Task and Social Behavior in Marriage *

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The general proposition that family groups are marked by both task and social-emotional specialization requires qualification. Task behavior is here defined as a subject-object activity and social-emotional behavior as a subject-subject activity. Social-emotional behavior can be delegated in a multi-person group, but not in a two-person group such as the marital pair. It is proposed that in marriage task performance is specialized, while social behavior is a mutual matter. Findings from a study of married couples confirm the existence of task specialization and social-emotional mutuality. Also, in this middle-class sample, the average husband and wife show few significant differences in their marriage goals; in their social-emotional need preferences within, though not outside, marriage; and in the correlates of their marital satisfaction. It is suggested that, both in family and in non-family groups, the degree of social-emotional specialization depends on group size; in the dyad, such specialization would disappear.

The welfare of any human group depends on the fulfillment of two kinds of functions: the performance of tasks for coping with the objective environment and the maintenance of social relationships among the members. From research on five-man problem solving groups, Bales and Slater have concluded that these two kinds of functions tend to interfere with each other.

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The two functions seemed best carried on by different individuals in the group, referred to as the task and the social-emotional specialist.

Parsons\(^3\) has drawn on that conclusion in writing about family interaction. He proposed that generally the "husband-father" role is that of task specialist, while the "wife-mother" role is that of social-emotional specialist. Zelditch\(^4\) has tried to substantiate Parsons' generalization. In a review of anthropological essays and field reports, he noted that in the large majority of cultures husbands and wives adhere to a division of roles, in which husband copes mainly with the external environment and wife maintains the home.

This view of marital roles is supported by folk wisdom. For example, in Korea the husband is sometimes referred to as "outside master" and the wife as "inside master,"\(^5\) a seeming acknowledgment of task versus social-emotional specialization. In our own culture, the poet Ogden Nash has noted with his typical irreverence that a husband and wife are incompatible, if "... he has no income and she isn't patible."

Nevertheless, Parsons' and Zelditch's broad generalization must be qualified. It appears largely correct for describing the roles of father and mother in the childbearing nuclear family, a multi-person group. Yet it does not apply as readily to the roles of husband and wife, considered purely in the context of the marriage relationship.

Consider the definitions of task and of social-emotional behavior. Task behavior refers to activity that involves "... the manipulation of the object-world ... for the achievement of goals defined within the system."\(^6\) Such behavior is not necessarily satisfying in itself, but is a means toward attaining a group goal. In principle, task behavior can be performed by any subpart of the group, and even can be delegated to persons who are not formal members.

Social-emotional behavior, in contrast, is activity that maintains the relations between the members. Zelditch terms it "... the expression of affection ... and a symbolization of common membership through supportive, accepting behavior."\(^7\) The expression of negative feeling would also, of course, be considered social-emotional behavior with repercussions for group maintenance. Social-emotional behavior is ultimately reciprocal and therefore it cannot be delegated to persons outside the group. Thus, while task activity

\(^3\) Talcott Parsons, "The American Family," in Parsons and Bales, \textit{op. cit.}

\(^4\) Morris Zelditch, Jr., "Role Differentiation in the Nuclear Family," in Parsons and Bales, \textit{op. cit.}


\(^6\) Zelditch, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 310.

\(^7\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 311.
refers to a subject-object relation, social activity represents instead a subject-subject relation.

According to these definitions, task and social behavior differ in their potentiality for delegation. A group's task orientation encourages specialization in its division of labor, particularly when there are many different tasks to be performed and when the members' relations are cooperative. However, social-emotional behavior cannot be delegated in this way, except to the extent that two members' relations to a third party are nominally equivalent. If A's and B's bonds to C are equivalent, then B's maintenance of the social-emotional relation with C serves to strengthen A's and C's relation. In that sense, social-emotional specialization does occur in groups of three or more persons such as in the child rearing family; the wife's care of children would be considered a social-emotional function.

From the standpoint of the marriage group, however, child care and other aspects of a wife's "inside mastery" must be considered tasks. The two members of a pair may differ in their propensity for initiating overt social-emotional interaction, but over the long run the maintenance of a given level of interaction depends on the degree of reciprocation by the less demonstrative partner. Back to Ogden Nash: the importance of the wife's "patibility" derives from the assumption that the husband wants to pat. A marriage where only one partner engages in social-emotional actions breaks down in its interaction. The lower its reciprocity, the lower should be the total level of social-emotional behavior.

