

INFLUENCE OF GENDER ROLE ATTITUDE, QUALITY OF ALTERNATIVES, INVESTMENT SIZE, AND COMMITMENT ON MARITAL SATISFACTION BETWEEN THAI WOMEN WHO MARRIED THAI MEN AND THAI WOMEN WHO MARRIED FOREIGN MEN

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Abstract: Gender role attitude, quality of alternatives, investment size, commitment, and marital satisfaction were measured and compared between Thai women who married Thai men and Thai women who married foreign men. Direct and indirect influences of gender role attitude, quality of alternatives, investment size, and commitment on marital satisfaction were also analyzed. The sample consisted of 200 respondents (N=200), of whom 100 were Thai women who married Thai men (50%) and 100 were Thai women who married foreign men (50%). The mean age of respondents was 35 years, ranging from 21 years to 58 years, and the mean age of their husbands was 39 years, ranging from 26 years to 60 years. Results indicated that Thai women who married foreign men have higher level of marital satisfaction, higher commitment, and lower quality of alternatives. There is no significant difference in gender role attitude and investment size. Path analyses produced similar results between the two groups of women in that there are no direct influences of gender role attitude, quality of alternatives, and investment size on marital satisfaction. However, an indirect influence between quality of alternatives and investment size on marital satisfaction emerged when mediated by commitment. Gender role attitude was found to have an indirect influence when mediated with commitment, only for the group of women who married foreign men. Both models, however, indicated that commitment is a significant predictor of marital satisfaction.

Keywords: Marital Satisfaction, Gender Role Attitude, Quality of Alternatives, Investment Size, Commitment, Interracial Marriage.

Introduction

Marriage is an important source of positive feelings and emotional support. It can bring about better psychological and physical health (Kiecolt-Glaser, 2001). While men enjoy the health benefit of marriage merely from being married, women gain benefit only if they are in a happy marriage (Bookwala, 2005). The number of Thai women who marry foreign men seems to increase exponentially with each passing

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year (Lapanun, Mettatiganon, & Apichatwallop, 2007). Many of these women are reportedly happier with their marriages than those who married Thai men. However, no scientific study has actually supported this claim.

Objectives

This study aimed to investigate and compare marital satisfaction, gender role attitude, quality of alternatives, investment size, and commitment between these two groups of women. It also explored the relationship between variables within the Thai context and examined the influence of gender role attitude, quality of alternatives, and investment size on marital satisfaction when mediated by commitment. These data may shed light on how to attain happier marriages, achieve healthier personal well-being among family members and, consequently, build a stronger society. It may also help rescue marriages in distress and prevent marital dissolution.

Literature Review

Theoretical perspectives and empirical findings suggested associations among gender role attitude, quality of alternatives, investment size, commitment, and marital satisfaction which formed the conceptual framework of this study.

Gender role attitude and marital satisfaction.

Frieze (2005) suggested that traditional gender role attitude could be a source of conflict in marriage. Individuals with traditional gender role attitude experience more jealousy and are more accepting of violence towards women and coercive sexual activities than individuals with egalitarian attitude. Consequently, traditional role attitude may create tension between couple instead of complementing one another, resulting in lower marital satisfaction.

However, studies on the influence of women's gender role attitude on marital satisfaction reveal inconclusive findings. Some studies suggested that women with egalitarian gender role attitude are less happy with their marriage (Huber & Spitze, 1980; Amato & Booth, 1995), while some studies suggested that women with egalitarian gender role attitude are happier (Frieze, 2005; Grote, Frieze, & Stone, 1996). These contradictions in research findings suggest that the relationship between gender role attitude and marital satisfaction may not be a direct one, and that more studies need to be conducted for more definitive conclusions.

Quality of alternatives and marital satisfaction.

When it comes to marriage, no matter what individuals believe, they always have alternatives. They can marry another person, cohabit with a new partner, become single, or replace marital relations with a different type of relationship such as adopting a child or building platonic friendships. Quality of alternatives refers to the perceived desirability of the best available alternative to a relationship. It is determined by the potential rewards and costs of other available relationships (Rusbult, 1983). The lower the quality of alternatives, the more individuals depend on their marriage to fulfill their needs (Coombs, 1991).

Investment size and marital satisfaction.

