

Financial and Relationship Satisfaction as a Function of Harsh Start-up and Shared Goals and Values

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A path model was developed to test hypothesized associations among financial satisfaction, harsh start-up, shared goals and values, and relationship satisfaction. It was noted that a partner's perceived financial satisfaction was directly associated with engaging less in harsh start-up discussions and sharing goals and values with the other partner. Harsh start-up discussions were directly associated with having fewer shared goals and values and decreased relationship satisfaction. The association between financial satisfaction and relationship satisfaction in the model was mediated by harsh start-up and shared goals and values. Implications for both practitioners and researchers are discussed.

Key Words: financial satisfaction, harsh start-up, relationship satisfaction, shared goals and values

Introduction

Financial satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and intimate relationship dynamics are factors affecting the lives of nearly all Americans. These issues have taken the front stage in media discussions in recent years, and rightfully so, since a need has been expressed by both financial services and relational therapy practitioners and researchers to explore the associations among these variables in order to understand how couples interact in regards to money. It is generally thought that having a better understanding of these associations can help professionals better serve their clientele. Financial satisfaction, in particular, has been given much attention in the new millennium by researchers in the personal financial planning and counseling fields (e.g., Archuleta, Britt, Tonn, & Grable, 2011; Britt, Grable, Nelson Goff, & White, 2008; Grable, Britt, & Cantrell, 2007; Joo & Grable, 2004; Kinnunen & Feldt, 2004). The concept of financial satisfaction appears to be multifaceted as it has been linked to financial behaviors, marital/relationship quality, financial stressors, and risk tolerance.

In regards to marital quality, researchers have recently taken steps to explore how intimate couple interactions, or

more specifically money arguments, are associated with marital quality. Research has established that financial issues are a significant cause of disputes among married couples (Geiss & O'Leary, 1981; Papp, Cummings, & Goeke-Morey, 2009; Pittman & Lloyd, 1988), with financial problems having an impact on a couple's ability to communicate and resolve conflict (Britt, Huston, & Durband, 2010; Dew & Dakin, 2011). Johnson and Booth (1990) suggested that marital satisfaction and stability is largely due to the dyadic processes in a relationship, meaning how couples perceive their ability to mesh together, interact with each other, and spend time together impact satisfaction. Conger et al. (1990) found that hostility in husbands and wives due to economic pressure lowers marital quality. Furthermore, they found that support through warmth and affection, as well as conflict management skills, helped to mediate the impact of economic pressure and the likelihood that marital quality would increase (Conger et al., 1990; Conger, Gee, & Lorenz, 1994; Conger, Rueter, & Elder, 1999). Of particular interest in the current study is the question of how financial satisfaction and relationship satisfaction are related. This is an association that is currently not well understood, especially when viewed through intimate couple

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interactions. More specifically, we are interested in looking at the associations among financial satisfaction, Gottman's (1999, 2005) concept of harsh start-up, shared goals and values, and relationship satisfaction.

The purpose of this paper was two-fold. A model using financial satisfaction, harsh start-up, and shared goals and values as determinants of relationship satisfaction was proposed and the model was then tested. The model was provided as a step towards the development of a theory of couples' financial and relational satisfaction. The outcome of such an exercise was that the identification of key variable associations will allow therapists, counselors, planners, and educators an opportunity to better meet the needs of their respective clientele.

Literature Review

A search of the recent literature in the financial planning and counseling and marriage and family therapy fields unearthed a growing interest in the associations among financial behaviors, financial satisfaction, couples' stress, and marital/relationship satisfaction. Grable et al. (2007), for example, designed a test to determine if a person's level of financial satisfaction could be used to distinguish between those who had considered obtaining a divorce over the past three years from those who had not. They found that individuals with low levels of financial satisfaction were more likely to have considered getting a divorce. The results from their study added support to the argument that personal financial factors might play a larger role in determining relationship satisfaction than once commonly thought.

In 2008, Britt et al. added to the debate by reporting results from a study designed to test how perceived personal, partner, and couple financial behaviors influence relationship satisfaction. They used the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) (Hendrick, 1988) as an outcome measure for relationship satisfaction. According to Hendrick, the RAS discriminates between couples (i.e., those who are married, living together, dating, or involved in a same-sex relationship) who stay together and those who do not. Britt and her associates used self-reported financial behaviors to conclude that partner and couple financial behaviors have an impact on the decision to stay in a committed relationship. However, how someone perceives his or her own financial behavior was not found to influence the maintain-separate decision. Britt et al.'s findings help confirm an association between financial behaviors and relationship satisfaction.

