with higher scores indicating increased marital satisfaction and a lower number indicating that a marriage is stressed. The KMSS has been validated through exploratory factor analysis (EFA) in research and significantly correlates with other measures such as the Family Strengths Scale, Quality of Marriage Index and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure
(KMOM) of 0.91 and the Bartlett Test of Sphericity ($p < .001$) validate the adequacy of KMSS. A subsequent confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) evaluated the factor structure of the one-factor model. Goodness-of-fit was not interpreted since the one-factor model was fully saturated and all three factor loadings (0.85, 0.91, 0.85) were significant (Omani-Samani et al., 2017). The reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) for KMSS is 0.93, confirming internal consistency.

**Procedures**

Prior to participant recruitment, approval was obtained through Liberty University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix A). Participants were recruited through convenience/snowball sampling procedures and then instructed to complete an online survey. The online survey was developed through Google Forms and questions from the instruments were used. The researcher enlisted participants through personal Facebook and Instagram accounts (Appendix C). Information provided included the purpose of the study and how participation will contribute to the outcome. Each participant voluntarily used the provided link and completed the survey. In order to complete the survey, participants had to acknowledge the electronic informed consent in the first question. The survey was created to take less than 15 minutes. The instruments that were used in the survey are a self-report questionnaire, the Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships (PAIR), and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS), and questions from these instruments were input into Google Forms. The survey was anonymous and did not include any identifying information. Data was uploaded to SPSS and statistical analysis was done at the completion of a two-week time period.

**Data Analysis**

After the surveys were collected, the data was analyzed. Data collected through the
survey provided quantitative analysis for this research study. The survey assessed the predictive relationship between marital satisfaction and the six sub-scales of intimacy in each participant.

**Multiple Regression Analysis**

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to analyze the data. To begin, data screening was accomplished for the variables Marital Satisfaction, as measured by KMSS, a continuous-interval level of measurement variable, and the six sub-scales of Intimacy, as measured by PAIR, a continuous-interval level of measurement variable. The following test of assumptions were conducted for multiple regression; assumptions #1 and #2 were verified first, and assumptions #3, #4, #5, #6, #7, and #8 were conducted using SPSS (Laerd, 2021):

1. There must be one criterion/outcome variable (Y) that is measured at the continuous level (i.e., the interval or ratio level). The criterion variable for this study will be marital satisfaction, as measured by KMSS, a continuous-interval level of measurement variable.
2. There must be two or more predictor variables (X) that are measured either at the continuous or nominal level. The predictor variables for this study will be the six sub-scales of intimacy (emotional, social, sexual, intellectual, recreational, and spiritual), as measured by PAIR, a continuous-interval level of measurement variable.
3. There must be independence of observations (i.e., independence of residuals). This will be tested in SPSS using the Durbin-Watson statistic, where values between 1 to 3 satisfy this requirement.
4. There must be a linear relationship between (a) the criterion/outcome and each of the predictor variables, and (b) the criterion and predictor variables collectively. The linear relationship will be tested by scatterplot in SPSS for each pairing with the criterion and will be determined visually.
5. There must be homoscedasticity of residuals (equal error variances). To test this assumption, examination of the plot of residual (error) variances in SPSS will be done to determine if residuals are relatively equal, shown visually as a box shape across the figure.

6. There must be no multicollinearity. This assumption will be determined by testing the variance inflation factor (VIF) in SPSS. A score less than 10 will satisfy this requirement.

7. There must be no significant outliers, high leverage points, or highly influential points. This assumption will be tested using casewise diagnostics in SPSS. Any records that are revealed as a result of the casewise diagnostics will be removed from the dataset prior to completing the regression.

8. The residuals (errors) must be approximately normally distributed. This will be determined using a normal P-P plot in SPSS. If the points of the scatterplot fall along the 45-degree line this indicates a normal distribution of the residuals.

Assuming that no assumptions have been violated, a multiple regression can be completed to predict marital satisfaction from the six sub-scales of intimacy.

**Summary**

A decrease in marital stability and a lack of marital satisfaction are common factors which can lead to divorce (Margelisch et al., 2017; Mitchell, 2010). Intimacy continues to be a strong predictor of success in a marriage and is associated with higher levels of marital satisfaction (Dandurand & LaFontaine, 2013; Ferreira et al, 2014; Holland et al., 2016). This correlational predictive research study sought to obtain data by measuring marital intimacy and marital satisfaction. The data determined the predictive relationship between the six sub-scales of intimacy and marital satisfaction in Christians and contributed to future literature.
Chapter Four: Findings

Overview

The purpose of this study was to examine the predictive relationship between marital satisfaction and the six sub-scales of intimacy in Christian couples. This study used a sample of 190 adults who had been married a minimum of three years and who identified as Christian. The participants were given a survey to measure the level of marital satisfaction and the six sub-scales of intimacy. Complete data was available for 145 of the participants. All variables measured were assessed for internal consistency within the sample using Cronbach’s alpha, which is the preferred form of reliability evaluation. All variables considered in this study demonstrated very good (.91) internal consistency (Table 1). A multiple regression analysis was used to determine the predictive relationship between marital satisfaction and the six sub-scales of intimacy. This chapter will present a summary of the research findings for each of the seven research questions.

