

FAMILY-OF-ORIGIN PREDICTORS OF HOSTILE CONFLICT IN EARLY MARRIAGE*

Glade L. Topham
Jeffry H. Larson
Thomas B. Holman

ABSTRACT: This study used data from 367 married couples to examine the relationship between select family-of-origin variables measured during engagement and hostile marital conflict measured 4–7 years later. Each spouse completed family-of-origin measures from the PREPARation for Marriage questionnaire during their engagement. Four to seven years later, they completed a measure of hostile marital conflict involving insults, name calling, unwillingness to listen, and lack of emotional involvement. Wives' mother–child relationship and the quality of parental discipline, as well as the husbands' perceived quality of their parents' marriage, were predictive of wives' perception of hostile conflict in their marriages. Only wives' quality of parental discipline was predictive of husbands' perception of hostile marital conflict. Implications for premarital counseling and marital therapy are discussed.

KEY WORDS: hostile conflict; family-of-origin; marriage.

Glade L. Topham, PhD, Assistant Professor of Human Development and Family Science, 233 HES, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078–6122 (glade.topham@okstate.edu). Jeffry H. Larson, PhD, is a Professor of Marriage and Family Therapy, 265 TLRB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602. Thomas B. Holman, PhD, is a Professor of Marriage Family and Human Development, 380-B SWKT, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602. Reprint and correspondence should be addressed to Dr. Topham.

*This is a revised version of a poster presented at the Annual Conference of the National Council on Family Relations, Irvine, California, November, 1999.

Research has given a great deal of attention to the many variables that lead to marital unhappiness and dissolution. Of this body of research, a substantial literature has shown hostile conflict to be one of the strongest predictors of marital unhappiness (e.g., Gottman, 1994; Mathews, Wickrama, & Conger, 1996). In fact, several studies have found that the presence of hostile conflict may predict marital dissolution with 80% accuracy (Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Mathews et al., 1996). Gottman (1994) defined hostile conflict as a pattern of negative couple interaction including; hot and frequent arguments, insults, name calling, unwillingness to listen, lack of emotional involvement, and a ratio of more negative behaviors than positive behaviors.

Knowledge of the nature and destructive effects of hostile conflict can be useful in helping couples identify and change those patterns of interaction associated with hostile marital conflict. Unfortunately, after these patterns of marital interaction become established, making changes may be a difficult task. If, however, the premarital predictors of such hostile marital conflict were known, couples could be helped to identify their own risk factors in the development of hostile marital conflict. This knowledge could be important in helping partners identify methods for preventing destructive patterns of interaction from developing before the patterns begin to be established. Unfortunately, little is known about the premarital predictors of hostile marital conflict.

Although an empirical connection has yet to be made between premarital variables and hostile marital conflict, a connection has been made between premarital variables and marital unhappiness and dissolution. While premarital variables are important in the prediction of marital unhappiness and dissolution, family-of-origin factors have been shown to be particularly influential (e.g., Amato, 1996; Holman & Birch, 2001). This research, however, has not explained the processes (e.g. communication, conflict resolution, consensus building) through which family-of-origin variables predict marital dissolution. Without an understanding of these processes it is unclear how to help couples avoid or change the interactive patterns that lead to marital unhappiness and dissolution. The purpose of the present study was to discover if select family-of-origin variables, measured premaritally, were predictive of hostile conflict in early marriage.

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Multi-generational family theory suggests that individuals acquire a foundation for interpersonal relationships in their families of origin (Framo, 1981; Hoopes, 1987; Kerr, 1981). Current marital and family difficulties are seen as extensions of relationship problems in the spouses' original families (Framo, 1976; Hoopes, 1987). Relationship issues such as conflict stemming from family-of-origin influences, may emerge with different meaning and increased intensity when individuals experience courtship or when they marry and begin to develop their own nuclear family. For this reason, when couples are preparing for marriage, they may begin to experience these family-of-origin influences in a way and with an intensity that they have not previously experienced. This influence may be conscious or unconscious (Hoopes, 1987) and remains strong even when individuals may not have continuing contact with their families-of-origin (Bartle-Haring & Sabatelli, 1998). These multi-generational influences may govern beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, self-esteem, and interactional patterns, whether they are functional or dysfunctional within the merging systems (Hoopes, 1987).

In addition to multi-generational family theory, social learning theory and attachment theory make important contributions to an understanding of the influence of early family experiences on later relationship behaviors. Social learning theory describes how poor parental marital quality and divorce may lead to hostility in the marriages of offspring. It suggests that people are not equipped with inborn repertoires of behavior, but that the origin of human behavior is primarily imitation: Children learn a repertoire of behaviors and schema from observation and modeling (Bandura, 1977). According to social learning theory, much of an individual's marital behavior is learned in one's childhood through observation of his or her parents in their marital interaction processes. From these early observations, children develop what Marks (1986) refers to as a marital paradigm. He defines this marital paradigm as "the picture, the set of images we have formed about how marriage practice might be or seems to be done, for better or worse" (p. 13). This paradigm contains guidelines for normal marital functioning including a belief about marital problems and their solution, and serves as a foundation upon which subsequent relationships are structured (Wamboldt & Reiss, 1989). Marks suggests that because the path of least resistance is to fall back on the marital paradigms learned in childhood and

adolescence, this paradigm continues to influence couple interaction throughout marriage. When children fail to experience a positive model of parental marital interaction (as in the case of divorce or intense parental conflict) they may not learn healthy interpersonal skills such as effective communication, conflict resolution, and compromising (Amato, 1996), which are the very skills which may prevent couples from engaging in hostile marital conflict (Gottman, 1994).

