

Love, Beauty, Marital Satisfaction, and Family Relations: A Study on Young Adult and Middle-Age Couples*

Amor, Beleza, Satisfação Conjugal, e Relações Familiares: Um Estudo com Casais Jovens Adultos e de Meia-Idade

Amor, Belleza, Satisfacción Marital y Relaciones Familiares: Un estudio sobre parejas de jóvenes adultos y de mediana edad

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ABSTRACT: The objectives of this study were to analyze the relationship between variables: love, beauty, marital satisfaction and family relationships in couples living in the city of São Paulo, Brazil. We investigated 200 subjects (50 couples of young adults and 50 middle-aged couples). The following instruments were used: questionnaire; Sternberg's Triangular Love Scale; Marital Satisfaction Scale; Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale Adaptability, Faces III and; Marital Conflict Scale. It was found that middle-aged couples had higher marital satisfaction rather than adults young couples. The subjects who considered their spouse as a beautiful person were more: marital satisfaction ($r=0.424$; $p<0.001$), intimacy ($r=0.384$; $p<0.001$), passion ($r=0,372$; $p<0,001$) and decision/commitment ($r=0,337$; $p<0,001$); felt more love for your spouse ($r=0,371$; $p<0,001$). This group of couples also showed greater family cohesion ($r=0,387$; $p<0,001$) and less family conflict ($r=-0,342$; $p<0,001$). We conclude that the favorable perception of beauty both itself and the spouse has a positive influence on marital and family relationships.

Keywords: Love; Beauty; Marital satisfaction; Family; Marriage.

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RESUMO: Os objetivos deste estudo foram analisar a relação entre as variáveis: amor (em suas dimensões Intimidade, Paixão e Decisão/Compromisso), beleza, satisfação conjugal e relações familiares (indicadas pela coesão familiar e conflitos familiares) em casais jovens adultos e de meia-idade. Foram investigados 200 sujeitos (50 casais de jovens adultos e 50 casais de meia-idade). Utilizaram-se os seguintes instrumentos: questionário; Escala Triangular do Amor de Sternberg; Escala de Satisfação Conjugal; Escala de Avaliação da Coesão e Adaptabilidade Familiar - Faces III e; Escala de Conflito Conjugal. Constatou-se que os casais de meia-idade apresentaram maior índice de satisfação conjugal do que os casais jovens adultos. Os sujeitos que consideravam seu cônjuge como sendo uma pessoa bonita tinham maior: satisfação conjugal ($r = 0,424$; $p < 0,001$), intimidade ($r = 0,384$; $p < 0,001$), paixão ($r = 0,372$; $p < 0,001$) e decisão/compromisso ($r = 0,337$; $p < 0,001$) e; sentiam mais amor pelo cônjuge ($r = 0,371$; $p < 0,001$). Este grupo de casais, também, apresentou maior coesão familiar ($r = 0,387$; $p < 0,001$) e menos conflitos familiares ($r = -0,342$; $p < 0,001$). Conclui-se que a percepção favorável da beleza tanto de si quanto do cônjuge exerce influência positiva nas relações conjugais e familiares.

Palavras-chave: Amor; Beleza; Satisfação conjugal; Família; Casamento.

RESUMEN: Los objetivos de este estudio fueron analizar la relación entre variables: amor, belleza, satisfacción marital y relaciones familiares en parejas residentes en la ciudad de São Paulo, Brasil. Se investigaron 200 sujetos (50 parejas de adultos jóvenes y 50 parejas de mediana edad). Se utilizaron los siguientes instrumentos: cuestionario; Escala de Amor Triangular de Sternberg; Escala de Satisfacción Marital; Adaptación de la familia y adaptación de la escala de evaluación de cohesión, Faces III y; Escala de Conflictos Maritales. Se encontró que las parejas de mediana edad tenían mayor satisfacción marital en lugar de adultos parejas jóvenes. Los sujetos que consideraron a su cónyuge como una persona hermosa fueron más: satisfacción marital ($r = 0,424$; $p < 0,001$), intimidad ($r = 0,384$; $p < 0,001$), pasión ($r = 0,372$; $p < 0,001$) y decisión / compromiso ($R = 0,337$, $p < 0,001$); Sentía más amor por su cónyuge ($r = 0,371$; $p < 0,001$). Este grupo de parejas también mostró mayor cohesión familiar ($r = 0,387$, $p < 0,001$) y menor conflicto familiar ($r = -0,342$; $p < 0,001$). Concluimos que la percepción favorable de la belleza tanto a sí misma como al cónyuge tiene una influencia positiva en las relaciones matrimoniales y familiares.

