

INVESTIGATING THE INTERRELATIONSHIPS AMONG
VARIOUS MEASURES OF FAMILY STRENGTHS

by

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B.S., Friends Bible College, 1987

M.S., Friends University, 1991

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

School of Family Studies and Human Services
College of Human Ecology

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ABSTRACT

The study of family strengths, as opposed to family dysfunction, has increased over the past few decades. Six interrelated components of family strength were identified that may affect the degree of marital satisfaction of husbands and wives. The six components - worth, commitment to relationship stability, commitment to relationship growth, communication, positive interaction, and time spent together - are characteristics within a family that may have substantial connections.

Identical surveys were administered to couples in three major metropolitan areas. The data for the study were a sub-sample of data collected as a mail survey as part of a larger survey of membership retention within a mainline Protestant denomination. The main mail survey contained 10 pages. For about one-third of the sample, an additional two-page survey was given concerning premarital counseling and marital satisfaction. Another third of the sample was given an additional 2-page survey on family strengths and marital satisfaction. In addition to 20 family strengths items, those surveyed were asked to respond to the three questions of the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale.

Data from these couples were used to test a hypothesized model of the interrelationships between the various measures of family strength using a detailed path analysis model with marital satisfaction as the dependent variable. The variables worth, commitment, communication, positive interaction, and time together functioned as intervening variables in the model with age, gender, various measures of religiosity, income, education, and age of children functioning as independent variables. The data

were then analyzed by ordinary least squares regression techniques to test the model using marital satisfaction as the dependent variable.

The results of testing the model indicated that strength in certain characteristics predicted strength in other characteristics at statistically significant levels ($p < .05$). Intrinsic religiosity predicted worth. Worth predicted commitment to stability and commitment to growth. The two areas of commitment predicted communication. Communication predicted positive interaction. Positive interaction predicted time together, and strengths in most of the characteristics predicted marital satisfaction. It is important for researchers, educators, therapists, and other professionals who work with families to gain an understanding and awareness of the current breakdown of marriage and family in our Western society. A greater understanding of family strengths and how they work together is crucial to providing families and family professionals with information useful for supporting family systems.

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DEDICATION

To my amazing wife, Stacey. I love you! I love living life with you!

This has been a part of our life for a long time, but we are DONE!

You are so smart and so talented. Just like a lot of things in my life,

I couldn't have done this alone, we are a team.

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

I love you, and you know that you are

“Hot Stuff” to me.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the early 1980's, 96% of those polled by the Harris poll said the most important thing in life was to have a good family life (Stinnett & DeFrain, 1985). In a similar Gallup poll, eight out of ten people said family was one of the most or the most important parts of their lives (Stinnett & DeFrain, 1985; Cantril, 1965). Knowing that people strongly desire to have a good marriage and a healthy family system, it is a startling fact that between one-half and two-thirds of marriages dissolve and end in divorce (National Center For Health Statistics, 1995). It is not surprising that many researchers and social scientists are asking the following questions: "What makes a marriage last?" and "What makes a family strong?"

Much of the research about families has focused on understanding the pathology or dysfunction of families to understand what is wrong with families (Otto, 1962; Stinnett & Sauer, 1977; Schumm, 1985). Researchers have sought to understand how the problems within the family affect the individuals within the family, as well as the rest of society (Otto, 1962; Stinnett & DeFrain, 1985). The need for empirical research that contributes to isolating the components of marital success and family success is increasing.

Differing from the research trying to identify elements of family dysfunction, a small amount of research has been conducted over the past three decades with the intent of identifying what makes families "strong" or "healthy" (Arditti, 1999; Brigman & Stinnett, 1983; Greeff & LeRoux, 1987). These researchers wanted to understand what

makes a family strong; they wanted to know what characteristics strong families have in common.

Research seeking to identify characteristics of strong families has been conducted across the United States (Brigman, Schons & Stinnett, 1986; Brigman & Stinnett, 1983; Stinnett, 1979; Stinnett, Sanders, DeFrain, & Parkhurst, 1982; Stinnett & Sauer, 1977), and several other countries (DeFrain, DeFrain & Lepard, 1994; Brigman, Schons & Stinnett, 1986; Casas, Stinnett, DeFrain, Williams & Lee, 1984; Porter, Stinnett, Lee, Williams & Townley, 1985; Wuerffel, DeFrain & Stinnett, 1990). The findings of the research allowed researchers to identify characteristics that are common within strong families (Schumm, 1985; Stinnett, et al., 1982; Stinnett & Sauer, 1977). In 1977, a researcher named Nick Stinnett, along with his colleagues, identified six characteristics that seemed to be present in strong families, both in the United States and abroad. It also should be noted that all of the researchers found a high degree of marital satisfaction in strong families (Stinnett, et al., 1982; Stinnett, 1979; Otto, 1962). The following six characteristics that strong families have in common are:

1. Expression of appreciation for each other
2. Willingness to spend time together and participate in activities together
3. Good communication patterns
4. Commitment to a religious lifestyle
5. Commitment to each other
6. The ability to deal with problems and crises in a positive way

The model of family strengths that Stinnett developed has become the model

often used by family therapists (Powell & Dosser, 1992), social workers (Carbonell, Reinherz & Giaconia, 1998), psychiatrists (Allen & Petr, 1998; Stinnett, et al., 1982), and family life educators (Duncan & Brown, 1992). Understanding what makes families strong has given helping professionals specific characteristics they can focus on and develop within families.

In 1985, Schumm challenged that the research on family strengths had given an “interesting ensemble of characteristics of strong families” (p. 1). He continued to make the point that nobody has taken the ensemble of characteristics and developed theoretical propositions of how these family strength characteristics might affect each other. In this challenge Schumm proposed a theoretical model using the six family strengths identified by Stinnett (1979). Schumm hypothesized a multivariate model of family strengths within the family. Thus far, no researcher has taken on his challenge to hypothesize a multivariate theoretical model of the relationships among family strengths and to test such a model.

If a multivariate model of the interaction of family strengths were developed, it could be helpful in a number of ways. Family life educators working with families currently have no way of knowing which family strength is the most important for a family to develop first. If some family strengths are required to be developed before other strengths can be developed, then it would be ineffective and possibly detrimental for family life educators to focus on developing a secondary family strength area before a primary strength characteristic was developed (Schumm, 1985). A family may be attending a program to work on a certain aspect of family strength that cannot be developed prior to the development of another aspect of family strength. Families may

be failing to succeed in programs because family life educators do not have a propositional model of the connections among family strengths from which to base their educational interventions.

Olson et al. (1985) was the first to develop a Family Strengths Scale to be used to assess how strong a family was in certain areas of family strength. A weakness of Olson's scale was that it did not survey a family for strengths in the areas of appreciation, time together, or commitment. In other words, the scale did not assess some of the family strengths characteristics that had been identified by Stinnett (1979, 1982) and used as a model by helping professionals. In 1989, Schumm et al., developed a new 20-item survey designed to assess the family strength characteristics that had been embraced in a number of helping fields. The survey assessed the family strengths of time together, positive interaction/appreciation, open and empathetic communication, conflict resolution, commitment, and personal worth of self and others (Schumm, 1989, 2001). Schumm, Hatch, Hevelone, & Schumm (1989) administered the 20 new items as part of a larger survey of membership retention within a mainstream Protestant denomination. In addition to the 20 family strengths items, Schumm asked those surveyed to respond to the three questions of the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS) (Schumm, et al., 1986). Based on Spanier and Cole's (1976) conceptual model, the KMSS is composed of three items that assesses feelings of satisfaction with the marriage, with one's partner as a spouse, and with one's relationship with one's spouse. The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale was used because it had been proven to successfully measure an individual's level of marital satisfaction (Touliatos, Perlmutter & Straus, 1990). Marital satisfaction was assessed because previous research determined that in a high percentage of strong

families the marital dyad also had a high degree of marital satisfaction (Casas, Stinnett, DeFrain, Williams, & Lee, 1984). To adequately survey family strengths, the level of marital satisfaction in the marital dyad must also be assessed. Schumm's survey of family strength items provided some measures that are useful in determining how strong a family is in the surveyed family strength areas (Schumm et al., 2001). Using these 20 items developed by Schumm et al., (and later reevaluated by Akagi et al., 2003) to determine how strong a family is in the six identified strength areas, it is now possible to propose and test a theoretical model of the interrelationships among various measures of family strengths.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the interrelationships among various measures of family strengths. More specifically, the purpose of this study was to test a detailed path analysis model using marital satisfaction as the dependent variable. The data for the study are a sub-sample of data collected in 1989 as a mail survey by Schumm and his colleagues as part of a larger survey of membership retention within a mainline Protestant denomination (Schumm et al., 1989). In the 1989 study couples were asked to respond to questions concerning the strength of various measures of family strength within the context of their marriage. Couples were asked to assess how strong their marriage was in the areas of worth, commitment, communication, positive interaction, time together, and overall marital satisfaction. Couples in three major metropolitan areas,

Kansas City, Dallas/Fort Worth, and Los Angeles were surveyed. In the hypothesized model (see Table 1), the variables worth, commitment, communication, positive interaction, and time together functioned as intervening variables with age, gender, various measures of religiosity, income, education, and age of children functioning as independent variables.

Statement of the Problem

Past research has identified certain characteristics that seem to be present in strong families (Otto, 1962; Stinnett & Sauer, 1977; Stinnett, 1979; Stinnett, et al., 1982). As discussed earlier, Stinnett identified six characteristics that seem to be present in strong families: 1) expression of appreciation for each other, 2) willingness to spend time together and participate in activities together, 3) good communication patterns, 4) commitment to a religious lifestyle, 5) commitment to each other, and 6) the ability to deal with problems and crises in a positive way (Stinnett, 1979; Schumm, 1985). Educators and therapists try to help families grow in these six areas (Schumm, 1985). Helping professionals do not have a researched model telling them if there are certain characteristics a family needs to develop before others can be developed. Educators and therapists do not know (from empirical sources) where to start with families to help them develop in the six family strength areas. Without knowing the interrelationships among various measures of family strengths, helping professionals have to make a guess about on which family strength characteristic to focus. If helping professionals focus on

developing all the identified family strength characteristics at once they could be setting a family up for failure; if indeed there are certain characteristics that must be in place before other characteristics can be developed. Family life educators and therapists need to know what effect certain family strengths may have on other identified family strength characteristics. Beyond the scope of this study, it seems family life educators would be helped by knowing if there is a hierarchy for the development of family strengths. Although a tool for identifying family strengths within a family has been developed (Schumm et al., 1989), new research needs to be conducted to determine the interrelationships among the various measures of family strengths. This study should further the understanding of the connections among family strengths.

Importance of the Study

It is important to understand how different family strengths affect the family and how different family strengths interact and relate with each other. Stinnett stated in a 1979 publication that, “the prevention of serious emotional problems through the strengthening of family life is of primary importance.” He further stated, “the challenge of strengthening family life depends, at least in part, upon gaining more knowledge about strong, healthy families” (p. 3). In order to prevent the lifelong detrimental effects of divorce and the breakdown of the family system, educators, therapists, and families must become more knowledgeable about the role that the family strength characteristics play in strengthening and preserving families.

The six characteristics of strong families identified by Stinnett (1979, 1985), along with the 20-item survey developed by Schumm et al, (1989) to determine how strong a family is in six characteristics identified by Stinnett, may now make it possible to determine what relationships may exist among the six characteristics. If this study can identify statistically significant pathways among the identified family strengths, that are associated with greater marital satisfaction, then educators and therapists may be able to help individual families at their points of greatest need. Families could be given information and education specific to the family strength characteristic they need most to develop. Educators would have less need to guess the priority of which family strengths to promote within individual families.