Another example includes a study conducted by Archuleta et al. (2011) that examined the influences of demographic variables, religiosity, psychological constructs, financial satisfaction, and financial stressors on marital satisfaction. In this study, marital satisfaction referred to whether one was likely to stay married or leave the relationship. Archuleta and her associates used the Kansas Marital Satisfaction scale (Schumm et al., 1986) as a validation tool of whether a person was likely to marry the same person, marry someone else, or not marry again. As the number of financial stressors increased, respondents reported lower financial satisfaction and a lower likelihood of staying with their partner.

The literature seems to indicate that financial satisfaction and financial behaviors, holding relevant demographic and socioeconomic factors constant, are significantly associated with marital/relationship satisfaction. Individuals with the highest financial satisfaction levels and those who perceive their partner's financial behaviors as being positive, tend to be the most satisfied. That is, those individuals fitting these profiles were less likely to have thought about divorce or hold negative perceptions about their relationship. It is important to note, however, that the implied association is from financial satisfaction and stress to marital or relationship satisfaction.

Interestingly, none of the studies reviewed, when conducting this research, examined how financial satisfaction and relationship satisfaction are associated, using mediating variables. Among many clinicians, it has generally been assumed that the way in which couples work through the intricacies of living together plays an important role in shaping relationship satisfaction, but little attention is paid to the financial aspect of couples' relationships, whether this entails looking at financial satisfaction, financial behaviors, or the like. In the current research, we addressed the following question: Do relationship interaction variables, such as harsh start-up and shared goals and values, mediate the relationship between financial satisfaction and relationship satisfaction? Answering this question will help facilitate the development of theory that might help explain the apparent association between diverse measures of subjective satisfaction assessment, including the domains of financial and relational satisfaction.

Conceptualization of Theoretical Model

The proposed model of financial satisfaction, couple interactions, and relationship satisfaction is displayed in Figure

1. This model is premised on Gottman's (1999) theoretical, empirical, and clinical work in the area of marital satisfaction. Gottman argued that there are three types of couples: volatile, validating, and conflict-avoiding. What makes these couples stable and happy is that they have a 5-to-1 ratio of positive-to-negative interactions. Gottman proposed that when couples engage in negative couple interactions, resolving conflict becomes increasingly difficult and marital satisfaction decreases. When shared meaning is facilitated in the relationship, marital satisfaction increases. The financial planning and counseling literature, described previously, that shows an association between relationship satisfaction and financial satisfaction, as well as financial disagreements and intimate couple interactions, lends further support to the hypothesis that couples' interaction strategies likely play a role in shaping financial satisfaction. Gottman argued that couples who honor each other's life dreams create positive affective interaction within the couple relationship. This does not mean that a couple has to agree with or accept all of each other's dreams. A spouse can provide support and tolerance for a partner's life's dreams or share in them fully. Even if a couple disagrees on a subject, they can provide nurturance and caring for the other spouse to support their life's dreams and views about various subjects. Consider findings reported by Previti and Amato (2003) who concluded that those who perceive cohesiveness in their marriage tend to be happier in their relationship. Cohesiveness, as defined by Previti and Amato, was viewed as love, respect, friendship, and good communication.

Relationship Satisfaction

Marital satisfaction can be described as an individual's perception of marriage (Anderson, Schumm, & Russell, 1983). Relationship satisfaction can be conceptualized similarly to marital satisfaction; however, relationship satisfaction encompasses a broader group of individuals (i.e., married and non-married but in an intimate relationship) as one's perception of his/her intimate relationship. In regards to how money impacts relationships among married couples, Kerkmann, Lee, Lown, and Allgood (2000) asserted that 15% of marital satisfaction can be explained by financial factors such as financial problems and perceptions of how finances are managed. More recently, Papp et al. (2009) discovered that money conflicts were positively associated with negative communication behaviors. They suggested that money was not the most frequently argued issue in marriages but the most intensely fought about topic. Britt et al. (2010) evaluated the nature of financial arguments in marriage. They found that negative commu-

nication and financial resources are predictors of money arguments. Dew and Dakin (2011) examined the reverse association when they studied financial disagreements and negative communication patterns. They asserted that financial disagreements were among the top two predictors of marital conflict tactics (i.e., how a couple handles conflict) when compared to other types of common disagreements like housework. More specifically, they found that increases in financial disagreements were associated with increases in heated arguments and decreases in calm discussions.