Attachment theory makes its contribution to understanding the long-term impact of early family experiences through its explanation of the importance of the parent-child relationship. Attachment theory suggests "the nature and quality of one's close relationships in adulthood are strongly influenced by affective events that took place in childhood, particularly within the child-caretaker relationship" (Collins & Read, 1990, p. 644). Bowlby (1977) suggested that the quality of the child-caretaker relationship has a profound impact on the child's developing personality and concept of self and others. He hypothesized that children internalize their experiences with caretakers in such a way that these early relationships come to form a template for later relationships outside the family. He referred to these templates as "working models" or internal representations that children develop of themselves and others. These "working models" are carried forward into other relationships where they guide expectations, perception, and behavior (Bowlby, 1973). "How an individual's attachment behavior becomes organized within his personality ... [determines] the pattern of affectional bonds he makes during his life" (Bowlby, 1980, p. 41).

Adults who experience secure parent-child attachments are likely to experience greater social confidence, are more comfortable with close relationships, are more able to depend on others, and are more likely to have a higher sense of self-worth. They tend to view people as trustworthy, dependable, and altruistic (Collins & Read, 1990). In contrast, adults who experience insecure parent-child attachments tend to be extremely demanding of support and attention and are emotionally hypersensitive and volatile. At the same time they tend to be self-deprecating, excessively dependent on others' approval for self-validation, and overly dominant and demanding in relationships (Bartholomew, 1993). Consequently, individuals with insecure attachment may be at particular risk for hostile approaches to conflict.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Parental Marital Status and Offspring Marital Satisfaction

Research has been fairly consistent in showing a connection between parental divorce and offspring divorce (e.g., Amato & Booth, 1997; Bumpass, Martin, & Sweet, 1991). This connection, although not without exception (Bumpass et al., 1991), has been shown to be stronger for women than for men (Amato, 1996; Amato & Keith, 1991; Booth & Edwards, 1989). In addition to the intergenerational transmission of divorce, research has also supported the idea of the intergenerational transmission of marital satisfaction and marital quality. In fact, some research suggests parental marital unhappiness has more adverse consequences than parental divorce on offspring marital quality and marital interaction (Amato & Booth, 1997; Booth & Edwards, 1989).

Despite the abundant evidence that divorce and marital quality run in families, it is unclear if there is a causal explanation and through which processes it occurs (Amato, 1996; Wertlieb, 1997). Many different explanations for the intergenerational transmission of divorce and marital quality have been proposed but support for these explanations remains tenuous. Of the explanations offered, two of the most viable are the “inappropriate modeling of spouse roles” and the “personality trait” explanations.

The inappropriate modeling of spouse roles explanation suggests that spousal roles most likely are modeled inappropriately by parents who are in unhappy marriages or who are divorced. If children of divorce emulate their parents' style of interaction, they will tend to have similar problems in their own marriages (Amato & Booth, 1997; Booth & Edwards, 1989). The personality traits explanation suggests that parental unhappiness and divorce are predictive of negative marital interaction in offspring because they lead children to develop personality traits that interfere with healthy marital interaction (Amato, 1996; Amato & Booth, 1997; Parke & O'Neil, 1997). Childhood exposure to marital discord has been shown to be associated with poor social competence and problematic peer relationships in childhood (Parke & O'Neil, 1997) and has been shown to be predictive of conflict in the marriages of offspring (Caspi & Elder, 1988).

Both of the above explanations for the intergenerational transmission of marital unhappiness and divorce point to offspring interpersonal behavior as the mechanism of transmission—a connection that has received some empirical support (Amato, 1996; Sanders, Halford, & Behrens, 1999). For example, parental divorce has been

shown to predict a conflictual interpersonal style marked by jealousy, lack of trust, and lack of commitment (Amato, 1996). The resulting negative interactive style is comparable to hostile marital conflict as defined by Gottman (1994).

Quality of the Parent–child Relationship

Burns and Dunlop (1998) suggest that parental divorce is not the causal factor leading to offspring marital dissolution, but that the causal factor is the inadequate parenting that is likely to accompany parental divorce. Holman and Birch (2001) also found that parental divorce's impact on offspring's current marital satisfaction was totally mediated by the quality of the childhood parent–child relationship. Amato (1996) suggests that if children (of either divorced or married parents) have a good relationship with one or both parents, they may gain emotional stability and social skills required for successful adult relationships (i.e. non-hostile conflict resolution styles).