Definition of Terms

To facilitate a better understanding of this study, specific definitions of terms used in the collection, analysis, reporting, and discussion of the data are presented.

Commitment to Growth - is considered to be a strength when a respondent indicates that he or she is committed to working at improving his or her marriage.

Commitment to Stability - is considered to be a family strength when a respondent indicates that he or she would never consider divorce from his or her spouse.

Communication - is considered a family strength when a respondent feels he or she has mutual openness, honesty and understanding with his or her spouse.

Family Strength - is defined as social and psychological characteristics which create a sense of positive family identity, promoting satisfying interaction among family members, and encouraging the development of individual potential of family members (Otto, 1975).

Intrinsic Religiosity - for the purpose of this study describes a person who spends time outside of church in private thought and prayer, has a strong sense of God's presence, tries to live life according to personal religious beliefs, and believes religion is important because it answers questions about the meaning of life.

Marital Satisfaction - is considered a strength when a respondent indicates satisfaction with marriage as an institution, satisfaction with the marriage relationship, and satisfaction with one's husband or wife as a partner. Marital satisfaction is measured by the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale.

Orthodoxy – for the purpose of this study describes a person who believes the Bible is the

inspired Word of God, Jesus is the Son of God, miracles really occurred as described by the Bible, and that people are accepted by God through faith.

Positive Interaction - is considered to be a strength when a respondent indicates mutual respect and kindness being shown as the couple spends time together.

Time Together – is considered to be a strength when a respondent indicates that as a couple “a lot” of time is spent talking together.

Worth – is considered to be a strength when a respondent feels he or she is a person of worth, a spouse is a very important person to him or her, and he or she believes his or her spouse values him or her.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 introduces the subject of the research project, states the purpose of the study, states the problem, discusses the importance of the study, and defines terms related to the research. Chapter 2 presents the literature review. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology, including the design of the study, instrumentation, a description of the sample, and data collection. The findings are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 includes the summary of results, limitations of the study, conclusions, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this study focused on five areas: (a) Foundation of knowledge about strong families, (b) Otto's research and findings, (c) Stinnett and Sauer's research and findings, (d) Tools available to measure family strengths, (e) Additional research on six characteristics of strong families, and (f) Further research questions that emerge from identifying the gaps in research, gaps which could be explored to better understand and help families.

Foundation of Knowledge About Strong Families

Searching the literature for what is known about strong families revealed two researchers who provided a foundation for understanding what makes families strong. In the early 1960s and continuing in the mid 1970s, Herbert Otto was the principal researcher seeking to understand strong families. In 1962, Otto stated, "that current and past literature, with a few exceptions, reflects much emphasis and study of the pathology of the family and pathological processes within the family" and "by extending our understanding and knowledge of what we mean by family strengths and resources, we are in a better position to help families in the development of their strengths, resources, and potentialities" (p. 79). Otto was the first researcher to give validity to research

identifying what makes families strong. Otto and his colleagues observed strong families and identified 11 components or abilities that strong families possess (1962).

In the mid-70s, the second of these two foundational researchers began his study of what makes families strong. In 1977, Stinnett and his colleague Sauer identified four characteristics they believed to be present within families that were strong. As a result of a 1979 study, Stinnett added two more strength characteristics, thus identifying a total of six characteristics he believed to be present within strong families. Other researchers have since used Stinnett's research methods and studied strong families from other countries and found these same six characteristics to be present in those families (Brigman, Shons, & Stinnett 1986; Casas et al., 1984; DeFrain, Defrain, & Lepard, 1994; Porter et al, 1985; Wuerffel, DeFrain, & Stinnett, 1990). The remainder of this section will present the research methods and findings of Otto (1962) and Stinnett (1979) to better understand what makes families strong.

Otto's Research and Findings

The first studies focusing on family strengths began in 1962 at the University of Utah (Otto). The Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Utah conducted a series of research projects in an attempt to answer a few questions about families. The basis for their interest began with an observation that teachers, social workers, and members of other professions often describe a family as being a "good" family or a "strong" family. They found that these comments would lead to the assumption that they

had some specific “good” qualities or “strengths” in mind. Further investigation showed that the people labeling other families as “good” or “strong” did not really know what made the family appear to be strong. After some inquiries, the researchers found that there was considerable confusion about which qualities made a family “strong” or “good” (Otto, 1962).

Otto and his colleagues focused their attention on identifying individual and family strengths. The research was simple: husbands and wives were asked to talk about and respond to the following open-ended statement: “The following are what we consider to be major strengths in our family” (Otto, 1962, p. 77). From the answers given by the spouses the researchers developed and reported what they called “the framework of family strengths” (Otto, 1962, p. 77).

Otto theorized that family strength is the end product of a series of ever-changing factors or components seen as fluid, interacting, and related. He believed that family strength components are not independent but interrelated and that variations in abilities, capacities, or strengths occur throughout the life cycle of a family (Otto, 1962, 1975). Families that are considered or observed to have “strength” are actually very fluid, ever changing, and coping in healthy ways with what life throws at them. Otto identified 11 family strength components or “abilities” that “strong” families possess.

Otto's Family Strength Component #1

The ability to provide for the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of a family

Otto (1962) observed that in strong families food and shelter are provided in an open, loving, and safe environment. "From the humblest home to the mansion, the way the physical space is used may be constructive and creative, or restrictive" (1962, p. 78). Qualitative differences were also noted in the way a family prepared and used food. In strong families the preparation and purchasing of food were done in a way that was fun and educational. In strong families the emotional needs of its members were met: affection, love, understanding, and trust were shared openly and often. The providing of emotional needs was a two-way process, with the parents providing for the emotional needs of the children and the children giving appreciation to the parents. A strong family created an atmosphere which provided for the spiritual needs of its members by a shared set of beliefs and spiritual or religious values. Hünler and Gençöz (2005) refined these findings when they discovered that marital satisfaction was only predicted by religiousness in cases of parallel beliefs. These families also provided a safe environment for sharing doubts and concerns about religious beliefs (Otto, 1962).

Otto's Family Strength Component #2

The ability to be sensitive to the needs of the family members

Husband-wife and parent-child relationships in strong families are sensitive to each other's social, psychological, and physical needs. Otto noted that wives seemed to

be more sensitive to the needs of their husbands, but in strong families husbands reciprocated and were aware of their wives' needs and responded accordingly. Qualities such as encouragement, support, help with household chores, verbal appreciation, and support during crisis were given as family members were sensitive to one another and responded with the appropriate action.

Otto's Family Strength Component #3

The ability to communicate

In 1977, Stinnett and Sauer discovered a principle that coincided with Otto's 1962 findings. Strong families made an effort and had a strong commitment to good communication patterns. They attended seminars, counseling sessions, and workshops and were committed to improving verbal and nonverbal communication skills. The ability to talk through problems until an issue was resolved and the character qualities of honesty and truthfulness were high priorities in marital couples in strong families. Good communication patterns between parents and their children were expressed through good listening skills, time talking together, and through the parents expressing interest in the children and their activities. These qualities helped to create a safe environment for children so they were able to express themselves with more confidence knowing they would be heard and have a positive response from their parents as they communicated. Good listening skills also created an atmosphere of respect. They were saying to one another, "You respect me enough to spend time with me and listen to what I have to say."

Part of communication in strong families was arguing, or fighting. Strong families did fight. They got mad at each other and had conflicts, but during conflict, strong families had the ability to discuss problems openly and resolve issues by sharing feelings and finding solutions that worked for each member.

Otto's Family Strength Component #4

The ability to provide support, security and encouragement

Members of strong families provided support and encouragement for each other; thus allowing each member to seek new areas of growth and to develop creativity, imagination, and independent thinking. Husband-wife and parent-child relationships were enhanced by compliments and positive statements, which promoted high self-esteem.

Otto (1962) gave an example of one family that occasionally held what they called "creativity sessions" (p. 79). In these sessions family members were encouraged to think of new and better ways to improve family living thus illustrating each family member's importance to the family as well as encouraging individual thought and expression.

Otto's Family Strength Component #5

The ability to establish and maintain growth-producing relationships

both within and outside the family

Strong families created an atmosphere for relating in healthy ways allowing individuals to choose and maintain healthy relationships outside the family system. As discussed earlier strong families produced a safe environment where members felt accepted and free to communicate with each other. The ability to establish and maintain healthy, growth-producing relationships was one of the characteristics of a strong family.

Otto's Family Strength Component #6

The capacity to maintain and create constructive and responsible community

relationships in the neighborhood and in the school, town, local and state government

Strong families assumed responsibility for their communities. Members of strong families used their talents or resources to better the community in which they lived. They were also able to strike a balance between community involvement and home life. They didn't let themselves get overly involved to the detriment of their family life (Otto, 1962).

Otto's Family Strength Component #7

The ability to grow with and through children

Otto stated, "When parents can actively utilize their relationships with their children as a means of growth and maturation, this can be called a strength" (p. 79). In strong families parents can see their own foolishness as they observed foolishness in their children. For example, when a parent observed a child being insensitive with/to others, they might discover that he or she needed to become more empathetic in the parent-child relationship in an effort to model the desired behavior for the child. As a result of observing a child's behavior, the parent might make a greater effort to be more kind with/to others (Otto, 1962).

Otto's Family Strength Component #8

Ability for self-help, and the ability to accept help when appropriate

Strong families had the ability to identify problems and take the necessary steps to solve the problems. When strong families experienced conflict and periods of crisis, they were quick to admit when they needed help from outside sources. They sought counsel from appropriate outside sources when counsel was needed (Otto, 1962).

Otto's Family Strength Component #9

An ability to perform family roles flexibly

Members of strong families were able to interchange roles when needed. For example, a father could perform tasks usually performed by the mother or vice versa. Children within strong families also could take on parental roles when the parents needed help (Otto, 1962).

Otto's Family Strength Component #10

Mutual respect for the individuality of family members

Respect and individual recognition were given for each member of a strong family. They recognized the error of limiting the growth of individuals by stereotyping. Members of strong families were recognized for their individual strengths (Otto, 1962).

Otto's Family Strength Component #11

A concern for family unity, loyalty, and interfamily cooperation

Otto noted that strong families were committed to developing interfamily cooperation. They united in the face of crisis, relied on each other, and further developed mutual trust; families united during a crisis instead of being fragmented by it. This developed a supportive system where each member supported and protected the other members (1962).

Otto continued to make the claim that family strengths were not isolated variables. They formed clusters or constellations, which were dynamic, fluid, interrelated and interacting (1962). He continued to conduct research further identifying these fluid ever-changing characteristics that characterized strong families. His findings about the abilities or strengths of strong family changed very little over the years. Otto's last major publication about family strengths was published in 1980 identifying essentially the same family strength characteristics that he had identified in his earlier research.