Financial Satisfaction

Financial satisfaction can be conceptualized as contentment with one's financial situation (Zimmerman, 1995). Financial satisfaction can include individual assessments of debt, income, savings, and long-term goal achievement (Hira & Mugenda, 1999; Joo & Grable, 2004). Among financial counselors and planners, it is generally known that tensions over money within a marital relationship can reduce financial satisfaction, which can have a negative impact on marital satisfaction (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Berry & Williams, 1987; Burgoyne, Reibstein, Edmunds, & Dolman, 2007; Cutrona et al., 2003). It is not unreasonable to assume that individuals who are experiencing financial and relationship distress may be confused about the ultimate causes and effects of such anguish, because relationship and personal financial management issues cannot always be easily distinguished. As an example, Lawrence, Thomasson, Wozniak, and Prawitz (1993) found that 51% of couples report arguing about money. They concluded that couples were more likely to argue about the way money was managed rather than how much money they actually had. Couples who are willing to communicate about finances tend to be happier with their financial situations. As noted previously, Britt et al. (2008) confirmed this finding. They noted that individuals in a committed relationship exhibit positive communication methods and financial behaviors that lead to increased levels of financial satisfaction, and that financial satisfaction itself tends to be positively associated with perceptions of relationship quality. In the current study, it is hypothesized that those who have higher financial satisfaction will be less likely to engage in harsh start-up, have more similar goals and values, and be more satisfied in their relationships.

Harsh Start-Up

As shown in Figure 1, harsh start-up is conceptualized to have a direct association with shared goals and values. Harsh start-up refers to how couples engage in discussion. Couples that begin the discussion process with criticism or

sarcasm (i.e., forms of partner contempt) tend to find themselves faced more often with disagreement. In the initial stage of the quarrel, harsh conflict occurs when one escalates from neutral to negative affect. In other words, when someone starts a discussion or an argument with negative emotion, such as blaming or criticizing one's spouse or partner, he or she is engaging in harsh start-up (Gottman, 1999). It is hypothesized in the current study that those who are subject to a harsh start-up approach to discussions will report fewer shared goals and values and decreased relationship satisfaction.

Shared Goals and Values

For the purpose of this model, shared goals and values refers to having similar views about (a) the meaning of money and how it should be used, (b) the function of autonomy and independence, and (c) hopes and aspirations for family and future relationship goals. Archuleta, Grable, and Britt (2010) and Archuleta (in press) adapted the concept of shared goals and values from Gottman's (1999, 2005) work. Archuleta and colleagues found that shared goals and values were directly related to financial satisfaction. In addition, having additional common shared goals and values was more likely than communication strategies (i.e., harsh start-up, gridlock and perpetual issues, and compromise scales adapted from Gottman) to increase relationship satisfaction. Since the current study explores the association between financial satisfaction and relationship satisfaction, we hypothesized that having more goals and values in common should be directly and positively associated with one's relationship satisfaction, but the factor should also mediate the relationship between financial and relationship satisfaction. The association is premised on the following assumption: when a couple has common beliefs about money, they will have increased relationship satisfaction, because negative or conflicting discussions concerning daily money issues are likely to decrease.

Based on a review of previous literature, financial satisfaction is hypothesized to be an important determinant of harsh start-up and shared goals and values; the factor is shown to have both direct and indirect effects on relational satisfaction. That is, couple interactions, like harsh start-up and sharing similar goals and values, mediates the relationship between financial and relationship satisfaction. Based on these possible mediated effects, the current study tested nine research hypotheses. Six hypotheses examined direct relationships among the variables in the model. These hypotheses include:

- H₁: increased financial satisfaction is associated with being less likely to engage in harsh start-up
- H₂: being less likely to engage in harsh start-up is associated with increased shared goals and values
- H₃: increased financial satisfaction is associated with increased shared goals and values
- H₄: increased shared goals and values is associated with increased relationship satisfaction
- H₅: being less likely to engage in harsh start-up is associated with relationship satisfaction
- H₆: financial satisfaction is positively associated with relationship satisfaction.