As in the case of parental divorce and marital quality, research has consistently shown the parent–child relationship to be a strong predictor of successful offspring marital interaction (e.g., Belsky & Esabella, 1985; Holman & Birch, 2001). Specific variables in the parent–child relationship found to be important in predicting offspring relationship success include parental warmth and nurturance (Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2000; Belsky & Esabella, 1985; Franz, McClelland, & Weinberger, 1991) and parental tolerance for intimacy and autonomy (Bartle-Haring & Sabatelli, 1998). Similar to the relationships between parental divorce and offspring divorce, these effects tend to be stronger for women than for men (Holman & Birch, 2001).

Research examining the importance of the parent–child relationship on later offspring marital quality and divorce separately for mothers and fathers has been consistent in identifying the importance of the mother–child relationship (e.g., Birtchnell & Kennard, 1984) but has been mixed with regard to the importance of the father–child relationship (Birtchnell & Kennard, 1984; Burns & Dunlop, 1998; Franz et al., 1991; Wamboldt & Reiss, 1989).

Quality of Parental Discipline

In addition to the importance of parental warmth and a close parent–child emotional connection, research has shown the quality of parental discipline to be a key factor in the nature of offspring marital interaction (Belsky & Esabella, 1985; Caspi & Elder, 1988; Elder,

Caspi, & Van Nguyen, 1986; Parke & O'Neil, 1997). Specifically, parental discipline that is consistently, clearly, and calmly administered has been shown to be predictive of offspring marital success (Parke & O'Neil, 1997). In contrast, when parenting is controlling and hostile children tend to have unaffectionate, explosive, and conflicted marriages (Belsky & Esabella, 1985; Caspi & Elder, 1988; Elder et al., 1986). This may be explained by the impact of this style of parenting on children. Parents who are overly strict in their discipline, give little or no explanation, and do not discuss the punishment with the child, tend to raise children who are more likely to have low self-confidence and lack social skills (Anderson & Hughes, 1989; Marion, 1995)—traits that are likely to carry into adulthood (Parke & O'Neil, 1997). The combination of poor social skills and a vulnerable self-concept may predispose spouses to increased reactivity and hostility in marital conflict.

In addition to strict and inconsistent parenting, children who are raised with permissive and inconsistent parenting are more likely to be impulsive, less self-reliant, and more likely to lack social and cognitive skills (Marion, 1995). This low inhibition paired with a lack of social skills may be partly responsible for partners' sudden, eruptive and hostile approach to conflict. Gottman (1994) found that this quick and hot "start up" to couple conflict by wives was particularly damaging to the marital relationship.

Quality of Family-of-Origin Environment

Much like the previously discussed variables, the quality of the family-of-origin environment has received a great deal of empirical support as a predictor of marital satisfaction and positive marital interaction (e.g., Holman, Larson, & Harmer, 1994; Wamboldt & Reiss 1989). However, the family-of-origin factors that are important to marital success have been shown to differ for men and women. Research indicates that women who divorce or who report low marital quality are more likely than those happily married to have experienced a low level of emotional closeness (Kelly & Conley, 1987), a low level of emotional health (low autonomy and intimacy; Lane, Wilcoxon, & Cecil, 1988), high levels of conflict (Whyte, 1990), and a low level of expressiveness (Wamboldt & Reiss, 1989) in their families of origin. For men, a high level of tension (Kelly & Conley, 1987), low emotional health (although less significant for men than for women; Lane et al., 1988), a low overall quality of family home environment (Holman et al., 1994), and an excessively high level of control (Wamboldt &

Reiss, 1989) in their families of origin are predictive of their marital unhappiness.

In addition to the influence of their family-of-origin experiences, research indicates that husbands' and wives' reported marital quality is also influenced by the family-of-origin experiences of their partners. For example, the level of marital quality for women is influenced by the level of expressiveness (Wamboldt & Reiss, 1989) and the overall quality of the family environment (Holman et al., 1994) in their husband's family of origin. Men's level of marital satisfaction and marital quality is influenced by wives' level of conflict in their families of origin (Wamboldt & Reiss, 1989).

Of these family-of-origin variables shown to be important research suggests family communication and conflict resolution are some of the most important predictors of later marital interaction (Wamboldt & Reiss, 1989; Whyte, 1990). Children from conflict-ridden families often fail to learn interpersonal skills useful in conflict resolution in their own relationships (Caspi & Elder, 1988). Without the ability to resolve interpersonal conflict, couples may become overburdened by the myriad of conflicts that are typical in marital relationships. In this context, unresolved conflicts wear away at marital satisfaction, creating a more hostile environment. In contrast, partners who learn how to successfully resolve interpersonal conflict in their families of origin are more likely to have stronger couple consensus and greater marital satisfaction (Wamboldt & Reiss, 1989).

OVERVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

In summary, the literature provides some evidence that family-of-origin interaction and affection processes may be predictive of offspring marital interaction; however, no research was found which specifically suggests a family-of-origin relationship to hostile marital conflict. The thesis of the present research was that negative family-of-origin experiences have an important influence in the development of hostile marital conflict. Six hypotheses were tested for both husbands and wives. The decision to test the hypotheses separately for husbands and wives was based on research that suggests husbands' and wives' family-of-origin experiences affect later marital interaction differently. In addition, because research indicates that husbands' and wives' family-of-origin experiences

affect both their own and their partners' perception of marital quality, the decision was made to include within each hypothesis the expected influence from both the participant's family of origin as well as the influence from the participant's spouse's family-of-origin. The six hypotheses were:

- (1) Parental divorce and partner parental divorce are positively related to hostile marital conflict.
- (2) Parents' marital satisfaction and partner's parents' marital satisfaction are negatively related to hostile marital conflict.
- (3) The quality of the mother-child relationship and the partner's mother-child relationship are negatively related to hostile marital conflict.
- (4) The quality of the father-child relationship and the partner's father-child relationship are negatively related to hostile marital conflict.
- (5) The quality of parental discipline and the partner's parental discipline are negatively related to hostile marital conflict.
- (6) The quality of the family-of-origin environment and the partner's family-of-origin environment are negatively related to hostile marital conflict.

In addition to these six hypotheses, the question "Which predictor(s) or combination of predictors best explain(s) hostile conflict in early marriage?" was explored.

METHODS

Participants

The larger study from which the data for this study were drawn included 367 couples (734 individuals) who took the PREPreparation for Marriage questionnaire (PREP-M) between 1989 and 1993, who were either seriously dating or engaged to be married at the time they took PREP-M, and who provided tracking information (Time 1). The PREP-M was administered primarily by therapists, educators, and clergy as the participants were either receiving premarital counseling, attending a preparation for marriage course, or attending a university course on family relations. A description of participant demographic characteristics can be found in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Sample Characteristics at Time 1 and Time 2 (N = 367 couples)

	<i>Time 1</i>		<i>Time 2</i>	
	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
Mean age	22.58	20.83		
Age at marriage			24.00	22.12
Completed education				
Some high school	2	2	1	
High school	16	11	4	2
Some college/tech	254	268	47	58
Associate's degree	35	38	16	13
Bachelor's degree	56	44	135	242
Master's degree	4	4		
Grad/professional (Uncompleted)			64	22
Grad/professional (Completed)			99	29
Yearly income:				
None	16	39	5	82
Under \$5,000	162	252	6	40
\$5,000–\$14,999	151	58	19	38
\$15,000–\$24,999	26	13	56	51
\$25,000–\$49,999	11	4	202	128
\$50,000 or more			78	28
Religious affiliation				
Catholic	45	43	42	43
Protestant	31	36	27	30
Latter-day saint	278	282	281	284
Islamic	1			
Eastern religion	1	1		
None	9	2	7	3
Other	2	3	9	7
% of Respondents who are students	72.6%	82.9%		

Instruments

The preparation for marriage questionnaire (PREP-M)

The PREP-M served as the Time 1 survey. The PREP-M is a 205-item questionnaire designed to measure important background and family-of-origin characteristics, personality variables, and interactional processes of premarital couples. The questionnaire has demonstrated strong internal consistency reliability and has demonstrated substantial predictive validity in predicting marital satisfaction and stability one year into marriage (Holman et al., 1994; alpha reliability for the total PREP-M is .83).

The subscales from the PREP-M that were used in this study were those that measured the hypothesized predictor variables. With the exception of the items measuring the variable parents' marital status, which used a multiple-choice format, all of the items used a 5-point Likert-type scale format. All of the subscales for the predictor variables had good internal consistency including parents' marital satisfaction (3 items; alpha reliability for husbands was .87 and for wives was .88), the quality of the father-child relationship (4 items; alpha reliability for husbands was .81 and for wives was .85), the quality of the mother-child relationship (4 items; alpha reliability for husbands was .75 and for wives was .80), the quality of parental discipline (4 items; alpha reliability for husbands was .70 and for wives was .73), and overall quality of the family-of-origin environment (4 items; alpha reliability for husbands was .82 and was .81 for wives).

Follow-up (Time 2) survey

The follow-up survey included items taken directly from the PREP-M, revised items from the PREP-M, as well as newly created items that were part of a larger study on marital interaction. The select variable of interest for this study was a conflict resolution style called hostile conflict characterized by hot and frequent arguments, insults, name calling, unwillingness to listen, lack of emotional involvement, and a ratio of more negative behaviors than positive behaviors (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). To measure this style of interaction, couples were asked to read a paragraph describing hostile marital conflict as defined by Gottman and Levenson (1992) and were asked to specify how often (0 = never and 4 = very often) their marital interaction fit the qualifications of the hostile marital conflict style (Although Gottman identified two different styles of hostile marital conflict—hostile and hostile/detached—they were combined into one style for the purposes of this study).

Procedure

A list was compiled of all couples who were either seriously dating or engaged at the time they completed the PREP-M (1989–1993; Time 1). All of those couples had given their consent to participate in a follow-up study. Follow-up surveys were sent to 2176 individuals in the fall of 1996 and returned by 1016 individuals. This represented a response rate of 47% of all individuals originally surveyed. For 367 couples both members of the couple returned the surveys (72% of the individuals returning surveys).

