

Research Article

Filial Obligation and Marital Satisfaction in Middle-aged Couples

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Abstract

Purpose of the Study: Although prior research suggests that high filial obligation has an adverse impact on psychological well-being, little is known about the implications of these beliefs for marital quality during midlife. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine dyadic associations between middle-aged husbands' and wives' filial obligation beliefs and their marital satisfaction.

Design and Methods: Using a sample of 132 middle-aged husbands ($M = 51.45$ years) and wives ($M = 49.75$ years) drawn from Wave 1 of the Family Exchanges Study, we tested actor-partner interdependence models to determine associations between husbands' and wives' filial obligation beliefs and marital satisfaction in both spouses. We also examined associations between spousal dissimilarity in filial obligation and marital satisfaction.

Results: Wives' greater filial obligation was associated with their own lower marital satisfaction. Conversely, husbands' greater filial obligation was associated with their own higher marital satisfaction. Greater spousal dissimilarity in filial obligation was associated with lower levels of marital satisfaction for husbands but not for wives.

Implications: Given that support provided to aging parents most often occurs within the context of marriage, findings highlight the importance of examining dyadic associations between filial obligation beliefs and marital quality among middle-aged couples.

Key Words: Midlife, Marriage, Couples, Intergenerational relationships, Family issues

Maintaining connections to aging parents is considered a major developmental task for married couples during midlife (Huber, Navarro, Womble, & Mumme, 2010).

However, although relationships with parents may enhance marital quality, these ties may also be a source of strain in the marriage (Bryant, Conger, & Meehan, 2001; Reczek,

Liu, & Umberson, 2010). Consistent with the life course perspective (Bengtson & Allen, 1993), beliefs about family involvement are likely to influence how individuals experience their family relationships. Marital quality is a particularly important outcome to examine, as it has critical implications for marital longevity, psychological well-being, and physical health (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007; Robles, Slatcher, Trombello, & McGinn, 2014). Yet, to date, little is known about linkages between spouses' beliefs about helping parents and marital quality. Moreover, it is unknown whether spousal similarity (or dissimilarity) in such beliefs is associated with marital quality beyond the beliefs of each spouse. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to examine dyadic associations between filial obligation beliefs and marital satisfaction among middle-aged couples. We also evaluated whether these associations differed significantly between husbands and wives.

Filial Obligation in the Context of Marriage

Filial obligation refers to one's sense of responsibility to provide support to parents. Regardless of generation or socioeconomic status, the majority of Americans feel some degree of filial obligation (Dellmann-Jenkins & Brittain, 2003), and most middle-aged offspring provide everyday types of support to their parents (e.g., advice and practical assistance) at least once per week (Fingerman, Kim, Tennant, Birditt, & Zarit, 2015). However, in contrast to the notion within Eastern cultures of filial responsibility as a moral imperative, it has been proposed that there is no normative consensus regarding filial obligation in Western societies (Fry, 1996). Thus, the extent to which adult children believe that they are responsible to help their parents may vary widely both between and within American families.

Although greater perceptions of responsibility to help aging parents may indicate positive family functioning, these beliefs may have detrimental effects on well-being and marital satisfaction in middle-aged offspring. Filial norms to assist parents may be weakening due to increased divorce and remarriage of parents (Fingerman, Pillemer, Silverstein, & Suito, 2012); but in contrast, values of individualism have strengthened over the past few decades. Indeed, ideal family interactions in the United States are largely viewed as a matter of choice rather than obligation (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001; Fine, 2005), and so adult children may perceive filial obligation as a threat to their own autonomy (Funk & Kobayashi, 2009). Further, prior research suggests that stronger filial obligation is related to feelings of guilt, inadequacy, stress, and burden (Cicirelli, 1993; Funk, Chappell, & Liu, 2013; Lee & Sung, 1997; Lyonette & Yardley, 2003; Selig, Tomlinson, & Hickey, 1991). Consequently, these negative emotional experiences could have a deleterious impact on other important life domains, including the quality of one's marriage.

In addition to the potential for lower marital satisfaction among spouses who report high filial obligation, these beliefs may also have adverse implications for one's partner's views of marital quality. Relationships with parents are commonly intertwined with a host of complex marital issues, such as determining the appropriate amount of time spent with extended family, deciding whether or not to intervene with parents' health conditions, and establishing boundaries between the nuclear family and each spouse's family of origin (Beaton, Norris, & Pratt, 2003; Silverstein, 1990). High filial obligation in one's partner may indicate strong feelings of responsibility to fulfill the needs and desires of his or her parents. This commitment could lead to marital conflict regarding a partner's tendency to honor parents' wishes over those of his or her spouse, which may have a negative impact on marital quality for both spouses (Beaton et al., 2003).

