Shared Goals and Values: Towards a Theory of Couples' Financial Satisfaction

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Abstract
Using a sample of 126 households living in one south-central Midwestern U.S. state, a path model was developed to test hypothesized associations among financial satisfaction, shared goals and values, depressed mood, and the way couples discuss issues as determinants of satisfaction. It was noted that harsh startup when beginning a discussion was positively associated with depressed mood, negatively associated with shared goals and values, and indirectly negatively associated with financial satisfaction; depressed mood was negatively associated with shared goals and values and directly and indirectly negatively associated with financial satisfaction; and shared goals and values was positively associated with financial satisfaction.

Keywords: Financial Satisfaction, Harsh Startup, Shared Goals and Values

Introduction

Financial satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and financial and psychosocial behaviors, as factors affecting the lives of nearly all Americans, have taken the front stage in pop culture discussions. And rightfully so, since a need has been expressed by both practitioners and researchers to explore the associations among these variables in order to understand how couples interact and how helping professionals can better serve their clientele. Financial satisfaction, in particular, has been given much attention in the new millennium by researchers in the personal financial planning and counseling field (e.g., Britt, Grable, Nelson Goff, & White, 2008; Grable, Britt, & Cantrell, 2007; Joo & Grable, 2004; Kinnunen & Feldt, 2004). The concept of financial satisfaction appears to be multifaceted as it has been linked to financial behaviors, marital quality, financial stressors, and risk tolerance. There is some literature that connects economic distress to couple interactions and psychological distress, but no literature that specifically relates these concepts to financial satisfaction (e.g., Conger et al., 1990, Conger, Gee, & Lorenz, 2004; Conger, Rueter, & Elder, 1999; Papp, Cummings, & Goeke-Morey, 2009). In this paper, we ask if there is an association among couple interactions, psychological distress, and financial satisfaction. More specifically, we are interested in looking at Gottman's (1999, 2005) concept of harsh start-up, as well as an adapted scale of shared goals and values, and depressed mood.

Similar research interests were sparked during the farm crisis of the 1980's when researchers asked questions related to economic distress, couple interaction, and psychological distress. Consider Johnson and Booth's (1990) study of married individuals living in farm households. They found that economic distress has direct effects on marital quality as well as an association with psychological distress. Johnson and Booth noted that slightly less than half of the effect of economic distress on thoughts of divorce was mediated through depression.

Conger et al. (1990) found similar results in that psychological factors, such as depressed mood, play a mediating role in attitude formation. Conger and his associates noted that economic strain has a positive association with couples' hostility, which results in reduced marital quality. In addition, Rosenblatt and Keller (1983) found that couples who indicated greater economic distress reported greater blaming in the marriage. This outcome leads to the assumption that economic distress may have a causal association to depression, which might result in spouses blaming each other and ultimately leading to thoughts of divorce.

A search of the recent literature in the financial planning and counseling field for this study unearthed a growing interest in the associations among financial behaviors, financial satisfaction, and couples' stress. Grable et al. (2007), for example, designed a test to determine if a person's level of financial satisfaction could be used to

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distinguish between those who had considered getting a divorce over the past three years from those who had not. They found that individuals with low levels of financial satisfaction were more likely to have considered getting a divorce. The results from their study added support to the argument that personal financial factors might play a larger role in determining relationship satisfaction than once commonly thought.

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

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

Interestingly, none of these studies examined the impact that relationship factors and depressed mood have on financial satisfaction. Among many clinicians, it has generally been assumed that the way in which couples work through the intricacies of living together probably has no affect on financial satisfaction. Very little effort has been taken, however, to explore this assumption empirically. In this paper, we ask the following question: do relationship variables, such as harsh start-up, shared goals and values, and depressed mood have an effect on financial satisfaction? Answering this question is important as a mechanism to better understand the concept of financial satisfaction. This knowledge will help facilitate the development of a theory of financial satisfaction, as a precursor to explaining marital stability.

The purpose of this paper is to report the test results of a model of financial satisfaction, using shared goals and values, depressed mood, and the way couples discuss issues as determinants of satisfaction. The model is provided as a step towards the development of a theory of couples' financial satisfaction. The outcome of such an exercise is that the identification of key variable associations will allow therapists, counselors, and educators an opportunity to better meet the needs of their respective clientele.