RESULTS

A correlation matrix was created to test the hypotheses of the study. The correlation matrix included the husbands' and wives' family-of-origin variables (predictor variables) as well as the husbands' and the wives' ratings of hostile marital conflict (dependent variables; see Table 2). The following is a list of the hypotheses with a description of whether or not they were supported.

- (1) Parental divorce and partner parental divorce are positively related to hostile marital conflict. This hypothesis was not supported.
- (2) Parents' marital satisfaction and partner's parents' marital satisfaction are negatively related to hostile marital conflict. This hypothesis was not supported.
- (3) The quality of the mother–child relationship and the partner's mother–child relationship are negatively related to hostile marital conflict. This hypothesis was partially supported. Both husbands' ($r = -.13$, $p = .02$) and wives' ($r = -.13$, $p = .02$) mother–child relationships were predictive of husbands' perceived hostile marital conflict. Only wives' mother–child relationship was predictive of wives' perceived hostile marital conflict ($r = -.26$, $p < .01$).
- (4) The quality of the father–child relationship and the partner's father–child relationship are negatively related to hostile marital conflict. This hypothesis was not supported.
- (5) The quality of parental discipline and the partner's parental discipline are negatively related to hostile marital conflict. This hypothesis was partially supported. The quality of wives' parental discipline was predictive of husbands'

TABLE 2
Variable Intercorrelations

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. H Perceived Host	-													
2. W Perceived Host	.47**	-												
3. H Par. Mar. Status	-.32	-.04	-											
4. H Father-child	-.10	-.04	-.22**	-										
5. H Mother-child	-.13*	-.04	-.06	.41**	-									
6. H Overall Family	-.10	-.03	-.22**	.60**	.54**	-								
7. H Par. Discipline	-.06	-.09	-.16**	.48**	.39**	.50**	-							
8. H Par. Mar. Sat.	-.05	.04	-.31**	.49**	.34**	.58**	.46**	-						
9. W Par. Mar. Status	.09	.01	.00	.07	.02	.05	-.04	-.06	-					
10. W Father-child	-.07	-.10	.04	.07	.12	.04	.13*	.08	-.13*	-				
11. W Mother-child	-.13*	-	-.03	.06	.06	.09	.13*	.08	.00	.19**	-			
12. W Overall Family	-.13*	-	.00	.09	.09	.07	.14**	.07	-.12*	.49**	.48**	-		
13. W Par. Discipline	-.22**	-	-.01	.07	.04	.09	.17**	.06	-.14**	.44**	.35**	.50**	-	
14. W Par. Mar. Sat.	-.04	-.08	.04	.06	-.01	-.02	.10	.08	-.26**	.45**	.24**	.53**	.41**	-

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

($r = -.22, p < .01$) as well as wives' perceived hostility ($r = -.23, p < .01$). Husband's quality of parental discipline was neither predictive of husbands' nor wives' perceived hostility.

- (6) The quality of the family-of-origin environment and the partner's family-of-origin environment are negatively related to hostile marital conflict. This hypothesis was partially supported. The quality of wives' family-of-origin environment was predictive of husbands' ($r = -.13, p = .01$) as well as wives' perceived hostility ($r = -.22, p < .01$). Husband's family-of-origin environment was neither predictive of husbands' nor wives' perceived hostility.

Following the correlation analyses, simultaneous multiple regression was used to answer the question, "Which predictor(s) or combination of predictors, best explain(s) hostile conflict in early marriage?" As part of these analyses, collinearity diagnostics were performed to test for multicollinearity. The results of the analyses indicated no problem with multicollinearity—none of the dimensions tested had a variance inflation factor (VIF) over 6.

First, husbands' perceived hostile marital conflict was regressed onto husbands' and wives' family-of-origin variables. The combination of these variables explained close to 50% of the variance of the dependent variable (adjusted $R^2 = .49, F(12, 349) = 2.56, p < .01$). Of the 12 predictor variables only wives' quality of parental discipline ($sr^2 = .03, t = -3.43, p < .01$) was significantly related to husband-perceived hostile marital conflict after controlling for the other predictor variables.

Next, wives' perceived hostile marital conflict was regressed onto husbands' and wives' family-of-origin variables. These family-of-origin variables accounted for 8% of the variance in wives' perceived hostile marital conflict (adjusted $R^2 = .08, F(12, 344) = 3.58, p < .01$). Of the 12 predictor variables only the wives' mother-child relationship ($sr^2 = .02, t = -2.96, p < .01$) and the quality of wives' parental discipline ($sr^2 = .02, t = -2.41, p < .02$) were significantly related to wives' perceived hostile marital conflict after controlling for the other predictor variables.