Furthermore, although some research suggests that normative beliefs about helping parents are not necessarily predictive of support behavior (Chappell & Funk, 2012; Peek, Coward, Peek, & Lee, 1998), other studies have found a positive association between filial obligation and the amount of intergenerational support provided by adult offspring (Cicirelli, 1993; Klein Ikkink, van Tilburg, & Knipscheer, 1999; Piercy, 1998; Stein et al., 1998). Therefore, spouses who report stronger filial obligation may be highly involved with helping their parents. In turn, more frequent involvement with parents may result in feelings of jealousy and rivalry for attention in one's partner (Chasin, Gruenbaum, & Herzig, 1990; Silverstein, 1990), which could contribute to the partner's lower marital satisfaction.

Differences in Marital Partners' Perceptions of Obligation

Beyond each spouse's filial obligation beliefs, the extent to which spouses differ in these beliefs may be related to the quality of their marriage. Consistent with other personal values and attitudes, filial obligation beliefs are likely to vary within families as a result of differences in life experiences (Gans & Silverstein, 2006). A limited literature has examined the links between couple-level similarity in value domains (e.g., those pertaining to family relationships) and marital quality, generating somewhat equivocal findings. Whereas several studies indicate that greater partner similarity in value orientation is associated with higher marital satisfaction in husbands and wives (Becker, 2013; Deal, Wampler, & Halverson, 1992; Gaunt, 2006; Luo et al., 2008), other research did not find such associations (Luo & Klohnen, 2005). Notably, however, prior studies have mainly focused on newlyweds or young married couples, and so findings may not generalize to middle-aged wives and husbands.

Compared with value domains that are more individualistic in scope and nature (e.g., one's political orientation or

gender role attitudes), spousal similarity in beliefs concerning issues that involve a common focus may be most consequential for marital quality (Deal et al., 1992) or partner coordination (Levinger & Breedlove, 1966). Spouses typically collaborate in making decisions about supporting older parents (Szinovacz & Davey, 2008), and the provision of intergenerational support is likely to affect the daily lives and routines of both partners. On the one hand, it is possible that similar filial obligation beliefs between husbands and wives could contribute to lower marital satisfaction. For example, if each spouse perceives high filial obligation, both partners may want to provide frequent assistance to their own parents. As a result, this could lead to disagreements over the relative distribution of family resources (e.g., time and money) or to a lack of shared time to invest in the marital tie.

On the other hand, family systems theory (Bowen, 1978) suggests that spousal disagreement about family norms more often generates conflict that has detrimental implications for husbands' and wives' perceptions of marital quality. For instance, a husband with high filial obligation beliefs may be strongly committed to helping his own parents. When his wife has low filial obligation, she may be more likely to resent his high levels of involvement with parents and may attempt to urge him to change these support patterns. In addition, role theory proposes that people experience greater strain or pressure from close third parties (e.g., spouses) when they devote more time and energy to one role obligation than the third party believes is normative or appropriate (Goode, 1960). In support of this perspective, a study of daughters caring for their aging parents found that declines in caregivers' marital satisfaction were related to perceptions that their husbands were not emotionally supportive or that they attempted to interfere with the caregiving role (Suitor & Pillemer, 1994). Further, unsupportive or interfering husbands in this study tended to view wives' caregiving activities as hindering their performance in other family roles, especially with regard to their marriage. Consequently, it is probable that within-couple disparities in views of filial norms could lead to tension or arguments that interfere with marital functioning. Therefore, we posit that dissimilarity in spouses' filial obligation beliefs may be associated with lower marital satisfaction.

Potential Gender Differences

Due to the gendered nature of family support patterns, associations between filial obligation beliefs and marital satisfaction may differ between wives and husbands. Compared with men, women provide more frequent support to their aging parents and parents-in-law (Chesley & Poppie, 2009; Henz, 2009; Kahn, McGill, & Bianchi 2011) and experience greater strain as a result of competing demands related to work and family responsibilities (Stephens, Franks, Martire, Norton, & Atienza, 2009). For instance, a study of dual-earner couples found that, although husbands reported more time deficits with their

spouses and children because of long work hours, feelings of time pressures related to one's own work-family conflict were only detrimental to wives' well-being (Nomaguchi, Milkie, & Bianchi, 2005). Moreover, relative to sons, daughters are more likely to convert filial norms into the provision of support (Silverstein, Gans, & Yang, 2006). Thus, high filial obligation could have particularly strong implications for wives' marital satisfaction. Because wives may tend to view family support as predominantly their domain, greater spousal dissimilarity in filial obligation beliefs may also be more salient to their marital satisfaction. Finally, given wives' more frequent provision of support to parents, high filial obligation in one's partner may be more strongly linked to lower marital satisfaction among husbands. That is, compared with wives, husbands may be less satisfied in their marriages when their partners perceive high filial obligation.