It is proposed, therefore, that in the marriage group per se both spouses are task specialists and neither spouse is a social-emotional specialist. Furthermore, it would seem that an American middle class husband need not differ substantially from his wife in his marital aspirations. The satisfactoriness of such marriages may depend as much on the husband's as on the wife's performance in the social-emotional realm.

METHOD

The sample consisted of sixty middle class couples, all of whom had chil-

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8 This view is consistent with that of Durkheim. See Emile Durkheim, The Division of Labor in Society, translated edition, Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1947.

9 Deutsch has explained how a group's cooperative goal orientation enhances members' ability to take on specialized, non-overlapping tasks. See Morton Deutsch, "A Theory of Cooperation and Competition," Human Relations, 2 (May, 1949), pp. 129-152.

10 Even this more limited interpretation of the tendency toward social-emotional specialization has been criticized by Slater in his conceptual discussion of Parsons' approach to parental role differentiation. See Phillip E. Slater, "Parental Role Differentiation," American Journal of Sociology, 67 (November, 1961), pp. 296-308.
children, had been married between four and twenty-two years, and lived in the area of Greater Cleveland. The average couple was in the late thirties, had been married 13.6 years, had three children, and came from the upper part of Class III on Hollingshead’s occupational-educational index.11 Thirty-six couples were parents of children in an elementary school; the other 24 couples were clients at a family service agency, who were comparable in the above-mentioned social characteristics. This selection of the sample ensured a relatively broad variation in marital satisfaction and also enabled use of the agency counselors for providing independent validating judgments.

Each couple participated in a two- to three-hour long interview and performance session, in which husband and wife were seen first separately and later jointly. The respondents each gave information on the following matters. Each partner ranked the importance of certain marital goals, and described both spouses’ real and ideal performance in the task and social-emotional areas of marriage. Questions about task performance covered ten representative duties such as doing dishes or repairs. Questions about social-emotional matters asked about each partner’s supportiveness, the couple’s frequency of communication, and the sexual relationship.

Indices of marital satisfaction were derived from questions about general happiness, from those about specific satisfaction areas, and from the discrepancies between statements about real versus ideal behavior.

A laboratory performance part of the session consisted of joint performance on four tests, of which a parallel form had previously been administered individually. The first two group tests required subjects to discuss and rank the importance of two sets of goals; the third was a joint vocabulary test; and the fourth was the Color-Symbol Test, our own special group adaptation of the Wechsler-Bellevue Digit-Symbol Test.12 The joint session was observed and tape recorded. Three observation indices of behavior were obtained, on which two judges arrived at agreement that exceeded 80 per cent. These indices described a couple’s activity level, acceptance of the other’s contributions, and rejection of his contributions.

Fifteen months after the first interview, 49 of the 60 couples completed an additional set of instruments, consisting primarily of personality tests.

RESULTS

Findings will be presented under two general headings: (1) specialization


versus mutuality in husbands’ and wives’ task and social behavior; and (2) difference versus similarity in their marital goals, their needs, and their sources of marital satisfaction.