Stinnett and Sauer's Research and Findings

In 1977, Stinnett and Sauer, both from the university of Nebraska, conducted a study in an attempt to understand what characteristics make families strong (1977). Stinnett and Sauer recognized that the major work done in the area of family strengths was by Otto in 1962, and they were also aware that research concerning what contributes to family strength was scarce (1977). Otto's research had been conducted by asking 27 families to list the characteristics they felt were their family's strengths. Stinnett and Sauer (1977) desiring to expand the understanding of what makes families strong, surveyed 99 families seeking to get information from husbands and wives concerning these areas: (a) the marriage relationship, (b) the parent-child relationship, (c) how they enhance each other's self-esteem, (d) communication in husband-wife and parent-child relationships, (e) patterns of dealing with conflict and, (f) patterns of dealing with fragmentation and the fast pace of life. In an attempt to gather this information

Stinnett and Sauer developed 15 open-ended questions they believed would provide them with information about strong families in the areas previously discussed. The subjects given the survey were recommended by extension home economists from the Cooperative County Extension Service in each of the 77 counties of Oklahoma. The extension home economists were sent letters requesting they recommend two or more families in their county they felt were strong families. They were given guidelines to use in selecting these families. The general guidelines were:

1. The family members appeared to have a high degree of happiness in the husband-wife and parent-child relationships.
2. The family members appeared to fulfill each other's needs to a high degree.
3. The family was intact with both parents present in the home.
4. The family had at least one school-age child, 21 years or younger, living at home.

One hundred and eighty families were sent letters explaining the study.

Questionnaires for both the husbands and wives were included in the package. One hundred and fifty-seven subjects representing 99 families responded.

Following are the 15 open-ended questions the subjects were asked to respond to along with their general responses. The information provided is all that was given by the researchers.

1. What do you feel has contributed most to making your marriage satisfying?

The most frequent answers to this question were, "mutual respect and understanding," "religious convictions," "mutual love," "good communication," and "flexibility" (p. 8).

2. What would you most like to change in your marriage relationship?

Over one-third of those responding said there was “nothing” they want to change in their marriage relationship. The second most frequent response was that they would like to “have more time to spend together” (p. 8).

3. What do you feel has contributed most to making your relationship with your child strong?

The top five responses were, “mutual love,” “doing things together,” “good communication,” “participation in religious activities with children,” and “participating in child’s activities,” such as hobbies and sports (p. 8) .

4. What would you most like to change about your relationship with your oldest child living at home?

Most respondents again said there was “nothing” that they wanted to change about their relationship with their eldest child. The second most common response was “a desire that both parent and child could be more understanding and tolerant” (p. 8). The researchers did not give the actual percentages of the responses.

5. What does your spouse do that makes you feel good about yourself?

The most common answer to this question was, “compliments and expresses appreciation” (p. 8). This answer accounted for over 48% of the responses to this question.

6. What do you do that makes your spouse feel good about himself/herself?

The most common response was, “compliment and express appreciation” (p. 8). Fifty percent of those responding answered similarly.

7. What does your child do that makes you feel good about yourself?

As with the two previous questions, the most common response was, “compliments and expresses appreciation” (p. 8). The second most common response was, “tells/shows me that I am loved.” A third common answer was, “asks advice/talks to me” (p. 8).

8. What do you do that makes your child feel good about himself/herself? Over 40% of those responding again said, “compliments and expresses appreciation” (p. 8).

9. What two things do you most enjoy doing with your spouse?

The five most frequent responses, in order, were, “going out as a couple for evening entertainment,” “talking together/being together,” “working together,” “religious activities,” and, “athletic activities,” such as golf, tennis, or bicycling (p. 9).

10. What two things do you most enjoy doing with your child?

The most common answer was, “talking together/being together.” The second and third most frequent responses were, “athletic activities,” and “participating in child’s hobbies, interests, and activities” (p. 9).

11. If the communication pattern between you and your spouse is good, what do you think has made it good?

One quarter of those responding to this question said that what made their communication successful was, “talking out problems together.” The second most frequent answer was, “honesty/openness” (p. 9).

12. If the communication pattern between you and your child is good, what do you think has made it good?

The most common response was “listening” followed by “talking together” and “expressing interest in them/participating in their activities” (p. 9).

13. When there is conflict (serious disagreement) between you and your spouse, how does he/she deal with it?

The overwhelming answer to this question was, “discusses problem/gets it out in the open.” This answer represented 41.1% of the responses. The second most frequently given answer was “identifies the problem and decides on a solution” (p. 9).

14. When there is conflict (serious disagreement) between you and your spouse or other family members, how do you deal with it?

The answers were similar to those of the previous question. The most common answer was “discuss problem/get it out in the open” (p. 9). The next most common answer was “identify problem and decide on a solution.” Other responses were, “let each person express his/her views, and “allow anger to subside before attempting to solve the problem” (p. 9).

15. What do you do to prevent fragmentation and the busy pace of life from hurting your family life?

The five most frequently given answers to this question were, in order, “planning activities so family can be together,” “limiting unnecessary activities,” “making a commitment to a life-style of doing things together as a family in work and play,” “eating meals together,” and “placing family first” (p. 9).

Stinnett and Sauer concluded from their 1977 findings that the following four characteristics seemed to emerge as being descriptive of strong families:

1. Expression of appreciation of each other
2. Willingness to spend time together and participate in activities together
3. Good communication patterns

4. Commitment to a religious lifestyle

In 1979, Stinnett conducted a similar study of strong families resulting in the addition of two more characteristics that seemed to be present in strong families. These additional characteristics were commitment and ability to cope with crises. In this study, Stinnett defined more clearly what each of the characteristics meant. Following is a description of the six strength characteristics identified by Stinnett to be present within strong families.

Family Strength Characteristic #1

Appreciation

Stinnett and Sauer (1977) were surprised to find appreciation coming up as often as it did in the survey responses. For the purposes of their research, the strength characteristic “appreciation” simply meant that family members expressed verbal or nonverbal appreciation for one another. Family members built each other up psychologically. They gave each other verbal praise and nonverbal touches and glances which increased esteem and unity in the family system.

Otto found “appreciation” to be present in strong families as did Stinnett, but Stinnett et al. advanced the conceptualization of appreciation by identifying appreciation as a basic need in promoting good relationships (Stinnett & Sauer, 1977). Otto had identified more broad characteristics that promote good relationships: the ability to provide for the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of a family; the ability to be sensitive to the needs of the family members; the ability to provide support, security and

encouragement; the ability to establish and maintain growth-producing relationships within and without the family; the ability to perform family roles flexibly; mutual respect for the individuality of family members; a concern for family unity, loyalty, and interfamily cooperation. Stinnett et al. combined aspects of these characteristics into a more easily understood and developed characteristic, appreciation (1979).

Two examples from the book, Secrets of Strong Families, (Stinnett & DeFrain, 1985) that strong families gave about how this strength, appreciation, was evident in their families as follows:

“He makes me feel good about me and about us as a couple. Very few days go by without him saying something like, ‘You look very nice today’ or ‘The house is so clean and neat; it’s a real pleasure to be home’ or ‘Great dinner’ or ‘I’d rather stay home with you; let’s skip that party’” (p.44).

“This sounds too simple, but Jane thanks me for everyday things I do. If, for example, I wash the dishes, she thanks me. This helps me to know that I am not taken for granted” (p. 45).

Family Strength Characteristic #2

Spending Time Together

Stinnett found that strong families did many activities together (1979). He found that strong families genuinely enjoyed each other: the togetherness was not smothering, all members of the family enjoyed it. Within strong families Stinnett found that the members of the family structured their life so that they had time to spend together.

Stinnett was able to again identify “spending time together” as a congruent factor amongst families that were strong (1979). Key elements to the development of Stinnett’s identified components seemed to involve families spending time together (1985). Schumm (2001) and later Akagi, Schumm, & Bergen (2003) found that subjects did not perceive spending time together as the same thing as enjoying time together. Among older couples where one or both spouses are retired, the importance of joint time spent together decreased (Davey & Szinovacz, 2004). Weigel and Ballard-Reisch (1999) agreed that, “In American culture, self-disclosure and spending time together are usually seen as a hallmark of strong, intimate relationships” (p. 267).

Two examples from the book, Secrets of Strong Families, (Stinnett & DeFrain, 1985) that strong families gave about how this strength, time together, were evident in their families were as follows:

“I remember stories Mom and Dad told me when they tucked me into bed” (p. 81).

“We spend time together because we like each other. It isn’t like this-is-a-good-thing-to-so-we’d-better-plan-time-together. We enjoy each other’s company. Frankly, I get lonesome for my husband and kids when we’re apart for very long” (p. 87).

“We always eat dinner together and try to be together for breakfast as well. And we have a rule of no television during meals” (p. 91).

Family Strength Characteristic #3

Good Communication Patterns

The third quality identified through the research conducted by Stinnett, which again was somewhat congruent with the finding of Otto, was that strong families had very good communication patterns. They spent time together talking, they had listening skills, and were committed to resolving conflict (Stinnett, 1979).

Stinnett also identified that strong families at times would fight. They got mad at each other, but they were able to get their conflict out in the open and discuss it. They shared their feelings and worked toward solutions.

Litzinger and Gordon (2005) noted that unhappy couples lacked skills that allowed for effective communication. This lack of skills made a significant contribution toward dissatisfaction within the marriage. In contrast, good communication skills increased satisfaction within the marriage and family system.

While high sexual satisfaction may be an indicator of greater marital satisfaction despite poor communication, Metz and Epstein (2002) noted that poor communication and conflict may impact sexual functioning. This may ultimately lead to sexual dysfunction that causes increased conflict and distress.

Two examples from the book, Secrets of Strong Families, (Stinnett & DeFrain, 1985) that strong families gave about how this strength, good communication, was evident in their families as follows:

“Each night when the children are ready for bed, we go into their bedrooms and give a big hug and kiss. Then we say, ‘you are really good kids and we love you very

much.’ We think it’s important to leave that message with them at the end of the day” (p. 60).

“One thing that means a lot to us is going to dinner alone (without the children). We plan about three hours to do this. We may have dinner one place and a special dessert at another or go window-shopping after. We get a lot of visiting done this way” (p. 60).

Family Strength Characteristic #4

Commitment

The members of strong families were committed to making each member of the family happy. Spouses were committed to staying married to each other, and parents were committed to meeting the needs of the children. This commitment was revealed in the fact that family members focused their time and energy toward the family (Stinnett, 1979).

Strong commitment was often present in newlyweds. It is this strong commitment to the relationship that Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro and Hannon (2002) characterized as having an important role in the willingness of people to overlook and forgive errors and work on strengthening the relationship. The ability of newlyweds to pledge, or bind themselves to one another emotionally in marriage, and to overlook offenses were factors in their ability to make a strong commitment.

The identification “commitment” as a characteristic found in strong families was another core component identified by Otto. For example, a family’s ability and desire to

provide for the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of its members seemed to require a great deal of commitment amongst family members. Commitment was a foundational principle to many of the 11 components of strong families identified by Otto.

Following are two examples of what strong families had to say about commitments:

“We give each other the freedom and encouragement to pursue individual goals. Yet either of us would cut out activities or goals that threaten our existence as a couple” (Stinnett & DeFrain, 1985, p. 17).

“My family is the one group of people who has always had faith in me. I know that they’re interested in what happens to me and that I can take any troubles home for help” (Stinnett & DeFrain, 1985, p. 18).

Family Strength Characteristic #5

High Degree of Religious Orientation

Otto wrote in 1975, “the world of family life education would benefit from exploring the spiritual aspects of developing human potential and family strengths” (p. 265). Stinnett & DeFrain, in 1985, were able to do what Otto suggested by exploring the spiritual aspects of a family. They found that many strong families had a high degree of religious orientation. They had a spiritual lifestyle that went beyond Sunday church attendance. These families said they had an awareness of God or a higher power that gave them a sense of purpose and gave their family support and strength. The families reported that this awareness helped them to be more forgiving, more patient with each

other, and to be more positive and supportive (1979). More detailed evidence to support this was reported by Carothers, Borkowski, Lefever, Burke, and Whitman (2005). While the study focused more on teenaged and at-risk mothers, they concluded that families that regularly attended church tended to receive more types of support and find the support given to be more satisfying. A separate study found no correlation between quality of life and religious commitment (Burchard et al., 2003).

