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Preinteraction Expectations, Marital Satisfaction, and Accessibility: A New Look at Sentiment Override

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This study investigated spouse expectations immediately prior to a marital interaction and also examined whether the accessibility of evaluative judgments about the partner and the marriage advances understanding of marital satisfaction and its correlates. Ninety-two couples participated in the study. As hypothesized, marital satisfaction correlated with preinteraction expectations of partner behavior and with current affect, and expected partner behavior mediated the relation between satisfaction and affect. Response latency to make evaluative judgments of the partner and the marriage moderated the relation between satisfaction and expected partner behavior for husbands. The findings are integrated with basic research on attitudes, and their clinical implications are outlined.

Marital distress is the most frequent reason for individuals seeking professional help in the United States (Veroff, Kulka, & Douvan, 1981), and it is therefore not surprising that the study of marital satisfaction dominates the marital research literature (Glenn, 1990). Despite a vast literature on the correlates of marital satisfaction, little is known about the relation between marital satisfaction and spouse expectations immediately prior to a marital interaction. Such expectations may be important as they are likely to influence subsequent behavior, suggesting that marital interaction cannot be understood fully without researchers examining the expectations that each spouse brings to an interaction. The present study therefore investigated the expectations that arise immediately prior to marital interaction.

Investigation of preinteraction expectations also provides the opportunity to examine a well-known clinical phenomenon that has received remarkably little research attention. Marital therapists are familiar with spouses who respond noncontingently to the partner and to questions about the partner and marriage; their responses ignore relevant information and instead simply reflect their marital satisfaction or sentiment toward the partner. In fact, Weiss (1980) coined the term *sentiment override* to refer to this phenomenon, and it has been widely used to explain spouse judgments and behaviors. From this perspective, a spouse's preinteraction expectations merely reflect his or her marital satisfaction. By drawing on research on social cognition and attitudes, we investigated the sentiment override hypothesis directly and tested whether the relation between marital satisfaction and preinteraction expectations is moderated by the ease with which a spouse can call to mind his or her feelings about the partner and marriage. This approach to the study of marital satisfaction has the potential to significantly advance understanding of the construct and its correlates, an important goal in view of Nye's (1988) observation that "early on . . . every individual characteristic [was correlated] . . . with marital success, producing an R of about .50 . . . we have not progressed much beyond that point in 50 years" (p. 315).

Preinteraction Appraisals

The need to investigate spouse expectations prior to an interaction is underscored by recent theoretical statements and by empirical findings. For example, the contextual model of mar-

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ital interaction (Bradbury & Fincham, 1989, 1991) stresses the role of each spouse's psychological context for understanding his or her judgments and interactional behavior. Both transient thoughts and feelings (proximal context) as well as relatively stable psychological features of the spouse (distal context) influence spouse processing of events, and thereby judgments and behaviors, exhibited in marital interactions. Appraisals, or thoughts and feelings before an interaction, can also influence spouse behavior through their impact on contextual variables. Although the spouse's proximal context is updated frequently during the course of an interaction, initial expectations may be self-perpetuating. For example, preinteraction expectations could result in behaviors that lead the partner to react in a manner congruent with the spouse's initial expectations (Snyder & Swann, 1978). Alternatively, expectations may influence the spouse's processing of partner behavior and allow neutral or even disconfirming behavior to be seen as congruent with expectations (Fazio, Effrein, & Falander, 1981). Thus, preinteraction expectations may be self-reinforcing and difficult to reverse, and can potentially shape the course of an interaction. Given their theoretical importance, the relative lack of data on preinteraction expectations is surprising.

The limited data relevant to preinteraction expectations also suggest that they may be important. Levenson and Gottman (1983, 1985) found that physiological measures taken immediately prior to a problem-solving discussion were related to husbands' current satisfaction and strongly predicted change in husband and wife satisfaction over a 3-year period. They interpreted their finding in terms of spouse expectations. Specifically, they suggested that "over time, a couple develops a set of expectations about the prospect of interacting that is grounded in their past interactive experience" (p. 92) and that these expectations "account for the arousal differences we have observed during baseline periods . . . . These expectations are then carried over into the interactions themselves" (p. 92).[1] Although intriguing, this account is necessarily post hoc as spouse expectations were not investigated directly. However, a subsequent study provides some data in support of this account. Vanzetti, Notarius, and NeeSmith (1992) asked spouses immediately prior to high- and low-conflict discussions to complete a 12-item, bipolar adjective checklist predicting how their partner would act during the discussion (e.g., "calm," "listening to spouse," and "dominant"). Consistent with Levenson and Gottman's (1985) reasoning, distressed spouses expected their partner to exhibit more negative and fewer positive behaviors than did nondistressed spouses.