The Present Study

In the present study, we used actor-partner interdependence models (APIMs) to examine dyadic associations between husbands' and wives' reports of filial obligation and both spouses' marital satisfaction. We also determined associations between spousal dissimilarity in filial obligation and marital satisfaction in each spouse. We predicted that one's own and one's partner's higher filial obligation would be associated with lower marital satisfaction. Further, over and above these associations, we hypothesized that greater dissimilarity in spouses' filial obligation would be associated with lower marital satisfaction. With respect to potential gender differences, we predicted that the negative association between one's own filial obligation and marital satisfaction would be stronger among wives, whereas the negative association between one's partner's filial obligation and marital satisfaction would be stronger among husbands. Finally, we hypothesized that greater spousal dissimilarity in filial obligation would be more strongly related to wives' lower marital satisfaction.

Design and Methods

Participants

The sample included heterosexual married couples drawn from Wave 1 of the Family Exchanges Study (Fingerman et al., 2011). These couples were recruited in two steps. First, an eligible participant was identified within each household. Participants were recruited from the Philadelphia Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area (urban, suburban, and rural areas), which includes five counties in Southeastern Pennsylvania and four counties in New Jersey (Pennsylvania State Data Center, 2001). Individuals were eligible if they were aged 40 to 60 years and had at least one living parent and at least one child aged 18 years or older. Potential participants were contacted via telephone using lists purchased from Genesys Corporation and random

digit dialing in regional area codes. An age-stratified sampling method was used (aged 40 to 50 years and aged 51 to 60 years). Of the 845 eligible participants, 633 (75%) completed computer-assisted telephone interviews regarding their relationships with adult children and parents.

Participants were then asked to provide contact information for spouses who might be willing to participate in the study (if the participant was married and spouses shared parenthood of adult offspring). Among the 633 participants, 335 (51%) were married and 287 (86%) agreed for their spouses to be contacted. Of the 287 spouses, 197 (71%) completed interviews. Thus, 197 married couples participated in the study. We anticipated that filial obligation beliefs within middle-aged couples could have different implications when one or both spouses have no living parents. Therefore, we focused on couples in which both spouses currently had at least one living parent ($n = 132$ couples). Table 1 shows demographic and background characteristics for the 132 married couples.

Measures

Filial Obligation Beliefs

Filial obligation was assessed through six items adapted from a measure used in previous research (Fingerman

et al., 2011; Silverstein et al., 2006). Participants reported how often from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*) they believe that middle-aged offspring should help their parents with six domains of everyday support (emotional, practical, financial, advice, socializing, and listening to the parent talk about daily events). Mean scores were 3.92 for wives ($SD = 0.50$, range = 1.33–5.00, $\alpha = .79$) and 3.89 for husbands ($SD = 0.52$, range = 2.33–5.00, $\alpha = .79$). To examine spousal dissimilarity in filial obligation, we calculated the absolute difference score in spouses' filial obligation (i.e., the absolute value of the difference between one's own and one's partner's filial obligation; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). Use of the absolute difference score rather than the difference score (i.e., Own filial obligation – Partner filial obligation) enabled examination of the magnitude of within-couple differences in filial obligation beliefs, while avoiding problems related to collinearity in the models. Thus, higher absolute difference scores reflected greater discrepancy in these beliefs within the couple. The mean absolute difference score in filial obligation was 0.54 ($SD = 0.45$, range = 0.00–2.67).

Marital Satisfaction

Marital satisfaction was assessed with one item adapted from prior research (Umberson, 1989). Participants rated

Table 1. Demographic and Background Characteristics of Husbands and Wives ($N = 132$ couples)

Characteristic	Husbands			Wives		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i> (%)
Age (years)	51.45	4.98		49.75	4.58	
White			115 (89)			113 (86)
Education level						
High school			32 (24)			38 (29)
Some college			27 (21)			32 (24)
College graduate (4-year degree)			43 (33)			30 (23)
Post graduate			30 (23)			30 (23)
Currently employed						
Full time			111 (85)			80 (61)
Part time			3 (3)			23 (17)
Mother currently living			114 (86)			114 (86)
Mother's age	78.92	6.94		77.07	7.29	
Father currently living			64 (49)			68 (52)
Father's age	78.44	6.14		77.71	6.72	
Both parents currently living			46 (35)			50 (38)
Parents' functional disability ^a			50 (38)			49 (37)
Everyday support to parents ^b	3.61	1.29		4.25	1.36	
Caregiving support to parents ^c			47 (36)			48 (36)
Caregiving support to parents-in-law ^d			4 (3)			6 (5)

Notes: ^a1 = At least one parent requires help with one or more daily activities (personal care, housework, shopping, managing finances, or transportation), 0 = Parents do not need help with daily activities.

^bMean frequency of six types of everyday support (emotional, practical, financial, advice, socializing, and talking with the parent about daily events) over the past year from 1 (*less than once a year or not at all*) to 8 (*daily*).

^c1 = Provided assistance related to parents' functional disability at least once in the past year, 0 = Did not provide assistance related to parents' functional disability.