Conceptualization of Research

Financial Satisfaction

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

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

Harsh Start Up

As shown in Figure 1, harsh startup is conceptualized as an exogenous variable that has a causal affect on depressed mood and shared goals and values. Harsh start-up refers to how couples engage in discussion. Couples that begin the discussion process with criticism or sarcasm (i.e., forms of partner contempt) tend to find themselves faced more often with disagreement. In the initial stage of the quarrel, harsh conflict occurs when one escalates from neutral to negative affect. In other words, when one starts a discussion or an argument with negative emotion, such as blaming or criticizing one's spouse or partner, he or she is engaging in harsh startup. It is hypothesized in this study that those who are subject to a harsh startup approach to discussion will report greater feelings of depression and fewer shared goals and values.

Depressed Mood

Depressed mood has been found to be a related to economic distress (e.g., economic pressure, economic hardship, and economic stress), marital interactions, and marital quality (Catalano & Dooley, 1977; Lorenz, Conger, & Montague, 1994; Conger et al., 2003; Conger et al., 1994). Catalano and Dooley found that economic distress, particularly unemployment, was linked to psychological distress. In their study, psychological distress was measured using the CES-D (i.e., Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression scale). Lorenz et al. (1994) established a link between depressed mood and economic distress using the SCL-90-R scale (Derogatis, 1983). They suggested that family support may have a stronger effect on psychological distress than outside family support. Similarly, Conger et al. (2003) noted that increased couple's relationship support decreased the association between economic distress and emotional distress. Taken together, these findings indicate that family relationship support is an important factor associated with psychological and economic distress. In another study conducted by Conger et al. (1994), the effect of family economic pressure on depressed mood and marital quality was explored. They found that there was a direct link between spousal hostility—a component of marital interaction—and depressed mood, as well as a direct tie between depressed mood and marital quality. Kinnunen and Feldt (2004) reported similar findings in that psychological distress partially mediated the association between economic strain and dyadic adjustment. Based on these findings, depressed mood in this study was hypothesized to be concurrently influenced by the way couples discuss issues and as causal factor associated with financial satisfaction and shared goals and values.

Shared Goals and Values

For the purpose of this model, shared goals and values refers to having similar views about the meaning of money and how it should be used, as well as related household outcomes; having similar views on the function of autonomy and independence; and having shared views about hopes and aspirations for family and future relationship goals. As shown in Figure 1, having more goals and values in common should be associated with one's financial satisfaction perception (i.e., positive in this case). The association is premised on the following assumption: when a couple has common beliefs about money, they will have increased financial satisfaction because negative or conflicting discussions concerning daily money issues are likely to decrease.

While harsh startup is hypothesized to be a critically important determinant of depressed mood and shared goals and values, the factor is shown to have only an indirect effect on financial satisfaction. That is, there is no theoretical basis for suggesting that the way in which couples discuss issues, in general, has a direct effect on measures of satisfaction. Rather, harsh startup, a form of couple interaction, is shown to be theoretically related to depressed mood and shared goals and values. It is these two intervening variables that have a direct effect on a person's financial satisfaction.