In the present study, we directly examined preinteraction expectations and distinguished a spouse's expectations of partner behavior from his or her current affect. Levenson and Gottman (1985, p. 92) seemed to view the heightened physiological arousal they studied as an index of affect (e.g., "fear of the impending interaction") and, as noted above, they argued that it is the expectations developed over time that give rise to this affect. Their analysis therefore suggests that the association they found between marital satisfaction and preinteraction affect is not a direct one, but one that is mediated by preinteraction expectations. Thus, the distinction drawn between expected partner behavior and current affect allows for the direct exploration of the relations among marital satisfaction, preinteraction expectations, and current affect. Specifically, we examined three hypotheses regarding preinteraction appraisals.

Hypothesis 1: Marital satisfaction will be related to self-reported affect immediately prior to interaction.

Hypothesis 2: Marital satisfaction will be related to expectations of partner behavior during an upcoming interaction.

Hypothesis 3: Expectations of partner behavior will mediate the relation between marital satisfaction and preinteraction affect (i.e., marital satisfaction → expected behavior → affect).

The Accessibility of Marital Satisfaction

The second goal of this study was to investigate a new approach to conceptualizing and studying the role of marital satisfaction in marriage that integrates clinical observation and insights from research on social cognition. Clinical observation has given rise to the construct of sentiment override, whereby spouses respond to questions about the partner and marriage

[1] We differ from Levenson and Gottman (1985) in believing that the spouse is the appropriate unit of analysis; spouses rather than couples develop expectations.

simply in terms of their dominant sentiment about the marriage rather than in terms of the specific question asked. If correct, this sentiment override hypothesis has important implications for research. In its strongest form, it poses a threat to the validity of self-report studies on marriage. Specifically, if dimensions of marriage assessed through self-report simply reflect level of satisfaction, they will therefore necessarily be correlated if the range of marital satisfaction sampled is not restricted. Despite its importance for interpreting research findings, data have not been collected specifically to investigate the construct of sentiment override.

Although intriguing, basic research on cognition suggests that sentiment override may be more complex than initially thought. From the perspective of cognitive psychology, sentiment override can be conceptualized as "top down" or theory-driven processing. Viewed in this way, marital satisfaction is a concept that can influence the processing of spouse- and marriage-relevant information. One of the most robust findings in the social cognition literature is that concepts made available through situational manipulations (e.g., priming) or naturally occurring states (e.g., depression) can influence the encoding of new information (cf. Wyer & Srull, 1989). Such encoding, in turn, tends to influence retrieval of material from memory. Concepts easily accessed from memory can therefore have a pervasive impact on spouses' information processing and judgments. However, when judgments are made, not all concepts are equally accessible or brought to mind with equal ease. In fact, the importance of individual differences in concept accessibility is well documented (Markus & Smith, 1981). Thus, even if marital satisfaction is chronically accessible to all spouses, individual differences in accessibility may still exist.

To examine this possibility, the present study drew on an accessibility-based approach to the study of attitudes, which has proved to be extremely fruitful. Fazio (1990a) defined an attitude as "an association in memory between a given object and one's evaluation of that object" (p. 81) and argued that the strength of the association determines the probability with which the attitude will be accessed from memory and activated upon encountering the attitude object. Applied to the current context, this hypothesis indicates that the strength of the association in memory between the representation of the partner and the spouse's sentiment (satisfaction) about the partner will determine whether the sentiment is called to mind when questions are asked about the partner and marriage. The relevance of this approach is emphasized by the view that marital satisfaction is best conceptualized as a spouse's overall evaluations about the partner and marriage (e.g., Fincham & Bradbury, 1987).

Fazio (in press) suggested that the strength of the association between an object and its evaluation can be measured by the speed with which a person makes an evaluative judgment when he or she encounters the attitude object. His impressive research program documents the utility of this conceptualization for understanding a variety of important events, including information processing, decision making, and behavior toward the attitude object (cf. Fazio, in press). For example, Fazio and Williams (1986) showed that the speed with which people made evaluative judgments about Ronald Reagan moderated the relation between their attitudes toward Reagan and their judgments about the 1984 presidential and vice-presidential debates; for fast responders, the correlation between their attitude toward Reagan and their judgment of the impressiveness of the Republicans' performances was significantly higher (.738) than for slow responders (.404). Similar results were obtained for the accessibility of attitudes toward Walter Mondale. Most important, this moderating effect was independent of the extremity of the person's attitude, as attitude extremity is associated with accessibility (Fazio, in press).