Stinnett (1985) wrote that spiritual wellness was a very personal, practical, day-to-day matter for the strong family members. Religion was neither superficial ritual nor highly theoretical theology. Following are some statements from strong family members that led Stinnett to this conclusion: “Our family has certain values: honesty, responsibility, and tolerance to name a few. But we have to practice those in everyday life. I can’t talk about honesty and cheat on my income tax return. I can’t yell responsibility and turn my back on a neighbor who needs help. I’d know I was a hypocrite, and so would the kids and everyone else” (p. 117).

Family Strength Characteristic #6

Ability to Cope with Crises

The final quality of strong families identified by Stinnett was the ability to deal with crises and problems in a positive way. Strong families dealt with a problem by seeing a positive outcome and focusing their efforts and strengths to resolve the problem. They were able to cope with crises as a unit by working together rather than becoming fragmented (1979, p. 8).

Stinnett (1979) was able to reduce the number of key components that need to be present for a family to be strong to six components. These six components or characteristics seem to be the basic building blocks, that when present, may lead to the development of the 11 components identified by Otto. Building upon Stinnett et al.'s findings, additional research has been conducted to understand strong families in other cultures and countries. The vast majority of new research on strong families identifies very similar strength characteristics as Stinnett identified in the late seventies. Schumm stated in a 1985 paper that other strengths have been added to the list of characteristics of strong families. These added characteristics include love, understanding, trust, and individuality, but even these are largely extensions on the previous six strengths rather than completely new concepts (Schumm et al., 1985).

A 2005 study focusing solely on clergy and their spouses found that interactions outside of marriage were rarely mentioned as a primary coping resource (McMinn et al., 2005). Most pastors relied on intrapersonal forms of coping to assist them in times of crisis. Husbands and wives in the ministry relied on their spouses or on spiritual disciplines such as prayer and scripture reading to support them when under stress or in crisis.

With Stinnett's findings in hand, some researchers turned to families outside the United States to see if "good families" in other parts of the world would be like families in the United States. Casas, Stinnett, Defrain, Williams, and Lee (1984) studied families in Central and South America. Verna Weber (1984) completed a study of strengths of black families in South Africa. Bettina Stoll (1984) investigated family strengths in a sample of families from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Porter, Stinnett, Lee,

Williams, and Townley (1985) wanted to study the strengths of Russian families but had to settle for a study of Russian families who had recently immigrated to the United States. In Stinnett, Stinnett, Beam & Beam's 1999 book, Fantastic Families, a researcher named Yuh-hsien Chen is mentioned (1988) who looked at the strengths of Taiwanese and Chinese families that had recently immigrated to the United States. Brigman, Schons, and Stinnett (1986) studied the strengths of Iraqi families a few years before the first Gulf War. John and Nikki Defrain and Lepard (1994) and their daughters went to the South Pacific island of Fiji for seven months to learn about family life there.

Casas et al., (1984) stated that families that express appreciation for each other, have a willingness to spend time together and participate in activities together, have good communication patterns, are committed to each other, and have the ability to deal with problems and crises in a positive way will be strong families in any culture. Stinnett et al (1999) stated, "In spite of cultural differences, research has shown that good families around the world share more similarities than differences" (p. 229). As research on families continues to progress in the United States and abroad it becomes clear that family dynamics around the world appear to be remarkably similar.

Tools Available to Measure Family Strengths

The review of the literature has thus far identified six core characteristics that seem to be present within families that are strong. Several tools have been developed to

measure family strengths. The focus of the literature review will now explore what tools are available to measure these six strengths within a family.

Olson, Larson, and McCubbin (1985) were the first researchers to develop a Family Strengths Scale. Olson's Family Strengths Scale was used to assess how strong a family was in certain areas of family strength. Schumm et al., (2001) stated that a weakness of Olson's scale was that it did not test a family for strengths in the areas of appreciation, time together, or commitment - characteristics that had been identified by Stinnett to be present in strong families. Because the strength characteristics identified by Stinnett had become somewhat of a standard model for family strengths within the helping profession, a tool was needed to measure those strengths. Schumm et al., (1989) developed a new 20-item survey designed to assess similar family strength characteristics that had been embraced by a number of helping fields. The survey assessed the family strengths of time together, positive interaction (appreciation), open and empathetic communication, conflict resolution, commitment, and personal worth (of self and others) (Schumm et al., 1989, 2001).

Schumm et al., (1989) administered the 20 new items as part of a larger survey of membership retention within a mainstream Protestant denomination. In addition to the 20 family strengths items, Schumm asked those surveyed to respond to the three questions from the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale, which has been proven to successfully measure individual marital satisfaction (Touliatos, Perlmutter, & Straus, 1990). Marital satisfaction was assessed because previous research determined that in a high percentage of strong families the marital dyad also had a high degree of marital satisfaction (Stinnett, 1979).

Schumm et al., (2001) stated that it was their hope that the Family Strength Scales they developed would be used for future research focusing on family strengths rather than family dysfunction. It was their hope that the scales would be used as a pretreatment assessment in marital and family therapy. The scales could be used to identify a family's strengths as well as weaknesses, and the therapy process could capitalize on families' strengths and strengthen areas of weakness.

In 1962 at the end of his paper discussing what he had found to be present in families that saw themselves as being "strong," Otto stated:

"One of the greatest challenges facing us today is to learn more about family strengths and how they can be fostered and developed. We need to learn more about how this tremendous potential and resource can be brought to bear to insure responsible family participation and leadership in relation to the crises and problems of our time" (p. 80).

In 1985, Schumm challenged that the research on family strengths has given us an "interesting ensemble of characteristics of strong families" (p. 1). Schumm made the point that nobody has taken the ensemble of characteristics and developed theoretical propositions of how these family strength characteristics might influence each other. In this challenge, Schumm proposed a theoretical model of the six family strengths identified by Stinnett. He also hypothesized the interconnections of the family strengths within the system, but did not test the model. Thus far no researcher has accepted the challenge to hypothesize a theoretical model of family strengths interaction and to test it.

If a theoretical model of the interaction of family strengths were developed, it could be helpful in a number of ways. For example, family life educators working with

families currently have no way of knowing which family strength is the most important for a family to develop first. If some family strengths are required to be developed before other strengths can be developed, then it would be ineffective and possibly detrimental to focus on a secondary strength before a primary strength in a family life program (Schumm, 1985). A family may be attending a program to work on a certain aspect of family strength that cannot be developed prior to the development of another aspect of family strength.

In their 1999 book, Fantastic Families, Stinnett, Stinnett, Beam and Beam concluded that individuals, churches, and businesses need to take on the task of helping families develop the six identified family strengths. A model giving understanding of a developmental ordering of the strengths would aid in helping families gain strength in the six identified areas. Using these 20 items developed by Schumm et al., (and later reevaluated by Akagi et al., 2003) to determine how strong a family is in the six identified strength areas, it seems that it may now be possible to propose and test a theoretical model of the interrelationships among various measures of family strengths.

Additional Research On The Six Characteristics of Strong Families

As previously discussed, in 1989, Schumm et al., developed a new 20-item survey designed to assess the family strength characteristics that had been embraced in a number of helping fields. The survey assessed the family strengths of 1) time together, 2) positive interaction/appreciation, 3) open and empathetic communication, 4) conflict resolution, 5) commitment, and 6) personal worth of self and others (Schumm, 1989,

2001). These six characteristics will be used for the purpose of this study. Intrinsic religiosity and orthodoxy are two independent variables that will also be used as part of this study.

Time Together

Sweatman conducted a study in 1999 seeking to understand the effect of working in a cross-cultural mission field on marital satisfaction. He found that a couple's quality and quantity of leisure time together had a significant affect on a couple's level of marital satisfaction. The results of the study seemed to indicate that the business of working on a mission field caused couples to sacrifice spending positive time together in an effort to just "get the job done" (p. 159). These couples indicated that rather than taking the time to enjoy each other they found themselves doing work, which over time had a negative effect on their marital satisfaction. Therefore, it seems that the family strength characteristics positive interaction and time together seem to have an effect on each other as well as an effect on the a couple's level of marital satisfaction.

Ballard-Reisch, Zaguidouline & Weigel (2003) conducted a study exploring the behavior of Russian couples engaged in maintaining their marriages. It seemed to indicate that Russian couples that make an effort to make assurances about the future of the relationship, communicate openly and honestly, spend time having fun together, and work together on daily chores have high levels of marital satisfaction.

Positive Interaction/ Appreciation

A study by Sacco and Phares (2001) indicated that regardless of personal levels of self-esteem or depression in the individuals in a marriage, individuals were more satisfied with their marriage when their partners viewed them positively. Individuals were less satisfied when their marital partners viewed them negatively. Regardless of depression and self-esteem level, participants in this study were more satisfied with their marriage when their partner viewed them positively.

Western culture places significant emphasis on helping people see themselves in a positive light. When faced with personal weaknesses or failings, it is not uncommon for people to distort the truth about themselves in order to feel good, or better, about themselves. Some evidence suggests that these distortions, used in moderation, are associated with good mental health—and possibly good physical health as well (Taylor & Brown, 1988; Taylor, Kemeny, Reed, Bower, & Gruenewald, 2000). A good self-view generates confidence and positive emotions, which can spread to bring positive adjustments in other areas of life.

Open and Empathetic Communication

Galileo once said, “Philosophy is written in that great book which lies ever before our eyes—I mean the universe—but we cannot understand it if we do not first learn the language and grasp the symbols in which it is written” (Shands, 1968, p. 1). Open and empathetic communication is one of the cornerstones of a strong marriage and a strong

family. One of the new approaches to marriage therapy is the movement towards marriage education. Therapists and researchers who believe in marriage education believe it is crucial to teach couples how to prevent major conflicts and strengthen communication by educating couples before they get married.

These educators and therapists “educate” (as opposed to just “preparing”) couples with communication skills they will need to handle conflicts and problems after the marriage. Several techniques are taught to these couples such as: engaging in a “fair fight for change”; softening one’s “start-up” in raising a difficult marital issue; “the speaker-listener technique,” in which couples learn during disagreements how to listen to their partners’ side of a disagreement (Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994, pp. 63-72); separating problem discussion from problem solution (Markman, et al., 1994, pp. 82-88); using “I” rather than “you” when expressing difficulties; and taking key breaks in a heated argument before the discussion escalates out of control (Gottman & Silver, 1999, pp. 224-33). Therapists who believe in marriage education believe that these communication skills give couples the methods to handle problems in the future (Wall & Miller-McLemore, 2002, p. 270).

It can be counterproductive to a relationship to suggest that a marriage will succeed solely on the basis of the partner’s personal skills in communication. There are other resources available to help a couple stay strong and committed. The couple’s ability to contribute to and find support from other social institutions is one example of support for a couple that does not have effective communication skills (Wall & Miller-McLemore, 2002).

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution is one of the characteristics that has been identified in a strong marriage and family (Schumm et al., 1989). Part of resolving conflict in relationship is having clear communication: listening and sharing together until a resolution is reached (Shands, 1968). Without clear communication, resolving conflict is difficult if not impossible. According to Shands, “Any word is heard as a series of phonemes, but it is understood as a whole; to illustrate the point, let us take the sequential parts, “to” and “get” and “her”---when we hear them as a single whole, we hear “together,” a totally different meaning from the sum of the parts” (p. 89).