Table 1

Cronbach’s Alpha for Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cronbach's Alpha</th>
<th>Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items</th>
<th>N of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.909</td>
<td>.911</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Screening

Data screening for multiple regression was completed for the variables gender, years married, marital satisfaction, and the six sub-scales of intimacy (spiritual, emotional, social, physical, intellectual, and recreational), in preparation to complete a multiple linear regression.
Gender is a categorical variable with two groups of male and female. Frequency tables were created for gender and years married, and results showed that there were more female participants ($n = 122$) than male ($n = 23$) participants (Table 2) and that the majority of participants (89.7%) had been married 10 or more years (Table 3). Marital satisfaction is a continuous-interval level of measurement variable and is measured by the KMSS. Intimacy is also a continuous-interval level of measurement and measured using the PAIR.

**Table 2**

*Gender Frequency Table*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>84.1</td>
<td>84.1</td>
<td>84.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3**

*Years Married Frequency Table*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 14 years</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 to 19 years</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 or more years</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td>89.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 5 years</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>95.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 9 years</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis of the Marital Satisfaction, Emotional Intimacy, Physical Intimacy, and Spiritual Intimacy histograms showed that results were not normally distributed. Results showed a large number of participants with high scores for Marital Satisfaction, Emotional Intimacy, and Physical Intimacy (Figures 1-3) indicating a higher level of response in those areas among participants. Additionally, results showed a large number of participants with low scores for Spiritual Intimacy, indicating a lower level of spiritual intimacy among participants. However, Social Intimacy, Intellectual Intimacy, and Recreational Intimacy histograms showed a normal distribution (Figures 5-7).

Figure 1

*Marital Satisfaction Histogram*
Figure 2

*Emotional Intimacy Histogram*

![Emotional Intimacy Histogram](image)

Figure 3

*Physical Intimacy Histogram*

![Physical Intimacy Histogram](image)
Figure 4

*Spiritual Intimacy Histogram*

![Spiritual Intimacy Histogram](image1)

Figure 5

*Social Intimacy Histogram*

![Social Intimacy Histogram](image2)
Figure 6

*Intellectual Intimacy Histogram*

![Intellectual Intimacy Histogram](image1)

Figure 7

*Recreational Intimacy Histogram*

![Recreational Intimacy Histogram](image2)
Tests of Assumptions

The following tests of assumptions were conducted in preparation for the multiple regression.

1. There must be one criterion/outcome variable (Y) that is measured at the continuous level (i.e., the interval or ratio level). The criterion variable for this study was marital satisfaction, as measured by KMSS, a continuous-interval level of measurement variable.

2. There must be two or more predictor variables (X) that are measured either at the continuous or nominal level. The predictor variables for this study were the six sub-scales of intimacy (emotional, social, physical, intellectual, recreational, and spiritual), as measured by PAIR, a continuous-interval level of measurement variable.

3. There must be independence of observations (i.e., independence of residuals). The Durbin-Watson statistic for the regression is 2.079, demonstrating independence of observations (Table 4), which satisfies this assumption.

4. There must be a linear relationship between (a) the criterion/outcome and each of the predictor variables, and (b) the criterion and predictor variables collectively. Based upon a scatterplot between Marital Satisfaction and Intimacy, there is a linear relationship between the two variables (Figure 8). Upon examination of the overall linearity of the model, which was completed through partial regression plots, it has also been determined that there is a linear relationship (Figures 9-14) between the criterion and each of the six predictor variables.
Table 4

Model Summary Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
<th>Durbin-Watson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.786&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.617</td>
<td>.601</td>
<td>2.673</td>
<td>2.079</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Predictors: (Constant), Social Intimacy, Spiritual Intimacy, Physical Intimacy, Recreational Intimacy, Intellectual Intimacy, Emotional Intimacy

b. Dependent Variable: Marital Satisfaction

Figure 8

Scatterplot of Marital Satisfaction and Intimacy

![Scatterplot of Marital Satisfaction and Intimacy](image-url)
Figure 9

*Partial Regression Plot of Predictor Spiritual Intimacy Against Marital Satisfaction*

![Partial Regression Plot of Predictor Spiritual Intimacy Against Marital Satisfaction](image)