Because of the large number of Latter-day Saints (LDS) in the sample, supplementary analyses were conducted to investigate the possibility of an interaction between the predictor variables and religion. After creating a dummy variable for religion (1 = LDS and 0 = other), product variables were created for each of the 12

predictor variables by multiplying each of the predictor variables by the dummy code for religion. Hierarchical regression was then used to test for interaction effects. The variables were entered in the analysis in two steps: all of the predictor variables and the dummy variable for religion were entered on the first step and all of the product variables were entered on the second step. Two separate regression analyses were conducted; one for husbands' perceived marital hostility and one for wives' perceived marital hostility. Results indicated that the addition of the product variables failed to provide a significant change in R^2 for both husbands' perceived marital hostility (R^2 change = .04, F [25, 335] = 1.25, p = .25) and wives' perceived marital hostility (R^2 change = .02, F [25, 330] = .60, p = .84). None of the product variables was significantly related to wives' perceived marital hostility; however, one of the product variables, the quality of wives' father-child relationship, was significantly related to husbands' perceived marital hostility (sr^2 = .01, t = -1.97, p = .05).

In order to better understand this interaction, separate simultaneous multiple regression equations were run for the LDS participants and the non-LDS participants with the original predictor variables and the criterion variable husbands' perceived hostility included. The variable quality of wives' father-child relationship was not significantly related to the criterion variable for either the LDS (n = 284; sr^2 < .01, t = -.51, p = .61) or non-LDS samples (n = 82; sr^2 = .04, t = 1.85, p = .07). Therefore, while the results of the supplementary analyses indicate an interaction between religion and wives' father-child relationship for husbands' perceived marital hostility and although it would be important to investigate this interaction further in future research, the interaction does not appear to interfere with the generalizability of the results of this study.

DISCUSSION

Overall, the present research suggests that wives' family-of-origin experiences are more important than husbands' family-of-origin experiences in predicting marital hostility as perceived by either partner. This supports other research which suggests that wives are the "chief architects" of the marital relationship. That is, wives are primarily responsible for the structure and climate of the relationship (Holman & Birch, 2001; Wamboldt & Reiss, 1989). This may be due to the fact that while after marriage a husbands' family of origin tends to

loosen its hold on him, a woman's maintains relatively greater continued connection (Troll & Bengston, 1982). It is likely that this greater connection during early marriage extends and deepens the impact a wife's family-of-origin relationship has on her and her marriage.

In addition to showing the importance of wives' family-of-origin variables in predicting hostile marital conflict, the present research suggests that wives' perception of hostile marital conflict is more influenced by family-of-origin experiences (of either partner) than is husbands' perception of hostile marital conflict. From the 12 family-of-origin variables (6 wife and 6 husband variables) in the regression equation, only one had a significant influence on husbands' perceived hostile marital conflict, whereas, three were important in predicting wives' perceived hostile marital conflict. This again supports the research of Holman and Birch (2001) and Wamboldt and Reiss (1989) which suggest that, in regard to their own marriage, wives are more influenced by family-of-origin experiences than husbands. This may be due to wives being more attuned to the subtleties of marital interaction than husbands. Because wives tend to monitor the marital relationship more closely, they may be more likely to be sensitive to and are more likely to report marital conflict (Gottman & Levenson, 1985). It is likely that wives' greater sensitivity to the marital climate also makes them more vulnerable to either their own or their husbands' negative family-of-origin experiences.

The results regarding the relationship between the family-of-origin environment and hostile marital conflict were a little surprising. The quality of wives' family-of-origin environment was significantly related to husbands' and wives' perceived hostile marital conflict before controlling for the other family-of-origin variables but not after. These findings partially support previous research (Wamboldt & Reiss, 1989; Holman et al., 1994) which shows the family-of-origin environment to be predictive of later marital interaction. The present study, however, extends this research in suggesting that much of the influence of the overall family-of-origin environment in predicting quality of later marital interaction is explained more specifically by other family-of-origin variables (i.e., the mother-child relationships and the quality of parental discipline).

In conclusion, this study extends previous research and adds to our understanding of the premarital predictors of later marital quality and stability. This research is the first research of its kind to examine the relationships between premaritally measured family-of-origin variables and later marital hostility. Other research has shown a

relationship between family-of-origin variables and later negative marital interaction, however, according to Gottman (1994) some patterns of negative interaction in couples may not be destructive to the longevity of the marriage (e.g. volatile couples) if couples maintain a ratio of five positive comments for every one negative comment. The present research is important because it examines the predictors of a specific style of interaction (hostile marital conflict) shown to be particularly destructive to marital quality and longevity (Gottman, 1994).

Limitations

One limitation of the present study was the homogeneity of the sample. The sample consisted of predominantly Caucasian, Latter-day Saints who were enrolled in college. Although some research has shown differences between LDS and other American marriages (e.g., Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993), other research suggests that in many ways, the interaction of LDS couples is similar to the interaction of other American couples (Carroll, Linford, Holman, & Busby, 2000; Heaton, Goodman, & Holman, 1994; Holman & Harding, 1996). Much of this research indicates that LDS are most different from those of other religions or those of no religious affiliation in matters of attitudes and beliefs. However, in terms of differences of behaviors within the marriage or family, LDS adults are much more similar to other Americans than they are different.