Possible mediation relationships within the model were tested by examining the following three hypotheses:

- H₇: the relationship between financial satisfaction and relationship satisfaction is mediated by harsh start-up and shared goals and values
- H₈: the relationship between harsh start-up and relationship satisfaction is mediated by shared goals and values
- H₉: the relationship between financial satisfaction and shared goals and values is mediated by harsh start-up.

Methods

Data for this study were obtained by mailing 4,048 surveys to 2,024 households living in one south-central Midwestern U.S. state. Possible respondents were randomly selected from a database retrieved from a financial services organization. Because the researchers did not know if a couple or single person lived in the households on the mailing list, each household received two surveys, one for each spouse or partner in a household. Procedures to increase response rates included incentive postcards, where those who participated in the survey were invited to enter a drawing for one of three prizes including a grand prize of \$100 or one of two \$50 prizes. Respondents could also indicate that they would like to receive the results of the survey. In addition, follow-up postcards were sent three weeks after the initial mailing. The follow-up postcards also included information that the deadline to return the survey was extended to allow more time for respondents to complete the survey. Prior to collecting data, approval from the sponsoring university's Institutional Review Board was received.

To comply ethically, an informed consent statement was included in the survey packet.

A total of 135 surveys were returned as useable; 27 survey packets were returned as undeliverable and 23 surveys were returned as unusable with missing data. The response rate was difficult to determine for this sample because the composition of households was unknown to the researchers. In other words, the second paper-pencil survey included in the packet may have been irrelevant if the household was comprised of a single person rather than a couple. For example, sending a survey packet with two surveys to one household with a single individual may have resulted in a skewed response rate, because the single individual received the survey but no one received the second survey.

Sample Characteristics

For this study, 109 respondents identified themselves as being married or in a committed intimate relationship. The average age of respondents was 53.3 ($SD = 16.23$) years and 70% reported being married or remarried. The average years couples were in a committed relationship (i.e., married, remarried, or cohabitating) was 26.76 ($SD = 15.59$). Half (50%) of respondents were male and 50% were female. Nearly half (42%) of the sample reported holding a bachelor's degree or higher level of education. Nearly the entire sample reported their ancestry as European-American (82.2%), while 8.1% identified themselves as Native American or Alaskan Native. The average household gross income fell in the range of \$50,000-\$60,000.

Outcome Variable

Relationship satisfaction was used as the dependent variable and was assessed using the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMS) (Schumm et al., 1986). The KMS is a widely used instrument for use in assessing the three distinct factors of marital quality: (a) satisfaction with a person's marriage as an institution; (b) satisfaction with the relationship including intimacy and quality of communication; and (c) satisfaction with husband or wife as a spouse (Mitchell, Newell, & Schumm, 1983). The validity and reliability of the instrument is well established. Reliability estimates, as represented by Cronbach's alpha typically range from .75 to .90 (see Calahan, 1997; Eggeman, Moxley, & Schumm, 1985; Grover, Paff-Bergen, Russell, & Schumm, 1984; Schumm et al., 1986). Scale scores have been shown to be positively associated with the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Kurdek, 1992), the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (White, Stahmann, & Furrow, 1994), and the Quality Marriage Index (Karney & Brad-

bury, 1997). Studies that have used the scale show that distressed spouses tend to exhibit lower scores than well adjusted spouses (Shek, Lam, Tsoi, & Lam, 1993). Further, scores are known to be positively related to measures of life satisfaction. In the current study, questions from the KMS were altered to reflect relationship satisfaction rather than marital satisfaction, because the survey was sent to individuals who were both married and not married. KMS scores ranged from 3 to 21, with a mean of 15.7 and a standard deviation of 7.4, respectively. Cronbach's alpha for the scale was $\alpha = .95$.