Figure 10

*Partial Regression Plot of Predictor Emotional Intimacy Against Marital Satisfaction*

![Partial Regression Plot of Predictor Emotional Intimacy Against Marital Satisfaction](image)
Figure 11

*Partial Regression Plot of Predictor Social Intimacy Against Marital Satisfaction*

![Partial Regression Plot of Predictor Social Intimacy Against Marital Satisfaction](image)

Figure 12

*Partial Regression Plot of Predictor Physical Intimacy Against Marital Satisfaction*

![Partial Regression Plot of Predictor Physical Intimacy Against Marital Satisfaction](image)
Figure 13

*Partial Regression Plot of Predictor Spiritual Intimacy Against Marital Satisfaction*

![Partial Regression Plot of Predictor Spiritual Intimacy Against Marital Satisfaction]

Figure 14

*Partial Regression Plot of Predictor Recreational Intimacy Against Marital Satisfaction*

![Partial Regression Plot of Predictor Recreational Intimacy Against Marital Satisfaction]
5. There must be homoscedasticity of residuals (equal error variances). Examination of the
plot of residual (error) variances (Figures 9-14) showed that the residuals are relatively
equal, shown visually across the figures.

6. There must be no multicollinearity. This assumption was determined by testing the
variance inflation factor (VIF). A VIF score less than 10 indicates no multicollinearity.
The VIF is 1.292 for spiritual intimacy, 5.286 for emotional intimacy, 2.416 for social
intimacy, 2.344 for physical intimacy, 4.162 for intellectual intimacy, and 2.190 for
recreational intimacy, indicating no multicollinearity (Table 5).

7. There must be no significant outliers, high leverage points, or highly influential points.
This assumption was tested using casewise diagnostics and no records were revealed.

8. The residuals (errors) must be approximately normally distributed. The normal P-P plot
for the regression indicates a normal distribution of the residuals (Figure 15).

| Table 5 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regression Coefficients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Intimacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Intimacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational Intimacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Intimacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Intimacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Intimacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| a. Dependent Variable: Marital Satisfaction |
The data for the multiple regression met the tests of assumptions, therefore a multiple regression analysis was conducted.

**Results**

This research study focused on seven research questions and seven hypotheses. A multiple regression analysis was completed to determine the predictive relationship between marital satisfaction and the six sub-scales of intimacy in a sample of 145 Christian adults (N = 145). To begin, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and N = number of observations) were determined for the seven variables: marital satisfaction, spiritual intimacy, emotional intimacy, social intimacy, physical intimacy, intellectual intimacy, and recreational intimacy (Table 6).
There were seven research questions the study investigated. First, do the six sub-scales of marital intimacy (emotional intimacy, social intimacy, physical intimacy, intellectual intimacy, recreational intimacy, and spiritual intimacy) collectively predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples? Second, does emotional intimacy predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples? Third, does social intimacy predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples? Fourth, does physical intimacy predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples? Fifth, does intellectual intimacy predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples? Sixth, does recreational intimacy predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples? Finally, does spiritual intimacy predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples?

The first research question sought to determine if the six sub-scales of marital intimacy (emotional intimacy, social intimacy, physical intimacy, intellectual intimacy, recreational intimacy, and spiritual intimacy) collectively predicted marital satisfaction in Christian couples. Results of the overall regression analysis, including all six predictors, was statistically significant, $R = .786$, $R^2 = .617$ (Table 4), $F(6, 138) = 37.085, p < .001$ (Table 7). Based on the results, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted.

For research questions two through seven, each of the predictors were assessed to determine the individual contribution by examining the $t$ ratios for the individual regression slopes. The second research question sought to determine if emotional intimacy individually predicted marital satisfaction. Results of the regression analysis (Table 5) showed that emotional intimacy significantly predicted marital satisfaction, $t(145) = 4.88, p < .001$, therefore the null hypothesis for research question two was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. The predictive relationship between emotional intimacy to marital satisfaction was hypothesized; higher scores for emotional intimacy predicted higher scores for marital satisfaction.
Table 6

*Descriptive Statistics for Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital Satisfaction</td>
<td>17.35</td>
<td>4.229</td>
<td>145</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spiritual Intimacy</td>
<td>7.06</td>
<td>3.218</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Intimacy</td>
<td>23.23</td>
<td>6.053</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational Intimacy</td>
<td>20.92</td>
<td>3.920</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Intimacy</td>
<td>20.89</td>
<td>4.026</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Intimacy</td>
<td>22.70</td>
<td>5.857</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Intimacy</td>
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<td>5.259</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7