Working together in a relationship involves the ability to communicate and understand whole concepts in a give and take exchange of ideas. When a couple cannot work together and resolve conflict, marital disagreements can create stress and dissatisfaction with the marriage. Marital discord and distress have been associated with a host of psychological difficulties, particularly depression (Beach, Whisman, & O’Leary, 1994).

One example of the importance of communication in resolving conflict comes from the writer of the book of Genesis in the Bible:

“But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. Look!” he said. “If they can accomplish this when they have just begun to take advantage of their common language and political unity, just think of what they will do later. Nothing will be impossible for them. Come, let’s go down and give them different languages. Then they won’t be able to understand each other. In

that way, the Lord scattered them all over the earth; and that ended the building of the city. That is why the city was called Babel, because it was there that the Lord confused the people by giving them many languages, thus scattering them across the earth” (Gen. 11:6-9 New Living Translation).

The writer of the book of Genesis makes the point that when people are one in language and thought they can achieve anything they can imagine. Conflict resolution is crucial for the marriage relationship to work by communicating and working through difficult situations. When there is conflict and disagreement, goals are difficult to reach and couples and families do not work well together to achieve their desires.

Commitment

Marital success is dependent on the commitment level between both partners. One person alone can't build a relationship or keep a marriage together, no matter how hard he or she tries. Sabatelli and Cecil-Pigo (1985) surveyed 301 married persons and found that partners who were participating equally in a relationship and who experienced maximum interdependence were also the most committed. People want to know that their partner is equally involved in the relationship before putting forth their best effort in the marriage.

A successful marriage requires a high degree of motivation and a strong desire to expend the personal time and effort to make sure it succeeds. Even if a couple experiences extremely difficult circumstances in their marriage, through extraordinary motivation and commitment to the relationship, a couple can overcome obstacles and

have a successful and satisfying relationship. Other couples in hard circumstances give up on their marriages after giving very little effort to the relationship, possibly because they do not really value the marriage and are not committed to its success (Nock, 1995; Surra & Hughes, 1997).

Johnson (1973, 1982, 1991) has argued that the experience of commitment is not unitary. There are three distinct types of commitment, each with a different set of causes, a different phenomenology, and different cognitive emotional and behavioral consequences. Personal commitment refers to the sense of wanting to stay in the relationship, moral commitment to feeling morally obligated to stay, and structural commitment to feeling constrained to stay regardless of the level of personal or moral commitment. In 1999, Johnson, Caughlin, and Huston conducted a study to assess the viability of Johnson's (1991) commitment framework. Their study supports the main tenet of Johnson's (1991) commitment framework. "Personal, moral and structural commitment are distinguishable experiences that are not captured in measures of so-called global commitment" (Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston, 1999, p. 173).

Another study on commitment by Markman et al., makes the distinction between "dedication commitment" and "constraint commitment." Dedication commitment refers to an ideal state in which couples express "loyalty, trust [and] devotion" toward one another. Constraint commitment, however, is a less than ideal state in which couples stay together by a sense of "obligation, . . . covenant, and [feeling of being] trapped" (Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994, pp. 169-70).

Amato and DeBoer, in 2001, used national, longitudinal data from two generations to assess two explanations for the intergenerational transmission of marital instability.

These researchers found that parental divorce nearly doubled the odds that offspring would see their own marriages end in divorce. The reason they gave for offspring with divorced parents having an elevated risk of getting divorced is because they hold a comparatively weak commitment to lifelong marriage (p. 1038). Amato and DeBoer defined commitment as, “A tendency to remain in a marriage, even when it is troubled or when appealing alternatives to the marriage exist” (p. 1040). When a marriage is unsatisfying, spouses with a weak commitment are more likely to leave the marriage to find happiness with someone else. Spouses with a strong commitment level are more likely to remain in a troubled marriage because they believe that the relationship may be satisfying again one day (Amato & DeBoer, 2001).

Bumpass, Martin, and Sweet (1991), using the National Survey of Families and Households, found that parental divorce increased the odds of marital disruption in daughters by 70%. Using the study of Marital Instability Over the Life Course, Amato and DeBoer (1996) found that the odds of divorce increased by 69% if the wife’s parents had been divorced and by 189% if both the wife’s and the husband’s parents had been divorced. According to Amato and DeBoer, the best documented risk factor for marital dissolution was parental divorce (2001).

In 2006, Weigel, Bennett, & Ballard-Reisch published an article entitled, *Roles and Influence in Marriages: Both Spouses’ Perceptions Contribute to Marital Commitment*. They studied a couple’s commitment to a marriage and roles and influence in a marriage. This study found that when spouses see their roles and levels of influence in the relationship as equal, fair, and satisfying, they generally are more likely to experience positive levels of commitment.

Personal Worth of Self and Others

A study surveying Palestinian women from the west bank and the Gaza Strip to explore their level of commitment, communication, and satisfaction in their marriages seems to indicate that in the context of marriage, when a person is abused and their feeling of self-worth is diminished, then they are not committed to their marriage in general or to improving their marriage (Haj-Yahia, 2002). It seemed that within the context of a marriage, a spouse's feeling of worth may have an affect on their level of commitment to the stability and growth of their marriage. This same study also seemed to indicate that the greater the extent to which these women were psychologically abused the less open and positive was their communication with their husbands. The study also indicated that women who came from higher income families and had higher levels of education seemed to feel a greater sense of worth and therefore have a greater sense of hope that they could get help to improve their marriages and increase positive communication with their husbands.

Evidence supports that, regardless of self-esteem level, people desire and react positively to information that encourages and supports their feelings of self-worth (Banaji & Prentice, 1994; Leary, Haupt, Strausser, & Chokel, 1998; Taylor, 1991; Taylor & Brown, 1988). Self-esteem enhancement theory suggests that both high and low self-esteem individuals will be more satisfied with their marriage when their marriage partners view them in a positive way.

Myers and Diener (1996) described those who are happy as having high self-esteem. These individuals usually believe themselves to be more intelligent, more

ethical, less prejudiced, better able to get along with others, and healthier than the average person. According to this study, positive well-being is linked together with those who are happy and have higher self-esteem. Happiness, however, is not limited to the affluent, according to Suhail and Chaudhry (2004). Well-being, in both Eastern and Western societies, requires a need to understand the significance of a desirable balance of work, relationships, and wealth.

Self-esteem and gender-role conflicts are associated with abusive behaviors among men who were court mandated for partner abuse treatment (Pence & Paymer, 1993; Walker, 1984; Harway & O'Neil, 1999). Men with low self-esteem who indicated they outwardly express their emotions reported a higher use of threats and intimidation. Emotions expressed by men with low self-esteem who have committed domestic violence are likely to be abusive emotionally (Schwartz, Waldo, & Daniel, 2005).

Research finds that a crucial factor influencing an individual's commitment to marriage is the degree to which one's spouse verifies how one sees oneself (Burke & Stets, 1999; Ritts & Bahr, 1995; Swan, Hixon, & De La Ronde, 1992). Regardless of the view, positive self-view or negative self-view, the nature of the view does not matter (Swan et al., 1992). The greater the verification, the greater the commitment to the marriage; when one spouse confirms the other's self-view, commitment is fostered.

Research indicates that family support provides information to the child concerning his or her inherent self-worth (Gecas, 1992). The family is crucial for the maintenance and development of self-esteem among high school-aged adolescents (Hoelter & Harper, 1987). Research directly examining the effect of perceived appraisals on self-esteem for older adolescents has found that boys' self-esteem is affected most by

the perceived appraisal of their parents, while girls' self-esteem is affected most by how the parents perceive their friends (Hoelter, 1984).

Intrinsic Religiosity

The multidimensional nature of religious beliefs and practices has been studied by numerous researchers (Ellison & Taylor, 1996; Glock & Stark, 1965; Levin, Taylor, & Chatters, 1994; Pargament, 2002). An individual's relationship with a divine being and his or her perception of the power and influence of an omnipotent deity have been crucial in the study of religious orientation. In the following quote, Spilka & Werme (1971) describe the potential positive and negative connotations of institutional and personal religion:

“[Institutional and personal religion] may serve as an outlet for emotional disturbance; as a haven or a source of stress; as an avenue to social acceptance; or as an orientation towards the more full realization of one's worth and capabilities as a human being.” (p. 474).

In 2005, Schieman, Pudrovska, and Milkie conducted research on *The Sense of Divine Control and the Self-Concept: A Study of Race Differences in Late Life*. Their study found, among other things, that among Whites only, divine control was associated negatively with mastery. However, among Blacks, especially among Black women, divine control was associated positively with self-esteem.

The influence of religiosity on the inner lives of individuals has been a topic of great interest over the years to sociologists. In a study of 279 secondary school pupils, 13

to 16 years old, in Wales, Williams, Frances, & Robbins (2006) found that low self-esteem was associated with the rejection of Christianity. This finding correlated with the study by Jones and Francis (1996), which showed a positive correlation between high self-esteem and a positive attitude toward Christianity.

Religiosity has become a topic of interest to mental health researchers. Pajevic, Sinanovic, and Hasanovic (2005) conducted a study on religiosity and mental health. New studies in this field indicate beneficial effects of religion on mental health in humans. Studies have indicated that religiosity reduces tendencies for risky behavior, impulsive reactions and aggression. Tendencies towards psychopathic and paranoid behavior, depressive and schizoid tendency, and overcoming emotional conflicts are a few of the tendencies religiosity helps to correct. In their study, Pajevic, Sinanovic, and Hasanovic stated:

“In comparison to low-religious adolescents, the factors such as inner conflicts, frustration, fear, anxiety, psychological trauma, low self-esteem, unbalance of psychical homeostasis, emotional instability, and negative psychical energy are less present in highly religious adolescents and neutralized in a healthier and more efficient way” (p. 84).

A majority of Americans feel that religion is an important part of their lives (Gallup, 1995). Other studies have established that religion is important to well being (Pargament, 2002a). George, Ellison, and Larson (2002) concluded that strong evidence indicates that religion appears to promote healthier habits, which then promote health. The present findings in counseling and psychology about religion highlight evidence that religion can be a source of well being in clients' lives, and the findings suggest that

religious clients may derive meaning from their religion, which in turn helps them feel better (Steger & Frazier, 2005).

Not every researcher has found religion to be a source of strength. Shands has a different perspective in his study about faith and religion and scientific research. In his study he made the following statement, “. . .[F]aith is obviously inadequate when it is desired to attain reliable information, and the pervasive doubting and demands for proof are the basis of scientific research” (1968, p. 102).

One function of religion is to provide individuals and families with the means through which they can experience purpose in their lives (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003). Religion can give people a feeling of coherence about life and a sense of purpose and meaning about ultimate truths in life (Exline, 2002). Religion, as well as a faith community, appears to provide the place and opportunity for individuals to discover meaning and purpose in their lives.

Orthodoxy

Orthodoxy – for the purpose of this study is an independent variable that describes a person who believes the Bible is the inspired Word of God, Jesus is the Son of God, miracles really occurred as described by the Bible, and people are accepted by God through faith. Many people believe in spiritual values that include beliefs in Jesus, God, and the Holy Bible. Many of these people believe that a significant amount of troubles and problems exist in our world today because individuals are not conforming to what the Bible, and God, say to do and how to live life (Pajevic, Sinanovic, & Hasanovic, 2005).

Research Questions

This literature review explored literature that has identified six core characteristics present within strong families as well as tools that are available to measure these six strengths within a family. In this section, research questions are proposed that have emerged by way of identifying the gaps in research that could be explored to greater understand and help families.