^d1 = Provided regular assistance to parents-in-law related to a disability or illness, 0 = Did not provide regular assistance to parents-in-law related to a disability or illness.

the overall quality of the marital relationship on a scale from 1 (*poor*) to 5 (*excellent*). Mean scores were 4.11 for wives ($SD = 0.95$, range = 1.00–5.00) and 4.21 for husbands ($SD = 0.97$, range = 1.00–5.00). Scholars have argued that the assessment of marital quality is best limited to an overall evaluation of sentiment toward the marriage (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987).

Control Variables

Based on prior research indicating a significant association between psychological well-being and marital satisfaction (Proulx et al., 2007), we controlled for the variance explained by husbands' and wives' depressive symptoms. Depressive symptoms were assessed with five items from the Brief Symptom Inventory (Derogatis & Melisarator, 1983). On a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*quite a bit*), participants reported how distressed or bothered they were over the past 7 days by symptoms of depression (e.g., feeling lonely and feeling no interest in things). Mean scores were 1.49 for wives ($SD = 0.63$, range 1.00–4.60, $\alpha = .80$) and 1.47 for husbands ($SD = 0.64$, range = 1.00–3.80, $\alpha = .84$).

We took into account additional variables to contextualize each spouse's relations with parents. Participants reported how often they gave six types of everyday support to their own parents (emotional, practical, financial, advice, socializing, and listening to the parent talk about daily events) on a scale from 1 (*less than once a year or not at all*) to 8 (*daily*). In line with prior studies (Fingerman et al., 2011; Silverstein et al., 2006), we calculated the mean frequency of support given to parents. Mean given support was 4.25 for wives ($SD = 1.36$, range = 1.00–7.17, $\alpha = .87$) and 3.61 for husbands ($SD = 1.29$, range = 1.00–6.50, $\alpha = .87$). Participants also reported their parents' functional disability with regard to activities of daily living including personal care, shopping, housework, managing finances, and transportation (1 = *at least one parent requires help with one or more daily activities*, 0 = *parents do not need help with daily activities*). Parental disability was reported by 37% of wives and 38% of husbands. Finally, participants reported whether they had provided caregiving assistance (i.e., help in response to illness or disability) to their own parents (1 = *provided assistance related to parents' functional disability at least once in the past year*, 0 = *did not provide assistance related to parents' functional disability*) or parents-in-law (1 = *provided regular assistance related to a disability or illness*, 0 = *did not provide regular assistance related to a disability or illness*). Among wives and husbands, 36% provided caregiving assistance to their own parents at least once in the past year. Caregiving assistance to parents-in-law was provided by 5% of wives and 3% of husbands.

Statistical Analyses

To account for the nonindependence in dyadic data and to explore questions of mutual influence, we used APIMs (Kenny, 1996) with the mixed model procedure in SPSS. The

APIM combines a conceptual model of interdependence in dyadic relationships with statistical techniques that facilitate the examination of each individual's influence within the dyad. Thus, we were able to simultaneously evaluate the effects of husbands' and wives' filial obligation on their own (actor effect) and their partners' (partner effect) marital satisfaction. We also examined the couple-level effect of spousal dissimilarity in filial obligation beliefs on marital satisfaction in the second step of the model. Whereas traditional models that consider the *person* as the unit of analysis (e.g., regressions) estimate actor, partner, and couple-level effects in separate models for wives and husbands, the APIM considers the *dyad* as the unit of analysis. As such, significant differences in these effects between husbands and wives were tested with the inclusion of a distinguishing variable (i.e., spouse gender) in the model (Kenny et al., 2006). One's own and one's partner's depressive symptoms were included as covariates. Consistent with prior work (Kenny et al., 2006), all predictors and covariates were grand mean centered (i.e., computed across the sample of wives and husbands combined). In APIM analyses, it is considered inappropriate to center variables separately for each level of the distinguishing variable; therefore, we did not center according to the mean for husbands and the mean for wives (Kenny & Cook, 1999).

To examine actor and partner effects of filial obligation on marital satisfaction, we entered one's own and one's partner's filial obligation and control variable (depressive symptoms) in the first step of the model. We also tested for interactions with spouse gender (i.e., Own/partner filial obligation \times Gender and Own/partner depressive symptoms \times Gender) to determine whether these associations differed significantly between wives and husbands. In the second step, we added the absolute difference score in spouses' filial obligation to examine the couple-level effect of spousal dissimilarity in filial obligation beliefs on marital satisfaction. In addition, we entered an interaction term to evaluate whether this association differed on the basis of gender (Absolute difference score in filial obligation \times Gender). A simplified conceptual model for the dyadic analyses is shown in Figure 1.

Results

First, we examined bivariate associations among major study variables in preliminary analyses (Table 2). Husbands' and wives' reports of filial obligation were unrelated ($r = .06$, $t(130) = 0.72$, $p = .48$). However, spouses' reports of marital satisfaction were significantly correlated ($r = .46$, $t(130) = 5.94$, $p < .001$), indicating interdependence in the outcome measure.