*ANOVA Results*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>264.891</td>
<td>37.085</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>985.716</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>7.143</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2575.062</td>
<td>144</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Dependent Variable: Marital Satisfaction
b. Predictors: (Constant), Social Intimacy, Spiritual Intimacy, Physical Intimacy, Recreational Intimacy, Intellectual Intimacy, Emotional Intimacy

The third research question sought to determine if social intimacy individually predicted marital satisfaction. Results of the regression analysis (Table 5) showed that social intimacy did not significantly predict marital satisfaction, $t(145) = 1.64, p = .102$, therefore the null hypothesis for research question three was retained and the alternative hypothesis was rejected. Higher scores for social intimacy did not predict higher scores for marital satisfaction.
The fourth research question sought to determine if physical intimacy individually predicted marital satisfaction. Results of the regression analysis (Table 5) showed that physical intimacy did not significantly predict marital satisfaction, $t(145) = 1.70, p = .092$, therefore the null hypothesis for research question four was retained and the alternative hypothesis was rejected. Higher scores for physical intimacy did not individually predict higher scores for marital satisfaction.

The fifth research question sought to determine if intellectual intimacy individually predicted marital satisfaction. Results of the regression analysis (Table 5) showed that intellectual intimacy did not significantly predict marital satisfaction, $t(145) = -1.19, p = .235$, therefore the null hypothesis for research question five was retained and the alternative hypothesis was rejected. Higher scores for intellectual intimacy did not individually predict higher scores for marital satisfaction.

The sixth research question sought to determine if recreational intimacy individually predicted marital satisfaction. Results of the regression analysis (Table 5) showed that recreational intimacy did not significantly predict marital satisfaction, $t(145) = 0.92, p = .359$, therefore the null hypothesis for research question was retained and the alternative hypothesis was rejected. Higher scores for recreational intimacy did not individually predict higher scores for marital satisfaction.

The final research question sought to determine if spiritual intimacy individually predicted marital satisfaction. Results of the regression analysis (Table 5) showed that spiritual intimacy did not significantly predict marital satisfaction, $t(145) = 1.36, p = .177$, therefore the null hypothesis for the final research question was retained and the alternative hypothesis was
rejected. Higher scores for spiritual intimacy did not individually predict higher scores for marital satisfaction.

Summary

This quantitative study sought to determine the predictive relationship between the six sub-scales of intimacy and marital satisfaction in Christian couples. The sample consisted of 145 participants who had been married for a minimum of three years and who identified as Christian. A multiple regression analysis was performed to address each research question. Of the seven hypotheses, only two were statistically significant.

Hypothesis one predicted that the six sub-scales of marital intimacy (emotional intimacy, social intimacy, physical intimacy, intellectual intimacy, recreational intimacy, and spiritual intimacy) would collectively predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples. The p-value of < .001 (Table 7) was less than .05; therefore, hypothesis one was statistically significant.

Hypothesis two predicted that emotional intimacy would predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples. The p-value of < .001 (Table 5) was less than .05; therefore, hypothesis two was statistically significant.

With p-value’s greater than .05 (Table 5), the remaining hypotheses were not statistically significant. Overall, scores for marital satisfaction were highly predictive from the six sub-scales of intimacy, with the strongest single predictive contribution from emotional intimacy. The next chapter discusses these findings in more detail, the implications, limitations, and recommendation for future research.
Chapter Five: Conclusions

Overview

This chapter will analyze the significance of the results related to the research questions investigated in this study. Current findings will be discussed for each research question and compared to findings from earlier studies. Additionally, this chapter will discuss implications and limitations of the study, and provide recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this research study was to examine the predictive relationship between intimacy and marital satisfaction in Christian couples who have been married for a minimum of three years. This study utilized a sample of 145 participants obtained through social media, to examine the following variables: marital satisfaction, emotional intimacy, social intimacy, physical intimacy, intellectual intimacy, recreational intimacy, and spiritual intimacy. Participants were administered an online survey that consisted of a self-report questionnaire, the Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships to measure marital intimacy, and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale to measure marital satisfaction. Findings of this study supported findings from previous studies and will be discussed further in the following section.

Discussion

This section elaborates on the findings of the study compared with current literature and theory. Previous research shows that marital satisfaction is an important component to a healthy marriage and factors such as lack of marital intimacy can attribute for increased marital dissatisfaction (Kayabol & Sumer, 2020; Randles & Avishai, 2018). Existing literature fails to include Christian participants, thus, research results on marital intimacy and marital satisfaction among diverse populations were considered in this research study.
Research Question One

Research question one sought to determine if the six sub-scales of marital intimacy (emotional intimacy, social intimacy, physical intimacy, intellectual intimacy, recreational intimacy, and spiritual intimacy) collectively predict marital satisfaction in Christian couples. Results from the multiple regression analysis indicate that the six sub-scales of intimacy collectively predicted marital satisfaction, $R = .786$, $R^2 = .617$ (Table 4), $F(6, 138) = 37.085$, $p < .001$ (Table 7). The literature supports the current findings and research found that individually these components did not affect marital satisfaction, but when all of the components were taken as an aggregate, the benefit was realized (Hook et al., 2003). Additionally, researchers note that love, affection, and trust in a marriage increased intimacy in a marriage (Hook et al., 2003).