Over time, individuals invest resources such as money, time, emotional energy, and self-disclosure in their relationship. If the relationship ends, the investments would be lost. The bigger the investment size, the higher the cost of ending. The higher the cost of ending, the less likely the individual will end the marriage (Rusbult, Agnew, & Arriaga, 2011). Investment size is not significantly related to relationship satisfaction (Rusbult, 1983). Large investment size may serve as a trap to keep individuals in an unsatisfying relationship. In other words, people stay in their marriage not because the marriage provides them with positive feelings but because they perceive that the cost of ending the marriage would be unacceptably high. An often-cited illustration of this can be found in the conventional wisdom that marital couples sometimes remain together for the sake of the children (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001).

Commitment and marital satisfaction.

Commitment is an important factor in happy marriages. It has a strong influence on relationship motivation, cognition, and affect (Agnew, 2009). It is linked to marital satisfaction, trust, and pro-relationship behaviors (Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999). It is more than the wish to stay together. It is also the promise of dedication to take responsibility and make the marriage work through thick and thin. People who are committed to the relationship convey this dedication to their spouse in that they want to go through life with him or her alone and no one else (Mananggit & Agaser, 2012). Individuals who score higher on commitment tend to be more forgiving, accommodating, and willing to sacrifice for their partner. These behaviors sustain marriage and increase marital stability (Agnew, 2009). Individuals who are committed to their marriage treat their spouses differently than individuals who are less committed, and these actions can influence marital satisfaction (Broderick & O'Leary, 1986).

Marrying Thai men and marrying foreign men in modern Thai society.

Individuals are inclined to marry within their social group. They have a tendency to choose a partner who is similar to them in status and cultural background (Kalmijn, 1998). However, marriage between people from different backgrounds has increased in number in recent decades (Gaines, Rios, Granrose, Bledsoe, Farris, Page Youn, & Garcia, 1999). Love is believed to be one of the predominant reasons. Most couples cite love as their main reason for choosing their partner (Gaines, 1997; Ross, 2002). Intermarriage is seen as adventurous and romantic. People like to believe that true love can conquer all, despite the difference in race, religion, age, or class (Waters, 2005).

In modern Thai society, marrying a foreigner does not lead to disapproval as it once did. In some regions or groups, it is even encouraged (Adsakul, 2008; Lapanun, 2012; Lapanun et al., 2007). Marriage between a Thai woman and a foreign man is usually heterogamous in nature. They are often different in race, culture, language, religion, age, education, class, values, and worldviews (Cohen, 2003; Adsakul, 2008). These differences in inherent characteristics can influence their level of marital satisfaction (Davidson, 1992). Apart from sharing little in characteristics, Thai

women and their foreign husbands also share very little interests and activities. The interaction between them is often limited by the lack of fluency in the same language. (Soygudrua, 2011; Cohen, 2003).

Despite all the differences and language barrier, there is a widespread speculation that Thai women married to foreigners are happier (Lapanun, 2012). However, there was no scientific data to support the claim.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 below shows the conceptual framework of this study.

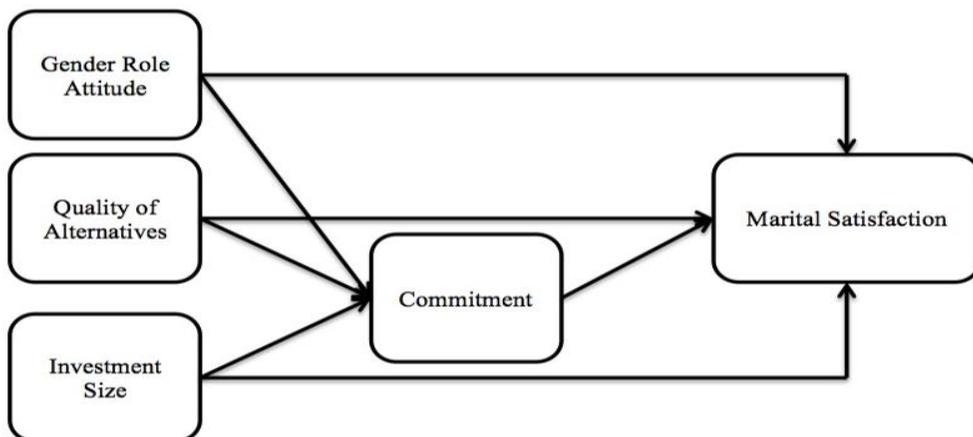


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of This Study

Method

The participants (N=200) consisted of legally married Thai women aged 18 and above. Participants were divided into two sample groups: (1) Thai women who married Thai men, and (2) Thai women who married foreign men. As for the foreign men, the inclusion criterion was that they must have held a non-Thai nationality at the time they were married.