The generalizability of the results of the present study was examined, in part, by investigating the interaction between the predictor variables and religion. As mentioned earlier, an interaction between the quality of wives' father-child relationship and religion was identified. That is, the relationship between the quality of wives' father-child relationship and husbands' perceived hostile marital conflict varied depending upon whether or not the participants were LDS. Although as mentioned earlier, this interaction is not believed to have interfered with the generalizability of the results of the current study, it would be important for this issue to be explored further in future research.

The homogeneity of race and education in the current study may be a key limitation based on previous research which suggests that race and education are important variables in how family-of-origin experiences affect marital interaction (Amato & Keith, 1991; Glen & Kramer, 1987; McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988). Consequently, the results must be interpreted with caution. Future research should focus on a more heterogeneous and representative sample of couples drawn

from the general population rather than from family relations classes or from premarital counseling settings.

Another limitation of the study was the small number of participants who reported frequent hostile marital conflict. Of the 734 individuals in the study, only 68 (9%) reported marital hostility as occurring "sometimes" and only 31 (4%) reported marital hostility as occurring "often" or "very often." Because of the relatively small number of participants who reported frequent hostility in their marriages, the relationship between the family-of-origin variables and hostility may have been under-estimated. The small number of participants reporting frequent hostility may be a result of participants' underreporting the amount of hostile conflict in their marriages. Future studies should use behavioral observation to obtain a more objective assessment of marital conflict.

Implications

Premarital counselors and family life educators may use the results of this study to help individuals make a more informed choice of marital partner by helping raise their awareness of the potential positive and negative influences from both their own and their partner's families of origin. Likewise, these discussions can be helpful for couples who have decided to marry and would like to work through potential problems in their relationship stemming from their families of origin. Therapists can assist couples in examining and mitigating negative family experiences by using techniques such as the "family-of-origin exploration" (FOE; Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997). In the FOE, partners trace the parental models that they bring into their relationships, especially models of conflict resolution. Using a genogram, the goal is to obtain both interactional and historical information about one's past parent-child interactions that are related to one's current behaviors and attitudes, especially as they are related to conflict resolution processes. Patterns from the past that are related to dysfunctional patterns in the current marriage can be identified and better interaction styles can be taught. This is especially true for the expression of anger.

Specifically, wives may wish to examine the relationship they had with their mothers while they were growing up as well as the way their parents disciplined them. Helping them alter maladaptive cognitions related to the parent-child relationship may be useful in their overcoming hostile feelings they have toward themselves or toward their parents for feeling mistreated (Bedrosian & Bozicas, 1994). This

may prevent these hostile feelings from spilling over into the marital relationship.

REFERENCES

- Amato, P. R. (1996). Explaining the intergenerational transmission of divorce. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *58*, 628–640.
- Amato, P. R., & Booth, A. (1997). *A generation at risk: Growing up in an era of family upheaval*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Amato, P. R., & Keith, B. (1991). Parental divorce and adult well being: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *53*, 43–58.
- Anderson, M., & Hughes, H. (1989). Parenting attitudes and the self-esteem of young children. *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, *160*, 463–465.
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bartholomew, K. (1993). From childhood to adult relationships: Attachment theory and research. In S. Duck (Ed.), *Learning about relationships* (pp. 30–62). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Bartle-Haring, S., & Sabatelli, R. (1998). An intergenerational examination of patterns of individual and family adjustment. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *60*, 903–911.
- Bedrosian, R. C., & Bozicas, G. D. (1994). *Treating family of origin problems: A cognitive approach*. New York: Guilford.
- Belsky, J., & Esabella, R. A. (1985). Marital and parent–child relationships in family of origin and marital change following the birth of a baby: A retrospective analysis. *Child Development*, *56*, 342–349.
- Birchneil, J., & Kennard, J. (1984). Early and current factors associated with poor-quality marriage. *Social Psychiatry*, *19*, 31–40.
- Booth, A., & Edwards, J. N. (1989). Transmission of marital and family quality over the generations: The effects of parental divorce and unhappiness. *Journal of Divorce*, *13*, 41–58.
- Bowlby, J. (1973). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 2. Separation, anxiety, and anger*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1977). The making and breaking of affectional bonds. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, *130*, 201–210.
- Bowlby, J. (1980). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 3. Loss*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bumpass, L. L., Martin, T. C., & Sweet, J. A. (1991). The impact of family background and early marital factors on marital disruption. *Journal of Family Issues*, *12*, 22–42.
- Burns, A., & Dunlop, R. (1998). Parental divorce, parent–child relations, and early adult relationships: A longitudinal Australian study. *Personal-Relationships*, *5*(4), 393–407.
- Carroll, J. S., Linford, S. T., Holman, D. B., & Busby, D. M. (2000). Marital and family orientations among highly religious young adults: Comparing Latter-day Saints with traditional Christians. *Review of Religious Research*, *42*, 193–205.
- Caspi, A., & Elder, G. H. (1988). Emergent family patterns: The intergenerational construction of problem behaviour and relationships. In R. A. Hinde & J. Stevenson-Hinde (Eds.), *Relationships within families* (pp. 334–353). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Collins, N. L., & Read S. J. (1990). Adult attachment, working models, and relationship quality in dating couples. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *58*, 644–663.
- Conger, R. D., Cui, M., Bryant, C. M., & Elder, G. (2000). Competence in early adult romantic relationships: A developmental perspective on family influences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *79*, 224–237.