Marriage is the beginning of the family unit and lack of intimacy is one of the leading causes for couples to seek counseling. Literature found that when couples are able to solely rely on one another through difficult moments during marriage, this led to an increase in intimacy (Gerschwer, 2021). Gerschwer (2021) also discovered that when couples faced a significant crisis or life event, this became a turning point in the marriage which brought couples closer together. Clinicians who utilize therapeutic modalities that are based on cognitive behavioral theory, have proven to significantly increase marital intimacy by defining and solving problems that arise in marital relationships (Baziar et al., 2021; Yoo et al., 2014). Additionally, problem-solving based family therapy, derived from family systems theory, helps to reduce problems and increase marital satisfaction in marriages (Pugliese & White, 2014).

Research Question Two

Research question two sought to determine if emotional intimacy predicted marital satisfaction in Christian couples. Results of the regression analysis (Table 5) showed that
emotional intimacy significantly predicted marital satisfaction, $t(145) = 4.88, p < .001$. The predictive relationship between emotional intimacy to marital satisfaction was hypothesized; higher scores for emotional intimacy predicted higher scores for marital satisfaction. The literature supports the current findings and previous studies found that emotional intimacy is the primary indicator of marital satisfaction and a lack of emotional intimacy is one of the main causes of divorces (Kardan-Souraki et al., 2016; Nik et al., 2021; Padgett et al., 2019).

Additionally, romanticism, shared social experiences, and conscientiousness are indicators of the level of emotional intimacy within a marriage (Dandurand & Lafontaine, 2013; Kamali et al., 2020; Paetzold & Rholes, 2015).

Discrepancies between each of the sub-scales of intimacy and emotional intimacy have also shown to affect marital satisfaction, specifically physical intimacy (Yoo et al., 2014), proving how important emotional intimacy is within a marital relationship. Based on the study’s results, emotional intimacy is connected to marital quality. Practitioners treating couples in marital distress have used therapeutic modalities derived from family systems theory. Specifically, differentiation of self (DoS), derived from family systems theory, is the ability of an individual to balance emotional functioning and intimacy in in their marriage, and a spouse’s level of DoS is positively correlated to their marital quality and satisfaction (Bowen, 1993; Mozas-Alonso et al., 2022).

**Research Question Three**

Research question three sought to determine if social intimacy predicted marital satisfaction in Christian couples. Results of the regression analysis (Table 5) showed that social intimacy did not significantly predict marital satisfaction, $t(145) = 1.64, p = .102$; therefore, higher scores for social intimacy did not predict higher scores for marital satisfaction. Though
literature was limited, it supports the current findings. Previous studies that examined the relationship between social intimacy and marital satisfaction also found no evidence that participating in more social activities increased marital satisfaction (Blatterer, 2015; Piechota et al., 2022). Ariyo and Mgbeokwii (2019) sought to define a link between companionship between couples and long-term satisfaction and found that participants were happier in their marriage when they considered their spouse to be their closest companion (Ariyo & Mgbeokwii, 2019).

Couples early on in their marriage tend to spend a significant amount of time together and with mutual friends, while they are learning what the other enjoys and enjoying things together. Couples struggling with social intimacy, may benefit from a therapeutic modality derived from social learning theory which theorizes that couples modify each other’s behaviors through various rewards and punishments that follow a specific behavior (Johnson & Bradbury, 2015). Marital therapy seeks to modify behavior; thus, spouses learn to trust one another through engaging in consistent positive behavior with one another.

**Research Question Four**

Research question four sought to determine if physical intimacy predicted marital satisfaction in Christian couples. Results of the regression analysis (Table 5) showed that physical intimacy did not significantly predict marital satisfaction, $t(145) = 1.70, p = .092$. Higher scores for physical intimacy did not individually predict higher scores for marital satisfaction. Current findings support previous studies that examined the relationship between physical intimacy and marital satisfaction. Demerdjian (2018) sought to establish a connection between physical intimacy and marital satisfaction, but findings of the study could not connect overall physical intimacy and marital satisfaction.
Supporting studies showed that physical intimacy in not enough to meet the intimacy needs in a marriage and negative changes in sexual desire negatively impacted marital satisfaction (Blatterer, 2015; Ferrerira et al., 2012). Ince and Isik (2022) examined the relationship between physical touch and marital satisfaction and found that multiple forms of physical intimacy, including romantic touch, holding hands, and kissing, positively correlated with an increase in marital satisfaction (Ince & Isik, 2022).