**Specialization versus Mutuality.** It is accepted that husbands and wives differ in the kinds of family tasks that they generally perform. Thus Herbst and Blood and Wolfe have published findings on Australian and American samples, showing that husbands and wives each have special areas of both performance and decision-making. For example, the husband is generally more likely to do and decide about house repairs, while the wife is more prone to care for and decide about child care and family health. Furthermore, Blood and Wolfe reported that on eight representative ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ household tasks, there is only a small percentage of equality in performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Equality and Inequality between Husbands’ and Wives’ Reported Performance of Task and Social-Emotional Items (60 Couples)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Husbands’ Reports</th>
<th>Wives’ Reports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>H=W*</td>
<td>H=W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Task Performance:</strong> Who . . . [how frequently do you]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . repairs things around the house?</td>
<td>59*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . does the evening dishes?</td>
<td>53*</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . pays the monthly bills?</td>
<td>53*</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . keeps in touch with relatives?</td>
<td>51*</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . does the grocery shopping?</td>
<td>50*</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . puts out the trash?</td>
<td>48*</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . gets information about insurance, talks to insurance agents?</td>
<td>39**</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . makes complaints . . . to salesmen, workmen, landlord?</td>
<td>41*</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . gets information before you buy big items . . . ?</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . gets ideas and information about . . . vacation?</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Social-Emotional Performance:** [How often] do you [does spouse] . . . | | | | |
| . . talk about feelings with [other] when . . . bothered or upset? | 36 | 24 | 40** | 20 |
| . . when there is a difference of opinion, make a great effort to see [other’s] point of view? | 34 | 26 | 36 | 24 |
| . . ask [other] about what [other] has done during the day? | 33 | 27 | 32 | 28 |
| . . tell [other] about the things [done] during the day? | 29 | 31 | 33 | 27 |
| . . praise [other] when [other] has done something [you like]? | 32 | 28 | 27 | 33 |
| . . kiss [other] when [you, husband] leave for or return from work? | 12 | 48* | 6 | 54* |

* H=W columns indicate number of reports that spouses perform a given activity to a different degree; H=W columns show number of reports that the activity is performed equally often by both partners.

* P < .01, by binomial test for N=60.

** P < .05.


Their sample of 731 Detroit households showed a high degree of "role specialization" on these tasks, with either husband or wife taking greater responsibility on any single task.

Our own findings are similar. Table 1 shows that on eight of the ten family tasks covered in our interview schedule there was significant specialization. On all of the tasks, except getting information about "buying big items" or about "what to do on vacation," it was reported that one spouse took predominant responsibility. The two exceptions, which covered topics not dealt with in previous studies, do not deal with routinized household matters.

On the other hand, in the social-emotional realm, Table 1 shows considerably less contrast between the husband's and wife's activity. There is significantly more inequality on only one of the six items—i.e., "talking about one's feelings with [spouse] when one is bothered or upset;" here the wife was usually seen as the more vocal partner. On the remaining five items, there was as much or more mutuality in the spouses' reported behavior as there was specialization.

Table 1 showed the comparison of $H=W$ with $H \neq W$ frequencies within each of the sixteen relevant items. A different analysis would compare the percentages of task and social-emotional $H=W$ items for each single respondent.\(^{15}\) Would such a procedure yield a similar result?

The results clearly support the present thesis. Forty-nine of the sixty husbands showed a larger percentage of $H=W$ items on the social than on the task set; similarly, 53 of 60 wives reported greater equality on the social-emotional items. By sign test, these results show a task-social difference significant at far beyond the .001 level.

The most convincing evidence in support of the present thesis is drawn from an item-by-item correlational analysis. This analysis is based on the assumption that specialization would be indicated by negative correlations between husband's and wife's performance, while mutuality would be shown by positive correlations. Table 2 shows that, indeed, all task items had negative correlations \(^{16}\) and all social-emotional items had positive correlations.

While all correlations in Table 2 were in the predicted direction, some were very high and others were near zero. To begin with, the correlations be-

\(^{15}\) This procedure was suggested by an anonymous reviewer.

\(^{16}\) In the original study, the form of the task questions precluded the present correlational analysis. Respondents had given only one response to describe both husband's and wife's task activity. For that reason, it became necessary to readminister the questionnaire about task performance, using the same question-answer format as employed on the social-emotional items—with husband's and wife's activity described separately. Of the original 60 couples, 37 pairs completed the new form.
between two independent ratings ($H_w \times W_h$) were almost uniformly lower than those between ratings by the same judge. Obviously, two spouses’ ratings within any pair often differed. The independent ratings constitute the most valid test of the hypothesis, but one should not disregard the strong support from the non-independent ratings in the last two columns of Table 2. The latter correlations indicate that the research participants perceived that tasks tend to be specialized while social maintenance is a mutual matter.

It seems meaningful that some items, such as making repairs or getting insurance information, produced very high negative correlations; one partner’s activity on such items almost precludes the other’s activity. Other items, such as doing the dishes or making complaints, do not represent mutually exclusive behavior; it is feasible either to do dishes jointly or to delegate the function almost entirely, and it is possible that neither or both partners may voice their complaints to outside agencies. In the social-emotional realm, “asking the spouse about his daily activities” showed the lowest positive
correlation, while kissing behavior showed the highest one, once again a reflection of common sense.