Fazio's (in press) approach may be particularly fruitful for understanding sentiment override and thereby advancing the study of marital satisfaction and its correlates. That is, sentiment override can be viewed as the operation of an accessible attitude. Because couples seeking therapy tend to have strong negative evaluations of the partner, it is perhaps not surprising that clinicians have noted the manner in which their sentiment colors their judgments and actions. As stated earlier, extreme attitudes tend to be more accessible. Given this fact, spouses with very positive views of their partner should view him or her through rose-colored glasses, a phenomenon that has been noted in research (e.g., Fincham, Beach, & Baucom, 1987). It appears that the notion of sentiment override as currently understood most likely refers to phenomena associated with attitude extremity. The present

study examined a more complex view of sentiment override by investigating the accessibility of sentiment independent of the extremity of the sentiment or the level of marital satisfaction. Thus, accessibility was examined within distressed, moderately happy, and very happy spouses.

The preceding analysis suggests an important refinement to the association hypothesized earlier between marital satisfaction and expectations (Hypothesis 2). Specifically, the accessibility (associative strength) of a spouse's sentiment (evaluation) toward the partner should moderate the relation between marital satisfaction and expectations of partner behavior during an upcoming discussion. This formulation gives rise to the fourth hypothesis investigated in this study.

Hypothesis 4: The correlation between marital satisfaction and expected partner behavior will be higher for spouses whose sentiment toward the spouse is more accessible than for spouses whose sentiment toward the partner is less accessible.

To summarize, the present study investigated the relation between marital satisfaction and appraisals that occur immediately prior to marital interaction. In doing so, it also explored an accessibility-based approach to the study of marital satisfaction that has the potential to advance understanding of the role of satisfaction in marriage.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited through advertisements in local newspapers. The 92 couples who participated in the study had been married an average of 5.1 years and reported an average income of $30,000–$34,999. Over 95% of the couples were Caucasian. Husbands averaged 31.8 years of age (SD = 8.2), had 15.8 years of formal education (SD = 3.2), and obtained a mean score of 106.3 (SD = 23.8) on the Marital Adjustment Test (MAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959). Wives averaged 30.9 years of age (SD = 7.9), had 14.9 years of formal education (SD = 2.2), and obtained a mean score of 109.1 (SD = 28.2) on the MAT. Approximately one third of the sample was maritally distressed according to their scores on the MAT (< 100). Each couple was paid $30 for their participation.

Procedure

Couples participating in the project did so at our research facilities located in a psychological service delivery center on campus. Upon arrival, the couple spent a few minutes with a research assistant, who talked with them to establish rapport. The tasks to be completed in the session were then described in general terms before the research assistant reminded the spouses that they could terminate their participation in the study at any time. After reading and signing consent forms, each spouse was seated before a personal computer.

The first computer task was described as one that involved word recognition and meaning. This task was the same as the one used by Fazio (e.g., Fazio, Sanbonmatsu, Powell, & Kardes, 1986) to determine the strength of attitudes. Spouses were told that a word would appear on the computer screen and that their job was to press a key labeled *positive* or a key labeled *negative* to indicate their judgment of the word. They were told to respond as accurately and as quickly as possible. A list of 48 attitude objects (including the names of animals, foods, groups, roles, activities, and various persons) was used. Embedded in the list were four target stimuli that were used to create an index of the strength of the spouse's attitude toward his or her partner (the partner's name, "your spouse," "your wife" or "your husband," and "your partner"). Each trial consisted of the appearance of a fixation stimulus ("***")—to ensure that spouses focused their attention on the appropriate position on the screen—that was then replaced by the target word. The word remained on the screen until the spouse responded. A 3-s interval separated each trial. Each spouse's judgment was recorded together with the latency of the response (from the appearance of the word to the button press) to the nearest millisecond. To familiarize spouses with the procedure, a block of 10 practice trials was given involving words that were not included in the list of 48 attitude objects.

The second task comprised a computer-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire included 7 items that inquired about the spouse's marital satisfaction (e.g., "The relationship I have with my wife is satisfying") and 15 filler items used to measure the respondent's baseline speed of responding (e.g., "The capital of Illinois is Springfield"). The item presentation consisted of three phases to ensure that response latency did not reflect individual differences in the speed of reading the stimulus statement. First, the statement was presented with the last word missing (e.g., "The relationship I have with my wife is"). After 4 s the incomplete statement disappeared. Second, a fixation stimulus ("***") appeared for 0.5 s and then disappeared. Third, the final word in the statement appeared (e.g., satisfying). The respondent then pressed one of five buttons labeled "–" (strongly

disagree), "-" (disagree), "O" (neutral), "+" (agree), and "++" (strongly agree), which were given the numeric values of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, respectively. Fazio (1990b) reported that such 5-point scales can be fruitfully used when one wants to collect simultaneously both scalar responses and response latencies. The spouses' scalar response and their latency of responding, measured from the appearance of the final word to a button press, were recorded. Before completing this task, spouses responded to five practice trials.