The research instrument was a self-administered survey questionnaire which consisted of a researcher-constructed segment and two standardized measures comprising the *Investment Model Scale* (IMS) developed by Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998) to measure marital satisfaction, quality of alternatives, investment size, and commitment, and the *Attitudes Toward Women Scale* (AWS-15) developed by Spence and Helmreich (1972) to assess gender role attitude.

The Investment Model Scale (IMS) is a 37-item, self-report instrument designed to measure commitment and its three component variables (satisfaction, investment size, and quality of alternatives), as put forth in the three-factor Investment model. The questions are separated into four scales, one for each component and an additional global commitment scale. Each of the three scales contains five unscored facet items that illustrate the construct of interest and prime the participant for the five global items that are actually scored (10 item statements per subscale). Thus, only the global items are used to measure the construct for data analysis.

Rusbult et al. (1998) used a four-point Likert scale for the facet items where A = *Don't agree at all*, B = *Agree slightly*, C = *Agree moderately*, and D = *Agree completely* and a nine-point Likert scale for the global items where 0 = *Do not agree at all*, and 8 = *Agree completely*. As mentioned earlier, only the global items will be scored.

The validity and reliability of the measure were reported as good. The variables had moderate associations with other measures of couple functioning such as dyadic adjustment and the Relationship Closeness Inventory's 'strength of influence' subscale. Model comparison analysis over time indicated that commitment was highly predictive of couple functioning and dissolution of relationships (Rusbult et al., 1998). The latter authors pointed out that the measure has strong alpha coefficients that ranged from .69 to .77.

The 15-item Attitudes toward Women Scale (AWS-15) was developed by Spence and Helmreich (1972). With the AWS-15, the respondent's gender role beliefs were assigned to one of two categories, either 'traditional' or 'egalitarian', as determined by their score. The original Attitudes toward Women Scale (AWS) consisted of 55 items on a four-point Likert scale, designed to measure attitudes toward women's behavior, rights, and overt sexism. Creators Spence and Helmreich (1972) modified the scale into two shorter forms, the AWS-25 and the AWS-15. The AWS-15, which was the short form used in this study, consists of 15 statements to which the respondent selects a response based on a four-point Likert scale where A = *Agree strongly*, B = *Agree mildly*, C = *Disagree mildly*, and D = *Disagree strongly*. Examples of statements include: "A woman should be as free as a man to propose marriage;" "Sons in a family should be given more encouragement to go to college than daughters;" and "Swearing and obscenity are more repulsive in the speech of a woman than a man." Each response is scored from 0 to 3, with a score of 0 being given to responses reflecting traditional views of gender roles. The most contemporary gender role responses were given scores of 3. Scores on the AWS-15 scale range from 0 to 45 from traditional to contemporary views. In scoring items, A=0, B=1, C=2, D=3 except for items 2, 3, 4, 6, 10, 11, and 14 where the scale is reversed. A high score indicates an egalitarian attitude, while a low score indicates a traditional attitude towards gender role. AWS-15 was chosen for this study because it is more convenient yet highly correlated with the full test (Spence & Helmreich, 1972).

Results

Result 1: There is no direct influence of gender role attitude, quality of alternatives, and investment size on the level of marital satisfaction among Thai women who married Thai men and Thai women who married foreign men.

Result 2: For Thai women who married Thai men, there is an indirect influence of quality of alternatives and investment size on marital satisfaction mediated by commitment such that the lower the quality of alternatives, the higher their commitment level; and the higher their commitment level, the higher is their marital satisfaction. Also, the higher their investment size, the higher their commitment level; and the higher their commitment level, the higher is their marital satisfaction.

As for Thai women who married foreign men, there is an indirect influence of gender role attitude, quality of alternatives, and investment size on marital satisfaction

mediated by commitment such that the more they lean toward traditional gender role, the higher their commitment level; and the higher their commitment level, the higher is their marital satisfaction. Moreover, the lower the quality of alternatives, the higher their commitment level; and the higher their commitment level, the higher is their marital satisfaction. Also, the higher their investment size, the higher their commitment level; and the higher their commitment level, the higher is their marital satisfaction.

Result 3: There are no significant differences in gender role attitude and investment size between Thai women who married Thai men and Thai women who married foreign men. On the other hand, there are significant differences between the two groups in terms of quality of alternatives, commitment, and marital satisfaction such that Thai women who married Thai men have significantly higher quality of alternatives, significantly lower level of commitment, and significantly lower level of marital satisfaction, compared to their counterparts who married foreign men.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Respondents were recruited from local markets, weekend markets, convenience stores, department stores, and embassies located in central Bangkok and its vicinities. The sample consisted of 200 respondents, of whom 100 were Thai women who married Thai men (50%) and 100 were Thai women who married foreign men (50%). The mean age of respondents was 35 years, ranging from 21 years to 58 years, and the mean age of their husbands was 39 years, ranging from 26 years to 60 years. Majority of the respondents were Buddhist (72.5%), with 19% Christian, 12% Muslim, 3% Hindi, and 1% atheists.