Dyadic Associations Between Filial Obligation and Marital Satisfaction

We evaluated associations between one's own (actor effect) and one's partner's (partner effect) filial obligation and marital satisfaction in the first step of the analyses (Table 3). The actor effect was significantly moderated by spouse

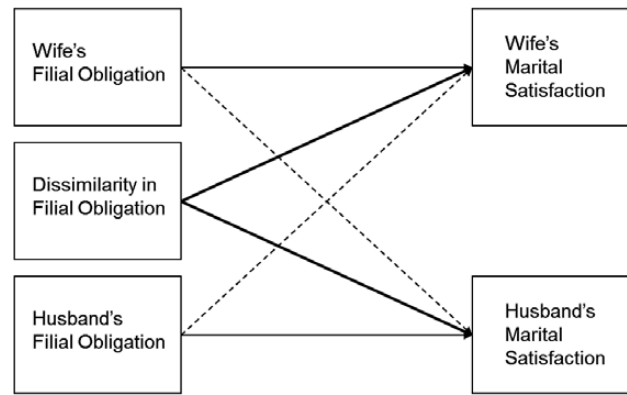


Figure 1. A simplified conceptual model of the hypothesized effects of husbands' and wives' filial obligation beliefs on their own (actor effect; solid lines) and their partners' (partner effect; dashed lines) marital satisfaction. The effect of dissimilarity in spouses' filial obligation beliefs (couple-level effect; bolded lines) on marital satisfaction is also shown.

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson Correlation Coefficients for Key Variables ($N = 132$ Couples)

Variable	<i>M (SD)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Wife's filial obligation ^a	3.92 (0.50)						
2. Husband's filial obligation ^a	3.89 (0.52)	.06					
3. Dissimilarity in filial obligation ^b	0.54 (0.45)	-.14	-.11				
4. Wife's depressive symptoms ^c	1.49 (0.63)	-.03	-.12	.08			
5. Husband's depressive symptoms ^c	1.47 (0.64)	-.05	.02	.22*	.02		
6. Wife's marital satisfaction ^d	4.11 (0.95)	-.17 [†]	-.03	-.09	-.37***	-.14	
7. Husband's marital satisfaction ^d	4.21 (0.97)	-.09	.19*	-.32***	-.13	-.39***	.46***

Notes: ^aMean of six items rated from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*).

^bAbsolute difference in spouses' filial obligation beliefs.

^cMean of five items rated from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*quite a bit*).

^dRated from 1 (*poor*) to 5 (*excellent*).

[†] $p < .07$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

gender ($B = -.35, p = .001$). To examine the nature of this interaction, we estimated a model with separate intercepts for wives and husbands. As depicted in Figure 2, one's own higher filial obligation was associated with lower marital satisfaction for wives ($B = -.35, p = .03$) and with greater marital satisfaction for husbands ($B = .35, p = .02$). Thus, consistent with our hypothesis, wives with high filial obligation were less satisfied in their marriages. Contrary to our expectation, however, husbands were happier with their marriages when they reported stronger filial obligation.

In contrast to our prediction, one's partner's filial obligation was not significantly associated with marital satisfaction. Moreover, there was no significant interaction with spouse gender. Therefore, counter to our hypothesis, husbands were not less satisfied in their marriages when their wives reported higher filial obligation.

Associations Between Spousal Dissimilarity in Filial Obligation and Marital Satisfaction

As presented in Table 3, the association between spousal dissimilarity in filial obligation and marital satisfaction was significantly moderated by spouse gender ($B = .19, p = .04$)

in the second step of the analyses. We estimated a model with separate intercepts for husbands and wives to further evaluate this interaction. Figure 3 shows that greater spousal dissimilarity in filial obligation was associated with lower marital satisfaction among husbands ($B = -.52, p = .003$) but not among wives ($B = -.13, p = .45$). Thus, in accordance with our hypothesis, husbands were less satisfied with their marriages when there was a greater difference between their own and their wives' filial obligation beliefs. Counter to our prediction, however, differences in spouses' filial obligation beliefs were unrelated to wives' marital satisfaction.

Post Hoc Tests

To further examine the nature of the association between spousal dissimilarity in filial obligation and husbands' marital satisfaction, we conducted an analysis of variance. We first calculated a difference score for spouses' filial obligation (Husbands' score - Wives' score), whereby a positive score reflected husbands' higher filial obligation relative to wives and a negative score indicated husbands' lower filial obligation relative to wives. We then created four groups of difference score patterns using quartiles as cutoff points: (i) husbands' scores are much lower than wives' scores (below

Table 3. Dyadic Associations Between Husbands' and Wives' Filial Obligation and Marital Satisfaction (N = 132 Couples)