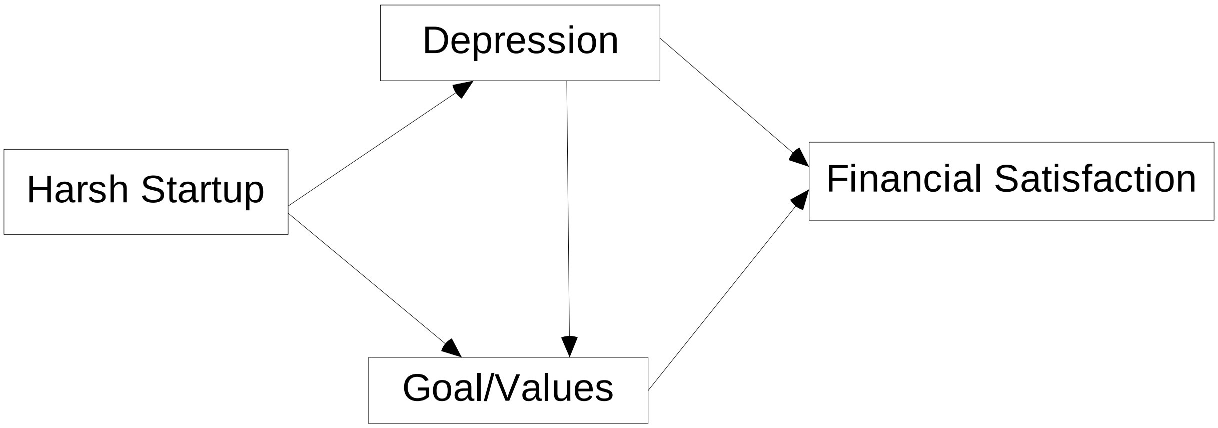

Figure 1. Model of Financial Satisfaction

Research Hypotheses

Seven research hypotheses were tested in this study. The first two hypotheses proposed that harsh startup has a direct effect on both depressed mood and shared goals and values. The third hypothesis conjectured that depressed mood has a direct effect on shared goals and values. The fourth and fifth hypotheses proposed a direct effect from depressed mood and shared goals and values to financial satisfaction. The final two hypotheses were premised on the assumption that both harsh startup and depressed mood have an indirect effect on financial satisfaction. The specific hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Harsh startup is positively associated with depressed mood
Hypothesis 2: Harsh startup is negatively associated with shared goals and values
Hypothesis 3: Depressed mood is negatively associated with shared goals and values
Hypothesis 4: Depressed mood is negatively associated with financial satisfaction
Hypothesis 5: Shared goals and values is positively associated with financial satisfaction
Hypothesis 6: Harsh startup is indirectly negatively associated with financial satisfaction
Hypothesis 7: Depressed mood is indirectly negatively associated with financial satisfaction

Methods

Data for this study were obtained by mailing 4,048 surveys to 2,024 households living in one south-central Midwestern U.S. state. That is, each household received two surveys, one for each spouse or partner in a household. Possible respondents were randomly selected from a database retrieved from a financial services organization. Procedures to increase response rates included incentive postcards, where those who participated in the survey were invited to enter a drawing for one of three prizes, including a grand prize of $100 or one of two $50 prizes. Respondents could also indicate that they would like to receive the results of the survey. In addition, follow-up postcards were sent three weeks after the initial mailing. The follow-up postcards also included information that the deadline to return the survey was extended to allow more time for respondents to complete the survey. A total of 126 surveys were returned useable; 27 survey packets were returned undeliverable and 23 surveys were returned unusable with missing data. The response rate is difficult to determine for this sample because the second paper-pencil survey included in the packet may have been irrelevant if the household had only one adult. For example, sending a survey packet with two surveys to one household with a single individual may have resulted in a skewed response rate because the single individual received the survey but no one received the second survey.

Sample Characteristics

The average age of respondents was 53.30 (SD = 16.23) years. The average years couples were married or reported participating in a committed relationship was 26.76 (SD = 15.59). Fifty percent of respondents were male and 50% were female. Forty-two percent of the sample reported holding a bachelor's degree or higher level of education. Nearly the entire sample reported their ancestry as European-American (82.2%), while 8.1% identified themselves as Native American or Alaskan Native. The average household gross income fell in the range of $50,000-$60,000.

Outcome Variable
Financial satisfaction was measured with a composite scale score. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction associated with following four areas of their financial life: (a) the amount of money they had saved, (b) the amount of debt they held, (c) their ability to meet long-term goals, and (d) their income level. Responses were scored using a 10-point stair-step scale, with 1 = Extremely Unsatisfied and 10 = Extremely Satisfied. Responses for each item were summed into a scale score. Scores ranged from 4 to 40, with mean and standard deviation scores of 24.2 and 8.7, respectively. The scale's Cronbach's alpha score was $\alpha = .86$.

Independent Variables
Harsh startup was measured using a scale consisting of five items. The five items were adapted from work originally conducted by Gottman (2005). Conceptually, harsh startup can be viewed as a way couples interact; more specifically, how couples engage in the discussion process over conflictual topics. Each of the following items was assessed dichotomously, with a true statement scored as 1, otherwise 0: (a) Arguments often seem to come out of nowhere, (b) I seem to always get blamed for issues, (c) My spouse criticizes my personality, (d) Our calm is suddenly shattered, and (e) I think my partner can be totally irrational. For scaling purposes, scores were summed into a harsh startup index scale score. Higher scores indicate a tendency towards harsh startup when discussing relationship issues. The mean and standard deviation scores for the measure were 1.3 and 1.5, respectively. The Cronbach's alpha score for the scale was $\alpha = .79$.