Additional Variables

Other variables for the study included financial satisfaction, harsh start-up, and shared goals and values. In terms of financial satisfaction, respondents were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction associated with the following four areas of their financial life: (a) the amount of money they had saved, (b) the amount of debt they held, (c) their ability to meet long-term goals, and (d) their income level. Responses were scored using a 10-point stair-step scale, with 1 = extremely unsatisfied and 10 = extremely satisfied. Responses for each item were summed into a scale score. Scores ranged from 4 to 40, with mean and standard deviation scores of 24.7 and 9.47, respectively. The scale's Cronbach's alpha score was $\alpha = .86$.

Harsh start-up was measured using a scale consisting of five items. The five items were adapted from work originally published by Gottman (2005). Conceptually, harsh start-up can be viewed as a way couples interact; more specifically, how couples engage in the discussion process over conflictual topics. Each of the following items was assessed dichotomously, with a true statement scored as 1, otherwise 0. Items were reversed coded and summed into a harsh start-up index scale score so that higher scores reflected being less likely to engage in harsh start-up. Items included: (a) Arguments often seem to come out of nowhere, (b) I seem to always get blamed for issues, (c) My spouse criticizes my personality, (d) Our calm is suddenly shattered, and (e) I think my partner can be totally irrational. The mean and standard deviation scores for the measure were 3.5 and 1.9, respectively. The Cronbach's alpha score for the scale was $\alpha = .80$.

The Shared Goals and Values Scale (Archuleta, in press; Archuleta et al., 2010) is comprised of four items. The items within the measure were adapted from separate goals and values questions originally designed by Gottman (2005). Two questions were taken from Gottman's

(2005) Shared Meaning Goals and two were adapted from the Shared Meaning Symbols scale. Originally, Gottman assessed these items using True/False responses. In the current study, the items were altered, and the four statements were assessed on a 7-point Likert-type scale. This scale enables researchers to assess how much a respondent is likely to agree with their partner about financial goals, the meaning of money, autonomy and independence, and hopes and aspirations. The four items included in the measure were: (a) We have similar financial goals; (b) Our hopes and aspirations, as individuals and together for our children, for our life in general, and for our old age are quite compatible; (c) We have similar values about the importance and meaning of money in our lives; and (d) We have similar values about “autonomy” and “independence.” The list of questions was preceded by the following statement: “Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.” A 7-point Likert-type scale was used to code responses, with 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree and scores were summed. Higher scale scores indicated more shared goals and values in the couple relationship. Scores ranged from 5 to 28. The mean and standard deviation scores for the scale were 20.3 and 8.8, respectively. The Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was $\alpha = .89$.

Data Analysis Method

Although each of the independent variables (i.e., financial satisfaction, harsh start-up, and shared goals and values) used in the current study showed excellent reliability, each scale was tested independently to determine construct validity. Financial satisfaction was measured using four items on a 10-point stair step scale. A factor analysis, using varimax rotation, was conducted to address construct validity. The results of the factor analysis that confirmed construct

validity of the scale by all items loading on one factor with all factors achieving a .50 coefficient or higher are depicted in Table 1.

Harsh start-up, as an adaption of Gottman’s (2005) measure, was tested first. A factor analysis, using varimax rotation, was conducted to examine the validity issue. Factor loadings, as shown in Table 2, achieved higher than .50, supporting the construct validity of the scale.

The shared goals and values scale was tested for construct validity. A factor analysis, using a varimax rotation technique, was used to confirm that the measure offered adequate construct validity. Each of the factor coefficients loaded at a .50 level or higher.

A correlation analysis was conducted to examine relationships among the variables. This was followed by a path analysis that were used to examine the direct and indirect relationships with relationship satisfaction. All data analyses were performed using SPSS 20.0 and Mplus 6.11 (Muthen & Muthen, 2006). Full information maximum likelihood assumptions were used to handle missing data. Bootstrap procedures were used to test for mediation (2,000 bootstraps) (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

Results

Correlations

Correlations for the variables of interest are reported in Table 4. All of the variables were found to have a significant positive correlation with relationship satisfaction: financial satisfaction ($r = .30, p < .01$), harsh start-up (i.e., being less likely to engage in harsh start-up) ($r = .60, p < .01$), and shared goals and values ($r = -.72, p < .01$). The only significant positive association among the independent variables was with harsh start-up and shared goals

Table 1. Factor Loadings for Financial Satisfaction

| Financial satisfaction ($\alpha = .86$) | Factor scores |
|---|----------------------|
| 1. Amount of money saved | .90 |
| 2. Amount of debt owed | .79 |
| 3. Ability to meet long-term goals | .88 |
| 4. Income level | .83 |