Following completion of the computer tasks, spouses filled out several questionnaires, including the MAT and the Inventory of Marital Problems. The latter was used to select a topic for a "problem-solving discussion." Following the procedure used in previous research to select a difficulty for discussion (e.g., Fincham & Bradbury, 1992), the research assistant identified the topic with the highest difficulty rating that both spouses had indicated as a difficulty in their marriage, and then instructed the couple that they would be talking about the topic. Each spouse was then given a set of questions to answer. The questions asked spouses to indicate the extent to which they expected their partner to engage in specific behaviors and to indicate how they were currently feeling. As part of their participation in this project, spouses also completed several personality measures and made ratings of partner responsibility for negative marital events.

Measures

Marital Satisfaction

The MAT (Locke & Wallace, 1959) is a widely used measure of marital satisfaction consisting of 15 items. It has adequate reliability (split-half r = .90), discriminates between nondistressed spouses and spouses who have documented problems (Locke & Wallace, 1959), and correlates with clinicians' judgments of marital discord (Crowther, 1985).

A second measure of marital satisfaction was formed with the scalar responses to the seven satisfaction items on the computer-administered questionnaire. This measure was reliable (coefficient α = .96 and .98 for husbands and wives, respectively) and correlated with MAT scores (husbands = .73, wives = .82).

Inventory of Marital Problems

The topic for the 10-min discussion was derived from spouses' ratings of 19 issues (e.g., in-laws, sex, trust, and finances) that are common problems in marriage (Geiss & O'Leary, 1981). Spouses rated on 11-point scales the extent to which each item was a source of difficulty or disagreement in their marriage (1 = *not a problem*, 11 = *major problem*).

Preinteraction Appraisals

Questions were asked about possible partner behaviors and about possible emotions the respondent was currently experiencing.

Expected partner behaviors. Respondents were asked to rate possible partner behaviors that were positive (e.g., "My spouse will be supportive of me and my views of the problem") and that were negative (e.g., "My spouse will not listen fully to what I am saying"). Responses were given on 7-point scales ranging from *very unlikely to happen in the discussion* (1) through *somewhat likely* (4) to *very likely to happen in the discussion* (7). Reliability of responses was high for both positive behaviors (coefficient α = .80 and .81 for husbands and wives, respectively) and negative behaviors (coefficient α = .81 and .85 for husbands and wives, respectively). However, the correlation between expected positive behaviors and expected negative behaviors was high (husbands = −.84, wives = −.79), and hence a single index of expected partner behavior was formed with both positive and negative behavior items. This index was scored so that higher scores indicated more positive behaviors.

Preinteraction affect. Spouses were asked about positive (e.g., happy) and negative (e.g., angry) affects. They indicated the extent to which they were currently experiencing each affect by marking a line, for example:

not happy ———————— happy.

The distance from the left end of the line was used as a measure of the extent to which each affect was experienced. Again, reliable responses were obtained for measures of positive (coefficient α = .91 and .89 for husbands and wives, respectively) and negative (coefficient α = .88 and .91 for husbands and wives, respectively) affect. The correlation between positive and negative affect was high (husbands = −.61, wives = −.60), but as the major portion of the variance in these emotion indexes was not shared, they were analyzed separately.

Accessibility of Marital Satisfaction

Two indexes of the accessibility of marital satisfaction were formed, one from each of the two computer tasks. In each case, response latency for items related to the spouse or marriage was used to measure accessibility, or the strength of the association between the attitude object (spouse or marriage) and an evaluative judgment. Faster response times indicated

higher accessibility, and slower response times reflected lower accessibility. Because response latency data are typically skewed, response latencies were transformed by a logarithmic function. The procedures described below conform to established principles in response latency research and follow closely the recommendations made in a recent guide to the use of the response latency procedures (Fazio, 1990b).