Depressed mood was measured with seven items adapted from a combination of the CESD (Radloff, 1977), Self-Rating Depression Scale (Zung, 1965), and the General Well-Being Schedule (Fazio, 1977). The purpose of the scale was to provide researchers with an objective indication of symptomatology presented by a respondent. The seven items were as follows: (a) I feel hopeful about the future; (b) I feel depressed; (c) I have felt tired, worn out, used up, or exhausted; (d) I have had suicidal thoughts; (e) I am happy, satisfied, or pleased with my personal life; (f) In general, I have been in excellent spirits; and (g) I feel sad or blue. Items a, e, and f were reverse coded. Each item used the following seven-point Likert-type scale: 1 = Strongly Agree and 7 = Strongly Agree. Scores for each item were summed into a depressed mood scale. Scores ranged from a low of 7 to a high of 48. The mean and standard deviation scores for the scale were 18.6 and 6.9, respectively. Cronbach's alpha for the measure was $\alpha = .82$.

A shared goals and values scale was developed as a component of the research analysis procedure associated with the project. The four items comprising the scale were adapted from separate goals and values measures originally designed by Gottman (2005). Two questions were taken from the Shared Meaning Goals and two were adapted from the Shared Meaning Symbols scale. These four statements were assessed on a seven-point Likert-type scale. This new scale was conceptualized as a tool that would enable researchers to assess how much a respondent is likely to agree with their partner about financial goals, the meaning of money, autonomy and independence, and hopes and aspirations. The four items included in the measure were as follows: (a) We have similar financial goals; (b) Our hopes and aspirations, as individuals and together for our children, for our life in general, and for our old age are quite compatible; (c) We have similar values about the importance and meaning of money in our lives; and (d) We have similar values about "autonomy" and "independence." The list of questions was preceded by the following statement: "Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements." A seven-point Likert-type scale was used to code responses, with 1 = Strongly Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree. Scores were summed. Higher scale scores indicated more shared goals and values in the couple relationship. Scores ranged from 5 to 28. The mean and standard deviation scores for the scale were 22.9 and 4.2, respectively. The Cronbach's alpha for the scale was $\alpha = .86$.

Data Analysis Method
Although each of the independent variables (i.e., harsh startup, depression, and shared goals and values) used in this study showed excellent reliability, each scale was tested independently to determine construct validity. Harsh startup, as an adaption of Gottman's (2005) measure, was tested first. A factor analysis, using varimax rotation, was conducted to examine the validity issue. Factor scores, as shown in Table 1, achieved a .50 level or higher, supporting the construct validity of the scale.

Table 1. Factor Loadings for Harsh Startup Scale

	Factor Scores
Harsh Startup (α = .79)	
Arguments often seem to come out of nowhere.	.81
I seem to always get blamed for issues.	.85
My spouse criticizes my personality.	.67
Our calm is suddenly shattered.	.71
I think my partner can be totally irrational.	.66

Table 2 shows the results of a similar factor analysis test for the depressed mood scale. Again, results from the factor analysis led to the conclusion that there was adequate construct validity for the scale because multidimensionality in how couples interact with each other was shown.

Table 2. Factor Loadings for Depressed Mood Scale

	Factor Scores
Depressed Mood (α = .82)	
I feel hopeful about the future	.61
I feel depressed	.84
I have felt tire, worn out, used up, or exhausted	.55
I have had suicidal thoughts	.52
I am happy, satisfied, or pleased with my personal life	.73
In general, I have been in excellent spirits	.77
I feel sad or blue	.83

The shared goals and values scale was tested for construct validity. A factor analysis, using a varimax rotation technique, was used to confirm that the measure offered adequate construct validity because multidimensionality in how couples interact with each other was confirmed. Each of the factor coefficients loaded at the .50 level or higher.