Two other sources of data are pertinent. The spouses' interaction, as observed in the laboratory session, also showed a positive correlation between husband's and wife's social-emotional behavior: (a) acceptance of each other's contributions, \( r = .12, p = \text{n.s.} \); (b) rejection of each other's contributions, \( r = .31, p < .02 \). Incidentally, the reported social-emotional behavior from the interview correlated .15 with spouses' observed acceptance of each other and \(-.24\) with their observed rejection during the laboratory session.

Additional validating evidence in favor of the social-emotional index came from the Agency caseworkers' ratings. Considering their sub-sample of 24 couples, the caseworkers' ratings of supportiveness correlated positively with the interview index: for husbands, \( r = .33 \), for wives, \( r = .42. \)\(^{17}\)

These findings, then, confirm the proposition that while task-oriented behavior in marriage tends to be specialized, social-supportive activity encourages reciprocation. In the latter area, two spouses within the same marriage tend to be more similar than husbands or wives across different marriages.

**Difference versus Similarity.** Husbands and wives in this study do not differ as widely in the social-emotional contribution to marriage as one might have believed. In part, this conclusion derives from our limited definition of social-emotional behavior. It leads one to ask, though, whether husbands and wives necessarily differ in other aspects of their social-emotional relationship. How different or similar are they in their marital goals, their needs, or their satisfactions?

**Similarity in Marriage Goals.** Some experts in marriage research\(^ {18} \) claim that American marriage has become predominantly concerned with companionship. If that claim is correct, it would suggest that men and women are equally concerned with primarily social-emotional goals. On the other hand, a study by Farber\(^ {19} \) has reported that wives attached significantly higher importance than did husbands to social-emotional as opposed to task-oriented goals.

In our own study, each respondent ranked a set of nine general marital goals adapted from Farber's set, ordering them according to their importance

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\(^{17}\) Ratings by Agency caseworkers also showed a strong positive correlation between their perceptions of husband's and wife's social supportiveness in the 24 Agency couples: \( r = .59, p < .01 \). This finding supports the present interpretation, but has limited validity due to the non-independence of the ratings.


for achieving a good marriage. The nine goals are shown in Table 3. Two are primarily social-emotional—Affection and Companionship—and four are mainly task-oriented—Economic Security, an Attractive Home, Wise Financial Planning, and a respected Place in the Community.

Table 3 indicates that there was no difference between husbands’ and wives’ ranking of Affection and Companionship. These two goals were ranked at the top, the other four goals near the bottom of the order. Nor was there any difference between the husband and wife groups in their mean ratio of ranks for social versus task goals (t=.43, n.s.). On rankings of single goals, the only significant differences occurred on Economic Security (H>W, p<.01) and Religion (H<W, p<.05).

Why are these results unlike Farber’s? One explanation might be that the

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**TABLE 3**

Relative Importance of Nine Marriage Goals as Ranked by Sixty Couples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals in Marriage *</th>
<th>Mean Ranks b</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Couples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Affection.</strong> Having family members satisfied with the amount of love they give to each other.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Companionship.</strong> Having family members enjoy doing things together and feel comfortable with each other.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Happy children.</strong> Helping the children to become well-adjusted and to enjoy their lives.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal development.</strong> Giving each family member the opportunity to develop as an individual.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religion.</strong> Living according to religious principles and teaching.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economic security.</strong> Keeping up or improving the family’s standard of living.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attractive home.</strong> Having a place which is comfortable and attractive to live in.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wise financial planning.</strong> Making sound decisions in budgeting for present and future purchases, and making intelligent use of money.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A place in the community.</strong> Giving family members a respected place in the community.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The goals, which were presented in a different order to the subjects, were introduced somewhat as follows: "... Indicate which of these goals is most important to you, second, third, and so on ..."

* The numerals show the mean rank for each goal for each group. On the average, therefore, Affection was seen as first in importance by both the couples and the wives, and third by the husbands.

* Rho between husbands’ and wives’ mean ranks was .83.

* P<.05 (sign test), wives’ ranks were higher than husbands’.