Table 2. Factor Loadings for Harsh Start-up Scale

| Harsh start-up ($\alpha = .80$) | Factor scores |
|---|----------------------|
| 1. Arguments often seem to come out of nowhere. | .81 |
| 2. I seem to always get blamed for issues. | .85 |
| 3. My spouse criticizes my personality. | .67 |
| 4. Our calm is suddenly shattered. | .72 |
| 5. I think my partner can be totally irrational. | .67 |

Table 3. Factor Loadings for Shared Goals and Values Scale

| Shared goals and values ($\alpha = .89$) | Factor scores |
|---|---------------|
| We have similar financial goals. | .91 |
| Our hopes and aspirations, as individuals and together for our children, for our life in general, and for our old age are quite compatible. | .89 |
| We have similar values about the importance and meaning of money in our lives. | .89 |
| We have similar values about “autonomy” and “independence.” | .80 |

Table 4. Financial Satisfaction, Harsh Start-up, Shared Goals and Values, and Relationship Satisfaction Correlations

| Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---------------------------|--------|--------|-------|--------|
| Relationship satisfaction | | | | |
| Financial satisfaction | .30** | | | |
| Harsh start-up | .60** | .05 | | |
| Shared goals and values | .72** | .05 | .69** | |
| <i>M</i> | 15.69 | 24.72 | 3.50 | 20.27 |
| <i>SD</i> | 7.44 | 9.47 | 1.90 | 8.80 |
| Range | 3 – 21 | 4 – 40 | 0 – 5 | 5 – 28 |
| α | .95 | .86 | .80 | .89 |

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

and values ($r = .69, p < .01$). It was no surprise that these variables were significantly associated, but it was perplexing as to why the other independent variable associations were not significant.

Path Analysis

The conceptualized model, showing the standardized beta coefficients, is presented in Figure 2. The direction of the coefficients provided support for the research.

Hypothesis 1, which stated increased financial satisfaction is associated with being less likely to engage in harsh start-up, was confirmed where financial satisfaction and harsh start-up were positively associated ($\beta = .28, p < .01$). For interpretation purposes, a one unit standard deviation increase in financial satisfaction was associated with a .28

standard deviation unit increase in engaging less in harsh start-up. In other words, those who were more satisfied financially engaged less in harsh start-up.

Hypotheses 2 and 3 were confirmed where engaging less in harsh start-up ($\beta = .53, p < .00$) and having increased financial satisfaction ($\beta = .17, p < .05$) was associated with increased shared goals and values. For the relationship between harsh start-up and shared goals and values, a one standard deviation increase in harsh start-up (i.e., engaging less in harsh start-up) was associated with a .53 standard deviation unit increase in shared goals and values. This finding suggests that couples who engage less in harsh start-up are more likely to share similar goals and values. For the relationship between financial satisfaction and shared goals and values, a one standard deviation increase

in financial satisfaction was associated with a .17 standard deviation unit increase in shared goals and values. In other words, those who are more satisfied financially have higher shared goals and values.

Hypotheses 4 and 5 were confirmed where increased shared goals and values ($\beta = .45, p < .00$) and being less likely to engage in harsh start-up ($\beta = .27, p < .00$) were associated with increased relationship satisfaction. The significant relationships mean that for every one standard deviation unit increase in relationship satisfaction, there was a .45 and .27 standard deviation unit increase in shared goals and values and harsh start-up, respectively. These findings can be interpreted to mean that couples who engage less in harsh start-up and are more likely to share similar goals and values have higher relationship satisfaction, but partners who perceive their financial situation more positively are not necessarily going to have higher relationship satisfaction. However, hypothesis 6 was not confirmed. This hypothesis stated that increased financial satisfaction ($\beta = .02, p = .55$) will be associated with increased relationship satisfaction.