Table 3. Factor Loadings for Shared Goals and Values Scale

	Factor Scores
Shared goals and values (α = .86)	
We have similar financial goals.	.91
Our hopes and aspirations, as individuals and together for our children, for our life in general, and for our old age are quite compatible.	.89
We have similar values about the importance and meaning of money in our lives.	.89
We have similar values about "autonomy" and "independence."	.79

The framework of financial satisfaction examined in this study was tested using a generalized least squares regression path model. Given the theoretical causation of harsh startup to depression and shared goals and values, and the direct effect hypothesized from depression and shared goals and values to financial satisfaction, the path model approach was deemed the appropriate assessment tool. In effect, the generalized least squares approach allowed for multiple regression models to be conducted simultaneously, based on assumed relationships between measures.

All analyses were conducted using AMOS® 6.0 for SPSS 15.0. According to Schumacker and Lomax (2004), AMOS is a structural equation modeling software program that allows researchers to evaluate the strength of associations. Because the purpose of this research was to test the hypothesized framework, which was based on theoretical linkages between the variables of interest, a generalized least squares method was used to estimate standardized regression coefficients from a series of tests. For example, a regression was run predicting depression from harsh startup. Another regression was used to predict shared goals and values through harsh startup and depression. In all, four independent regression models were run. Although not shown, error term weights were set at 1.0 for the models predicting depression, shared goals and values, and financial satisfaction. This allowed for an assessment of indirect, direct, and total effects of each independent variable on financial satisfaction. Results from the path analysis are discussed below.

Results
The strength of the hypothesized model (Figure 1) was confirmed. The model's chi-square statistic was non-significant—a desired path modeling outcome ($\chi^2(1, N = 135) = .90, p = .34$). The non-significant chi-square indicated that the model significantly reproduced the variance-covariance relationships within the sample. Comparative fit index (CFI) and the normed fit index (NFI) coefficients were used to confirm the chi-square findings. These coefficients can range in size from 0.0 to 1.0, with values closer to 1.0 suggesting a "measure of complete covariation in the data" (Byrne, 2001, p. 83). Researchers typically expect the CFI and NFI coefficients to be close to .90 (Bentler & Bonett, 1980). The baseline default model CFI was 1.0. The baseline NFI was .98.

The conceptualized model, showing the standardized beta and explained variance coefficients is presented in Figure 2. The direction of the coefficients provides support for the research hypotheses.

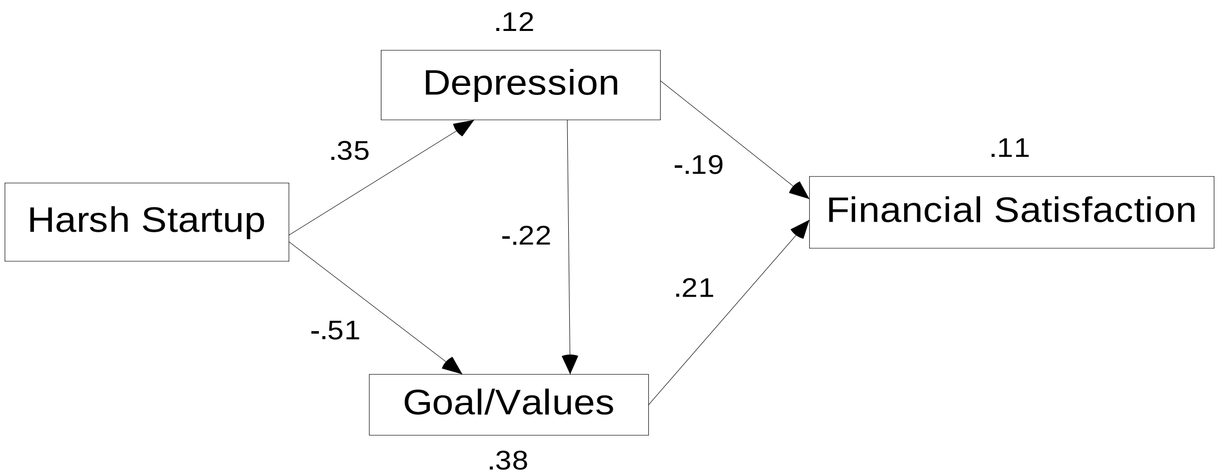

Figure 2. Path model of factors associated with financial satisfaction

Hypothesis 1, which stated, harsh startup is positively associated with depressed mood, was confirmed. The standardized coefficient of .35 was positive, suggesting that those who participated in harsh startup discussions were much more likely to report feelings of depression. Harsh startup explained 12% of the variance in depressed mood scale scores.