** P<.01 (sign test), husbands’ ranks were higher than wives’.
two lists of marital goals are somewhat different; another, that the present
definition of "social-emotional" goals is more restricted than Farber's. Both
these variations seem of minor import.
A more convincing explanation is that social class differences account for
the discrepancy. Despite the relatively high social class homogeneity of the
present sample, the class index and the ratio of social-emotional versus
task-oriented preferences correlated negatively for the husbands (r = -.23)
and positively for the wives (r = .27). Thus husbands and wives at the upper
end of the class continuum showed the smallest difference between their ranks.
And it turns out that Farber's sample, in which husband-wife rankings dif-
fered more, was drawn on the average from a social class stratum somewhat
lower than the present sample.  
It appears therefore that companionship marriage is more a reflection
of middle or upper-middle than of lower class position. Evidence from Blood
and Wolfe sustains that interpretation: they found that "mean intensity of
companionship" was highest for high-status white collar husbands and lowest
for low-status blue collar husbands.  The more a couple is assured of
economic security and occupational stability, the more likely it is that the
husband will share the wife's concern with social-emotional matters.
Social-Emotional Needs. Another set of findings pertains to the partners'
descriptions of their manifest personal "needs." During a follow-up visit 15
months after the first study, 49 of the initial 60 couples completed question-
naires concerning the relative strength of various needs. Data were collected
on two forms: a 144-item condensation of the Edwards Personal Preference
Schedule, measuring the strength of twelve general needs; and a parallel
form of this Schedule, in which Edwards' items for most needs were re-
written to refer specifically to the marital partner as the reference object.  
Four of Edwards' needs pertain to the social-emotional area: the needs for
Autonomy, for Affiliation, for Nurturance, and for Succorance. Table 4 shows
that on all four of these needs there were significant differences between the
mean scores of husbands and wives on the general form of the schedule. Hus-

20 This inference is based on Farber's description of his sample in another paper, from
which it appears that his respondents were significantly lower than ours in both educa-
tion and income. Bernard Farber, Effects of a Severely Mentally Retarded Child on
21 Blood and Wolfe, op. cit., p. 168, Table 79.
23 These revisions of the EPPS were made by Barbara Allan in connection with re-
search on her doctoral dissertation. The findings were obtained as part of the larger
research program.
TABLE 4
Differences between Husbands' and Wives' Social-Emotional Needs in General and in Marital Environment (49 Couples)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Need Name</th>
<th>General Test Form</th>
<th>Marital Test Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Husbands' Mean</td>
<td>Wives' Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wives' Mean</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nAutonomy</td>
<td>11.67</td>
<td>9.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nNurturance</td>
<td>10.32</td>
<td>12.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nSuccorance</td>
<td>6.30</td>
<td>8.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nAffiliation</td>
<td>13.38</td>
<td>14.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nInterdependence</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Edwards' original items for nAffiliation had to be entirely rewritten for the Marital Form, since completely parallel construction was inappropriate. The resulting items were labeled Need for Interdependence.

b Two-tailed t-test with 96 df, comparing husbands' and wives' mean scores.

* P<.07. ** P<.04. *** P<.02. **** P<.01.

bands scored higher than wives on their preference for Autonomy, and lower on their needs for Affiliation, Nurturance, and Succorance. On the marital schedule, however, these differences disappeared. In describing their need preferences in marriage, both partners showed markedly lower desire for autonomy, and acknowledged a far higher desire for interdependence, for giving nurturance to, and for receiving succor from the spouse. It appears that these latter needs are conventionally suppressed in the general environment, particularly by men; in marriage, though, these needs are given preference by both partners over other more achievement-oriented desires.

Would other samples of married partners show the same tendency? Until that is known, these findings support the assumption that marriage legitimizes the expression and gratification of needs that are inhibited in the general environment.

Marital Satisfaction. The findings on marital goals and needs suggest that these husbands and wives would place a considerably higher value on social-emotional than on task satisfactions in their marriage, and also that husbands and wives would be relatively similar in their profiles.

This study emphasized the collection of diverse indices of marital satisfaction. Measures ranged from two indices of global happiness, to ratings of single areas of the marriage, to differences between a partner's reported real and ideal behavior. On the basis of fifteen such indices of satisfaction, two separate factor analyses were conducted for the husband and wife samples.