The three mediation hypotheses were confirmed. For hypothesis 7, harsh start-up and shared goals and values mediated the relationship between financial satisfaction and relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .07, p < .05$). This finding infers that for every one standard deviation unit increase in financial satisfaction, a .07 standard deviation increase in relationship satisfaction occurred via harsh start-up and shared goals and values. For hypothesis 8, the relationship between harsh start-up and relationship satisfaction was mediated by shared goals and values ($\beta = .24, p < .01$). This finding means that for every one standard deviation unit increase in harsh start-up there was a .24 standard deviation unit increase in relationship satisfaction via shared goals and values. Regarding hypothesis 9, the relationship between financial satisfaction and shared goals and values was found to be mediated by harsh start-up ($\beta = .15, p < .01$). In other words, a one standard deviation unit increase in financial satisfaction was associated with a .15 standard deviation unit increase in shared goals and values via harsh start-up. The overall model accounted for 8% of the variance in harsh start-up, 36% of the variance in shared goals and values, and 46% of the variance in relationship satisfaction.

Discussion

Is there an association between and among couples' financial satisfaction, couples' interactional dynamics, and relationship satisfaction? This question has not generally been

asked by those conducting research in the financial counseling and planning literature. The current study fills a gap in the literature and helps clarify paths among financial satisfaction, harsh start-up, shared goals and values, and relationship satisfaction. In this study, relationship satisfaction does appear to be influenced by these factors, both directly and indirectly. It is interesting to note that in this study financial satisfaction and relationship satisfaction were not directly associated. This finding is perplexing given the previous research. However, financial satisfaction was evaluated using a different type of measurement. Further, this study utilized a different type of analysis than other studies. This finding implies that how financial satisfaction is measured and tested with relationship satisfaction can produce different results. Future research should explore this possibility in more detail. Regardless, the current study adds to the literature by showing that the way an individual in an intimate relationship perceives their financial satisfaction is associated with their perceived relationship satisfaction as a function of how they engage in conflict and whether they share similar goals and values.

Although the links between financial satisfaction, harsh start-up, shared goals and values, and relationship satisfaction are evident, financial counselors, relationship educators, and relationship therapists may have difficulty in utilizing this type of information. Aniol and Snyder (1997) reported that couples often seek financial help from relationship therapists or they seek out financial counseling when they experience relationship distress. This situation is likely because clients often cannot easily differentiate between which issue is more challenging. Financial counselors and relationship therapists often find this problematic because, generally, they are not equipped with the skills to work with both problems.

Implications for Practitioners Working with Couples

Findings from this study can be used to raise awareness among helping professionals (e.g., financial counselors/advisors, relationship therapists, and financial and relational educators) working with couples in intimate relationships by showing that how a partner perceives their financial situation is associated with how they conceptualize their relationship, but indirectly through how partners interact and view goals and values, especially about money. It is often assumed by many mental health professionals that financial problems in a relationship should be treated as any other relationship issue. This study semi-supports this notion because changing the way a couple interacts with

each other and helping them find shared goals and values, in general, is a common approach in helping couples to become more satisfied with their relationship. However, this notion needs to be tempered, as financial satisfaction was measured in this study via perceptions of savings, debt, financial long-term goals, and income. These are topics in which mental health professionals have very little training (Durband, Britt, & Grable, 2010). As a result, helping professionals should strongly consider collaborating with one another to address these issues and provide more comprehensive and effective services.

This study offers some evidence for financial counselors and therapists who work with couples as to how couples experience satisfaction. Both non-verbal and verbal communication skills have been found to increase support and conflict management abilities. For years, researchers have reported that good communication skills are central to a sound marriage (Geiss & O'Leary, 1981; Tucker & Anders, 1999). Gottman, Coan, Carrere, and Swanson (1998) found in their study of 130 newlywed couples that the only variable that predicted both marital satisfaction and marital happiness among stable couples was the amount of positive affect during conflict. They concluded that marriages which were happy and stable had a pattern of working through conflict because the wife used a softened start-up, the husband accepted influence from the wife, the husband de-escalated low-intensity negative affect, the wife was able to soothe her husband through humor, and the husband was likely to use positive affect and de-escalation to effectively soothe himself.