Unmet expectations in a marriage may lead to marital dissatisfaction. Men tend to place a greater importance on physical intimacy than women, thus, results of this study may be skewed considering only 16% of participants were male. Cognitive-behavioral marital therapy, derived from cognitive behavioral theory, addresses behavioral techniques that aim to correct unrealistic expectations, and can be an effective therapeutic modality for spouses individually and together.

**Research Question Five**

Research question five sought to determine if intellectual intimacy predicted marital satisfaction in Christian couples. Results of the regression analysis (Table 5) showed that intellectual intimacy did not significantly predict marital satisfaction, $t(145) = -1.19, p = .235$. Literature supports the current findings, though there are limited studies that examined the relationship between intellectual intimacy and marital satisfaction. Intellectual intimacy is the cognitive connection between spouses, which encompasses sharing thoughts, feelings, and opinions through communication. Communication is only one factor in developing intellectual intimacy within a marriage. Literature shows that when communication begins to decline in a relationship, there is also a decline in how relationship satisfaction (Ariyo & Mgbeokwii, 2019; Stinson et al., 2017).
While there are many forms of verbal and non-verbal communication that can be utilized in a marriage, the ability for spouses to actively listen to one another while showing empathy is important to the intellectual intimacy of the marriage. One form of active listening called active-empathic listening (AEL) has been shown to increase marital satisfaction (Manusov et al., 2018). Lipetz et al. (2020) discovered nine traits of active listening (attentiveness, understanding, responsiveness, alertness, empathetic, open-mindedness, perspective, reflective, and supportiveness) and those that incorporated a combination of these traits reported being more satisfied in their relationship. Practitioners who incorporate the use of cognitive-behavioral techniques in a therapeutic setting, can increase marital intimacy and the stability of the marriage by promoting communication, conflict resolution, and empathetic response skills (Kardan-Souraki et al., 2016).

**Research Question Six**

Research question six sought to determine if recreational intimacy predicted marital satisfaction in Christian couples. Results of the regression analysis (Table 5) showed that recreational intimacy did not significantly predict marital satisfaction, $t(145) = 0.92, p = .359$, therefore the null hypothesis for research question was retained and the alternative hypothesis was rejected. Higher scores for recreational intimacy did not individually predict higher scores for marital satisfaction. Literature showed that having common activities together can help deepen the marital relationship (Harasymchuk et al., 2020); however, research was limited on how recreational intimacy directly relates to marital satisfaction.

Couples that have been together for longer need to be more intentional about spending time together and planning dates, as the busyness of life can often take over. Based on the study’s results, recreational intimacy did not predict marital satisfaction which could be
attributed to participants length of marriage. Of the 145 participants, 90% had been married for over ten years, and 60% reported being extremely satisfied in their marriage. Adamson et al. (2021) found that women who had higher levels of education reported an increase in recreational intimacy, but the current study did not collect data on participants’ education level. Codina and Pestana (2019) found that men were significantly less satisfied with recreational aspects of the relationship than women, and results showed that despite women having less available recreational time, women enjoyed themselves more than men.

Emotionally-focused couples therapy (EFCT) has been found to be an effective therapeutic modality in helping couples increase marital intimacy in this area (Kardan-Souraki, et al., 2016). Practitioners use EFCT in an attempt to break negative cycles so that newer, positive patterns can occur. Literature found that couples who engaged in more recreational activities together reported an increase in constructive communication within the marriage and increased feelings of closeness (Hogan et al., 2021), which could attribute to this study’s findings on emotional intimacy.

**Research Question Seven**

Research question seven sought to determine if spiritual intimacy predicted marital satisfaction in Christian couples. Results of the regression analysis (Table 5) showed that spiritual intimacy did not significantly predict marital satisfaction, $r(145) = 1.36, p = .177$, therefore the null hypothesis for the final research question was retained and the alternative hypothesis was rejected. Higher scores for spiritual intimacy did not individually predict higher scores for marital satisfaction. This result was not surprising, because more than half (59%) of the participants reported they either never attend church with their spouse or they only attend once per month. Additionally, a large number of participants reported that they do not read the
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTIMACY AND MARITAL SATISFACTION

Bible with their spouse (74%) or pray together as a couple (56%). The literature supports the current findings and previous studies found no connection between spiritual intimacy and marital satisfaction.