The present discussion will consider only the first factor extracted from the correlation matrix, which accounted for much more variance than other
factors (see Table 5). For both husbands and wives, Factor I represented general marital satisfaction. Factor I showed high similarity between husband and wife samples; Kaiser's coefficient of factor similarity was .96.²⁴ For both spouses, Factor I was loaded more highly with social-emotional than with task adjustment variables. Satisfaction with either the husband's work or with the couple's division of tasks and decisions was related very little to either spouse's general happiness. In contrast, feelings about affection, use of leisure time, and each other's social supportiveness were rather highly related with general happiness. For husbands, sexual satisfaction was more related to general satisfaction, while for wives, marital communication was of greater importance.

Many of the correlations used in the factor analysis are highly reliable, but the reliability of the factor structure is more suggestive than definitive. One would therefore turn to other studies for corroboration of these factors. Tharp's ²⁵ recent factor-analytic study of marriage roles, based on Kelly's ²⁶ extensive survey of married couples, provides perhaps the best comparative information. Tharp found that for both husbands and wives the factor of Intimacy accounted for the largest amount of variance in describing both the expected and the enacted marriage roles. This factor comes closest to what has here been defined as social-emotional behavior, although under that rubric Tharp found additional factors which he labeled Socio-Emotional Integration and Understanding. Incidentally, Tharp's men and women differed as regards sexual and communicative relations in a way that parallels our subjects; for his husbands, the Intimacy factor was more highly loaded with sexual pleasure than for the wives, who associated Intimacy relatively more with adequacy of understanding.

**Differences between High and Low Satisfied Couples.** One other set of findings shows that marital satisfaction was related far more to social than to task performance. A comparison was made between two groups of fifteen couples, selected from the high and low extremes of the satisfaction continuum.²⁷ This comparison showed almost no significant differences in

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²⁴ Appreciation is acknowledged to Dr. James Lingoes of the University of Michigan for providing the appropriate computer program. The program was based on a dittoed paper by Henry F. Kaiser, "Relating Factors between Studies Based upon Different Individuals," Bureau of Educational Research, University of Illinois, July, 1960.


²⁷ The High group consisted of the fifteen couples from the School sample who had the highest factor score on Factor I of Marital Satisfaction; the Low group were those fifteen Agency couples with the lowest marital satisfaction factor scores.
### Table 5

**Principal Factors in Husbands' and Wives' Marital Satisfaction (60 Couples)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indices of Marital Satisfaction</th>
<th>Husband Factors</th>
<th>Wife Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Task satisfaction:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Couple's division of labor</td>
<td>-02</td>
<td>-02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Couple's decision-making balance</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Husband's work</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Wife's work</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social-emotional satisfaction:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Use of leisure</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Affection</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Communication frequency</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Husband's social-emotional role</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Wife's social-emotional role</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexual satisfaction:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. General sexual relationship</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Husband's desired frequency</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Wife's desired frequency</td>
<td>-06</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General satisfaction:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Achievement of nine marital goals</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Estimate of spouse's happiness</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Global happiness</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of variance</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Decimal points are omitted for factor loadings and communalities. All values are rounded to two significant digits. Principal axes solution with varimax rotation. The program was provided by Dr. James Lingoes of the University of Michigan.
task performance, but many differences in social-emotional relations. The high satisfied couples reported significantly more socially supportive activity and, in the laboratory, showed less rejecting behavior than the lows. The highs also reported a higher frequency of marital communication; specifically, highs talked with each other more on nine of eleven standard topics, the only exceptions being the discussion of unpleasant feelings and of money matters.

In the task area, though, the only significant difference between the high and low satisfied couples concerned the husbands' reports of their own decision influence. Low husbands reported their influence to be lower than did the high husbands, but the high and low wives' reports did not corroborate this. Also, there was no clear difference between the high and low groups in the dominance pattern they displayed during the laboratory session.

Consider one last finding, which occurred during the laboratory session. Contrary to the writer's original hypothesis, the high and low satisfied groups showed no difference in their joint performance on the two specially designed objective tests: the Vocabulary and the Color-Symbol test. In terms of a ratio of the couple's joint score to the previous average individual score, the highs worked together no better than did the lows. However, the highs tended to exceed the lows in their expected joint performance when they were asked to predict the couple's score before the first joint trial on the Color-Symbol Test. This laboratory finding is quite important: it shows that test performance did not, in fact, co-vary with the subjects' mutual feelings. The result adds support to the belief that these couples' marital satisfaction was associated less with their objective task performance than with their subjective evaluation of their relationship.

DISCUSSION

What does one conclude from these diverse findings? They suggest that

28 Both spouses in the High group reported significantly greater positive social-emotional performance by the other partner than did spouses in the Low group: husbands, $t=2.97$, $p<.01$; wives, $t=4.07$, $p<.001$.

29 $t=2.43$, $p<.03$.

30 $t=2.47$, $p<.02$.

31 For husbands' reports, $t=1.92$, $p<.06$; for wives', $t=.04$, n.s.

32 $t=1.72$, $p<.10$.

33 These results are limited, of course, to the particular tests used in our present setting. One should note O'Rourke's recent conclusion that the nature of the interaction situation—both in field and in laboratory—has a determinate effect on interaction patterns. John F. O'Rourke, "Field and Laboratory: The Decision-Making Behavior of Family Groups in Two Experimental Situations," Sociometry, 26 (December, 1963), pp. 422-435.
social-emotional performance is the essence of the marital relationship as seen by both spouses in these American middle class marriages, and further that it is a mutual rather than a specialized matter. This interpretation does not conflict with the probability that the average wife initiates more than half of the socially supportive interaction. In fact, other findings from our research program suggest that the wife's perceived social-emotional role may be a more important indicator of marital cohesiveness than is the husband's. Yet it is clear that a simple dichotomy of task versus social-emotional specialization in marriage receives neither logical nor empirical verification.

Several matters deserve further comment. These include a caution about limitations and some conclusions about task and social roles in groups of varying size.

With respect to limitations, the study was confined to sixty married couples, selected from the general population through their willingness to participate together in research on family life. The sample consisted predominantly of urban, white, American, middle class spouses, in the second decade of their marriage, and with young children in the home. It is possible that such couples would show greater value- and need-similarity than that found in the average pair. The peculiarities of our present sample can only be estimated through future parallel research. However, our findings do not depart radically from those of other studies cited earlier.

The findings that show the mutuality of social-emotional behavior have implications for the understanding both of family groups and of other kinds of groups. Concerning marriage, doubt is cast on the stereotype that the wife is principally interested in social-emotional relations while the husband forages merely for the material things in life. If the husband is indeed emotionally absent, the wife's ability to sustain social-emotional relations in the marriage is clearly limited. As mother, she can play a social role regardless of the husband's actions; as wife, she cannot.

This research also leads one to reconsider task and social behavior in non-family groups. Assuming that Bales' hypothesis of task versus social role specialization in problem solving groups is correct, it would need to be qualified by the effects of group size. According to our present reasoning, social-emotional specialization approaches zero when group size is reduced to two

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35 Blood and Wolfe, op. cit.; Farber, op. cit.; Tharp, op. cit.
36 A similar observation has recently been made by Leik. He noted that in the male-female dyad "... the standard role differentiation is more a consequence of interaction outside the dyad" than within the pairwise interaction. Robert K. Leik, "Instrumentality and Emotionality in Family Interaction," Sociometry, 26 (June, 1963), pp. 131-145 (p. 132, italics are Leik's).
persons. In a group of two partners, unilateral social-emotional behavior has little function for group maintenance—although it may be important for the initiator himself. Thus, either expressing one's feelings or telling a joke has a social maintenance function only when the other party reciprocates in some way.

The act of quiet listening to the initiator is one such form of reciprocation. However, listening behavior is difficult to observe and to operationalize, and it has not been included in existing systems of social observation. Furthermore, Bales' own observation system defines "social-emotional" to include actions which are task-oriented agreement or disagreement.\(^{37}\) For these two reasons, Bales and Borgatta's interaction profiles\(^{38}\) comparing two-person and larger groups do not offer an adequate test of our present assertion. The proposition that social-emotional specialization is absent in two-person groups requires new data for its general verification.\(^{39}\)