In addition, Rosenblatt and Keller (1983) reported that those who experience greater economic distress also indicate greater blaming in the marriage. This finding hints at the possibility that couples facing greater financial vulnerability are likely to have increased financial stress, which increases the likelihood of one spouse blaming the other for the financial stress. The results in the current study lend support to Rosenblatt and Keller's findings. The blaming in the marriage deters couples from effectively communicating or resolving conflict within the relationship. Although psychological factors were not considered in this model, economic stress has been found to lead to depression, further deteriorating a couple's ability to communicate and resolve conflict and ultimately decreasing marital satisfaction (Johnson & Booth, 1990). Future research could further address psychological factors related to financial satisfaction and relational satisfaction. A further understanding of how financial satisfaction, financial

stressors, and psychological factors are processed within a relationship will enhance financial counselors', educators', and planners', as well as relationship therapists' and educators', ability to work with couples.

Not only can these implications be applied to professionals working with married or cohabitating couples, but they also can be considered by practitioners working with premarital or pre-cohabitating couples. Educating couples on the importance of sharing common goals and values around money and how to effectively communicate and interact with one another is essential. If couples, either married or prior to marriage, differ in their perceptions of their financial situation and how they view shared goals and values, then strategies to find common ground needs to be addressed. Any of the assessments used in this study, especially the Shared Goals and Values Scale, can be an assessment tool for potential problems and a talking point for addressing differences in goals and values around money.

When couples create shared meaning about money and autonomy, it makes sense that they would be more satisfied with their financial situation. Partners may find peace of mind knowing that their partner will work towards similar financial goals as well as share similar values in regards to money. The shared goals and values scale was associated with harsh start-up, financial satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction. This finding is important because it means that having common perceptions about the meaning of money, similar hopes and dreams for one's life, and having similar values about autonomy and independence in the relationship may be more important than communication techniques used. Gottman (1999) explained that couples do not necessarily have to see eye-to-eye in all of these areas. However, spouses can have mutual respect, support, and caring for the other's differing views. The statements in the scale appear to measure very different concepts: money, hopes and dreams for family and relationship, and autonomy and independence. Thus, it is possible that the Shared Goals and Values Scale could have assessed the concept of respect rather than if a couple agreed with each other on particular issues. More research in the area of shared goals and values is needed to further evaluate not only the scale itself, but to garner further guidance and develop strategies for helping professionals to work with their couple clients to increase their ability to share meaning about money and independence.

Finally, this study further supports other researchers' work (Archuleta et al., 2011; Britt et al., 2008; Grable et al.,

2007) where it has been suggested that a need exists to equip those professionals who work with couples experiencing financial difficulties with necessary skills to assess and/or manage relational and financial concerns. One recommended method is for financial practitioners and relational/mental health practitioners to collaborate in providing more holistic care to their clients. This recommendation means that financial counselors, planners, and educators should seek out educational opportunities to further understand the relationship dynamics of money in order to provide more comprehensive services and make appropriate referrals when needed. Likewise, relationship and mental health professionals should seek out learning opportunities to increase their understanding of household financial management topics and the ability to make referrals to financial counselors or planners when necessary. The interdisciplinary collaboration of these fields has potential to yield long-lasting behavioral change and further promote clients' well-being.

Limitations and Future Directions for Research

The exploratory nature of this study requires readers to understand potential research limitations which may have impacted the outcomes of the research. The generalizability of this study should be considered; the sample was small and limited to one U.S. Mid-Western state and was comprised of primarily older European-American, rural households. The response rate, although unknown, was relatively low. Further, individuals who were more satisfied with their relationship may have been more likely to respond to a survey of this nature. Findings from this research may have also varied depending on geographical location and the socioeconomic status, race, and educational attainment of respondents. In the future, control variables, such as age, income, and gender, should be explored.

Utilizing path analysis may infer cause and effect from the results. However, the cross-sectional nature of the data used in this study does not lend itself to making causal references. Therefore, multidisciplinary and longitudinal research should be conducted to evaluate the relationships among financial satisfaction, relationship behaviors, and marital satisfaction. In addition, the number of children living in the home should be added into future research models. This study did not account for these aspects but previous literature on marital satisfaction does imply that children living in the home decreases marital satisfaction (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000; Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2003).

In addition to future research pathways already stated in this paper, the Shared Goals and Values Scale should be further explored, as well as measurements of financial satisfaction, to provide adequate assessment measurements for researchers and practitioners. Additional literature in these areas will help financial counselors, financial planners, marriage educators, financial literacy educators, and relationship therapists to provide more comprehensive services to their clients. Such research will also hasten the development of a theory addressing relationship satisfaction and financial satisfaction.

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