Palabras clave: Amor; Belleza; Satisfacción marital; Familia; Matrimonio.

Love has always been one of the feelings that man desires the most, so much so that it has gradually been gaining more space and becoming more visible in the world of science. In the past, love was thought of only within the scopes of philosophy and art. Freud stated that it was associated to sexual instincts while Skinner identified that love was a mutual reinforcement of behaviors. Many theories and much research have been proposed in order to understand the nature of love, such as Sternberg's triangular theory of love (Sternberg, 1986) and the colors of love theory (Lee, 1973; 1974; 1977).

Love is referenced as being one of the reasons for living or suffering; it is capable of representing both human happiness and affliction. This is why it is constituted as an emotion mainly associated to marriage (Oltramari, 2009). The romantic love that leads two people to get married can happen at any stage of life, and for most people it does happen at least once since human beings tend to feel incomplete without a romantic partner. In Sternberg's triangular theory (1986, 1988) love is the result of interaction between three components: intimacy, passion and decision/commitment. Intimacy develops over the course of a relationship, but it can also diminish, even in successful relationships. Passion comes on quickly, but also dissipates quickly and may end up being taken over by opposite feelings, such as hate. Decision/commitment takes longer to develop in a relationship yet it tends to remain stable over the years.

Evolutionist theories postulate that the roles of gender have evolved so that men and women present differences when choosing a partner. Women prefer partners with a higher status whereas men prefer partners who are more attractive; a sign of fertility and superior reproductive ability (Buss, & Barnes, 1986). According to Almeida and Madeira (2014), physical beauty proves to be the criteria of choice when a man is looking for a partner, younger women being chosen the most. This is mainly due to an evolutionary order, in other words, men instinctively look for women with better genes, a healthy appearance and the ability to have children.

Davis and Fingerman (2016) performed a systematic analysis of the language used in texts from the profiles of 4,000 people (young adults, middle-age and elderly) who used on-line dating sites. They determined that the most-used words on dating profiles related to affection, affiliation, love and companionship.

As far as the differences between genders for choosing a partner, both older men and younger men expressed more interest in physical beauty and sexuality while younger and older women were more interested in sexuality, family, friends, health and positive emotions. Older men were more likely to mention money in their profiles than younger men. This might be because older women are more concerned with the income of their possible partner, avoiding relationships that might prove to be a financial hardship or make them lose their financial independence. Both older men and older women mentioned health more than young adults. Having a healthy, functional body was important to these people's identity.

The society of the spectacle is based on a culture of see and be seen (Santos, Zoboli, & Correia, 2013) and it determines who is beautiful or who is ugly; idolizing the beautiful and leading men and women to bend over backwards in order to fit the media definition of beauty (Dourado, & Noronha, 2014). Body image comprises the exterior appearance of an individual (Tovian, 2002) and provides a base for identity (Norris, 1982). Historically, the human body has been connected to the history of civilization as each society and culture creates their own standards. Clearly, women and men's bodies are the fruit of social construction and the differences between the two genders have elaborated over time (Paim, & Strey, 2004). In Ancient Greece, the body and soul were realities that complemented each other and, for this reason, the educational processes that favored perfection and beauty were highly regarded (Monteiro, 2009). From ancient times until current times, beauty has been appreciated in building thoughts and human relations (Cuch, 2013).