First Computer Task

An index was formed based on the first computer task in which spouses rated words as positive or negative. Accessibility of marital satisfaction was based on the four target items concerning the partner. Only data that met the following two criteria were used. First, response latencies were excluded if they were less than 500 ms or longer than 3 s. Fazio (1990b) questioned the validity of responses faster than 500 ms and responses longer than 3 s on this task, as they most likely reflect lapses in attention. Second, negative responses were excluded. This was done because of the well-known difference in response latency for positive and negative responses (positive responses have shorter latencies) and because the overwhelming number of responses were positive. Except for three spouses (1.6%), all pressed the positive key for a majority of their responses to the four target items despite the fact that approximately one third of the sample scored in distressed range of the MAT (scores < 100). Only respondents who provided three or more data points following the application of these criteria (husbands = 84, wives = 71) were used.

A major issue that arises with the use of response latencies in the present context is whether any response latency index reflects associative strength or whether accessibility reflects individual differences in general speed of responding. To address this concern, the target latencies were adjusted for individual differences in speed of responding. A baseline speed of responding was formed for each respondent by computing the average response latency for all positive responses other than responses to the target items. A ratio index was then computed by dividing the average latency for the target stimuli by the sum of the average latency for the target stimuli and the baseline index of response speed.

Second Computer Task

A second index was formed based on spouses' responses to the computer-administered questionnaire in which respondents used a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree,* 5 = *strongly agree*) to indicate their ratings of statements. As with the responses to the first computer exercise, raw latencies were first screened for responses faster than 500 ms and slower than 3 s, and, again, latencies were transformed with a logarithmic function. A ratio index was computed in a similar fashion to the index computed for the first computer exercise. The baseline speed of responding used in the index was the average log-transformed response time to the 15 filler items that did not pertain to the partner or to the marriage.

Results

Results pertaining to each of the major goals of the study are presented in turn. In each case, analyses of the data are presented separately for husbands and for wives, as spouse responses are not independent.

Marital Satisfaction, Expected Partner Behavior, and Current Affect

The first set of hypotheses pertain to the relations among marital satisfaction, expected partner behavior, and current affect. As expected from Hypothesis 1, marital satisfaction was related to the affect spouses experienced immediately prior to the problem-solving discussion. For husbands, marital satisfaction correlated significantly with both positive, $r(92) = .38$, $p < .05$, and negative, $r(92) = -.46$, $p < .05$, affect. For wives, the correlations for positive, $r(92) = .39$, $p < .05$, and negative, $r(92) = -.49$, $p < .05$, affect were similar in magnitude.

The second hypothesis, concerning the relation between marital satisfaction and expected partner behavior, was also confirmed. Marital satisfaction correlated significantly with expectations of partner behavior for both husbands, $r(92) = .58$, $p < .001$, and wives, $r(92) = .55$, $p < .001$.

Hypothesis 3 posited that expected partner behavior would mediate the relation between marital satisfaction and current affect. Baron and Kenny (1986) outlined three tests for a mediating variable. Applied to the current context, the first test is that there should be a relation between marital satisfaction and affect. In examining Hypothesis 1, significant correlations were found for husbands and wives and for positive and for negative affect. The second test is that there should be a relation between expected partner behavior and affect. This test was also satisfied in that significant correlations ($p < .001$) were obtained for both positive

(husbands = .39, wives = .48) and negative (husbands = −.45, wives = −.60) affect.

The third test requires that the relation between marital satisfaction and current affect becomes nonsignificant or is significantly reduced when expected partner behavior is partialed out of the relation. To examine whether this happened, we used marital satisfaction and expected partner behavior as predictor variables in regression equations in which positive and negative affect served as the dependent variables. The results of these regression equations appear in Table 1.

The results in Table 1 show that for positive affect and for wives' negative affect, the previously significant relation with marital satisfaction (cf. Hypothesis 1) becomes nonsignificant when expected partner behavior is included in the regression equation. This result provides "strong evidence for a single, dominant mediator" (Baron & Kenny, 1986, p. 1176), allowing us to be more confident that expected partner behavior mediates the relation between satisfaction and preinteraction affect. Although the evidence is weaker, expecter partner behavior also turned out to be a mediating variable in the relation between satisfaction and husbands' negative affect; the relation between satisfaction and husbands' negative affect was significantly reduced when expected partner behavior was controlled, $t(92) = -1.79$, $p < .05$. The fact that marital satisfaction remained a significant predictor of husbands' negative affect when controlling for expected partner behavior suggests the operation of other mediating variables. Finally, it is worth noting that in all four cases expected partner behavior accounted for unique variance in preinteraction affect when controlling for marital satisfaction.

Accessibility of Marital Satisfaction

Two sets of analyses pertaining to accessibility examined the hypothesis that the accessibility of marital satisfaction moderates the relation between satisfaction and expected partner behavior. Because response latency or attitude accessibility is typically related to attitude extremity (Fazio, in press), it is important to examine the accessibility of marital satisfaction independent of level of marital satisfaction. To do this, fast and slow response groups were formed by means of a median split within levels of marital satisfaction. Following Fazio and Williams (1986), we then examined whether accessibility moderated the relation between satisfaction and expected partner behavior by comparing the correlations between these two variables in fast and slow response groups. The analyses pertaining to each index of accessibility are reported in turn.