CONTEMPORARY FAMILY THERAPY

- Elder, G., Caspi, A., & Van Nguyen, T. (1986). Linking family hardship to children's lives. *Child Development, 56*, 361–375.
- Framo, J. L. (1976). Family of origin as a resource for adults in marital and family therapy: You can and should go home again. *Family Process, 15*, 193–210.
- Framo, J. L. (1981). The integration of marital therapy with sessions with family of origin. In A. S. Gurman & D. P. Kniskern (Eds.), *Handbook of family therapy* (pp. 133–158). New York: Brunner/Mazel Press.
- Franz, C. E., McClelland, D. C., & Weinberger, J. (1991). Childhood antecedents of conventional social accomplishment in mid-life adults: A 36-year prospective study. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 60*, 586–595.
- Glen, N. D. & Kramer, K. B. (1987). The marriages and divorces of the children of divorce. *Journal of Marriage and The Family, 49*, 811–825.
- Gottman, J. M. (1994). *What predicts divorce: The relationship between marital processes and marital outcomes*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Gottman, J. M., & Levenson, R. W. (1985). A valid procedure for obtaining self-report of affect in marital interaction. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 53*, 151–160.
- Gottman, J. M., & Levenson, R. W. (1992). Marital processes predictive of later dissolution: Behavior, physiology, and health. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 63*, 221–233.
- Heaton, T. B., Goodman, K. L., & Holman, T. (1994). In search of a peculiar people: Are Mormon families really different? In M. Cornwall & T. Heaton (Eds.), *Sociology of Mormonism*. Champaign, ILL: University of Illinois Press.
- Holman, T. B. & Birch, P. J. (2001). Family-of-origin structures and processes and adult children's marital quality. In T. B. Holman & Associates (Eds.), *Premarital prediction of marital quality or break up: Research, theory, and practice*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Holman, T. B., & Harding, J. R. (1996). The teaching of nonmarital sexual abstinence and members' sexual attitudes and behaviors: The case of Latter-day Saints. *Review of Religious Research, 38*, 51–60.
- Holman, T. B., Larson, J. H., & Harmer, S. L. (1994). The development and predictive validity of a new premarital assessment instrument: The Preparation for Marriage Questionnaire. *Family Relations, 43*, 46–52.
- Hoopes, M. H. (1987). Multigenerational systems: Basic assumptions. *American Journal of Family Therapy, 15*, 195–205.
- Kelly, E. L., & Conley, J. J. (1987). Personality and compatibility: A prospective analysis of marital stability and marital satisfaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 58*, 27–40.
- Kerr, M. E. (1981). Family systems theory and therapy. In A. S. Gurman & D. P. Kniskern (Eds.), *Handbook of family therapy* (pp. 226–264). New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Lane, A. R., Wilcoxon, S. A., & Cecil, J. H. (1988). Family-of-origin experiences and the transition to parenthood: Considerations for marital and family therapists. *Family Therapy, 15*, 19–27.
- Lehrer, E., & Chiswick, C. (1993). The role of religion on marital stability. *Demography, 30*, 385–404.
- Marion, M. (1995). *Guidance of young children* (4th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Marks, S. R. (1986). *Three corners: Exploring marriage and the self*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Mathews, L. S., Wickrama, K. S., & Conger, R. D. (1996). Predicting marital instability from spouse and observer reports of marital interaction. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 58*, 641–655.
- McLanahan, S., & Bumpass, L. (1988). Intergenerational consequences of family disruption. *American Journal of Sociology, 94*, 130–152.

- Parke, R. D., & O'Neil, R. (1997). Influence of significant others on learning about relationships. In S. Duck (Ed.), *Handbook of personal relationships: Theory, research, and interventions* (pp. 45–59). New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Sanders, M. R., Halford, W. K., & Behrens, B. C. (1999). Parental divorce and premarital couple communication. *Journal of Family Psychology, 13*, 60–74.
- Stahmann, R. F., & Hiebert, W. J. (1997). *Premarital and remarital counseling*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Troll, L. E., & Bengtson, V. L. (1992). The oldest-old in families: An intergenerational perspective. *Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging, 15*, 39–44.
- Wamboldt, F. S., & Reiss, D. (1989). Defining a family heritage and a new relationship: Two central themes in the making of a marriage. *Family Process, 28*, 317–335.
- Wertlieb, D. (1997). Children whose parents divorce: Life trajectories and turning points. In I. H. Gotlib & B. Wheaton (Eds.), *Stress and adversity over the life course: Trajectories and turning points* (pp. 179–196). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Whyte, M. K. (1990). *Dating, mating, and marriage*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.