Beauty influences the perception of others. In terms of physical attraction there are certain positive attributes like social or occupational competence (Jackson, 2002). To a greater or lesser degree, all individuals present the need for their body to be approved and accepted by others (Brundage, & Broadwell, 1995). Over the last decade and the first few years of this current one, all the economy sectors involved in producing and/or maintaining beauty have experienced significant growth. This growth is a result of a strong focus on body worship coming from contemporary culture, one which the media exploits by mediating the individual-society relationship, creating trends, and attributing and recycling demands from the more diverse segments of reader-spectators (Castro, 2007).

The standards of beauty, sensuality, health and posture are what men and women use as references for creating their image (Barbosa, Matos, & Costa, 2011).

According to Dornelles (2002), men were given the role of dominator, the holder of reason, and women were given the model for the exterior; worrying about beauty, an object of pleasure, a reproducer and mother. Beauty is one of the measures used to win over the affection of another (Dourado, & Noronha, 2014). In this sense, Tantleff and Gokee (2002) state that the perception individuals have of their partner's appearance and the way in which this perception is expressed influence the way they see themselves, their own relationships, and their marital satisfaction.

Current research on loving relationships faces the challenge of investigating a complex, multifaceted phenomenon. The concept of marital satisfaction or what a satisfactory marriage should be is also a daunting, wide-ranging and complex task for science. Numerous research results indicate a high index of factors associated to the definition of the concept of marital satisfaction (Mosmann, Wagner, & Féres-Carneiro, 2006; Scorsolini-Comim, & Santos, 2010; Wagner, & Falcke, 2001). According to Sternberg (1988), the clearest way to identify satisfaction in a relationship occurs when you evaluate the difference between what one person expects from the other (out of the relationship) and what this same person is getting from the other. Marital satisfaction is connected to the evolution of a relationship which involves the expectations and aspirations a couple had before marriage and comparing them to the current marital reality (Campbell, Converse, & Rogers, 1976; Gottman, & Krokoff, 1989; Olson, 1979). Satisfactory marital relationships are mainly characterized by feelings of closeness, passion, understanding, happiness, attachment, autonomy, an understanding that no one can satisfy all these necessities for the other and that no relationship is without its problems (Dias, 2009).

However, a series of factors must be looked at in order to understand marital satisfaction. They are: gender, the previous personal history of each partner, attitude, health, personality, socio-historical aspects, culture, economy, family and education, values, sexual activity, the locus of control, the presence or absence of children, communication between the couple, the length of the relationship, paid employment and pre-marital sexual experiences, the current state of the family's vital and life cycle.

Marital relationships suffer from changes over the course of the family life cycle and the level of satisfaction consequently varies over the course of the time spent while living together (Scorsolini-Comin, & Santos, 2010).

The first years of marriage are described as a stage of great marital satisfaction (Lucas, & Clark, 2005) and marriages are ending earlier: the average length went from 17 years in 2007 to 15 years in 2012 (IBGE, 2013). Heckler and Mosmann (2014) studied young adult couples with two careers and found that some of them had skipped the dating period and started living together in the same house as soon as they met. In general, they experienced problems trying to invest in the relationship due to the short amount of time they had been together.

A longitudinal study from Miller, Hollist, Olsen, & Law (2013) on young adult couples (between the ages of 19 and 39) and middle-age couples (between 40 and 59) indicated that marital happiness and marital problems had a significant connection to physical health. There was a direct relation between happiness and good health among couples in both groups. A study conducted by Landis, Peter, Martin, & Bodenmann (2013) on 132 elderly couples showed the strategies of confrontation used by the dyad had a significant connection to marital satisfaction, which were the main indicators of adapting to daily stress in a marital context. Story, *et al.* (2007) suggested that elderly couples are inclined to the positive aspects of intimate relationships and have greater marital satisfaction when compared to middle-aged couples.

In this regard, cohesion - generally defined as an emotional bond or connection between family members (Olson, Russel, & Sprenkle, 1983) - reveals a better functioning for marital and family relations. There is a consensus among the theories of systemic perspective that cohesion is fundamental to determining family and marital health (Teodoro, & K  ppler, 2003). The more cohesive a family is the better it functions (Cluff, Hicks, & Madsen, 1994). High family cohesion favors the ability to adapt to conflicts and events on a daily basis that might otherwise have a negative effect on the system (Falc  o, 2006).