For the initial computer task in which respondents rated the positive versus negative nature of attitude objects, MAT scores were used to indicate level of marital satisfaction. High-accessible (fast) and low-accessible (slow) groups were formed by means of a median split within each tertile of marital satisfaction: distressed (MAT scores < 100), moderately happy (husbands' MAT scores = 100–120, wives' MAT scores = 100–127), and very happy (husbands' MAT scores > 120, wives' MAT scores > 127). The fast and slow groups formed

Table 1
Regression Analyses to Predict Positive and Negative Preinteraction Affect From Marital Satisfaction and Expected Partner Behavior

Predictor	Positive affect		Negative affect	
	R	*β*	*R*	*β*
		Husbands		
Overall	.43**		.54**	
Satisfaction		0.72		−0.63*
Expected behavior		1.26*		−1.47**
		Wives		
Overall	.50**		.52**	
Satisfaction		0.52		−0.45
Expected behavior		2.12**		−1.60**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

in this manner did not differ in marital satisfaction: for husbands, $t(82) = -.18$, and for wives, $t(69) = .94$.

We hypothesized that for the high-accessibility group, marital satisfaction would be more strongly related to preinteraction expectations when compared with the low-accessibility group. The results in Table 2 show that the correlations differed in the case of husbands but not in that of wives.

Similar analyses were performed with data from the second computer task in which spouses responded to seven satisfaction items embedded in a larger questionnaire. These seven items were summed to form an index of marital satisfaction. Unlike the MAT, which yields scores that are widely accepted as cutoff points for distressed, moderately happy, and happy groups, there are no norms for the satisfaction items used in the second computer task. In this task, a more fine-grained division was used to form marital satisfaction groups by dividing the sample into quintiles. This division also had the advantage of allowing us to examine whether the findings for accessibility are idiosyncratic to the use of only three levels of satisfaction. To form fast and slow response groups, the marital satisfaction scores were divided into quintiles, and within each a median split of response latencies was used to form fast and slow response groups. Group membership was thus independent of level of satisfaction: for husbands, $t(84) = .06$, and for wives, $t(71) = 1.07$. As shown in Table 2, the accessibility of marital satisfaction again moderated the correlation between satisfaction and expected partner behavior for husbands but not for wives.

Why an effect was found for husbands but not for wives was both puzzling and unexpected. Accordingly, we explored its generalizability by examining responsibility ratings that were obtained as part of a larger study. Because attributed responsibility or contribution to negative marital events has been related to marital satisfaction (Fincham & Bradbury, 1989), we examined whether accessibility moderates the correlation between satisfaction and attributed responsibility. Partner contribution to negative events was indicated on a scale ranging from 1 (*no contribution*) to 9 (*very large contribution*). Accessibility moderated the relation between MAT scores and responsibility scores for husbands (fast group = $-.52$, slow group = $-.09$, $z = 2.10$, $p < .05$) and for wives (fast group = $-.51$, slow group = $.24$, $z = -3.55$, $p < .01$)

Discussion

The goals of the present study were twofold: to examine the appraisals that occur immediately prior to an interaction and to explore a new approach to the study of marital satisfaction. We discuss the hypotheses pertaining to each goal and then outline the broader implications of the study.

Preinteraction Appraisals

All three hypotheses pertaining to the first goal of the study were supported. The first hypothesis concerned the relation between marital satisfaction and preinteraction affect. This hypothesis was derived directly from Levenson and Gottman's (1983, 1985) studies, which demonstrated a relation between marital satisfaction and physiological indexes of affect before a problem-solving discussion. Using a

Table 2
Correlations Between Expected Partner Behavior and Marital Satisfaction for High-Accessible and Low-Accessible Groups

Marital satisfaction	Group: Fast (high accessible)	Group: Slow (low accessible)	*Z*
Positive vs. negative choice			
Husbands	.70	.37	2.12*
Wives	.51	.63	−0.79
5-point response scale			
Husbands	.59	.23	2.02*
Wives	.58	.33	1.47

* $p < .05$.

self-report measure of affect, we similarly documented a relation between marital satisfaction and affect experienced immediately prior to an interaction; significant correlations between positive and negative affect and marital satisfaction were found for both husbands and wives. This finding can be a viewed as a self-report analogue of Levenson and Gottman's (1983) finding relating baseline physiology before the interaction to husband satisfaction. Unlike this prior study, however, we found that affect was related to current satisfaction for both husbands and wives.