Predictors	Marital satisfaction			
	B	SE	df	t
Step 1				
Actor depressive symptoms ^a	-.59***	.09	213.88	-6.89
Partner depressive symptoms ^a	-.18*	.09	213.79	-2.13
Actor filial obligation ^b	.002	.10	219.40	0.02
Partner filial obligation ^b	-.18	.10	219.20	-1.75
Gender ^c	-.05	.04	127.00	-1.26
Actor filial obligation × Gender	-.35**	.11	204.09	-3.23
Partner filial obligation × Gender	.06	.11	203.95	0.58
Step 2				
Actor depressive symptoms ^a	-.55***	.09	210.44	-6.38
Partner depressive symptoms ^a	-.16 [†]	.09	210.43	-1.86
Actor filial obligation ^b	-.03	.10	215.55	-0.26
Partner filial obligation ^b	-.22*	.10	216.30	-2.10
Dissimilarity in filial obligation ^d	-.33*	.15	126.00	-2.22
Gender ^c	-.05	.04	126.00	-1.29
Actor filial obligation × Gender	-.33**	.11	203.82	-3.14
Partner filial obligation × Gender	.09	.11	204.41	0.82
Dissimilarity in filial obligation × Gender	.19*	.10	126.00	2.12

Notes: There were no significant gender differences in the actor or partner effects of depressive symptoms.

^aMean of five items rated from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*quite a bit*).

^bMean of six items rated from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*).

^c-1 = Husband, 1 = Wife.

^dAbsolute difference in spouses' filial obligation beliefs.

[†] $p < .07$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

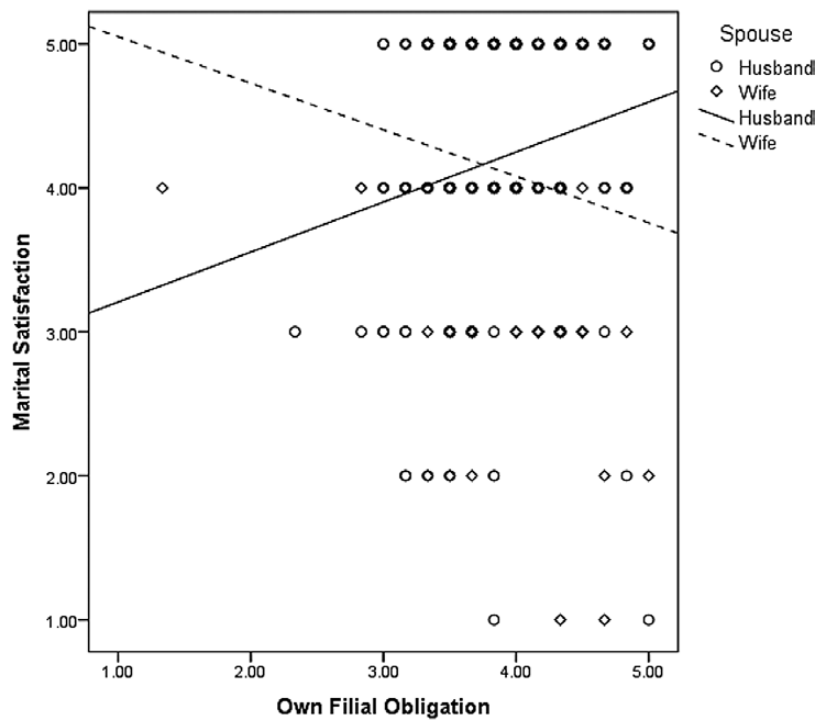


Figure 2. The significant moderating effect of spouse gender on the association between one's own filial obligation beliefs and marital satisfaction ($p = .001$). Greater filial obligation was associated with lower marital satisfaction among wives and with higher marital satisfaction among husbands.

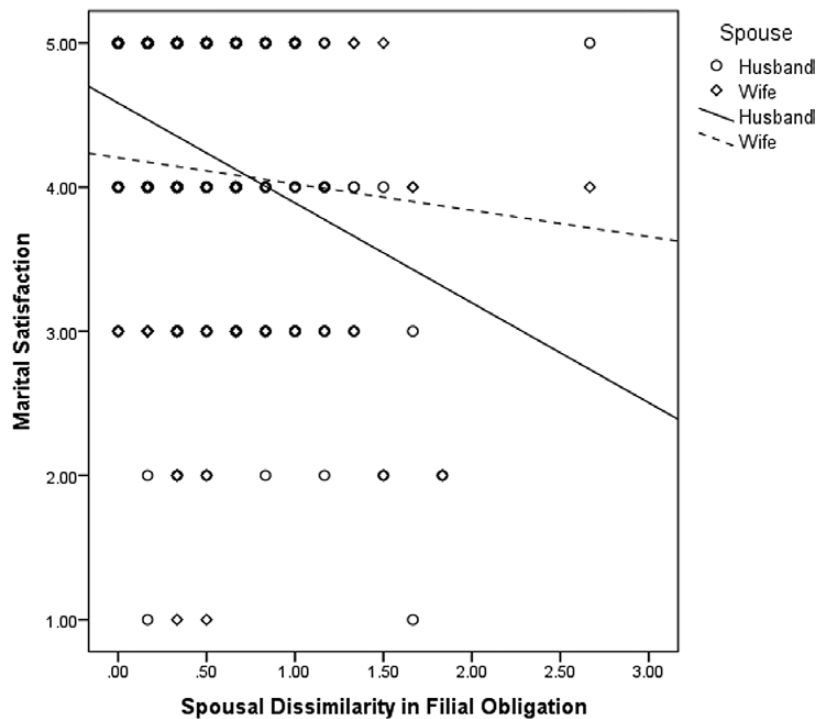


Figure 3. The significant moderating effect of spouse gender on the association between spousal dissimilarity in filial obligation beliefs and marital satisfaction ($p = .04$). Greater dissimilarity in filial obligation was associated with lower marital satisfaction among husbands but not among wives.