Based on these conditions, the objectives of this study were to analyze the relations between the variables: love (its dimension of Intimacy, Passion and Decision/Commitment), beauty, and marital satisfaction and family relations (indicated by family cohesion and family conflicts) in young adult couples and middle-aged couples. The motives for marital conflicts and the frequency with which they occurred in these relationships were also identified. It is necessary to develop this work because, besides being a relevant issue, there has been very little exploration of it on a scientific level which could lead towards proposals for public policies and health as well as provide subsidiary theories for other professionals.

Method

Study Design: descriptive exploratory research with a quantitative data analysis.

Participants: 200 subjects were studied, 50 being young adult couples (50 men and 50 women between 20 and 39 years old) and 50 being middle-aged couples (50 women and 50 men between 40 and 59 years old). Inclusion criteria for the couples was: a) they had to be married for at least 2 years; b) in the age bracket of 19 to 59; c) both partners in the same age group, in other words, either young adults or middle-aged, this was done so as to eliminate the possibility of getting a young adult married to a middle-aged person; and d) they must live in the city of São Paulo in São Paulo state.

Instruments: a research protocol was prepared in the same format (one feminine and the other masculine), however, masculine and feminine were put into in five blocks. The first block investigated the socio-demographic data (e.g. age, religion, schooling etc.). The second block evaluated the self-perception of beauty and the perception of the partner's beauty by answering a series of questions such as: "I consider myself: a) very ugly; b) ugly; c) neither ugly nor beautiful; d) beautiful; and e) very beautiful" and "I think my partner is..." choosing their answers from the same options as the previous question. The third block investigated the components of love using *Sternberg's Triangular Love Scale* which has 45 items (15 measure intimacy, 15 passion and 15 decision/commitment). Each one is evaluated on a *Likert* scale where the number 1 represents "nothing", 5 represents "moderately" and 9 "extremely". The scale has a blank space for all 45 questions which needs to be filled out with the name of the loved one (Cassepp-Borges, 2010).

The fourth block was made up of *The Golombok Rust Inventory of Marital State – GRIMS*). The GRIMS (Rust, Bennun, Crowe, & Golombok, 1988), translated and adapted to Portuguese by Falcke, 2003) assesses the quality of the relationship between a married couple in dimensions considered to be important for a good relationship: satisfaction, communication, shared interests, trust and respect. The scale is a 28-item questionnaire where the subject is scored on a Likert scale of 4 points (*strongly disagree, disagree, agree and strongly agree*). The higher the score, the more serious the problems are in the marital relationship. This block also included the item "How much you love your partner" (*Relationship Assessment Scale*, Hendrick, C., & Hendrick, S.S., 1986), which was evaluated using the Likert scale, the number 1 representing "not at all", 5 representing "sort of", and 9 representing "extremely".

The fifth block covered the Family Adaptation and Cohesion Scale, Faces III (Olson, Sprenkle, & Russell, 1979, translated and adapted by Falceto, 1997), and the Marital Conflict Scale (Buehler, & Gerard, 2002). Faces III assesses family and marital cohesion and adaptability and is composed of twenty items evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale (almost never, once in a while, sometimes, frequently, almost always). The Marital Conflict Scale consists of 9 items presented separately and divided into two sub-classes: 1) “conflict–misunderstandings” and 2) “conflict-aggression”. The first sub-class has 6 items measuring the frequency in which the subjects experienced misunderstandings with their partners in the last year. It uses a 6-point Likert scale (never, once a month or less, many times a month, about once a week, many times a week, almost every day). The second sub-class covers 3 items scored on a 3-point Likert scale (never, rarely, sometimes, usually, always) where one item measures the frequency with which the subject deals with conflicts in a calm way (inverted codified) and two items assess the frequency of discussions and aggressions. A medium score is achieved if the higher scores represent high levels of conflict.