As illustrated in the previous section of the literature review, quality research has identified six characteristics that seem to be present within strong families (Schumm, 1985; Stinnett, et al., 1982; Stinnett & Sauer, 1977). Searching the literature also has revealed that there is little understanding of any interrelationships among the various measures of family strengths, thus prompting the question “Are there any connections among the family strengths, and if so, what effect do they have on each other?”

Three of the six identified strength characteristics within strong families – worth, commitment, and communication - might be expected to have effects on each other. When people feel a sense of worth, are they more committed to the stability and growth of their marriage and are they motivated to make a greater effort to communicate openly and resolve conflicts that arise?

The six strength characteristics found to be present may well have an effect on each other and there seems to be enough supportive previous research to justify an investigation of the interrelationships among the various measures of family strengths. The literature also provided enough information about families and marriage to suggest a

detailed path analysis model using marital satisfaction as the dependent variable. The design of the study including the research model will be presented in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

This chapter describes the research methodology that was used to test eight hypotheses about the interrelationships among various measures of family strength. The eight hypotheses are outlined in Table 1. Data collected for an earlier study, which surveyed married individuals using the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale and Schumm's 20-item survey, will determine the individual's family strength in the six family strength characteristics described by Stinnett (1979). The data will then be analyzed by ordinary least squares (OLS) regression techniques (referred to as path analysis) to test a detailed path analysis model using marital satisfaction as the dependent variable. A diagram of the path analysis model can be seen in Diagram 1.

Table 1

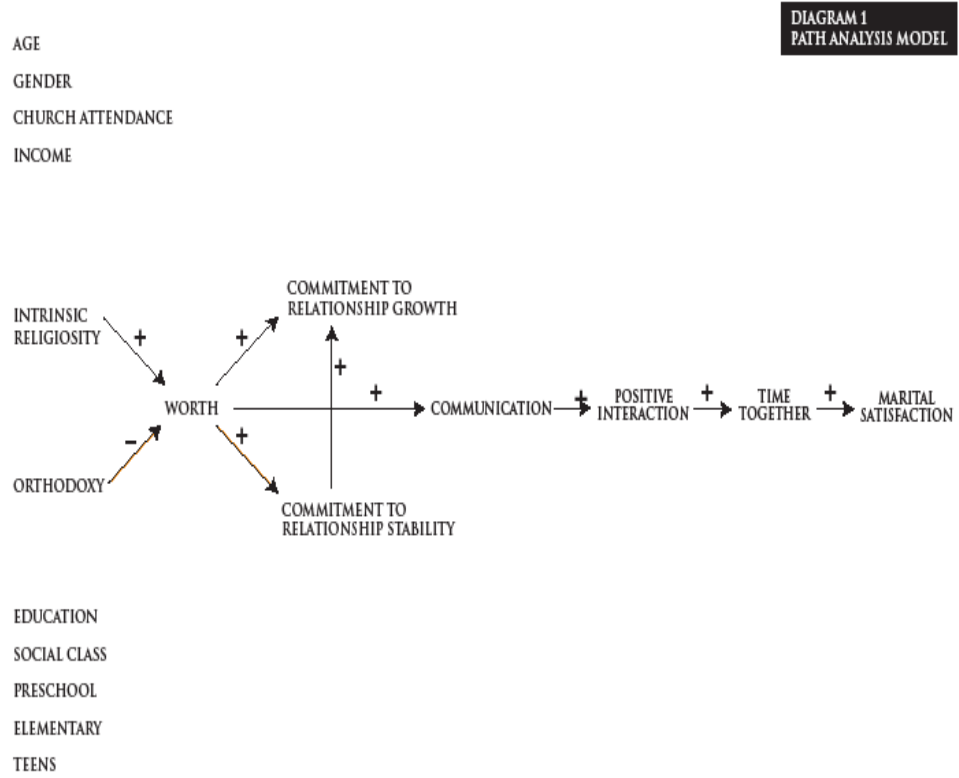
Hypothesis Table

Hypotheses tested in determining the interaction effect amongst various measures of family strength.

#1	Intrinsic religiosity is expected to have a positive effect on the intervening variable worth.
#2	Orthodoxy is expected to have a negative effect on the intervening variable worth.
#3	The three areas of Self-Worth are expected to positively affect an individual's Commitment to Stability.
#4	Worth and Commitment to Stability are expected to positively affect a couple's Commitment to Growth.
#5	Worth, Commitment to Stability and Commitment to Growth are expected to positively affect couples' Communication and Ability to Resolve Conflict.
#6	Worth, Commitment to Stability, Commitment to Growth, Communication/Conflict Resolution in a marriage are expected to allow a couple to interact positively when they are together.
#7	Worth, Commitment to Stability, Commitment to Growth, Communication/Conflict Resolution, and Positive Interaction are expected to motivate a couple to spend more time together.
#8	Worth, Commitment to Stability, Commitment to Growth, Communication/Conflict Resolution, Positive Interaction, and Time Together are expected to have a positive effect on Marital Satisfaction.

Diagram 1

Path Analysis Model



Data Collection

The data for the study are a sub-sample of data collected in 1989 by Schumm and his colleagues as part of a larger survey of membership retention within a mainlinesent to people in three major metropolitan areas, Kansas City, Dallas/Fort Worth, and Los Angeles. The main mail survey contained 10 pages. For about one-third of the sample, an additional 2-page survey was given concerning premarital counseling (Schumm & Silliman, 1996) and marital satisfaction (Schumm & Silliman, 1997). Another third of the sample was given an additional 2-page survey on family strengths and marital satisfaction (Schumm & Silliman, 1997). The surveys were returned by 1,150 people for a response rate of approximately 52 %. Of the 1,150 that responded, 385 of them had received the Family Strengths Survey. Among the 385, there were 122 men (31.7%) and 257 women (66.8%), with six people not reporting their gender. Also, 256 or 66.5% of the people that responded were married and 27 or 7% were remarried. Among the 385 people who were sent the family strengths survey, only 336 gave responses (87.3%)(49 responded to the longer survey but not to the supplemental family strengths survey). Of those 336, there were 114 men (33.9%) and 217 women (64.6%), with five not reporting their gender. Of those responding to the survey, 240 were married (71.4%), and 26 were remarried couples (7.7%). The rest of the people were never married (3.3%), divorced (5.1%), widowed (10.7%), separated (0.3%), cohabiting (0.9%), or engaged (0.3%). Schumm et al., (2001) reported that 737 people received the supplementary questionnaire, and 336 (45.6%) responded.

Instruments

The instruments used for this study were Schumm et al., (2001) Family Strengths Scales (See Appendix A), the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (See Appendix B), and various demographic items and measures of religiosity from the longer survey mailed to respondents.

Schumm et al., Family Strengths Scales

The family strength characteristics that make up the model were measured for individuals using Schumm's (1989, 1997) 20-item survey that measures the characteristics of: worth, commitment, conflict resolution/communication, positive interaction, and time together. Most of the items were written from a spouse's point of view about family strengths demonstrated by each other or within the marital relationship.

Worth

In Schumm's (1989) survey he asked respondents to respond to three items about worth. For each of the three statements, as with all of the family strength statements on this survey, the respondents were asked to circle a number one, two, three, four, or five. Answers ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" with the former being a one

and the latter being a five on the scale. For statement #1 the respondents were asked to indicate whether they felt they were a person of worth. Statement #2 called for the respondents to indicate how important their spouse was to them. The final statement in the “worth” section inquired about the respondent’s feeling about his or her worth to his or her spouse.

The items on worth are as follows:

1. I feel that I’m a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others.
2. My spouse is a very important person to me.
3. My spouse feels I am a very worthwhile person to him/her.

If a respondent answered positively to these three questions, it may be assumed that feelings of worth were strong in their marriage.

Commitment to Stability

The first three items in this section seemed to assess the respondent’s attitude toward divorce and the institution of marriage. The respondents were indicating if they would be committed to the marriage even if it was unfulfilling. The next two items in this section were given to examine how committed the respondent was to putting forth effort to improve their current marriage. Therefore for the purpose of this study the intervening variable commitment was divided into two variables: Commitment to Stability, measuring how committed they were to the institution of marriage and Commitment to Growth, indicating how committed they were to improving their current

marriage. As with the previous items, the survey respondents were asked to tell how strongly they disagreed or agreed with the following five statements.

The items on Commitment to Stability were as follows:

1. I would never even consider divorce from my spouse.
2. I would divorce my present spouse if he/she stopped pleasing me.
3. Ideas about “till death do you part” in marriage are not acceptable to me anymore; divorce is a valid option in many situations.

The items on Commitment to Growth are as follows:

4. I am committed to improving our marriage (even if it is pretty good the way it is).
5. I intend to continue to work at making my marriage better for both of us.

If the respondent answered positively to statements 1, 2, & 3 they could be considered to have a strong commitment to the institution of marriage. If the respondents answered positively to statements 4 & 5 they were considered to have a strong commitment to improving their current marriage.

Communication/Conflict Resolution

The family strengths “communication and conflict resolution” were combined for the purposes of this study, because in a previous study (Schumm et al., 2001), who used the same data set, it was determined that the six items measuring conflict resolution and communication loaded together in a factor analysis. The items for communication and

conflict resolution were tapping to highly related characteristics. Therefore for the purposes of this study the strength characteristics of conflict resolution and communication were viewed as having a joint effect.

The first four statements listed below were written to determine how well the respondent and their spouse communicated with each other. The first statement was written to determine how open and honest the respondent was with the spouse. The second statement asked the respondent how open and honest he/she felt the spouse was with them. The third item tested how well the respondent felt his/her spouse understands him/her. Finally in the communication section, the fourth statement was written to allow the respondent to indicate how well each felt they understood their spouse. Items 5 & 6 below were written to determine how well respondents felt they resolved conflict that arose with their spouse.

1. I am very open and honest with my spouse.
2. My spouse is very open and honest with me.
3. My spouse understands me very well.
4. I usually understand my spouse well.
5. My spouse and I are able to resolve most all of our disagreements to our mutual satisfaction.
6. My spouse and I are able to forgive each other for past offenses.

Positive Interaction/Appreciation

The items in this section were written to gather information about the quality of communication, over and above the quantity of communication. The respondents were asked to respond to statements about the quality of time spent with their spouse. The following three statements were given:

1. My spouse and I almost always treat each other with great respect and kindness.
2. My spouse and I often say unkind things to each other.
3. We enjoy spending time together with each other.

Time Together

These three items were written to gather information on the amount or quantity of communication. Respondents were asked to consider statements about how much time they were spending with their spouse. The following three items were given:

1. We have a lot of difficulty finding time to be alone with each other.
2. We spend a lot of time together, alone where we can talk.
3. We don't spend much time with each other anymore.

Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scales

The 3-item Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale using the standard 7-point response categories was used to measure marital satisfaction. In a working paper current as of December 7, 2000, Schumm, Bollman, and Jurich presented the most current information on the reliability and validity of the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS). In this paper Schumm et al., states, “present evidence indicates that the scale has high reliability and excellent validity” (p. 2). Schumm et al., cited Sabatelli’s (1988) recommendation of the KMSS because its brevity and considerable reliability and validity. Schumm et al., also cited Busby, Christensen, Crane, and Larson (1995) making the point that the KMSS was brief and useful for assessing both distressed and non--distressed couples. Schumm et al., also cited Busby et al., (1995) mentioning the KMSS and another scale providing “simple, unconfounded assessment of how spouses feel about their relationship” (p. 462). The KMSS also correlated with the Dyadic Adjustment Scale and the Quality of Marriage Index, and had a test-retest reliability of .71 (Schumm et al., 1986). The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale was developed in 1977 and was intended to assess three elements of marriage. The three elements were satisfaction with marriage as an institution, satisfaction with the marriage relationship, and satisfaction with one’s husband or wife. Schumm et al., (2000) made the point that the KMSS was designed to measure one element of marital quality -- satisfaction. The KMSS has been shown to be a reliable measure of marital satisfaction and was, therefore, used by Schumm and his colleagues to assess the level of marital satisfaction of the sample being used for this study.