Hypothesis 2 stated harsh startup is negatively associated with shared goals and values. The hypothesis was supported. The standardized coefficient was negative and large ($\beta = -.51$). The finding indicated that those who participate in harsh startup situations report having fewer shared goals and values.

Hypothesis 3 posited that depressed mood is negatively associated with shared goals and values. The hypothesis was confirmed. The association between depressed mood and shared goals and values was negative ($\beta = -.22$). Note that the combined effects of harsh startup and depressed mood explained 38% of the variance in shared goals and values scores. This level of explained variance is noteworthy, considering that the figure is based only on two predictors.

Hypothesis 4, which stated, depressed mood is negatively associated with financial satisfaction, was supported. Those who reported greater feelings of depression noted having lower financial satisfaction ($\beta = -.19$).

Hypothesis 5, similarly, was confirmed. This hypothesis stated that shared goals and values are positively associated with financial satisfaction. Respondents who reported having more shared goals and values were significantly more likely to report higher levels of financial satisfaction ($\beta = .21$).

Hypothesis 6 was premised on the assumption that harsh startup should have a negative indirect association with financial satisfaction. Confirmation of the hypothesis can be found in Table 4. The indirect standardized coefficient for harsh startup was ($\beta = -.19$). This can be calculated manually be multiplying the coefficient from harsh startup to depressed mood by the coefficient from depressed mood to financial satisfaction and adding that to the coefficient from harsh startup to shared goals and values multiplied by the coefficient from shared goals and values to financial satisfaction. Adding that to the multiplication of the harsh startup to depressed mood coefficient by the depressed mood to shared goals and values coefficient by the shared goals and values to financial satisfaction coefficient shows a -.19 result.

Hypothesis 7 stated that depressed mood is indirectly negatively associated with financial satisfaction. Using the same multiplicative process as in Hypothesis 6, the indirect effect of depressed mood was found to be negative as well ($\beta = -.05$). Although smaller than the harsh startup effect, the result provided support for the hypothesis.

Together, the three determinants of financial satisfaction, as conceptualized in the model, explained 11% of the variance in financial satisfaction. This is an impressive level of explained variance, considering that no socioeconomic, demographic, or no additional psychosocial variables were controlled for in the model.

Table 4 shows the indirect, direct, and total effects of harsh startup, depressed mood, and shared goals and values on financial satisfaction. Statistical significance is reported only for the direct effects. The 0.00 direct effect between harsh startup and financial satisfaction is an outcome of the model. No direct link was hypothesized between harsh startup and financial satisfaction.

Table 4. Standardized Independent Measure Effects on Financial Satisfaction

Measure	**Effects**		
	Indirect	**Direct**	**Total**
Harsh Startup	-.19	.000	-.19
Depressed Mood	-.05	-.19*	-.24
Shared Goals and Values	.000	.21*	.21

*p < .05; **p < .01

Conclusions, Implications, and Limitations

Is there an association between and among couples' (either those who are married or living in a committed relationship) shared goals and values, feelings of depression, the way couples discuss issues, and financial satisfaction? This question has not generally been asked by those conducting research in the family and consumer economics field. Among clinicians it has generally been assumed that the way in which couples work through the intricacies of living together likely has no affect on financial satisfaction. This study fills a gap in the literature and helps clarify paths from shared goals and values, depression, and harsh startup to financial satisfaction. That is, financial satisfaction does appear to be influenced by these factors, both directly and indirectly.

Information gathered from this study illustrates how financial satisfaction is impacted by factors generally assumed to be related only to marital satisfaction and stability. This study adds to the literature by showing that the way couples interact—more precisely, engage in conflict—does have an impact on the symptoms of psychological distress one experiences, as well as how a couple shares their life's goals and values. Ultimately, these factors affect how someone views their financial situation. Although the links between financial satisfaction, harsh startup, depressed mood, and shared goals and values are evident, relationship therapists, relationship educators, and financial counselors may have difficulty in utilizing this type of information. Aniol and Snyder (1997) reported that couples often seek financial help from relationship therapists or they seek out financial counseling when they experience relationship distress. This is likely because clients often cannot easily differentiate between which issue is more challenging. Financial counselors and relationship therapists often find this problematic because generally they are not equipped with the skills to work with both problems.