Procedures: the study was initially approved (CAAE 32031414.3.0000.5390) by the Research Ethics Committee for the School of Arts, Sciences and Humanities at the University of São Paulo (EACH/USP). The sample was obtained using the snowball technique, where one couple indicated other members of their contact network to participate in the study. The data was collected individually from the couple, in other words, it was first applied to one partner and then the other in a suitable environment which offered the most privacy, avoiding any possible interruption from others. All participants signed a consent form (TCLE) in accordance with ethical guidelines.

Data Analysis: the data went through a statistical analysis using the SPSS program (Statistical Package for Social Sciences®) version 18.0. Frequency tables for the variable categories were created using absolute (n) and percentage (%) values to describe the sample profile according to the variables studied. A Chi-squared test or Fisher’s Exact Test (for expected values lower than 5) was used to characterize the groupings and compare the variable categories. The level of significance adapted to the statistical tests was 5% or $p < 0.05$. Analyses were also made using the Student’s t-test and Pearson’s correlation coefficient.

Results

Analysis of the socio-demographic questions revealed the age of the 200 participants to be between 21 and 59 ($M=41.5$ years; $DP=10.1$ years). The men were between 23 and 59 years of age ($M=41.5$ years) and were generally four years older than the women, whose age varied between 21 and 56 ($M=37.5$). The length of marriage of the participants varied between 2 and 37 years ($M=16$ years). Only 15 subjects (7.5%) had previously been married or lived with someone else. Most subjects ($n=69$; 34.5%) had an average of 2 children and 5% of the middle-aged couples ($n=10$) had grandchildren. Most subjects ($n=192$; 96%) said they were religious, mostly Catholic ($n=117$; 58.5%), and Evangelical ($n=100$; 50%). Most of the interviewees ($n=169$; 84.5%) were employed and worked an average of 8.5 hours a day in a working day which varied from 4 to 18 hours. Both men and women had a high level of education; 58% ($n=116$) had a graduate or post-graduate degree. Both young adult couples ($n=53$; 26.5%) and middle-age couples ($n=86$; 43%) mostly lived with their children.

A factor analysis was used and the items with a factor of less than 0.3 were excluded. The items with a negative factor were inverted. The Student's *t*-test was applied afterwards to analyze the young adult and middle-age couples and showed that they had an average marital satisfaction of 2.96 ($DP=0.28$; $t=29.2$; $g.l.=190.4$; $p<0.001$) which represents a higher index of marital satisfaction than young adult couples ($M=1.9$; $DP=0.23$; $t=0.29$) according to Table 1. There was no significant difference between the group of men and women.

Table 1: Comparison of marital satisfaction among young adult and middle-age couples

Life cycle	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>DP</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>g.l.</i>	<i>p</i>
Young Adult	100	1,904	0,229	29,165	198,000	0,000
Middle-age	100	2,961	0,281	29,165	190,387	0,000

In reference to beauty, the data indicated that the majority ($n=125$; 62.5%) of the participants saw themselves as beautiful or very beautiful and considered their partner to be beautiful or very beautiful also ($n=178$; 89%). This favorable self-perception of beauty showed a positive correlation ($r=0.315$; $p<0.001$) with the favorable perception of the partner's beauty.

There was no significant difference in the age group of the couples when correlating this variable. The Pearson's correlation coefficient analysis showed that subjects who considered their partner to be beautiful had greater marital satisfaction ($r=0.424$; $p<0.001$), intimacy ($r=0.384$; $p<0.001$), passion ($r=0.372$; $p<0.001$), and decision/commitment ($r=0.337$; $p<0.001$); and they expressed a deep love for their partner ($r=0.371$; $p<0.001$) when questioned about how much they loved them on a scale from 1 to 9. This group of couples also presented more family cohesion ($r=0.387$; $p<0.001$) and less family conflicts ($r=0.342$; $p<0.001$). There was no significant difference in the correlation of these variables with the age group of the couples.