In view of the importance accorded expectations of partner behavior in understanding preinteraction appraisals (e.g., Bradbury & Fincham, 1991; Levenson & Gottman, 1985), predictions of partner behavior during the discussion were also examined. Hypothesis 2 posited a relation between marital satisfaction and expected partner behavior. This hypothesis was supported for husbands and wives. Thus, both elements of preinteraction appraisals—affect and expected partner behavior—were related to marital satisfaction. These findings prompt one to inquire about the relations among these three variables, an issue addressed by Hypothesis 3.

The third hypothesis specified a mediational model of the relations among marital satisfaction, expected partner behavior, and preinteraction affect. Specifically, expected partner behavior was hypothesized to mediate the relation between satisfaction and preinteraction affect (i.e., satisfaction → expected partner behavior → affect). Support for this mediational model was obtained for husbands' positive affect, wives' positive affect, and wives' negative affect. Although weaker, the data also supported this model for husbands' negative affect. The support found for this model is consistent with Levenson and Gottman's (1985) argument in which physiological arousal prior to interaction is attributed to expectations of behavior during the interaction. However, it is important to note that while the data support the hypothesized model, they do not rule out numerous alternative models.

The current study is among the first to examine preinteraction appraisals and is the only one to test explicitly the relations among expected partner behavior, current affect, and marital satisfaction. The importance of these appraisals is emphasized by their potential to influence, and perhaps even structure, the interaction that follows them. To date, no data exist on the relation of preinteraction appraisals to the behaviors that partners exhibit toward each other in an ensuing interaction. The need for such data is critical to sustain the theoretical importance accorded preinteraction appraisals.

Accessibility of Marital Satisfaction

Prompted by clinical observation and by statements regarding the limited progress made in research on the correlates of marital satisfaction, a second goal of the study was to investigate a new approach to the study of marital satisfaction. We argued that the correlates of marital satisfaction can only be understood fully when the accessibility of satisfaction is considered.

The fourth hypothesis of the study therefore specified that the correlation between marital satisfaction and expected partner behavior would be higher for spouses whose sentiment toward the partner is more accessible than for spouses whose sentiment toward the partner is less accessible. We tested this hypothesis using response latencies to inquiries about the partner and marriage as measures of accessibility. Consistent results were obtained when accessibility was measured with binary evaluative judgments and with evaluative responses made on a 5-point scale. The results were also consistent across different indexes of marital satisfaction, namely, a standard measure of marital satisfaction and a measure restricted to overall evaluative judgments. Correlations between marital satisfaction and expected partner behavior were higher among husbands whose sentiment or satisfaction was more accessible than for husbands whose sentiment was relatively less accessible. It is important to emphasize that this effect was independent of level of marital satisfaction (i.e., attitude extremity). No significant differences were obtained for wives.

The reason for the different pattern of findings obtained for husbands and wives is not clear. Ancillary analyses ruled out sex-related differences in variability of responses as an explanation. They also suggested that this moderating effect may occur for wives; accessibility moderated the correlation between satisfaction and partner responsibility for negative marital events for both husbands and wives. The reason for this difference in findings across correlates

is a matter of speculation. However, it is noteworthy that the predictions of partner behavior were somewhat more specific and concrete than were the responsibility attribution judgments (e.g., perceived responsibility for "causing arguments between the two of you"). It is therefore possible that the moderating role of accessibility is more reliable to the extent that judgments are more global and abstract. In such circumstances, spouses may, to the extent that it is readily accessible, use marital satisfaction as a source of information for making the judgment. Schwarz and Clore (1988) have offered a similar account in their work documenting respondents' use of their mood as a source of information in making judgments.

Consistent with this reasoning, the different pattern of findings for husbands and wives across the two correlates of marital satisfaction may reflect the fact that women are more attentive to relationship events and more likely, whenever possible, to engage in data-driven ("bottom up") processing than are men. This account could provide an explanation for why women are often viewed as barometers of a relationship. A related explanation for the findings invokes the concept of dominance. It seems plausible that the partner in the dyad who is lower in dominance is more likely to access expectations about the other person's behavior prior to an interaction because the consequences of the other's behavior are potentially greater and because it is the lower ranked person's role to respond to the dominant person's initiatives. Any such effect presumably reflects more comprehensive cognitive processing and could potentially eliminate any moderating role played by the accessibility of marital satisfaction on the correlation between satisfaction and expected partner behavior. However, no such prediction would be made for responsibility judgments. Because women are often thought to be the less dominant marital partner, this might account for the lack of an effect found for wives regarding behavioral expectations but not responsibility attributions.