The findings from the current study raise awareness for relationship therapists, educators, and financial counselors/advisors by showing that financial satisfaction is negatively linked to depressed mood and harsh startup, yet positively associated with shared goals and values. These factors do make a difference in the way couples perceive their financial situation. Helping professionals ought to consider collaborating with one another to address these issues and provide more comprehensive and effective services.

Application for Practitioners Working with Couples

This study does offer some evidence for couples therapists and financial counselors as to how couples experience financial satisfaction as it is related to their financial situation. Since financial issues have been found to be a significant cause of disputes among married couples (Geiss & O'Leary, 1981; Pittman & Lloyd, 1988; Papp et al., 2009), the ability to communicate and resolve conflict may be, as shown in this study, a factor that influences financial satisfaction. Johnson and Booth (1990) suggested that marital satisfaction and stability is largely due to the dyadic processes in the relationship, meaning how couples perceive their ability to mesh together, interact with each other, and spend time together. Conger et al. (1990) found that hostility in husbands and wives due to economic pressure lowers marital quality. Furthermore, they found that support through warmth and affection as well as conflict management skills helped to mediate the impact of economic pressure and the likelihood that marital quality would increase (Conger et al.; Conger et al., 1994; Conger, Rueter, & Elder 1999).

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

In addition, Rosenblatt and Keller (1983) reported that those who experienced greater economic distress also indicated greater blaming in the marriage. This finding hints at the possibility that couples facing greater financial vulnerability are likely to have increased financial stress, which increases the likelihood of one spouse blaming the other for the financial stress. The blaming in the marriage deters couples from effectively communicating or resolving conflict within the relationship. Economic stress can also lead to depression, which further deteriorates the couple's ability to communicate and resolve conflict, ultimately decreasing marital satisfaction (Johnson & Booth, 1990). Further understanding of how financial satisfaction and financial stressors are processed within the relationship will enhance financial counselors', educators', and advisors', as well as relationship therapists' and educators' ability to work with couples.

The Shared Goals and Values Scale

When couples create shared meaning about money and autonomy, it makes sense that they would be more satisfied with their financial situation. On the one hand, spouses may find peace of mind knowing that their partner will work towards similar financial goals as well as share similar values in regards to money. On the other hand, spouses who have decreased symptoms of psychological distress may be more likely to respect their partner's financial values and goals.

The development of the shared goals and values scale adds to the existing body of knowledge. The scale was based on Gottman's (2005) condensed Sound Relationship House Scales. The new shared goals and values scale adapted two questions about financial goals and common hopes and aspirations for family and relationship goals from the Shared Meaning Goals scale. In addition, two other questions were derived from the Shared Meaning Symbols. One statement assessed having compatible values about the meaning of money and the other addressed having similar values about "autonomy" and "independence." A factor analysis indicated that these four statements held together well and the scale was reliable.

The shared goals and values scale was associated with harsh startup, depressed mood, and financial satisfaction. This finding is important because it means that having common perceptions about the meaning of money, similar hopes and dreams for one's life, and having similar values about autonomy and independence in the relationship may be more important than communication techniques used. Gottman (1999) explained that couples do not necessarily have to see eye-to-eye in all of these areas. However, spouses can have mutual respect, support, and caring for the other's differing views. The statements in the scale appear to measure very different concepts: money, hopes and dreams for family and relationship, and autonomy and independence. Thus, the shared goals and values scale could actually have assessed the concept of respect rather than if a couple agreed with each other on particular issues. Further development and understanding of the scale should be explored.

Limitations

The exploratory nature of this study lends itself to several limitations, which may have impacted the outcomes of the research. The generalizability of this study should be considered. The sample was limited to one U.S. mid-western state and was comprised of primarily older non-Hispanic White rural households. The response rate, although unknown, was relatively low. Further, individuals who were more satisfied with their relationship and financial satisfaction may have been more likely to respond to a survey of this nature. Findings from this research may have also varied depending on geographical location, socioeconomic status, race, and education attainment. Further multidisciplinary research should be conducted to evaluate the relationships among financial satisfaction, financial stressors, and marital satisfaction. Additional literature in this area will help financial counselors, financial planners, marriage educators, financial literacy educators, and relationship therapists to provide more comprehensive services to their clients. Such research will also hasten the development of a theory of financial satisfaction.

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