Table 2: Pearson's correlation between the variables of love, beauty, marital satisfaction and family relations. How much they loved their partner

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Marital satisfaction	200	0,424	0,000
Intimacy	200	0,384	0,000
Passion	200	0,372	0,000
Decision/Commitment	200	0,337	0,000
How much they loved their partner	200	0,371	0,000
Family cohesion	200	0,387	0,000
Family conflict	200	-0,342	0,000

The motives behind marital conflict were identified from the levels of misunderstanding the couples generated in their marital relationship. As a result, misunderstandings about time management and intimacy was prevalent among young adults ($M=3.03$; $DP=1.31$), followed by family and financial conflicts of this same group ($M=2.55$; $DP=1.14$). For middle-aged couples, these results were very close which shows more misunderstandings around time management and intimacy ($M=2.94$; $DP=1.14$), followed by family and financial conflicts of this same group ($M=2.31$; $DP=1.07$).

Discussion

The socio-demographic results of this study revealed that older men marry younger women, as found in other studies (Otta, Queiroz, Campos, Silva, & Silveira, 1998; Camarano, 2002; Marques, 2012).

Furthermore, the level of marital satisfaction between middle-aged couples was greater than between young adults. In this context, it is worth noting that the average length of the participants' marriage was sixteen years, invalidating the possibility of the majority of recently married middle-aged couples. These results contrast with findings from literature stating that the major index for marital satisfaction occurs in the first years of marriage (Lucas, & Clark, 2005) and is in conflict with the finding of Story, *et al.* (2007) which states a tendency for increasing marital satisfaction in young adult couples and a decline for middle-aged couples.

This could have happened due to various factors such as the actual demands of the period of the subjects' individual and family life cycle, including reduced parental responsibilities (children had grown up or left home), an accumulation of financial resources, retirement fund or reduction in work load (Papalia, & Feldman, 2013). A longitudinal study by Gorchoff, Jonh, and Helson (2008) noted that marital satisfaction and quality increased at middle age. Women who went through the empty nest phase experienced positive changes in relation to those who still had their children living at home. This was associated to perceptions of their children's success, to an increase in the amount of work and energy invested in the marriage itself and in the quality of time spent with the partner.

Most of the participants looked favorably towards beauty in relation to themselves and their partners. The perception of self-image is influenced by a variety of events such as: the way in which each family sees themselves; the sociocultural insertion of each member; through observations made by partners; professional success or failure; and by the actual standards of beauty dictated by the media (Loiola, 2014). Dourado and Noronha (2014) indicate that beauty is one of the ways one wins the affection of the other and that it has been an important factor when choosing a partner. According to Camargo and Assumpção (2007) the fields of socio-anthropology and behavior, which are directly related to physical beauty, hold the idea that those considered to be beautiful should be happy, communicative, successful, intelligent, pleasant and charm all those in their social world. A longitudinal study by Shackelford, Schmitt and Buss (2005) found that young, recently-married youths who were interviewed in their first and fourth year of marriage, shared and valued good appearance out of a diverse number of preferences. Therefore, a large part of contemporary civilization ends up idolizing beauty.

There are individuals who see their body as an important vehicle for social ascension and also as capital in the labour market, marriage and sex. Not only is it a physical capital, the body is a symbolic capital, an economic capital and a social capital (Goldenberg, 2011). In this sense, a standard for body esthetics is visible with physical beauty in evidence, a phenomenon known as “Erotic Capital”, a term created and studied by sociologist Catherine Hakim which is linked to aspects like beauty and the role this characteristic performs in society (Loiola, 2014). In fact, choosing a partner has a diverse criteria attached to it for men and women. Some authors (Buss, & Barnes, 1986; Kenrick, Sadalla, Groth, & Trost, 1990) reveal that criteria such as creativity, friendship, sense of humor, intelligence, social position, emotional stability and the level of schooling are important when choosing a partner. However, Buston and Emlen (2003) hold that very beautiful women feel more attracted to the beauty of a man than any other characteristic, for example, money. According to Rüdiger (2009), women are increasingly interested in the esthetic profile of men, which is becoming an inhibiting element of love and maintenance for relationships, seeing many subjects having a high level of erotic demands.

Even though men value the same listed criteria as women do, they see beauty as the most important factor (Buss, & Barnes, 1986; Kenrick, Sadalla, Groth, & Trost, 1990). This appreciation for external beauty is due to the fact that men are genetically programmed to reproduce with a partner who is attractive, even though this is not a factor that always occurs (Almeida, 2013). Other researchers (Buss, & Schmitt, 1993; Buss, Shackelford, & Leblanc, 2000) add that men also demonstrate a preference for characteristics related to fertility and youth which are in turn generally related to healthy, clean skin. Women who prefer esthetic factors and sexual performance in relationships and consider them to be sufficient might be leaving things to chance, while men have to learn to value women not only for their physical attractiveness but also for their moral strength, talents and intelligence (Rüdiger, 2009). This same author also said that the esthetic factor has become an inhibiting element for love and maintaining relationships.

Physical appearance might be less important for those who have been married longer than for those who have just started new relationships. Some couples consider themselves beautiful, desirable and attractive while others might not be worried about physical appearance in their relationships. There are some who criticize themselves or their partners for being flabby, for example.

On the other hand, there are those who say that even though the idea of getting older brings a negative effect to physical appearance, the love and attraction for their partner transcends the social norms of beauty which expresses a pride in their bodies as a source of pleasure in sexual intimacy (Falcão, no prelo).

When studying the perception of love (characterized as intimacy, passion and decision/commitment) in satisfaction for both partners, Karwowski-Marques (2008) found that the feeling of love is directly related to marital satisfaction and that this strongly contributes to the quality of life for the individuals who are in loving relationships and want feelings of well-being, companionship and affection. This study also detected a positive correlation between the partner being considered beautiful and marital satisfaction, intimacy, passion, and commitment. These results corroborate with the findings from Tantleff and Gokee (2002) that a negative image of the body is related to fewer sexual experiences and low marital satisfaction. However, self-image influences interaction with others; in other words, a person who does not feel visually attractive will probably avoid social and family relationships.

The subjects in this study who considered their partner to be a beautiful person also presented greater family cohesion and fewer family conflicts. A study by Ribeiro and Vale (2012) showed that certain families valued beauty as a personal quality, mainly in socializing, family cohesion and the way they deal with others. In fact, the esthetic qualities exercise a key role towards sexual, family and loving happiness (Novaes, & Vilhena, 2003). Couples who are satisfied appear to function well, maintain strong emotional bonds with their partner, experience changes in the structure of power, rules and roles in their relationships over the course of married life when faced with dilemmas, as well as developing adequate standards of communication (Farias, 1994; Gottman, & Krokoff, 1989; Kaslow, & Robinson, 1996; Sharlin, Kaslow, & Hammerschmidt, 2000).

As far as the motives behind marital conflicts, we observed that in both groups conflicts of time management and intimacy were most dominant, followed by family and financial conflicts. These results agree with the findings in other studies (Mosmann, & Falcke, 2011). A study by Barth, *et al.* (2011) analyzed and compared the motives parents and children gave for marital conflict. According to these couples, the most frequent motives for misunderstandings are: Children, followed by Sex, Household Chores, Money and Legal Issues.

The ability to resolve conflicts that arise over the course of a marriage require marital resources such as problem solving ability, empathy and flexibility to make changes to patterns in the relationship (Ribeiro, Pinho, & Falcone, 2011).

Conclusions

This study proposed that the favorable perception of beauty on the part of both partners has a positive influence on marital and family relations. However, it is important to develop more studies in this area as it is a relevant issue for humanity. There are a few limitations to this work such as the intersecting nature of the data and the sample size that could be reduced to produce more efficient calculations. At the same time, the research on husbands and wives was beneficial towards understanding the issue at hand in that it assessed the point of view of both partners and not just one member of the dyad. However, it provided more difficulty for selecting samples because many cases had only one member of the dyad who agreed to participate in the study. The lack of studies with similar objectives as this one and the same target population made it difficult to discuss the results. For future works, we suggest investigating variables in order to compare the three age groups: young adults, middle-age and elderly.

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