

Marital Satisfaction: Connections of Self-Disclosure, Sexual Self-Efficacy and Spirituality among Nigerian Women

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Abstract: This study examined the influence of self-disclosure, sexual self-efficacy and spirituality on the marital satisfaction of some selected Nigerian women. The study is an ex post facto research and it made use of 2000 Nigerian married women for the study. The participants were randomly selected from diverse socio-economic and religious background. They were aged between 23 and 58 years. The study used multiple regression statistics on SPSS to analyze the data. The results indicated that there was significant relationship between each of the predicting variables and marital satisfaction. Also, there was a combinatorial effect between spirituality, self-disclosure, self-efficacy and marital satisfaction.

Key words: Marital satisfaction, self-disclosure, sexual self-efficacy, spirituality, Nigerian women

INTRODUCTION

Marital bliss is an experience that is subjective and highly individualistic. Yet, every married individual yearns for it. This is largely because it is the major index of a successful marriage. Several researches have attempted to explore factors that indicate of marital satisfaction. Fowers *et al.* (1996) linked marital satisfaction with communication. Plechaty *et al.* (1996) adduced that spouses' personality and living conditions as a couple in terms of their level of intimacy and communication could be adduced as the most frequent sources of satisfaction or dissatisfaction in the relationship. Age and the number of children a couple had also significantly correlated with marital satisfaction.

Other influences on happiness and satisfaction in marriages include autonomy and relatedness as shown by Rankin-esquer *et al.* (1997). Autonomy refers to spouses' "perceptions of the extent to which partners encouraged a sense of independence and individuality for each other (Rankin-Esquer *et al.*, 1997) while relatedness, in this study, referred to a spouse' perceptions of the amount of closeness that their partners provided.

Religious homogeneity, or couple similarity in religious affiliation, has been proposed to affect marital satisfaction through a shared religious belief system. These beliefs are proposed to decrease the likelihood that there will be spousal conflict over such issues as child raising and leisure activities (Heaton and Pratt, 1990). Fiese and Tomcho (2001) explained that religiousness may affect the couples' relationship because they engage in shared religious activities, such as church attendance, that foster relational well-being.

Mahoney *et al.* (1999) proposed that religion can have both proximal and distal effects on marital satisfaction. Proximal variables are construed to include how the couple organizes the activities that express their religiosity, as in joint religious activities. In addition to formal religious experiences such as attending church, proximal contributions include religious rituals and celebrating religious holidays. They found that homogeneity and religiousness were not consistently related to marital satisfaction. The authors concluded that proximal measures of religion that include the practice of regular joint activities provide a more specific and conceptually sound approach to studying the relation between religion and marital satisfaction.

In his own view, Gerlach (2002) stated that spirituality is an essential factor in personal, re-marital and co-parenting well-being. Spirituality is thought to include a system of beliefs that encompasses love, compassion and respect for life. Individuals may experience both spirituality and religion very privately within themselves (internally) and/or through social interaction with persons and organizations in an external way. Spirituality is about one's existence, relationships with oneself, others and the universe. It is something an individual experience and requires abstract thinking and will. Spiritual development provides a person with insight and understanding of him/herself and others.

Self-disclosure is the "act of revealing personal information to others" (Archer, 1980). Burger (1981) defined it as "the act of revealing information about oneself which is not readily available to an outside observer". In the same way, Fry (2004) citing Jourard (1959) has conceptualized self-disclosure as the process

of making the self known to others. Self-disclosure may be the act of revealing oneself to other people, but McAllister and Bregman (1986) believed, "the greater the set size of high intimacy disclosures, the greater should be the perceived liking and trust of the discloser for the receiver". Therefore, it can be also thought that self-disclosure has an impact on liking. Although usually discussed in light of the development of close relationships (Laurenceau *et al.*, 1998), self-disclosure has also been investigated as an outcome of alcohol intake (Steele and Southwick, 1985), gender differences (Dindia and Allen, 1992) and personality characteristics (self-consciousness and self monitoring, Shaffer and Tomarelli, 1989).

Burger's findings revealed that the self-perception of the participants had a large impact on the rating of the participants' attraction to the opposing participant. The initial feelings toward the opposing participant were indefinite because it was a complete stranger; however, by the second session, feedback was quite important in the formation of the final attitude that the participants had of the opposing participant. Burger explained that the initial disclosure level variable on the measures of liking and self-disclosures were weak. In effect, he stated that both sessions were affected by an individual difference variable. To take care of this in future studies, Burger proposed that general liking and general self-disclosure measures should be implemented. Lastly, Burger concluded that a person might disclose to a stranger because he/she were attracted to him/her.

Additionally, McAllister and Bregman (1986) tested high intimacy disclosures to see if they positively correlated with the perceived liking of the discloser. The researchers explained that the more extreme reaction to a set of like-valued stimuli with the addition of stimuli of the same value had been labeled the set size effect. Furthermore, set size effects might be expected to occur when combined with self-disclosure. McAllister and Bregman (1986) explained that the larger set of high intimacy disclosures, then the greater perception of the conversation's intimacy should be. This would also have an impact on the perceptions of the behavior. After an analysis of their findings, McAllister and Bregman (1986) concluded that as the number of disclosures increased, so did the perception of trust, liking and intimacy. As the researchers predicted, there was a set size effect for high intimacy disclosure. Similarly, Hansen and Schuldt (1984) observed the relationship between self-disclosure and satisfaction within a marriage. Through means of self-report and behavioral measures, Hansen and Schuldt evaluated the self-disclosure levels of husbands and wives to see how it related to the satisfaction of the

marriage. They closely examined the relationship of input and output self-disclosures and marital satisfaction and also examined the relationship of discrepancies in spouses' self-disclosure and marital satisfaction.

Hansen and Schuldt (1984) concluded that the input and output of the husbands' self-disclosure predicted their marital satisfaction when measured by the JSDQ. Hansen and Schuldt also found that duration of the self-disclosure output was not a predictor of the marital satisfaction of the husbands. Furthermore, Vogel and Wester conducted research to determine the degree to which the avoidance factor of self-disclosure predicted an individual's likelihood of seeking psychological help. In their study, the researchers examined the role of self-disclosure in predicting one's attitudes toward seeking psychological services using a validated measure of self-disclosure, namely the Distress Disclosure Index by Kahn and Hessling (2001). In so doing, the researchers measured a person's anticipated feelings of risk and anticipated perceptions of utility associated with self-disclosing to a counselor. Vogel and Wester hypothesized that the lower the tendency for someone to self-disclose distressing information, the more negative his/her attitudes would have been about counseling and the less likely he/she would have sought counseling. Furthermore, the researchers hypothesized that increased feelings of risk associated with self-disclosing would lead to less positive views of therapy and decreased chances of seeking counseling.

After a close analysis of their results, Vogel and Wester explained that the results provided strong evidence for the importance that one's comfort with self-disclosing distressing information and one's anticipated risk of self-disclosing to a counselor were both significant factors of participant's attitudes toward help seeking. Also claiming that the results supported the role of avoidance factors in inhibiting help seeking as participants' decreased tendencies to self-disclose distressing information to others. Vogel and Wester further concluded that the data showed an increased feeling of risk associated with self-disclosing to a counselor. The researchers also placed emphasis on their results of emotional self-disclosure.

Self-disclosure has been shown by researchers to be the highest predictor of successful marriages Weiss (2004). Wives tend to express more of their worries and concerns than do their husbands. However, husbands and wives equally self-disclose about positive life events and emotions. There is often dissatisfaction from a wife when she feels her husband's level of disclosure is low, implying he may not love her or that he does not care (Merves-Okin *et al.*, 1991). When there is a large

difference, such as this, in the amount of self-disclosure, marital satisfaction is low. However, marriage are highly satisfying in which both spouses agree that level are either low or high in self-disclosure (Merves-Okin *et al.*, 1991).

In a meta-analysis of 205 studies investigating gender differences in self-disclosure, Dindia and Allen (1992) found that women generally self-disclose more than men, especially in intimate relationships. Their analysis indicates that women self-disclose more than men to their same-sex friends and other-sex romantic partners, but men and women do not differ in their disclosure to male friends. They also found that these gender differences, although not as great as once thought, have shown no evidence of reduction during the past thirty years.

Research suggests that males in North American culture appear to be governed by a more rigid set of gender rules than females, especially regarding emotional expression (Timmers *et al.*, 1998). As a result, a man is likely to have harder time acting vulnerable and dependent. This restriction on male emotional expressiveness was demonstrated in a study in which male and female participants read a story about a man or a woman who appeared to be extremely upset while flying in a plane (Derlega and Chaikin, 1976). Both men and women considered the emotionally expressive male and the inexpressive female to be maladjusted. These results and similar findings from other studies, suggest that one important reason men disclose less than women is that for them to reveal tender and vulnerable feelings-to let down their emotional guard-is to run the risk of inviting negative evaluations from both men and women (Chelune, 1979).

The main goal of the study was to determine with greater precision the specific relationship between self disclosure, spirituality and sexual self efficacy and marital satisfaction.

- To what extent does the combination of factors such as self disclosures, sexual self efficacy, Spirituality predict marital satisfaction among Nigerian women?
- What is the relative contribution of each of the variables (self disclosure, sexual self efficacy, spirituality) to marital satisfaction among Nigerian Women?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopts an ex-post facto research design. This design is used because the researches have little or no control over the variables of the research. Kerlinger and Lee (2002) described ex-post facto research as a systematic empirical enquiry in which the scientist

does not have direct control of independent variables because their manifestations already occurs or because they are inherently not manipulable. Differences about relations among variables are made without direct intervention from concomitant variation of independent and dependent variables.

Participants: The reference population in the study is all the married women in Nigeria but the largeness of population makes this inaccessible. Hence, the use of population sample, which comprises of two thousand married women in Nigeria.

The research adopted the use of simple random sampling methods in selecting subjects for this study. Their age ranged between 23 and 58 years of age. They are of varied professional, educational, social and religious background.

Instrumentation and administration procedure: The following instruments were used to collect data for this study. These are:

- Sexual self efficacy scale.
- The daily spiritual experience scale.
- Intimate self disclosure scale.
- Marital happiness scale.

Sexual self efficacy scale for females (SSES-F): The Sexual Self-Efficacy Scale for Females (SSES-F) was adapted for the purpose of this study. It is a measure of perceived competence in the behavioral, cognitive and affective dimensions of female sexual response (Bailes *et al.*, 1989). The SSES-F has 37-items, sampling capabilities in four phases of the sexual response: interest, desire, arousal and orgasm. In addition, the measure samples diverse aspects of female individual and interpersonal sexual expression, e.g., communication, body comfort and acceptance and enjoyment of various sexual activities. The instrument includes the following eight subscales (items in parentheses): Interpersonal Orgasm (37, 29, 34, 36, 33, 32, 4, 28, 30), Interpersonal Interest/Desire (6, 5, 7, 22, 1, 9), Sensuality (19, 18, 17, 21, 20, 27), Individual Arousal (25, 31, 24, 26), Affection (15, 8, 16), Communication (14, 12, 13, 23, 35), Body Acceptance (3, 2) and Refusal (10, 11). Female respondents indicate those activities they can do and, for each of these, rate their confidence level.

The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES): The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES) was developed by Underwood and Teresi. DSES is a 16-item instrument This scale addresses reported ordinary experiences of

spirituality such as awe, joy that lifts one out of the mundane and a sense of deep inner peace. The DSES evidenced good reliability across several studies with internal consistency estimates in the 1990s. the overall alpha coefficient score in the Nigerian context was 0.91. Preliminary evidence showed that daily spiritual experience is related to decreased total alcohol intake, improved quality of life and positive psychosocial status (Underwood and Teresi, 2002). Likert scale format in which response categories are many times a day, every day, most days, some days, once in a while and never or almost never was used were used.

Intimate self disclosure scale: Intimate self disclosure scale was adapted form Self discolorure scale by Miller *et al.* (1983). It consisted of 10 different areas in which the subject has disclosed to her spouse. The scaling ranged between 0 and 4. the lowest which is “Discussed not at all” is scored 0 while the highest which is “Discussed fully and completely” is scored 4.

Marital happiness scale: This was developed by Oluwole (2003). The instrument is designed with the sole aim of measuring level of marital happiness among the couples. The validity score was 0.84.

In order to effectively reach all the respondents, the researchers with the assistance of research assistants distributed the questionnaires to the concerned couples for about 3 weeks.

Method of data analysis: The data collated were subjected to multiple regression statistics. The multiple regression analysis will yield analysis of variance, intercorrelation matrix and standard regression weight, which would be useful in interpreting the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 showed the result of the multiple regression coefficients of self disclosure, sexual self efficacy and spirituality on marital satisfaction among the women sampled for the study. While the R^2 is 0.056, the adjusted r^2 is 0.053 which is translated into 5.3% of the total variance. This implies that the large total variance of the proportion is not by chance. The ANOVA proved further

the high relationship existing between the predicting variables and the criterion variable with F-ratio of 23.503, df of 3/1,200 and $p < 0.05$.

Table 2 contains descriptive statistic and intercorrelations among the study variables. As shown in Table 1, marital satisfaction correlated with: Spirituality ($r = 0.227$; $p < 0.05$); self disclosure ($r = 0.324$; $p < 0.05$) and Sexual self efficacy ($r = 0.273$; $p < 0.05$). There were also significant correlations among the three independent variables.

The results of the analysis show the coefficient alphas of the three independent variables namely: spirituality ($\beta = 0.252$, $df = 1.199$, T-ratio = 8.355, T. Sig = 0.05), self disclosure ($\beta = 0.069$, $df = 1.199$, T-ratio = 2.284, T. Sig = 0.05) and sexual self efficacy ($\beta = 0.082$, $df = 1,199$, T-ratio = 9.764, T. Sig = 0.05). The least contributing factor to marital happiness in this study is self-disclosure.

From the results above, there is clear evidence that there is a statistically significant relationship between spirituality, self disclosure, sexual self efficacy and marital satisfaction. For the self disclosure having a link with the marital satisfaction, Fowers and Olson (1996) and Plechaty *et al.* (1996) indicated in their studies that communication is an index of marital satisfaction. And indirectly, self disclosure is an element in communication. This study could therefore, be said to corroborate their studies. Furthermore, Hansen and Schuldt (1984), McAllister and Bregman (1986), Weiss (2004) and Merves-Okin *et al.* (1991) noted in their various studies that there is positive relationship between self-disclosure and satisfaction within a marriage. The study also agrees with that of Dindia and Allen (1992) who found that women generally self-disclose more than men, especially in intimate relationships.

Table 1: Regression analysis on sample data using the contribution of the independent variables on marital satisfaction

| ANOVA | | | | | |
|------------|----------------|------|-------------|---------|-------|
| Source | Sum of squares | Df | Mean square | F-value | Sig. |
| Regression | 16869.433 | 3 | 5623.144 | 23.503 | 0.000 |
| Residual | 286143.546 | 1196 | 239.250 | | |
| Total | 303012.979 | 1199 | | | |

^aPredictors: (Constant), sexual self efficacy, spirituality, self disclosure

^bDependent Variable: marital satisfaction. R = 0.236, R square = 0.056, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.053$, S.E = 15.468

Table 2: Intercorrelations matrices showing the relationships between the predictor variables and marital satisfaction

| Variables | No. | Mean scores | S.D | Marital satisfaction | Spirituality | Self disclosure | Sexual self efficacy |
|----------------------|------|-------------|--------|----------------------|--------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Marital Satisfaction | 2000 | 54.87 | 15.897 | 1.000 | | | |
| Spirituality | 2000 | 40.44 | 25.006 | 0.227 | 1.000 | | |
| Self Disclosure | 2000 | 31.58 | 15.597 | 0.224 | 0.367 | 1.000 | |
| Sexual Self Efficacy | 2000 | 36.36 | 24.796 | 0.273 | 0.215 | 0.321 | 1.000 |

*S at 0.05 level

Table 3: Relative influence of the independent variables on marital satisfaction decision of the respondents

| | Unstandardized coefficients | | Standardized coefficients | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|---------|-------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | t-value | Sig. |
| (Constant) | 50.562 | 1.270 | | 39.807 | 0.000 |
| Spirituality | 0.160 | 0.019 | 0.252 | 8.355 | 0.000 |
| Self disclosure | -7.032E-02 | 0.031 | -0.069 | -2.284 | 0.023 |
| Sexual self efficacy | 1.151E-03 | 0.021 | 0.082 | 9.764 | 0.000 |

*Significant at 0.05

The present study also agrees with those of Gerlach (2003), Reed (1991) and Larson (2003) who discovered that spirituality is a paramount indicator of marital satisfaction, marital well being and marital stability and that spirituality is an essential factor in personal, premarital and co-parenting well-being. The study also corroborates those of Heaton and Pratt (1990), Fiese and Tomcho (2001) and Mahoney *et al.* (1999) who found that religiousness/spirituality may affect the couples' marital satisfaction. The findings further corroborated those of Tremblay *et al.* (2002) who observed that social and positive intrapsychic religious coping strategies predicted men's level of satisfaction. However, negative intrapsychic religious coping strategies were negative predictors of marital satisfaction only for highly religious women. Also, Sullivan's (2001) findings indicated that religiosity was associated with attitudes toward divorce, commitment and help seeking cross-sectionally among couples.

CONCLUSION

The women folk have been exposed to several cultural biases in the Nigeria society. This obviously influences their level of self disclosure, sexual self efficacy and spiritual expressions. As a result of this, many women believe that it is some sort of assault on the societal norm and culture if they are outspoken, assertive and possess sexual thrust. Women are conscious of been termed 'deviant' and 'domineering' at the home front whenever they want to assert themselves over some issues. However, this could spell doom for the marital satisfaction of such individual women and this could in the long run affect their marital stability. It is therefore, very important that marriage counselors, clinical psychologists and teachers to inculcate in women the need to rise up to the challenges of doing their best in paying any reasonable sacrifice to derive maximal satisfaction in their matrimonial homes.

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