Finally, the consistent findings for men may explain why some happily married husbands, presumably those whose satisfaction is highly accessible and who therefore engage in top *down processing, are so surprised when the* wife discloses that she is unhappy in the marriage and suggests marital therapy.

Implications and Limitations

The attempted integration of clinical insight and basic research in this study has important implications for both. Perhaps the most obvious implication concerns the understanding of sentiment override. It cannot be assumed that all spouses, even those who are maritally distressed, exhibit sentiment override. Rather, spouses are likely to differ in the degree to which they make judgments on the basis of their sentiment toward their partner, depending on the ease with which they call to mind their sentiment toward the partner and marriage. As regards assessment, therefore, an important clinical task is to assess the degree to which a spouse's response to a question about the partner or marriage reflects specific information relevant to the question rather than an overall summary judgment of the partner or marriage. In a similar vein, intervention that simply brings about behavioral changes in the partner is likely to be ineffective as a therapeutic strategy when the spouse's negative sentiment is highly accessible; the spouse is likely to view and respond to such changes on the basis of his or her negative sentiment.

The implications of this study for understanding marital satisfaction may prove to be extremely important. Specifically, investigating marital satisfaction in terms of its accessibility (the associative strength between the representation of the partner or marriage and an evaluative judgment) may significantly enhance the understanding of this central marital construct, as accessibility may be a pervasive moderating variable that influences the relation between satisfaction and its correlates. For example, the overall correlation between satisfaction and preinteraction expectations is somewhat misleading in that the magnitude of this correlation varied as a function of the accessibility of marital satisfaction: The correlation turned out to be higher for one category of husbands (fast responders) and lower for another (slow responders). In fact, preinteraction expectations turned out to be a statistically significant correlate of marital satisfaction for the former group but not for the latter.

The incorporation of accessibility, or associative strength, into research on satisfaction and its correlates is analogous to the refinement of a diagnostic category in a psychiatric nosology into several subcategories. It is not that the

original broad category (or set of correlates) is wrong, but rather that it is crude. The more homogenous subcategories allow a more precise picture to emerge that includes differential correlates for subcategories, new correlates, and so forth. The approach illustrated in this study also has the potential to further understanding of how marital satisfaction influences information processing, judgments, decision making, and behavior in marriage. Thus, for example, just as the accessibility of constructs that characterize the self influences information processing (e.g., Markus & Smith, 1981), constructs relevant to relationships are also likely to influence information processing. This influence most likely reflects the fact that much cognitive processing in close relationships is automatic and occurs outside of conscious awareness (Fincham, Bradbury, & Scott, 1990). Spouses therefore need not engage in controlled or conscious, effortful processing for accessibility effects to operate. An important task in future research is not only to explore the potential impact of accessibility effects but to determine the conditions under which accessibility effects operate in marriage.

Just as research on accessibility appears to have implications for understanding marriage, the investigation of accessibility in this domain may extend the boundary conditions under which its effects are thought to operate as it has not thus far been investigated in the study of close relationships. For example, Fazio (1990b) argued that with sufficient motivation and opportunity, people will consider the relevant raw data in making judgments rather than relying on preexisting attitudes. Thus, we might expect spouses to engage more readily in the kind of automatic or nondeliberative processing responsible for accessibility effects to the extent that they are forced to make quick, on-line judgments. But the conditions under which they made judgments in the present study were quite the opposite. Although speculative, it is possible that accessibility effects may be more pervasive than originally thought and that they may be governed by parameters other than motivation and opportunity.

Finally, it is important to note the preliminary nature of the present study. It is the first of its kind in the marital area and therefore requires replication. In addition, the reactive nature of the preinteraction assessment may have influenced the findings. It can be argued that spouses do not spontaneously generate expectations of partner behavior immediately prior to an interaction. A less reactive preinteraction measure, such as an open-ended listing of thoughts and feelings, needs to be used in future research to rule out the possibility that the present findings are artifactual. A final cautionary note is that the present findings should not be generalized to spouses seeking marital therapy in the absence of research on such spouses. It is quite possible that a ceiling effect may occur in such a sample that renders accessibility less important.

Notwithstanding the above observations, the present study yields valuable information on a relatively neglected but important topic in the marital literature, namely, preinteraction appraisals. It also demonstrates a new approach to investigating the role of satisfaction in marriage and of advancing knowledge of the correlates of marital satisfaction. This approach could lead to advances in understanding marriage, but whether this potential is realized depends on the outcome of future research.

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