In a previously published paper by Schumm et al., (2001), using the same sample and surveys, Schumm et al., subjected the 20 family strength items and the three Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale items to a maximum-likelihood common factor analysis, with varimax rotation. Because Schumm et al., expected seven factors, the analysis was run with directions to extract seven factors. SPSS programs were used for all statistical calculations. Schumm et al., found that extracting more factors did not substantially improve the factor structure. Schumm et al., also calculated the mean, the standard deviation and the Cronbach's alpha, estimating internal consistency reliability.

Schumm et al., (2001) reported that the Cronbach alpha reliability estimates were very good ($> .80$) for most of the scales - Marital Satisfaction, Affective Commitment, all of the Communication or Conflict Resolution Scales, and Time Together. Positive Interaction, Personal Worth, and the normative and total Commitment scales had reliability estimates ($> .70$) which were still acceptable.

Analysis of Data

The data were analyzed by running a series of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analyses predicting each variable in sequence, according to the theoretical model previously established.

Marital satisfaction was predicted from all intervening and independent variables using OLS regression. In turn, each intervening variable was predicted from the remaining intervening and independent variables in the model that explained it.

Mean substitution was used to account for missing data, maintaining a consistent number of subjects from one regression analysis to the next. Independent or intervening variables that yield standardized regression coefficients significant at $p < .05$ were considered to be statistically significant. SPSS Version 10.0 was used to perform the statistical analyses.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to test a regression model of hypothesized relationships between intervening variables worth, commitment to relationship stability, commitment to relationship growth, positive interaction, communication, time spent together, and the dependent variable marital satisfaction (see Diagram 1). The data were analyzed through path analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and the results are presented in Table 2.

The first intervening variable in the model was worth. Worth was predicted by age of subject, gender, church attendance, intrinsic religiosity, orthodoxy, having preschool children, having elementary school age children, having teenage children, annual income, educational attainment, and subjective social class. Of the 11 independent variables used to predict worth, only three were statistically significant. As shown in the column for model 1 in Table 2, the strongest predictor of worth was intrinsic religiosity (beta = .24, $p < .001$, but church attendance (beta = .13, $p < .05$) and orthodoxy (beta = -.15, $p < .05$) were also significant. Those results supported the hypothesis proposed with respect to intrinsic religiosity and orthodoxy. The overall adjusted R-squared for the model with respect to worth was 0.081.

The second intervening variable in the model was commitment to relationship stability. Commitment to relationship stability was predicted by worth, age of subject, gender, church attendance, intrinsic religiosity, orthodoxy, having preschool children, having elementary children, having teen children, annual income, educational attainment,

and subjective social class. Of the 12 independent variables used to predict commitment to relationship stability, only three were statistically significant. As shown in column 2 in Table 2, the strongest predictor of commitment to relational stability was worth (beta = .34, $p < .001$), but gender (beta = -.16, $p < .01$) and orthodoxy (beta = .21, $p < .01$) were also significant. Those results supported the hypotheses proposed with respect to worth. The overall adjusted R-squared for the model with respect to commitment to relationship stability was .191.

The third intervening variable in the model was commitment to relationship growth. Commitment to relationship growth was predicted by commitment to relationship stability, worth, age of subject, gender, church attendance, intrinsic religiosity, orthodoxy, having preschool children, having elementary children, having teen children, annual income, educational attainment, and subjective social class. Of the 13 independent variables used to predict commitment to relationship growth, only four were statistically significant. As shown in column 3 in Table 2, the strongest predictor of commitment to relational growth was worth (beta = .40, $p < .001$), but commitment to relationship stability (beta = .14, $p < .05$), age of subject (beta = -.14, $p < .05$), and intrinsic religiosity (beta = .16, $p < .01$) were also significant. Those results supported the hypotheses proposed with respect to commitment to relationship stability and worth. The overall adjusted R-squared for the model with respect to commitment to relationship growth was .266.

The fourth intervening variable in the model was communication. Communication was predicted by commitment to relationship growth, commitment to relationship stability, worth, age of subject, gender, church attendance, intrinsic

religiosity, orthodoxy, having preschool children, having elementary children, having teen children, annual income, educational attainment, and subjective social class. Of the 14 independent variables used to predict communication, four were statistically significant. As shown in column 4 in Table 2, the strongest predictor of communication was worth ($\beta = .42, p < .001$), but commitment to relationship growth ($\beta = .29, p < .001$) and commitment to relationship stability ($\beta = .22, p < .001$) were also strong predictors of communication. Intrinsic religiosity also had a statistically significant effect on communication. Those results supported the hypotheses proposed with respect to commitment to relationship growth, commitment to relationship stability and worth. The overall adjusted R-squared for the model with respect to commitment to relationship growth was .507.

The fifth intervening variable in the model was positive interaction. Positive interaction was predicted by communication, commitment to relationship growth, commitment to relationship stability, worth, age of subject, gender, church attendance, intrinsic religiosity, orthodoxy, having preschool children, having elementary children, having teen children, annual income, educational attainment, and subjective social class. Of the 15 independent variables used to predict communication, only three were statistically significant. As shown in column 5 in Table 2, the strongest predictor of positive interaction was communication ($\beta = .48, p < .001$), but commitment to relationship stability ($\beta = .12, p < .05$) and worth ($\beta = .13, p < .05$) were also significant. Those results supported the hypotheses proposed with respect to communication and commitment to relationship stability. The overall adjusted R-squared for the model with respect to commitment to relationship growth was .446.

The sixth intervening variable in the model was time spent together. Time spent together was predicted by positive interaction, communication, commitment to relationship growth, commitment to relationship stability, worth, age of subject, gender, church attendance, intrinsic religiosity, orthodoxy, having preschool children, having elementary school age children, having teenage children, annual income, educational attainment, and subjective social class. Of the 16 independent variables used to predict time spent together, seven were statistically significant. As shown in the column for model 6 in Table 2, the strongest predictor of time together was age of subject (beta = .24, $p < .001$) and having preschool children (beta = -.20, $p < .001$). Communication (beta = .23, $p < .01$), positive interaction (beta = .18, $p < .01$), intrinsic religiosity (beta = .11, $p < .05$), having elementary school children (beta = -.11, $p < .05$), and having teenage children (beta = -.10, $p < .05$) were also significant. Those results supported the hypothesis proposed with respect to positive interaction and communication. The overall adjusted R-squared for the model with respect to worth was .404.

The dependent variable in the model was marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction was predicted by time spent together, positive interaction, communication, commitment to relationship growth, commitment to relationship stability, worth, age of subject, gender, church attendance, intrinsic religiosity, orthodoxy, having preschool children, having elementary school age children, having teenage children, annual income, educational attainment, and subjective social class. Of the 17 independent variables used to predict worth, seven were statistically significant. As shown in the column for model 7 in Table 2, all of the intervening variables were strong predictors of marital satisfaction. The strongest predictor of marital satisfaction was communication (beta = .32, $p < .001$),

followed by positive interaction (beta = .26, $p < .001$), time spent together (beta = .20, $p < .001$), worth (beta = .20, $p < .001$), commitment to relationship stability (beta = .15, $p < .001$), commitment to relationship growth (beta = -.13, $p < .01$) and intrinsic religiosity (beta = -.11, $p < .05$). Those results supported the hypothesis proposed with respect to time spent together, positive interaction, communication, commitment to relationship stability and worth but failed to support hypotheses proposed with respect to commitment to relationship growth and intrinsic religiosity. The overall adjusted R-squared for the model with respect to worth was .609.

TABLE 2

Regression Model Results

Regression Model Predicting Marital Satisfaction as Measured by the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale and Intervening Variables from Independent Variables and Selected Intervening Variables (N = 238, using mean substitution of missing variables).

Predictor Variables	Models						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Time Spent Together	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	.20**
Positive Interaction	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	.18**	.32***
Communication	NA	NA	NA	NA	.48***	.23**	.32***
Commitment to Relationship Growth	NA	NA	NA	.29***	.06	.06	-.13**
Commitment to Relationship Stability	NA	NA	.14*	.22***	.12*	.03	.15***
Worth	NA	.34***	.40***	.42***	.13*	.04	.20***
Age of Subject	-.08	.02	-.14*	.10	.00	.24***	.04
Gender (female = 2)	-.09	-.16**	-.01	-.08	-.00	.09	-.03
Church Attendance	.13*	-.04	-.03	.08	.06	.03	.06
Intrinsic Religiosity	.24***	.10	.16**	-.10*	-.16	.11*	-.11*
Orthodoxy	-.15*	.21**	.01	-.00	-.00	.03	.07
Having Preschool Children	.01	.07	.02	-.05	.06	-.20***	.00
Having Elementary School Age Children	.03	-.07	.06	.02	.04	-.11*	.06
Having Teenage Children	-.08	-.02	.03	-.05	-.04	-.10*	.02

Annual Income	.10	-.06	-.01	.00	.08	.02	-.04
Educational Attainment	.06	-.06	-.01	-.03	.00	.03	.01
Subjective Social Class	.01	.04	-.00	-.06	-.02	.07	.02
R ²	.117	.225	.300	.531	.475	.438	.633
Adjusted R ²	.081	.191	.266	.507	.446	.404	.609
Degrees of Freedom	282	282	282	282	282	282	282

Overall significance level $p < .001$
for all models

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

NOTE: Education, Subjective Social Class, and Annual Income were not significantly related to any of the predicted variables.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Summary of Results

The purpose of this study was to test a regression model of hypothesized relationships between intervening variables worth, commitment to relationship stability, commitment to relationship growth, positive interaction, communication, time spent together, and the dependent variable marital satisfaction (see Diagram 1, p. 52). The results of regression analysis testing the model supported all of the proposed hypotheses (see Table 1, p. 53).

As shown in Diagram 2, intrinsic religiosity is a strong indicator of worth. Intrinsic religiosity refers to a person who seeks religious experience or involvement for internal or intrinsic benefits. Being a part of a religious community that provides some internal benefit may enhance a person's feeling of worth. Results from the regression analysis testing the model support the hypothesis proposed with respect to intrinsic religiosity having a positive effect on worth.

The hypothesis proposed with respect to orthodoxy having a negative effect on worth is also supported. Orthodoxy refers to a person's personal beliefs about religious ideas. The intervening variable orthodoxy having a negative effect on worth may indicate that when persons compare religious ideals or perceived standards with their lives, they may feel unworthy or underachieving in areas of religion. It is interesting that the independent variable church attendance has a positive effect on worth. Stinnett et al.,

(1999) found that attending church seems to provide family members with a greater sense of meaning by giving family members a feeling of being a part of something greater than themselves.

The results also indicate that worth has a positive effect on a person's level of commitment to the relational stability of their marriage, which supports the hypothesis in regards to worth having a positive affect on the variable commitment to relational stability. Members of strong families feel a sense of security and safety, because they know that their family is committed to them independent of their behavior. It seems that in the context of marriage, if three areas of worth are strong, self-worth, valuing their spouse, and feeling valued by their spouse, then worth has a positive effect on their commitment to the stability of their marriage. The results also indicate that orthodoxy, meaning a person's beliefs about religious ideas, may have a positive effect on their commitment to the stability of marriage. The results also indicate that the women surveyed for this study were not as committed as the men to the stability of the marriage. Haj-Yahia (2002) in his study of women on the Gaza Strip also found that women are not as committed as men to the institution of marriage. Haj-Yahia surmised that the roles of men and women within the institution of marriage seem to offer more freedoms for men. The results of this study may reflect similar findings, that the institution of marriage can feel constricting or unfair to woman, thus, reflecting their level of commitment to the longevity or stability of their marriage.