the 25th quartile); (ii) husbands' scores are lower than wives' scores (between the 25th and 50th quartile); (iii) husbands' scores are equal to or higher than wives' scores (between the 50th and 75th quartile); and (iv) husbands' scores are much higher than wives' scores (above the 75th quartile). There was a significant between-group difference, $F(3,128) = 3.46, p = .02$. Bonferroni comparisons revealed that husbands' marital satisfaction was significantly lower in Group 1 ($M = 3.78, SD = 0.94$) compared with Group 3 ($M = 4.63, SD = 1.02$); $p = .03$. These analyses indicate that, relative to husbands with filial obligation beliefs that are equal to or slightly higher than their wives, husbands are less satisfied when their own filial obligation beliefs are considerably lower than their wives' beliefs.

We also estimated post hoc models controlling for the mean frequency of everyday support that husbands and wives provided to their own parents over the past year, their provision of caregiving support (i.e., presence of help given in response to functional disabilities) to parents or parents-in-law, and whether each spouse had at least one parent with a functional disability to determine whether the findings changed in the context of these variables. The pattern of findings remained consistent across models. Thus, the stability of study findings was confirmed.

Discussion

Given that the majority of middle-aged adults are married and living with their spouses (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013), and more than one third of the 65.7 million family

caregivers in the United States provide support to their aging parents (National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP, 2005), it is critical to consider the implications of beliefs about intergenerational support in a dyadic context. The present study indicates that the link between one's own filial obligation beliefs and marital satisfaction differs significantly between husbands and wives. Over and above this association, greater spousal dissimilarity in filial obligation was related to lower marital satisfaction among husbands. Therefore, this study extends the current literature by demonstrating that both individual- and couple-level processes play important roles in determining associations between filial obligation beliefs and marital satisfaction during midlife.

Dyadic Associations Between Filial Obligation and Marital Satisfaction

In line with our hypothesis, the association between one's own filial obligation beliefs and marital satisfaction differed significantly on the basis of spouse gender. As predicted, wives with greater filial obligation reported lower marital satisfaction. Unexpectedly, among husbands, we found that greater filial obligation was associated with higher marital satisfaction. These findings indicate that the meaning and consequences of filial obligation may differ for wives and husbands. Traditional gender role expectations for family involvement could in part explain these differences. Women are traditionally expected to prioritize their engagement in family care roles (Blair-Loy, 2003; DiLeonardo, 1987)

and are more likely than men to convert filial norms into the provision of intergenerational support (Silverstein et al., 2006). Thus, wives who report strong filial obligation may perceive more interference between their roles as a daughter and a wife that has adverse implications for their marital satisfaction. Indeed, prior research has found that middle-aged women frequently report strain in their attempts to manage the competing demands of responsibilities to parents with their responsibilities as a wife, mother, and employee (Stephens et al., 2009). Comparatively, men have lower societal expectations to give support to aging parents. Therefore, husbands with high filial obligation may experience relatively lower levels of stress and burden related to such support. In line with this possibility, a study of dual-earner couples found that husbands tend to report less work–family conflict and individual stress, and higher levels of life satisfaction, family satisfaction, and marital satisfaction compared with their wives (Hill, 2005). Rather than reflecting husbands' own perceived responsibility to give support, an alternative explanation for the present findings is that greater filial obligation among husbands may indicate the belief that their wives should provide help to aging parents and parents-in-law. Consequently, these beliefs may be viewed more positively by husbands and may reflect high levels of family connectedness that enhance their perceptions of marital quality.

Counter to our prediction, one's partner's greater filial obligation was not significantly associated with lower marital satisfaction. These findings are consistent with prior research indicating that norms of family solidarity reported by one's partner are not predictive of marital satisfaction beyond one's own beliefs (Becker, 2013). Although we had expected that stronger filial obligation beliefs may reflect a high level of commitment to helping older parents that could contribute to feelings of jealousy and resentment in one's partner (Chasin, Gruenbaum, & Herzig, 1990; Silverstein, 1990), this study suggests that the strength of partners' filial norms may be relatively inconsequential to marital satisfaction when considered outside the context of the amount of intergenerational support that partners provide.

Associations Between Spousal Dissimilarity in Filial Obligation and Marital Satisfaction

Gender differences were also detected with regard to associations between spousal dissimilarity in filial obligation and marital satisfaction. In accordance with previous research examining dissimilarity in family role attitudes (Gaunt, 2006), greater dissimilarity in spouses' filial obligation was associated with lower marital satisfaction for husbands but was unrelated to marital satisfaction among wives. Post hoc tests in the present study indicate that the negative association for husbands is strongest among couples in which the husband reports considerably lower filial obligation than his wife. Husbands are traditionally viewed as the heads of their household, and so one possibility is that spouses'

greater disagreement about the extent to which support should be allocated to parents may be detrimental to husbands' feelings of control over family resources. The majority of the literature suggests that wives' increasing financial contributions to their marriages over the past several decades have not significantly altered the balance of marital power, such that husbands continue to exert more control over decisions involving the distribution of resources (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000; Bittman, England, Sayer, Folbre, & Matheson, 2003). Moreover, even when wives earn more money than their husbands, couples tend to maintain the traditional expectation of husbands' more dominant status in order to preserve marital harmony (Tichenor, 2005). Thus, for husbands, greater differences in spouses' perceptions of responsibility to aging parents may be a threat to traditional family norms that enhance their marital quality. Although we predicted that the negative association between spousal dissimilarity in filial obligation beliefs and marital satisfaction would be stronger among wives, it may be that these differences have relatively less influence on wives' marital satisfaction because women are generally expected to provide support to parents regardless of their husbands' beliefs.

Furthermore, spouses' dissimilar views in one family domain may indicate dissimilar views in multiple related aspects of family functioning that could contribute to marital conflict or disagreement (Deal et al., 1992). For instance, a husband who reports lower filial obligation than his wife may also perceive less responsibility to maintain connections to other extended family members or may be less likely to give assistance to grown children. In turn, he may be unhappy with his marriage when his wife strongly values these domains of family life despite his low levels of motivation to engage in such activities.

On average, filial obligation beliefs between husbands and wives in this sample were unrelated. This is somewhat surprising given the likelihood of assortative mating and environmental factors (e.g., a shared living environment and daily routines) that contribute to similarity in spouses' beliefs and behaviors. Nevertheless, this finding is consistent with prior work that proposed a gradual weakening and lack of consensus with regard to filial norms in Western societies (Fingerman et al., 2012; Fry, 1996) and suggests that dissimilarity in these beliefs is relatively common within middle-aged married couples. Considering the implications of spousal dissimilarity in filial obligation for marital satisfaction among husbands, it will be important for future studies to further examine dissimilarity in beliefs about intergenerational support and their potential consequences for marital functioning during midlife.

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths of this study include examination of one's own and one's partner's influences on marital satisfaction and the use of dyadic methods to account for the interdependence

inherent in these data. Importantly, we controlled for each spouse's depressive symptoms, which indicates that husbands' and wives' filial obligation beliefs are related to marital satisfaction over and above the variance explained by their psychological well-being. Moreover, post hoc tests revealed that the pattern of findings in this study remained after adjusting for each spouse's provision of everyday support to his or her own parents, caregiving support given to parents or parents-in-law, and parents' functional disability. Therefore, the present findings appear to be robust in the context of a representative range of support provided to aging parents, as well as the presence of parents' need for assistance during their daily activities.

Despite these strengths, the current study has several potential limitations. First, cross-sectional analyses precluded the inference of causal relationships between spouses' filial obligation beliefs and marital satisfaction. For instance, it may be that husbands who are more satisfied with their marriages tend to have stronger filial obligation. Thus, longitudinal studies are needed to clarify the temporal ordering of these constructs. Second, spouses reported on their own views of filial obligation but did not report perceptions of their partners' filial obligation or couple similarity in these beliefs. Hence, the examination of actual rather than perceived dissimilarity in filial obligation does not necessarily reflect spouses' assessment of such differences. Prior research suggests that perceived partner similarity is more predictive of relationship satisfaction than is actual similarity (Murray, Holmes, Bellavia, & Griffin, 2002), and so these findings may be an underestimate of the associations between spousal dissimilarity in filial obligation and marital quality. Future studies should compare the effects of actual versus perceived dissimilarity in these beliefs on husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction. Third, the sample consisted of adult children of older parents with overall low levels of functional disability. As such, findings may not generalize to spouses with parents who have intensive support needs. In the context of greater parent need, it is plausible that spouses' filial obligation beliefs (and dissimilarity in these beliefs) could have comparatively stronger associations with marital quality. Nonetheless, this study provides a foundation for future research to gain a fuller comprehension of the implications of husbands' and wives' filial obligation beliefs for the marital relationship.

Midlife is a time when the amount and intensity of intergenerational support are likely to increase as aging parents experience declines in their health and daily functioning. The current study indicates that husbands' and wives' filial obligation beliefs have different implications for their perceptions of marital quality and that spousal dissimilarity in filial obligation is linked to husbands' satisfaction with the marriage. Therefore, these findings suggest that the examination of dyadic processes is imperative in understanding the potential consequences of beliefs about helping parents for marital satisfaction among middle-aged couples.

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