A higher level of spiritual intimacy is related to less frequent conflict in marriage and greater collaboration between spouses (Mahoney et al., 2021). Rose et al., (2019) sought to examine the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction and results of this study showed that higher levels of religiosity did not increase marital satisfaction overall (Rose et al., 2019). Additionally, Agu and Nwankwo (2019) found no significant relationship between religious commitment and marital satisfaction. Bahnaru et al. (2019) examined the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction in addition to the role that marital counseling plays in increasing marital satisfaction and results of this study showed that couples enrolled in counseling who identified as religious had greater marital satisfaction at all marriage stages. Results from this study support current literature on intimacy and marital satisfaction.

Implications

The current study has added to the existing body of knowledge on Christian couples overall marital intimacy and marital satisfaction, the six sub-scales of intimacy, and the field of community care and counseling. The research findings contributed to a specific population in the Christian community which added to the existing research. This study can help create awareness on intimacy and marital satisfaction of this group and provide insight to meet their marital needs by developing specific strategies.

With a deeper understanding of how intimacy affects the level of marital satisfaction, the knowledge gained from this study can assist couples who are in relationship distress (Schaefer & Olson, 1981). Christian couples facing marital distress have an abundance of resources to turn to
for help, including counselors, church ministries, marriage retreats, Christian books and videos, and more (Kostenberger, 2010). Despite the overabundance of opportunity couples have to learn, grow, and improve, there continues to be a decline in marital satisfaction leading to the breakdown of the marital unit. From the findings of this study, marital counselors, pastors, and family educators can gain insight into the various types of intimacy affecting their clients’ relationships in order to provide them the opportunity to focus on creating change in these areas.

This study contributes to existing literature on the six sub-scales of intimacy and the relationship to marital satisfaction. The literature indicates that the six sub-scales of intimacy collectively predict marital satisfaction, though much of the current literature focuses on physical intimacy, spiritual intimacy, and emotional intimacy, with limited research available for social intimacy, recreational intimacy, and intellectual intimacy. Counseling professionals can gain insight from this study’s findings to holistically implement strategies to strengthen marital intimacy as a whole and improve marital satisfaction.

Lastly, this study contributes to the literature on religious activity and marital satisfaction. Current literature supports this study’s findings, that couples who are involved in consistent religious activity can improve marital satisfaction, but frequent church attendance was not found to be related to overall marital satisfaction (Fraser et al., 2021; Li et al., 2018; Lister et al., 2020). Research supports that spiritual intimacy within a marriage cultivates emotional intimacy, which has been identified as the primary indicator of marital satisfaction (Nik et al., 2021; Padgett et al., 2019). Thus, the current study adds to counseling professionals’ understanding of the relationship between marital satisfaction and religious commitment in order to encourage and improve individuals, couples, and families.
Delimitations and Limitations

In order to narrow the scope of this study, specific boundaries and delimitations exist. This study only focused on individuals who have been married a minimum of three years and who identify as Christian. Marital satisfaction generally starts out high for newlyweds who are in the “honeymoon stage” and declines over time (Lavner et al., 2017). This study only analyzed data that was self-reported from the participants, rather than objective measurements. Additionally, the researcher limited this study to two weeks before closing out the online survey.

Threats to both internal and external validity of the study are present. First, this study utilized a convenience / snowball sampling method to recruit participants through the researcher’s personal social media accounts. The target sample size for this study was 114 based on G*Power Calculation plus 15% added for attrition. Within a short period of time, 190 responses were received, however, the number of participants who completed the survey was higher than the number of participants who qualified to be included in the study. In addition, a majority of the respondents were from the same church or social group.

Second, to be included in the study, participants needed to identify as Christian. The term “Christian” is subjective and was left up to the participants to personally determine. The study did not evaluate the meaning of Christian for the participants and could not determine if the participants identified as Christian. Third, although there was some gender diversity, the demographic questionnaire showed a large number of female participants (84% female, 16% male), thus the results cannot be generalized across genders. Finally, the surveys may present unintended bias based on the participants’ current circumstances at the time of completion. It is possible that due to personal circumstances, participants may have skewed responses to marital intimacy and marital satisfaction.
Recommendations for Future Research

The current study was able to examine the predictive relationship between the six sub-scales of intimacy and marital satisfaction in Christian adults who have been married a minimum of three years. Though this study adds value to the existing body of knowledge, there are several recommendations for future research. First, the study collected data from individuals rather than couples. It would be beneficial for future research to consider gathering data from couples in order to have both perspectives represented. A second recommendation would be to measure marital satisfaction over a longer period of time and incorporate Relationship Enhancement Education and Counseling (REEC) to determine if this helps to improve marital satisfaction in couples.

Third, the majority of participants included in this study were female (84%) versus male (16%). It is recommended that future research consider the mediating role that gender may have on the relationship between intimacy and marital satisfaction. Fourth, insufficient research has focused on non-Christian participants; therefore, additional research is recommended for this population. The term Christian is subjective in nature with a wide range of historical backgrounds. For example, Baptists, Catholics, Methodists, and Non-denominational Christians have different religious beliefs and practices. Any future research should consider a measure to address this since there is a wide range of religions that could fall into this category.

Fifth, the current study utilized the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS) to measure marital satisfaction and the Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships (PAIR) to measure intimacy. Future research should consider the use of other measures for marital satisfaction and intimacy. Other measurement tools could provide a different perspective with couples in marital distress. Finally, a quantitative research approach was used for this study because this approach
analyzes numerical data to help draw conclusions and reveal patterns, trends, and relationships (Albers, 2017). A correlational predictive research design was used because this design sought to not only identify a relationship between two or more variables, but also predict a relationship from one variable to the other (Jackson, 2016). Future research should consider an alternate research design, utilizing the same variables, that would provide an opportunity to collect more complex data.

Summary

Marital satisfaction and marital intimacy remain vital factors impacting the well-being of a marriage. Though many Christians’ view this topic as shameful, the ability to openly speak about intimacy in your marriage is a healthy process. The purpose of this quantitative correlational predictive study was to explore the predictive relationship between intimacy and marital satisfaction in Christian couples in Northeastern United States.

Research on how intimacy affects the level of marital satisfaction had previously been limited to couples with no religious affiliation, thus, the unit of analysis for this study was the Christian adult who had been married for a minimum of three years. Likewise, previous research focused on only one component of marital intimacy, usually emotional or physical intimacy, and did not consider the other scales of intimacy. Participants of this study completed an online survey where the six sub-scales of intimacy, the predictor variables, and marital satisfaction, the criterion variable, were analyzed.

Findings from this study revealed that the six sub-scales of intimacy (emotional intimacy, social intimacy, physical intimacy, intellectual intimacy, recreational intimacy, and spiritual intimacy) collectively predicted marital satisfaction. The findings further revealed that only one of the six sub-scales of intimacy, emotional intimacy, when analyzed independently of the
others, predicted marital satisfaction. These findings supported previous research where marital satisfaction and emotional intimacy were linked.

Despite each of the participants verifying that they identify as Christian, an interesting discovery was the lack of spiritual intimacy reported. Participants reported rarely praying together with their spouse and rarely attending church together with their spouse. Another interesting discovery was the lack of male participation which limited the viewpoint of the husband. Implications of this study include impacts to marital counselors, pastors, and family educators. While the topic of intimacy remains an important part of marriage, each marriage is unique and the needs of each spouse should be further investigated when counseling a couple in marital distress.
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Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval

May 15, 2023

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-1434 The Relationship between Intimacy and Marital Satisfaction in Christian Couples

Dear Lauren Geronimo, Jason Ward,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording). The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Title of the Project: The Relationship between Intimacy and Marital Satisfaction in Christian Couples
Principal Investigator: Lauren Amato – Doctoral Candidate in the School of Behavioral Sciences at Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be over the age of 18, identify as a Christian, and be married to your current spouse for at least 3 years. You may have been married previously. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?
The purpose of the study is to examine the relationship between the six sub-scales of marital intimacy (emotional, social, physical, intellectual, recreational, and spiritual) and marital satisfaction in Christian couples, and the mediating effects of gender.

What will happen if you take part in this study?
If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:
1. Complete an anonymous survey about your marital satisfaction and marital intimacy. There are no right or wrong answers. The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

How could you or others benefit from this study?
Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include increased awareness on this topic that can assist married couples in improving their marriage.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?
The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?
The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher and the faculty Dissertation Chair will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be anonymous.
• Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and on the researcher’s Google Drive. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Is study participation voluntary?
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the survey without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?
If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?
The researcher conducting this study is Lauren Amato. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at [redacted] or lauren.g.amato@gmail.com. You may also contact the researcher’s faculty sponsor, Jason Ward, at [redacted].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent
Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.
Appendix C: Participant Recruitment Social Media Post

ATTENTION FAMILY AND FRIENDS: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctoral degree in the School of Behavioral Sciences at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to examine the predictive relationship between the six sub-scales of marital intimacy (emotional, social, physical, intellectual, recreational, and spiritual) and marital satisfaction in Christian couples. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older, married to your current spouse for at least three years, and identify as a Christian. Participants will be asked to take a brief anonymous survey which should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please click here: [Intimacy and Marital Satisfaction Survey](#). A consent document is provided on the first page of the survey.
Appendix D: Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships (PAIR)

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https://depts.washington.edu/PersonalAssessmentofIntimacyinRelationships(PAIR).pdf