The regression analysis also supported the hypothesis proposed with respect to the positive interaction of worth and commitment to stability having a positive effect on a couple's commitment to growth. These results seem to state that if a couple feels good

about themselves and each other and they are committed to the relationship, then they may be more motivated to put forth the effort to strengthen the marriage. It is interesting that intrinsic religiosity had no significant effect on commitment to stability but had a significant effect on a couple's commitment to growth. Intrinsic religiosity reflects a choosing of religion for internal reasons so it makes sense that a person seeking a meaningful outcome from religion may also be motivated to seek a meaningful outcome from marriage. The results related to commitment to growth indicated that age seemed to have a negative effect on a person's commitment in this area.

The hypothesized relationship between the intervening variable commitment to relationship growth, commitment to relationship stability, worth and communication was supported by the results. A couple's ability to communicate and resolve conflict tended to be positively affected when a couple had strength in the areas of commitment and worth.

Positive interaction was strongly affected by the intervening variable communication, which again supported the hypothesis that strength in the areas of worth, commitment to stability, commitment to growth, and communication/conflict resolution had a positive effect on how couples interacted. Commitment to stability also indicated a significant effect on positive interaction. If a couple is committed to their relationship, they may be more motivated to communicate well and enjoy being together.

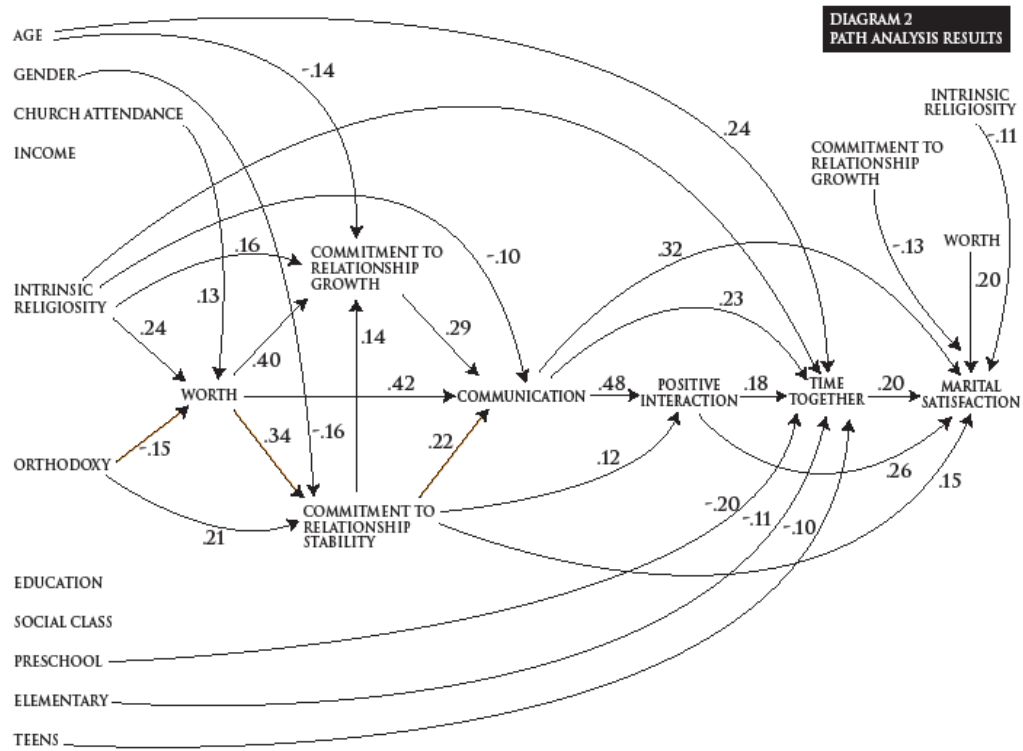
Time together was also positively affected when a couple had strength in the previous intervening variables, but the results indicated that having children in the home may have negatively affected the amount of time a couple spent together. It is interesting that time together was affected by more variables than any other intervening variable.

Age, intrinsic religiosity, and communication each had a statistically significant affect on time together.

The final hypothesis tested by regression analysis relating to marital satisfaction was also supported. The results indicate that a couple's level of marital satisfaction is increased when they value each other, make a commitment to each other, communicate well, enjoy being with each other, and spend time together. It is interesting to note that the more feeling-oriented variables, commitment to growth and intrinsic religiosity, have a direct negative effect on marital satisfaction, even though their indirect contributions in the path model are positive. It may be that those with a focus on growth and intrinsic meaning in their lives may have higher expectations from their marriages and may, thus, be more easily disappointed and become less satisfied with their marital partners. Perhaps they are less willing to consider an "average" marriage as acceptable for themselves.

Diagram 2

Path Analysis Results



Limitations of the Study

The data used to test the regression model for this study were gathered by surveying couples who were members of a specific mainline denomination; therefore the outcome results cannot be generalized for couples outside this denomination. In the most general sense, the purpose of this study was to investigate the interrelationships among various measures of family strengths, yet the data used to test the interrelationships among family strength variables were received from couples rather than multiple (> 2) family members. Although a couple is a family, nevertheless, the results may have been different if these couples' children would have been allowed to give their input concerning their family's strengths.

In the attempt to test a regression model of hypothesized relationships between family strength variables, Stinnett et al.'s (1999) six identified strength variables were chosen as the intervening variables for the model. Since Stinnett et al.'s strength variables were used for this study, the results are limited to understanding the connections between very specifically defined family strength characteristics. It should not be assumed that the strengths used for this regression model are the most accurate descriptors of what makes families strong.

Conclusions

The results of testing a detailed path analysis of the hypothesized relationships between identified family strength characteristics indicated that strengths in certain characteristics did predict strengths in other characteristics. Intrinsic religiosity predicted worth. Worth predicted commitment to stability and commitment to growth. The two areas of commitment predicted communication. Communication predicted positive interaction. Positive interaction predicted time together, and strength in all of the characteristics predicted marital satisfaction.

Stinnett stated in a 1979 publication that, “The prevention of serious emotional problems through the strengthening of family life is of primary importance.” He further stated, “The challenge of strengthening family life depends, at least in part, upon gaining more knowledge about strong, healthy families” (p. 3). The results of this study present the knowledge that when couples develop strength in six identified areas, they are probably more likely to have a higher degree of marital satisfaction. Family life educators would seem to have confirmation that there are connections among family strength variables and, if they help families develop strengths in certain characteristics, those strengths may be able to influence and even enhance strengths in other areas.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study provided evidence that indicated that a couple's level of marital satisfaction is increased when they value each other, make a commitment to each other, communicate well and resolve conflict, enjoy being with each other, and spend time together. One of the six strengths identified for the purpose of this study was "communication and conflict resolution." The family strengths "communication and conflict resolution" were combined for the purposes of this study, because in a previous study (Schumm et al., 2001), which used the same data set, it was determined that the six items measuring conflict resolution and communication loaded together in a factor analysis. The items for communication and conflict resolution were tapping two highly related characteristics. Evidence has been presented that supports the need for clear communication and the ability to resolve conflict in order to have a strong marriage and family system.

In the survey given for this study, the following six items were given concerning communication and conflict resolution. Items 5 and 6 below were written to determine how well the respondent felt he or she resolved conflict that arose with his or her spouse.

1. I am very open and honest with my spouse.
2. My spouse is very open and honest with me.
3. My spouse understands me very well.
4. I usually understand my spouse well.

5. My spouse and I are able to resolve most all of our disagreements to our mutual satisfaction.
6. My spouse and I are able to forgive each other for past offenses.

In the book, The Seven Principles of Making Marriage Work, authors Gottman and Silver make the point that marital conflicts do not have to be resolved for a marriage to be healthy (1999). Gottman and Silver separated marital conflict into two categories: solvable problems and perpetual problems. The authors' research suggested that, "Despite what many therapists will tell you, you don't have to resolve your major marital conflicts for your marriage to thrive" (p. 131). By understanding in which category a marital problem lies, either solvable or perpetual, a couple can be taught strategies to cope with these conflicts. Further research on the impact of communication and conflict resolution on the marital dyad and family could help educate families in the area of communication and conflict resolution.

Future research could survey entire families from a more generalized population using a variety of tools designed to measure a greater variety of family strengths. Further understanding of what makes families strong derived from a more generalized population could equip family life educators with tools and information to better serve a greater diversity of families.

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APPENDIX A

Schumm et al. Family Strengths Scales

Survey Items for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Family Strengths Items

Please indicate the extent to which you disagree or agree with the following items about time conflicts and different aspects of family life. Circle your answers.

Scale: SD = Strongly Disagree
D = Disagree
? = Uncertain or No Way to Know
A = Agree
SA = Strongly Agree

Communication/Conflict Resolution:

I am very open and honest with my spouse.	SD	D	?	A	SA
My spouse is very open and honest with me.	SD	D	?	A	SA
My spouse understands me very well.	SD	D	?	A	SA
I usually understand my spouse well.	SD	D	?	A	SA

Intrinsic Religiosity:

It is important to me to spend time outside of church in private thought and prayer	SD	D	?	A	SA
I have often had a strong sense of God's presence	SD	D	?	A	SA
I try hard to live all my life according to my religious beliefs	SD	D	?	A	SA
My religion is important to me because it answers many questions about the meaning of life	SD	D	?	A	SA

I would rather join a Bible study group than a church social group SD D ? A SA

My relationship with Christ is a vitally important part of my life SD D ? A SA

Positive Interaction/Appreciation:

My spouse and I almost always treat each other with great respect and kindness. SD D ? A SA

My spouse and I often say unkind things to each other. SD D ? A SA

Worth:

I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others. SD D ? A SA

My spouse is a very important person to me. SD D ? A SA

My spouse feels I am a very worthwhile person to him/her SD D ? A SA

Time Together:

We enjoy spending time together with each other. SD D ? A SA

We have a lot of difficulty finding time to be alone with each other. SD D ? A SA

We spend a lot of time together, alone where we can talk. SD D ? A SA

We don't spend much time with each other anymore. SD D ? A SA

Commitment To Growth:

I am committed to improving our marriage SD D ? A SA

I intend to continue to work at making my marriage better for both of us.

SD D ? A SA

Commitment to Stability:

I would never even consider divorce from my spouse.

SD D ? A SA

I would divorce my present spouse if he/she stopped pleasing me.

SD D ? A SA

Idea about till death do you part in marriage are not acceptable to me anymore; divorce is a valid option in many situations.

SD D ? A SA

APPENDIX B

Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale

Marital Satisfaction Items:

The following items concern your evaluation of your marriage at the present time.
Please CIRCLE the appropriate numbers.

Scale:

- 1 = Extremely Dissatisfied
- 2 = Very Dissatisfied
- 3 = Somewhat Dissatisfied
- 4 = Mixed
- 5 = Somewhat Satisfied
- 6 = Very Satisfied
- 7 = Extremely Satisfied

Dissatisfied = 1-3

Satisfied = 5-7

How satisfied are you with....

- | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. your marriage? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| b. your relationship with your spouse? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| c. your husband or wife as a spouse? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |