

Everyday Life Experiences at Home: An Interaction Diary Approach to Assess Marital Relationships

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This study investigates everyday life experiences of 21 couples, either married or living together, and relates them to marital happiness. Each spouse filled out a diary six times a day during a period of four weeks. The diary was prestructured, consisting of questions about the current subjective well-being, attributions of well-being, current needs, and the behavioral setting. If at the time of record taking both spouses happened to be together at the same place, they also estimated each other's well-being, attributions of mood, and needs. Finally, the quality of the relationship had to be indicated. It was assumed that marital happiness is associated with frequency and positivity of spousal interaction. Moreover, happiness should be related to balance of power between the spouses, and accuracy of perception of one another's emotional and motivational state. Happy couples were more frequently together than moderately unhappy couples. More specifically, they spent more time together at home and during recreation periods. Presence of the partner was especially rewarding to husbands; wives felt about equally well in situations with the husband present or absent. Happy spouses experienced more often balance of power rather than imbalance in favor of the husband or wife, and were better able to perceive accurately the other's motivational state than moderately unhappy spouses.

“We shall understand families when we understand how they manage the commonplace, that is, how they conduct themselves and interact in the familiar everyday surroundings of their own households.” This was how Kantor and Lehr (1975, p. ix) encouraged family researchers to go further in the investigation of family phenomena to reach everyday family affairs. To understand families it is necessary to understand their day-to-day life experiences. Daily family life consists of quite humdrum experiences: We meet the same people we have known for years, and we meet for insignificant social, emotional, or relationship purposes (Duck,

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1986). Whereas a large body of scientific information was accumulated about abnormal families and deviant behavior in the family, respectively, rather little attention was devoted to everyday life experiences (see, however, Birchler, Weiss, & Vincent, 1975). Stimulated by Kantor and Lehr's (1975) assertion, this study explores spouses' day-to-day life experiences and relates them to marital happiness.

Marriage is the most intense relationship in our life. As Argyle (1986), Argyle and Henderson (1985), and Perlman and Fehr (1987) argued, marriage is the greatest source of social support, has immense benefits for physical and mental health as well as for general well-being and life satisfaction. However, the spouse is also the greatest source of conflict. There is ample evidence testifying that most people consider a harmonious relationship the most important value in their lives but as divorce rates show, rather few are indeed fulfilled with their partnership (see Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976; Duck, 1986; Freedman, 1978; Gilmour & Duck, 1986; Perlman & Duck, 1987). This article seeks to contribute to the understanding of everyday life routines in marriages and their rewarding or punishing impact upon the spouses' emotions.

Reviewing the literature on the quality and stability of marriage, Lewis and Spanier (1979; see also Burr, 1973) enlisted among other variables husband-wife interaction as a crucial determinant of marital happiness. The more the shared activities and the less the physical separation the greater the marital quality. Also White (1983) pointed to the relation between marital interaction and marital happiness, emphasizing, however, the existence of a feedback loop from happiness to interaction frequency: The more frequently the spouses interact the happier they are with their relationship, and vice versa, the happier they are the more frequently they stay together. In other words, partners in satisfying marriages increase their investment of time in the relationship and seek to increase the frequency and duration of being together in a number of different settings.

Further, it can be assumed that being together is more rewarding to happy than to unhappy spouses. This assumption derives from learning theory (classical conditioning theory; e.g., Lott & Lott, 1972, 1974) as well as from social exchange theory (e.g., Berscheid, 1983; Homans, 1961; Sprey, 1979; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) stating that a relationship is the more satisfying the more favorable the ratio of rewards to costs. Assuming a circular effect, being together with the spouse should lead to more pleasurable feelings the more satisfying the relationship.

Literature on marital power structures and satisfaction often reports egalitarian families to be the happiest, whereas wife-dominated marriages tend to have the lowest marital satisfaction (e.g., Gray-Little & Burks, 1983; McDonald, 1980; Osmond & Martin, 1978; Szinovacz, 1987). These findings imply that happy couples more frequently experience a balance of power, whereas unhappy couples more frequently feel an imbalance. In everyday life situations power differences should be experienced as feelings of strength or weakness. The more power a spouse has in a specific setting the stronger he or she feels as compared to the partner. It can thus be expected that spouses in harmonious relationships more frequently experience equality, whereas spouses in distressed marriages more often feel imbalanced in favor of either the husband or the wife.

Happy and unhappy couples were also found to differ on accuracy of perception of each other. Spouses' accuracy of sending and receiving information of the partner is a necessary prerequisite to avoiding poor communication and to improving mutual understanding and problem-solving efficiency (e.g., Lewis & Spanier, 1979; Navran, 1967; Noller, 1984; White, 1985). According to Kahn (1970) happy couples are more successful at decoding one another's nonverbal communication. Also Noller (1984, 1987) showed that spouses high in marital adjustment are significantly better able to put themselves in the place of the other and are more sensitive to the other's feelings, whereas spouses low in marital adjustment make more encoding and decoding errors. Generalizing these findings about sending and receiving nonverbal cues, it can be expected that happy spouses are able to describe the other's mood-state, sources of mood, and his or her current needs more accurately than unhappy spouses, who consequently lack understanding of each other and strategies to cope with conflict successfully.

The Interaction Diary Method

In studies on spouses' joint everyday experiences, most frequently, either the wife or the husband was instructed to remember past events, to evaluate them, and to indicate the relative frequency with which they occur, or to imagine a specific situation and to rate the modal type of response. Another research strategy has been the simulation of family life within a rather artificial setting and the micro analysis of interaction sequences. Although the advantages of both questionnaire and simulation techniques are unquestioned for particular scientific problems, they also exhibit several shortcomings.

Critically reviewing methods commonly used to study marital interaction, Glick and Gross (1975) pointed to several limitations: The spouses' interpretation of specific events is most frequently inferred by the experimenter rather than assessed directly, and memory processes and response sets may lead to serious distortions of results. Simulation techniques usually fail to reproduce the most significant characteristics of close relationships: their high degree of privacy and intimacy. Questionnaires, on the other hand, frequently prompt the subjects to make evaluations across a wide range of situations and over a long period of time. Moreover, subjects are usually confronted with categories provided by the researcher that may not correspond to their own preferences of organizing and categorizing situations and emotional responses to these situations (see Brandstaetter, 1981). Another shortcoming was stressed by Bower (1981), Schwarz and Clore (1983), Thompson (1985), and others: The respondents' actual mood affects memory for past events, leading to biased responses in questionnaires assessing emotional experiences.

In an attempt to avoid some of the restrictions inherent to commonly used questionnaires, diary techniques were designed and applied in various settings (see Hormuth, 1986; Singer & Kolligian, 1987). Although, the number of diary studies is rather limited, Duck and Miell (1986), Baxter and Wilmot (1986), and Reis (1986) agree that the diary is indeed a valuable method for monitoring close relationships. These researchers also reported that the diary technique is reasonably reliable and does not disrupt the daily life of the participants.

In 1977, Brandstaetter designed a time-sampling diary to assess everyday life experiences of individuals (for reliability scores of this particular method, see Brandstaetter, 1981). Based on his method, a diary was developed to study everyday experiences of closely related couples. The couple interaction diary (CID) provides direct information about husband's and wife's experiences at home and outside.

Each spouse is asked independently to answer a few questions at randomly selected points of each day for some weeks. First, the subjects' own mood-state is rated, and subjective as well as objective characteristics of the situation are indicated. Second, if the partner is present, at the recording time, his or her mood-state is estimated and the current feeling about the relationship needs to be disclosed. The requirements of the diary are minimal: It permits the respondents to classify their experiences individually, and, because only the current situation needs to be indicated, no past events need to be remembered and evaluated.

Because nobody but the respondent has access to his or her diary, privacy of daily experiences is guaranteed. At the end of participation, respondents content-analyze their diaries individually and provide the researcher with their analyzed data.

Although the CID promises some advantages as compared to conventional techniques, the method implies one restriction: Due to the intensive longitudinal measurement, the number of couples who can be studied is limited.

METHOD

Couples

Data were obtained from a convenience-nonprobability sample of six married couples and 15 couples living together. The couples were recruited through advertisements, placed on blackboards and university newspapers of the University of Salzburg, Austria, inviting them to participate in a longitudinal diary study. When couples called in response to the advertisement, they were informed that no funds were available to recompense participation but that they would get feedback about psychological assessment of their own relationship. From 24 couples who responded to the advertisement, 21 participated in the study. The average age of the husbands was 25.5 years (range 20 to 35 years); wives were 23 years (range 20 to 30 years). Education ranged from elementary school (five husbands and four wives) and middle school (three husbands, five wives) through high school (thirteen husbands, twelve wives). The couples reported living together on average 33.9 months (range 3 months to 84 months). Two couples had a child under 6 months; 19 couples had no children. Twelve husbands and ten wives were employed whereas nine husbands and eleven wives were either students or housewives, thus, had no paying work. The monthly average household budget amounted to AS 14,000 (approximately 1,000 U.S. dollars at that time). The couples came from three Austrian regions, Salzburg, Upper Austria, and Tyrol.

Material

COUPLE INTERACTION DIARY

The Couple Interaction Diary (CID) was presented as a booklet with a set of questions on each page (Figure 1). The questions on a page were to be answered at various points of time randomly selected by the researcher for each day of the study and for each participating couple.

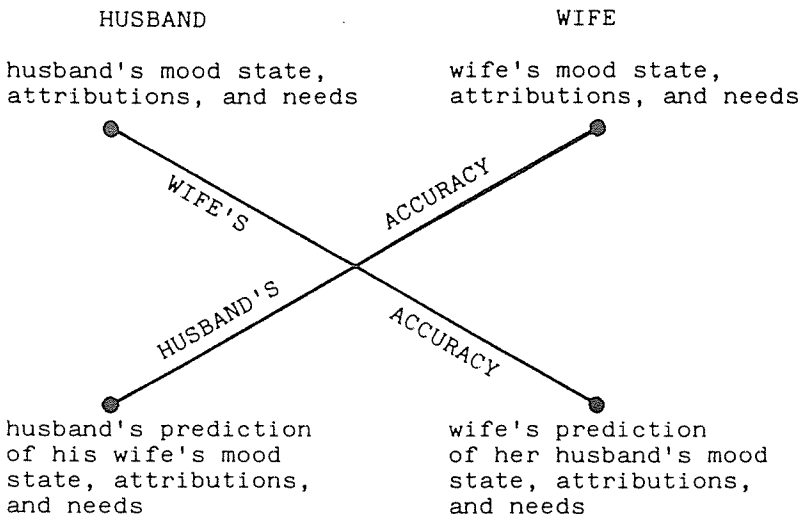


Figure 1: The couple interaction diary.

Though wife and husband filled out the diary at the same time they were requested to do it independently of each other. The time from 00:00 hours to 24:00 hours was divided into six segments of four hours each, and only one point of time was randomly chosen within each four-hour period. Each respondent was given a calendar with the time he or she had to make recordings. On the calendar six points of time appeared for each day, covering also sleeping times. However, the participants were not requested to answer during sleeping times but to mark it on the diary as soon as they wake up.

Questions are given in Figure 1, and, additionally, the participants indicated the date and hour (scheduled and real time) of record taking and specified whether registration occurred punctually or after delay.

After every ten-day recording trial, the participants were solicited to cooperate as "coinvestigators." They were instructed to analyze the contents of their diary themselves to guarantee complete privacy and anonymity. The coding scheme was discussed and designed together with the participants. The following categories were used to describe the situations registered in the diary: (a) hour and date of note taking; (b) mood-state (1 = negative, 2 = indifferent, 3 = positive); (c) time perspective (the participants were instructed to indicate whether their current mood derived from past, present, and/or future events); (d) attribution

of mood (the participants had to indicate the source(s) of their current mood-state. Overall, 39 sources of mood were registered in the diaries that were clustered according to previous studies (see Kirchler, 1984, 1985) into six categories, namely, participant himself or herself; partner, other people, such as friends, colleagues, and so on; one's belongings, such as hobbies, job, and so on; external sources except other people, for example, the car, public transport; and other sources, such as the global situation, food, and so on); (e) motives (the participants had to choose up to three different motives from a list of 19 motives, for example, physical comfort, need for affiliation, and so on. These motives were clustered (after Brandstaetter, 1983) into six categories: physical comfort; social motives (needs for affiliation, sex, love, and nurturance); power motives (e.g., needs for self-esteem, revenge, self-assuredness, independence); achievement motives; needs for activity and new experiences; higher-order motives, such as needs for order, aesthetic and ethical values, religion, and understanding); (f) locality or room (the participants had to identify where they were at the recording time. Overall, 40 different places were indicated and a distinction was made between places at home versus places outside); (g) activity performed at the time (e.g., recreation, working. Overall, 42 different activities were listed in the diaries that were aggregated to three clusters, namely, recreation, work, and other activities, such as body care, and the like); (h) other persons present (the participants had to mention the persons present at the time. In the diaries, 21 different types of persons were indicated that were categorized into five clusters: nobody present, partner, relatives, close friends, other people, such as colleagues, acquaintances, physician, and so on); (i) topic of discussion (if the participant had indicated a decision with somebody, then he or she was asked to register the topic of discussion (e.g., relationship, work. Overall, 40 topics were listed in the diaries). In the following analyses a distinction was made between private topics, such as talking about oneself, the relationship, or one's own job and small-talk topics, such as gossiping, talking about the weather, and other topics, such as purchasing decisions, and other involving but not private issues); (j) perceived power or ego-strength; and (k) freedom in the choice of the performed activity. The last two concepts were used to allow for a more deeper exploration of the emotional state; not only negativity versus positivity but also weakness versus strength and coercion versus freedom are perceived as relevant dimensions of the actual emotional state. If the partner had been present, the following categories were used

additionally: (l) estimated mood-state of the spouse (1 = negative, 2 = indifferent, 3 = positive); (m) estimated attributions; and (n) needs; (o) perceived balance or imbalance of power (comparison of strength of oneself and partner); (p) perceived love; and (q) perceived balance or imbalance of love. (r) At the end, freely chosen adjectives were recorded to describe the mood-state (e.g., satisfied, depressed).

Questionnaires

The German version of Cattell's 16-PF test was used to measure participants' personality structure (Schneewind, Schroeder, & Cattell, 1983). Furthermore, Olson and Porter's (1983) questionnaire, FACES II, which is used to assess marital adaptability and cohesion characteristics, was translated into German and applied. Four questions about marital harmony and two questions about marital power were added. The questions were the following: (a) I am very happy with my partner; (b) My partner accepts me as I am; (c) My partner loves me; (d) Our relationship is harmonious; (e) In our relationship my partner has the say; and (f) In our relationship I have the say; all questions were answered on 5-point scales. At the end, some demographic characteristics were requested.

Procedure

The participants were informed about the goal of the study and were instructed how to complete the diary. They had two days in which to become familiar with it. At the beginning, they also answered the questionnaires. At a subsequent meeting, the participants had an opportunity to ask technical questions about the diary method. In this session, the experimenter also explained the content analysis of the two-day recording period. The participants coded first several diaries completed by the researchers and discussed their codings together. This was done to reduce the room otherwise left for individual variation in the coding the same responses. Reducing the idiosyncrasy in the coding was necessary to allow for meaningful comparisons of diary entries across people. After coding the prearranged diaries, the subjects coded their own two-day trial registrations and discussed them with the researcher. Subsequently, the participants started with the diary and with the purchasing questionnaires. Every day each participant took the completed sheets out of the diary and put them in a diary-safe, consisting of a paper box with a small slot for the sheets. In order to guarantee complete privacy of the records, only the respective spouse

had access to his or her safe. After each ten days they met with the investigator or with research assistants and analyzed their recordings. At the end, the questionnaires were to be filled out again.

Filling out the diary at an entry time took about one to two minutes. The diary study took four weeks, except for the two-day pilot period. During this time, the couples were in close contact with one of the four student research assistants. Altogether, it took from the end of October to the beginning of December 1985 to collect the data.

RESULTS

Definition of Martial Happiness

Marital happiness was estimated in the following way: First, the answers on the 30 items of Olson and Porter's (1983) inventory and on the six added questions were factor analyzed (principal component analysis) for all 42 participants. The analysis produced eight factors with the first factor being labeled marital harmony. The items loading highly on this factor were items, 1, 8, 13, 17, 18, 19, 23, 28, and 29 of Olson and Porter's FACES II, and three out of the six added items (happiness with the partner, love, harmony).

Because the correlations of spouses average scores on these 12 items was sufficiently high ($r[21] = .64$; $p = .001$), marital happiness was defined as husband's and wife's combined responses. The couples' responses were averaged and dichotomized at the median in order to obtain two independent samples, one scoring high on marital happiness and the other scoring lower. Ten couples were found to have a highly harmonious relationship whereas 11 couples were moderately unhappy. The two subsamples resulted also if wives' and husbands' scores were analyzed separately instead of combining them.

Using the median as a cutoff point may be troublesome given the skewness of the distribution on marital satisfaction scores (median = 1.39; range 1.04 to 2.54). Therefore, an additional method was used to detect harmonious and unharmonious couples, respectively. The 21 couples were cluster analyzed using Ward's algorithm on the basis of husbands' and wives' answers on the 12 marital harmony questions. Cluster analyses revealed two clusters of couples that are almost identical with the two subsamples obtained by using the median as cutoff.

Happy and moderately unhappy couples were similar in demographic characteristics. They neither did differ significantly with respect to the

age of the spouses, education, months living together, the relationship status, job status, monthly average household budget, nor in the patterns of monthly expenditures.

Couple Interaction

Diary: Overview

The total number of observations—except the two-day trial period—amounted to 4,141 (overall 7,056 points of time were scheduled in the diaries; during sleeping times [2,352 scheduled points of time] no notes were taken in the diary; in 563 cases the participants forgot to register). In total, 59% of the diary entries were performed punctually at the scheduled time; 20% of the time the respondents were not able to register at the scheduled time (e.g., because they were driving the car, in a public performance, or had forgotten their diary at home). When this occurred, the participants had to memorize their experiences at the originally scheduled time, and to register as soon as possible. In total, 21% of the registrations were delayed. A delay occurred when the respondents forgot to register at the originally scheduled time. When this happened, the participants had to fill out the diary at the moment they became aware of the delay. In such cases the diary entries were not related to the situations at the originally scheduled time but described the situations at the time the respondents became aware of the delay. On the average, a delay of 30 to 60 minutes was reported. If a participant forgot to complete the diary for several entry periods he or she completed the diary for the last period only; the remaining periods were left unanswered. The percentages of punctual, remembered, or delayed registrations correspond to the results observed in previous studies (Brandstaetter, 1981; Kirchner, 1984). On the average, there were 3.6 observations for each day and each respondent.

Happy couples registered their experiences in the diary with accuracy equal to moderately unhappy couples. Accuracy is defined here as relative frequency a spouse recorded punctually the time in the calendar as compared to delays. A two-way analysis of variance (with sex and marital happiness as independent factors and the arcsine transformed relative frequency of registrations performed punctually at the scheduled time by each respondent) revealed no significant effects (marital happiness: $F[1, 19] = .40$; $p = .540$; sex: $F[1, 19] = .00$; $p = .900$; two way interaction: $F[1, 19] = .00$; $p = .940$). Accuracy also did not vary significantly across the hours of a day (from 8.00 to 22.00 hours), and across different situations (places, activities, and persons present).

Because the individual diary entries are related between the single events, data analysis on the event level would have led to severe shortcomings by using conventional procedures for data analysis. Therefore, each spouse's diary entries were averaged and analyzed at this aggregated level. This type of analysis is in line with the data handling techniques used in similar studies (e.g., Brandstaetter, 1983; Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Diener & Emmons, 1984; Hormuth, 1986).

Marital Happiness and Frequency of Day-to-Day Interactions

It was expected that happy spouses should be together in the same behavioral setting more frequently than moderately unhappy spouses. For each couple, the relative frequency of being together (frequency of being together divided by total diary entries) was calculated. An analysis of variance with marital happiness as independent variable and arcsine-transformed relative frequencies of being together revealed a significant effect ($F[1, 19] = 6.04; p = .024$), indicating that happy spouses joined each other more frequently in everyday settings ($M = .46$; corresponds to 44% of the time) than moderately unhappy spouses did ($M = .35$; corresponds to 34%). According to these data, happy spouses, on the average, were together seven hours a day as compared to approximately five hours of moderately unhappy couples.

A more detailed analysis of the frequency of staying together in different places, while performing various activities, or when joining other people, revealed the results presented in Table 1. In contrast to moderately unhappy couples, happy spouses were more frequently together at home ($t[19] = 2.60; p = .009$ and $t[19] = 2.26; p = .018$ according to husbands and wives, respectively), and during recreation periods ($t[19] = 2.44; p = .013$ and $t[19] = 2.77; p = .006$ according to husbands and wives, respectively).

Marital Happiness and Well-Being in Day-to-Day Interactions

Being together should be more rewarding to happy than to moderately unhappy couples. When the spouse is present, happy couples should be (a) in a better mood, (b) feel stronger, and (c) report experiencing a higher degree of freedom of constraints than unhappy couples.

Each spouse's diary entries of mood, feelings of strength, and freedom were averaged and analyzed by three univariate two (happy

TABLE 1 Relative Frequency of Day-to-Day Interactions with the Spouse in Various Places, During Performance of Various Activities, and When Joining Other People, as Perceived by Husbands and Wives

	<i>Happy Couples</i> (<i>n</i> = 10)		<i>Moderately Unhappy Couples</i> (<i>n</i> = 11)	
	<i>Husband</i>	<i>Wife</i>	<i>Husband</i>	<i>Wife</i>
<i>Places</i>				
At home	.74 (47.00)+	.60 (54.20)+	.58 (42.27)-	.47 (47.27)-
Outside the home	.22 (57.80)	.27 (48.10)	.16 (49.73)	.20 (46.36)
<i>Activities</i>				
Recreation	.62 (51.30)+	.56 (52.30)+	.48 (44.09)-	.39 (42.45)-
Work	.26 (42.90)	.35 (37.20)	.18 (37.00)	.24 (39.27)
Other activities	.51 (9.50)	.52 (11.50)	.46 (9.55)	.34 (10.64)
<i>Other persons present</i>				
Nobody	- (20.25)	- (15.90)	- (16.09)	- (23.70)
Partner	1.00 (45.00)	1.00 (38.20)	1.00 (31.18)	1.00 (24.36)
Relatives	.39 (6.30)	.21 (12.30)	.60 (4.00)	.29 (7.50)
Friends	.42 (3.00)	.41 (6.13)	.46 (7.36)	.26 (8.11)
Other persons	.06 (30.50)	.08 (20.30)	.00 (25.73)	.23 (20.45)

NOTE: Relative frequencies indicate the frequencies of being with the spouse in various settings. Numbers in parentheses indicate the absolute frequencies of being with or without the spouse in various places, when performing various activities, and joining other people. Symbols "+" and "-" indicate significant differences between happy and moderately unhappy spouses.

versus unhappy marriage) by two (partner present versus absent) by two (sex; within-factor) analyses of variance. The results are shown in Table 2. Marital happiness had a significant impact on the momentary feelings of strength ($F[1, 19] = 4.38; p = .050$) and freedom ($F[1, 19] = 5.01; p = .037$). Spouses in happy relationships felt stronger and freer than moderately unhappy spouses. The predicted interaction effect, marital happiness by presence of the partner, was not found. All three analyses revealed, however, a significant interaction effect (sex by presence of the partner). Presence of the other was especially rewarding to the husbands: Both happy and moderately unhappy husbands were in a better mood ($F[1, 19] = 6.96; p = .016$) felt stronger ($F[1, 19] = 7.45; p = .013$), and freer ($F[1, 19] = 5.60; p = .029$) if their wife was present. The wives, on the other hand, felt about equally well, strong, and free in situations with the husband present or absent.

TABLE 2 Average Mood, Strength, and Freedom in Day-to-Day Settings by Marital Happiness, by Presence Versus Absence of the Spouse, and by Sex (Means and Standard Deviations)

	<i>Happy Couples</i> (<i>n</i> = 10)	<i>Unhappy Couples</i> (<i>n</i> = 11)
<u>Mood (1 = bad mood, 3 = good mood)</u>		
Partner absent		
Husband	2.42 (.369)	2.31 (.277)
Wife	2.47 (.295)	2.42 (.227)
Partner present		
Husband	2.68 (.242)	2.50 (.215)
Wife	2.55 (.250)	2.41 (.234)
<u>Strength (1 = weak, 7 = strong)</u>		
Partner absent		
Husband	5.51 (.687)	4.73 (.727)
Wife	5.00 (.988)	4.69 (1.143)
Partner present		
Husband	5.96 (.483)	5.12 (.543)
Wife	5.24 (.961)	4.69 (1.182)
<u>Freedom (1 = unfree, 5 = free)</u>		
Partner absent		
Husband	3.78 (.655)	3.25 (.578)
Wife	3.70 (.485)	3.50 (.732)
Partner present		
Husband	4.39 (.505)	3.72 (.555)
Wife	4.10 (.501)	3.61 (.568)

A more detailed analysis of well-being in different places, while performing different activities, and when joining other people, is presented in Table 3. Due to the high correlations among well-being, strength, freedom (the mean correlations amounted to $r = .62, .63, .64,$ and $.66$ for happy husbands, happy wives, moderately unhappy husbands, and moderately unhappy wives, respectively) separate analyses of the latter two variables were omitted.

TABLE 3 Well-Being in Day-to-Day Interactions with the Spouse Absent or Present, in Various Places, During Performance of Various Activities, and When Joining Other People

	<i>Happy Couples</i> (<i>n</i> = 10)		<i>Moderately Unhappy Couples</i> (<i>n</i> = 11)	
	<i>Husband</i>	<i>Wife</i>	<i>Husband</i>	<i>Wife</i>
	<u>Partner Absent</u>			
Places				
At home	2.56	2.45	2.36	2.32
Outside the home	2.43	2.52	2.40	2.55
Activities				
Recreation	2.54	2.64	2.51	2.66
Work	2.35	2.40	2.24	2.31
Other activities	2.39	2.13	2.20	2.38
Other persons present				
Nobody	2.40	2.55	2.22	2.32
Partner	—	—	—	—
Relatives	2.50	2.56	2.51	2.62
Friends	2.83	2.76	2.55	2.82
Other persons	2.43	2.40	2.37	2.41
	<u>Partner Present</u>			
Places				
At home	2.67+	2.50+	2.48-	2.34-
Outside the home	2.69	2.66	2.51	2.48
Activities				
Recreation	2.78+	2.66	2.56-	2.57
Work	2.48	2.39	2.69	2.32
Other activities	2.49+	2.53+	1.75-	2.07-
Other persons present				
Nobody	—	—	—	—
Partner	2.68+	2.56+	2.50-	2.39-
Relatives	3.00	2.64	3.00	2.09
Friends	3.00	2.67	2.80	2.86
Other persons	2.25	1.75	—	2.56

Happy spouses were in a better mood than moderately unhappy spouses when they were staying together at home ($t[19] = 1.81$; $p = .043$ and $t[19] = 1.55$; $p = .073$ according to husbands' and wives' reports,

respectively). No significant differences in well-being of happy and unhappy couples were found when they were alone at home and in places outside the home. Happy husbands felt better than moderately unhappy husbands when their wives were present during recreation periods ($t[19] = 2.05$; $p = .028$ for husbands, and $t[19] = .69$; $p = .248$ for wives), and both happy husbands and wives felt better when they were staying together when performing activities other than work and recreation (e.g., body care, doing nothing) than moderately unhappy spouses ($t[17] = 3.17$; $p = .003$ and $t[18] = 1.81$; $p = .044$ for husbands and wives, respectively). Moreover, a four-way analysis of variance with marital harmony, sex, presence versus absence of the partner, and activities as independent variables revealed a significant three-way interaction effect (harmony by presence of the partner by activity [$F(2, 15) = 5.36$; $p = .018$): Although happy spouses felt better during recreation periods when the partner was present, moderately unhappy spouses felt slightly better when they were alone during recreation times. Social contacts were equally rewarding to happy and moderately unhappy spouses. In this analysis, however, happy and unhappy couples' mood was significantly different in situations with the partner present; happy husbands and wives felt better when the partner was present than moderately unhappy spouses felt when they were together.

Marital Happiness and Balance of Power

Happy couples should report having equal power, that is, feeling equally strong as the partner, more frequently than moderately unhappy couples. This was tested by comparing the frequencies of both spouses experiencing either (a) equal strength (= balance of power) or (b) higher strength of the husband or wife (= imbalance of power). The relative frequencies of each spouse's reports of experiencing balance of strength rather than imbalance were arcsine transformed and analyzed by a two (happy versus moderately unhappy relationship) by two (sex, within-factor) by two (conflict versus agreement) analysis of variance. Conflict was operationalized as any situation where one spouse felt bad and attributed his or her bad feelings to the partner only. All three main effects were significant (marital harmony: $F[1, 17] = 5.58$; $p = .030$; sex: $F[1, 17] = 12.05$; $p = .003$; and conflict versus agreement situations: $F[1, 17] = 46.51$; $p = .000$), indicating that in everyday life situations happy spouses experienced balance of power more frequently than moderately unhappy spouses. Husbands reported more often experiencing balance of power than wives, and in agreement situations,

TABLE 4 Frequency of Balance of Power by Marital Happiness and Conflict Versus Agreement Situations (Arcsine Transformed Relative Frequencies and Standard Deviations)

	<i>Happy Couples</i> (<i>n</i> = 9)	<i>Unhappy Couples</i> (<i>n</i> = 10)
Agreement Situation		
Husband	.80 (.305)	.56 (.222)
Wife	.74 (.228)	.46 (.184)
Conflict Situation		
Husband	.37 (.128)	.37 (.124)
Wife	.29 (.160)	.22 (.117)

husbands and wives felt more often equally powerful than in conflict. Also, the two-way interaction effect marital harmony by agreement versus conflict was significant ($F[1, 17] = 6.22; p = .023$), which indicates that happy spouses were not generally more frequently in balance than moderately unhappy spouses but only in agreement situations. Table 4 shows the results.

Next, the question arises concerning which partner had more power when imbalance occurred. When happy spouses experienced imbalance, this was more frequently in favor of husband (58% and 60% of the cases according to husbands' and wives' reports, respectively; the wives had more power 42% and 40% of the cases). When imbalance occurred in moderately unhappy marriages, the husbands had more power 55% of the cases; the wives were more powerful 45% of the cases. What is surprising is that unhappy spouses' reports of the husbands' power differed considerably: husbands reported 52% of the cases having more say than the wife whereas wives thought the husband dominated 63% of the cases.

The type of imbalance experienced by each spouse, was tested by computing the relative frequency of the husband being more powerful than the wife (experiences of higher strength of the husband were divided by the sum of experiences of imbalance of power). Each spouse's relative frequency score was arcsine transformed and analyzed by a two (happy versus moderately unhappy marriage) by two (sex, within factor) by two (conflict versus agreement) analysis of variance. No significant main, no two-way or three-way interaction ($F[1, 17] = 3.10; p = .096$) were observed.

Marital Happiness and Accuracy of Partner Perception

Perception of the partner's mood-state. Accuracy of mood perception was computed by counting the frequency of fit (= 1) versus misfit (= 0) of a spouse's estimation of the other's mood and the mood indicated by the partner (see Figure 2). The more often the estimated mood corresponded to the indicated mood the more accurately was the perception of the partner's emotional situation. The relative frequency of fit was arcsine transformed and analyzed by a two (marital harmony) by two (sex) by two (agreement versus conflict situation) analysis of variance. The results (Table 5) indicate that in agreement situations both happy and moderately unhappy couples and both husbands and wives are better able to predict the other's emotional state than in conflict ($F[1, 17] = 69.37; p = .000$). No other significant main effects and no interaction effects were found.

Perception of the partner's attributions of mood. In the diary, the participants indicated the sources of their own mood and estimated sources of the partner's mood. The sources or attributions of mood in the diary were classified into six mood clusters (participant himself or herself, partner, other people, one's belongings, external sources except persons, other). Then, the frequency of fit (= 1) and misfit (= 0), respectively, of indicated and estimated attributions was computed for each spouse (see Figure 2) and arcsine transformed. A three-way analysis of variance with marital harmony, sex, and agreement versus conflict as independent factors revealed no significant effects. As Table 5 shows, there is only a tendency indicating that predictions of sources of mood were more accurate in agreement than in conflict situations ($F[1, 17] = 3.25; p = .089$).

Perception of the partner's current needs. Accuracy of need perception was computed such as accuracy of attribution perception (see Figure 2). The needs recorded in the diary were classified into the following six categories: basic physical needs (e.g., hunger, illness), contact (e.g., affiliation, love), power (e.g., self-esteem, status), activity, experiences (e.g., achievement), higher-order needs (e.g., aesthetic values, religious values). Frequency of fit and misfit, respectively, of estimated needs and needs indicated by the partner himself or herself were computed for each spouse and arcsine transformed. Again, the transformed relative frequency scores were analyzed by a two by two by two analysis of variance that showed a significant main effect of marital harmony ($F[1, 17] = 6.90; p = .018$) but no other main effects and no interaction

#	DATE	HOUR SCHEDULED REAL	TYPE OF RECORDING PUNCTUALLY 0 WITH DELAY 0 MEMORIZED 0	
<p>1. HOW IS MY MOOD AT THE MOMENT? - O +</p>				
<p>2. WHICH ADJECTIVES DESCRIBE MY MOOD BEST?</p>				
<p>3. WHY DO I FEEL AS INDICATED?</p>				
<p>4. WHERE AM I?</p>				
<p>5. WHAT AM I DOING?</p>				
<p>6. WHO ELSE IS PRESENT?</p>				
<p>7. IF I AM TALKING TO SOMEBODY, WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?</p>				
<p>8. HOW STRONG/WEAK DO I FEEL AT THE MOMENT? WEAK ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ STRONG</p>				
<p>9. HOW FREE/UNFREE DO I FEEL AT THE MOMENT? UNFREE ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ FREE</p>				
<p>HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE PARTNER AT THE PRESENT MOMENT?</p>				
<p>10. HOW IS THE MOOD OF MY PARTNER AT THE MOMENT? - O +</p>				
<p>11. WHY DOES MY PARTNER FEEL AS INDICATED?</p>				
<p>12. AT THE MOMENT IF FEEL TO BE 0 STRONGER THAN MY PARTNER 0 EQUALLY STRONG AS MY PARTNER 0 WEAKER THAN MY PARTNER</p>				
<p>13. HOW MUCH DOES MY PARTNER LOVE ME AT THE MOMENT? J J J J J J J J J J</p>				
<p>14. AT THE MOMENT I LOVE MY PARTNER 0 MORE THAN HE/SHE LOVES ME 0 EQUALLY AS HE/SHE LOVES ME 0 LESS THAN HE/SHE LOVES ME</p>				

Figure 2: Spouse's accuracy of prediction of the partner's mood-state, attributions of mood, and current needs.

TABLE 5 Accuracy of Predictions of Partner's Mood, Mood Attributions, and Current Needs by Marital Happiness, Sex, and Conflict Versus Agreement Situation (Means and Standard Deviations)

	<i>Happy Couples</i> (<i>n</i> = 10)	<i>Unhappy Couples</i> (<i>n</i> = 9)
	<u>Mood</u>	
Agreement Situation		
Husband	.88 (.247)	.77 (.222)
Wife	.86 (.248)	.80 (.263)
Conflict Situation		
Husband	.44 (.234)	.48 (.095)
Wife	.42 (.210)	.55 (.182)
	<u>Attributions</u>	
Agreement Situation		
Husband	.62 (.383)	.63 (.277)
Wife	.79 (.365)	.53 (.269)
Conflict Situation		
Husband	.64 (.229)	.51 (.222)
Wife	.57 (.254)	.50 (.120)
	<u>Current Needs</u>	
Agreement Situation		
Husband	.80 (.300)	.49 (.143)
Wife	.76 (.264)	.55 (.228)
Conflict Situation		
Husband	.86 (.233)	.58 (.222)
Wife	.61 (.228)	.47 (.161)

effects. Happy spouses were better able to predict the other's needs both in conflict and in agreement situations than were moderately unhappy spouses (Table 5).

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to analyze closely related couples' everyday life experiences and associations with their marital harmony. To enter the intimate life of couples, a diary approach was chosen. Because of the

novelty of the method and the limited number of couples that could be investigated, this study must be considered a descriptive rather than hypothesis-testing study. Nevertheless, as the data show, the diary is a very useful method for investigating marital life.

It was expected that happy spouses would spend more time together; that is, they are together in everyday life situations more frequently than moderately unhappy couples. Staying together should be more rewarding to happy spouses than to unhappy spouses. In general, these assumptions were confirmed by the data. Because the unhappy couples sample consisted of moderately unhappy rather than severely distressed couples, one can expect that most of the differences found in this study would be considerably more accentuated if happy couples were contrasted with couples considering their relationship severely problematic. It should also be reemphasized that the assumptions tested in this study do not imply any causal relationship: Happiness may be considered as dependent as well as independent variable.

Happy couples were found to be together more frequently than moderately unhappy couples. This result is in line with findings reviewed by Lewis and Spanier (1979), Burr (1973), and White (1983). As shown in Table 1, happy spouses were together more frequently than moderately unhappy spouses at their private home and less frequently in public places. When being together, happy spouses reported more frequently performing recreation activities than unhappy spouses. These results clearly indicate that happy couples not only were together more frequently than unhappy couples but they also met in more private situations. Thus the more frequently spouses were together in intimate behavioral settings the more harmonious the relationship, and vice versa, the more harmonious the relationship the more often spouses were together in significant situations.

No differences between happy and moderately happy couples were, however, found in the type of social contacts. Contrary to the prediction, happy spouses did not meet more frequently involving others, such as relatives and close friends, than unhappy spouses. It seems that happy couples were involved equally well in social networks as unhappy couples. There is, however, an interesting difference in the perception of other people by moderately distressed husbands and wives: Although husbands considered most of the other people to be friends or relatives, those persons were acquaintances or strangers to the wives. Husbands' and wives' reports on the frequency of meeting other people are highly discordant. Meeting people to whom wives are less

close than their husbands may lead to serious troubles. In fact, there is evidence that distressed spouses most often quarrel about those persons whom one spouse considers friends, although the other thinks of as acquaintances (e.g., Piel, 1983, reports that 40% of marital conflict issues are related to common acquaintances, 26% are related to child-rearing problems, and 26% deal with financial budgeting).

Although happy spouses were more often together than unhappy spouses, they were not in a better mood when staying together than moderately unhappy couples. However, happy spouses felt significantly stronger and freer than unhappy spouses both in situations with the partner present and absent, and significantly better if the partner was the only person present (Table 3). This result could indicate that marital harmony not only affected emotional experiences in situations with the partner present, its "long arm" also embraced everyday life situations with the partner absent.

Interestingly, presence or absence of the spouse affected husbands more than wives, independently of the quality of marriage. Husbands were in a better mood, felt stronger, and freer when the wife was present rather than absent. The wives' mood-state, feelings of strength, and freedom, on the other hand, were less dependent on the husbands' presence. At first sight, this result contradicts the common opinion about the relative independence of the husband from his wife and the dependence of the wife from her husband. In everyday life situations, the husband seems to need the wife more than the wife needs the husband to feel good. It could, however, be argued that this result is due to the fact that "wife present" means usually leisure time for the husband, whereas "husband present" does not necessarily mean leisure time for the wife (see Brandstaetter, 1983). In fact, as Table 1 shows, husbands reported more frequently recreating and less often working when their wife was present than do wives when they are together with the husband. Undoubtedly, even nowadays wives perform most of the household chores: When the husband returns home from the daily work recreation time begins for him, whereas the wife keeps on working in the kitchen.

Marital happiness was frequently found associated with an egalitarian rather than patriarchal or matriarchal power structure (e.g., Corrales, 1975; Gray-Little & Burks, 1983; Safilios-Rothschild, 1976; Szinovacz, 1987). Thus in everyday life situations happy spouses were expected to report egalitarian power more frequently than moderately unhappy couples. This assumption was not unequivocally confirmed by the diary data. Happy couples more frequently reported balance of power rather

than imbalance as compared to moderately unhappy couples in agreement situations only. If conflict occurred both happy and unhappy couples reported imbalance equally frequently. Thus the less often spouses were in conflict the more frequently they experienced imbalance of power the more distressing the relationship, and, vice versa, the more satisfying the marriage the more likely an egalitarian power structure developed in everyday life interactions.

In previous studies imbalance of power was found to be more frequently in favor of the husband rather than the wife. This was especially true for happy marriages (Gray-Little & Bucks, 1983; McDonald, 1980). In the present study, happy and moderately unhappy couples showed no differences in the frequency of the husband or wife having the say. There was, however, a tendency of higher disagreement among unhappy couples on the question about who had the say: Husbands perceived 52% of the cases having more say than the wife, wives attributed the husband 63% of the cases more power. Happy couples agreed on this question (the respective percentages of husbands and wives are 58 and 60). This result seems to indicate that happy spouses are more empathetic, which results in greater congruence of perceptions of who dominates (see Olson, 1969).

Finally, husbands reported balance of power more often than wives. This discordance is probably due to the spouses' underestimation of their own power and overestimation of the other's. Because imbalance occurred more often in favor of the husband than wife, this bias was likely to occur and needs no further explanation.

The spouses' willingness to cope with conflict is a necessary but not a sufficient prerequisite of a marriage in harmony. To be able to cope with conflict in a jointly satisfying way, the spouses need to understand each other's problems. Happy couples were expected to understand each other's emotional and motivational state more accurately than moderately unhappy spouses. This prediction was supported for spouses' perception of the partner's needs only. This result shows that marital happiness is related to the spouses' ability to perceive each other's emotional state accurately.

However, happy couples were not better able to perceive the other's mood state more accurately than moderately unhappy couples, neither were they better able to detect the sources of the other's mood. Estimating the other's mood was probably a rather easy task because only the direction of mood (positive, indifferent, negative) was to be indicated. Thus both happy and moderately unhappy spouses had no

major difficulties in succeeding in this task. To be able to influence the other's emotional state, knowing the other's mood is not enough. It is necessary to be able to decode correctly the actual needs of the partner. This, however, was a crucial problem in unhappy marriages. Whereas happy spouses were willing and able to perceive accurately the other's motivational state, moderately unhappy spouses frequently failed to do so. The latter's misperception or misinterpretation of the partner's needs may be a significant deficiency, both leading to conflict and inhibiting mutually satisfying conflict resolution.

One would also expect that especially in conflict situations happy spouses are better able to understand the partner's emotional state than moderately unhappy spouses. This prediction was not verified by the data. In conflict, both happy and moderately unhappy couples' accuracy of partner perception decreased considerably. Happy and moderately distressed couples frequently failed to perceive the other's mood state accurately. Moreover, the probability of detecting the sources of the other's mood decreased. This result could indicate that happy and unhappy couples are equally unable to change the situation where the other feels bad. Lack of understanding of the partner's unpleasant experiences, both in happy and unhappy couples, can be an explanation for the observation that spouses frequently are not able to provide the other with the necessary emotional support in critical life situations, such as unemployment (e.g., Komarovsky, 1940; Schindler, 1979).

In conclusion, perceiving the partner's emotional reactions accurately is a highly important prerequisite to marital harmony. As the data show, happy spouses were better able than moderately unhappy spouses to detect the partner's emotional state and sources of mood in agreement situations only. In conflict, spouses were highly insensitive to the other's emotional state. Assuming a circular effect, we may conclude that being unaware or unable to perceive the other's situation accurately is likely to provoke conflicts. The inability to put oneself in the partner's place, to construct accurately his or her reality, and to empathize with him or her may cause negative emotions that are attributed to the partner internally, self-closure rather than disclosure and openness, and misperception of the actual power distribution. Consequently, being together, more and more will exert a punishing effect on moderately unhappy spouses; this also implies that the time spent together will decrease and the relationship will probably further deteriorate.

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