In terms of the highest educational level, majority had a bachelor's degree (60.5%), while 15.5% had a high school level of education or lower, 11.5% had education higher than a bachelor's degree, 9.5% had a vocational education, and one respondent reported having no formal education.

At the time, 96.5% of respondents were in their first marriage while 3.5% were in their second marriage. In terms of length of marriage up to the time of data gathering, respondents' answer ranged from 1 year to 40 years, with the mean duration of 7.9 years.

Regarding number of children, 29.5% ($n=59$) of the participants reported having no children, 36.5% ($n=73$) reported having one child, 20.5% ($n=41$) reported having two children, 7% ($n=14$) reported having three children, 5% ($n=10$) reported having four children, 0.5% ($n=1$) reported having five children, and 1% ($n=2$) reported having six children. As for the number of children from the current marriage, 34.5% ($n=69$) of the participants reported having no children, 33.5% ($n=67$) reported having one child, 19% ($n=38$) reported having two children, 6.5% ($n=13$) reported having three children, 5% ($n=10$) reported having four children, 0.5% ($n=1$) reported having five children, and 1% ($n=2$) reported having six children from the current marriage.

In terms of nationality of husband, 50% ($n=100$) of respondents were married to Thai men and 50% ($n=100$) of respondents were married to foreign men (See Table 1 for ranking and details). For analytical purposes, all non-Thai nationalities were grouped together as foreigners.

Table 1: Number of Respondents Ranked According to Their Husbands' Nationality

Ranking	Nationality of husband	Number of Thai women	Percentage
1	Thai	100	50.0
2	American	20	10.0
3	British	15	7.5
4	Chinese	15	6.0
5	German	8	4.0
6	Australian	7	3.5
7	Swiss	5	2.5
8	Italian	4	2.0
9	Norwegian	4	2.0
10	Canadian	4	2.0
11	Malaysian	3	1.5
12	Indian	3	1.5
13	French	3	1.5
14	Japanese	2	1.0
15	Taiwanese	2	1.0
16	Austrian	2	1.0
17	Swedish	1	0.5
18	Belgian	1	0.5
19	Indonesian	1	0.5
20	New Zealander	1	0.5
21	Spanish	1	0.5
22	Finnish	1	0.5
	Total	200	100.0

Reliability Analysis of Scales Employed

The criteria employed for retaining items are: (1) any item with 'Corrected Item-Total Correlation' (I-T) $\geq .33$ will be retained (.33² represents approximately 10% of the variance of the total scale accounted for), and (2) deletion of an item will not lower the scale's Cronbach's alpha. Tables 3 to 7 below present the items for the five scales and subscales together with their I-T coefficients and Cronbach's alphas.

Table 2: Attitudes toward Women Items Together with Their Corrected Item-Total Correlations and Cronbach's Alpha Values

Item	Attitudes Toward Women Scale	Corrected Item-Total Correlations
AWS 2	Under modern economic conditions with women being active outside the home, men should share in household tasks such as washing dishes and doing laundry.	.45
AWS 4	A woman should be free as a man to propose marriage.	.46
AWS 5	Women should worry less about their rights and more about becoming good wives and mothers.	.49
AWS 6	Women should assume their rightful place in business and all the professions along with men.	.55

Table 2: Attitudes toward Women Items Together with Their Corrected Item-Total Correlations and Cronbach's Alpha Values

Item	Attitudes Toward Women Scale	Corrected Item-Total Correlations
AWS 9	The intellectual leadership of a community should be largely in the hands of men.	.59
AWS10	Women should be given equal opportunity with men for apprenticeship in the various trades.	.55
AWS11	Women earning as much as their dates should bear equally the expense when they go out together.	.52
AWS12	Sons in a family should be given more encouragement to go to college than daughters.	.68
AWS13	In general, the father should have greater authority than the mother in the bringing up of the children.	.74
=====		
AWS 1	Swearing and obscenity are more repulsive in the speech of a woman than a man.	.10*
AWS 3	It is insulting to women to have the "obey" clause remain in the marriage service.	.16*
AWS 7	A woman should not expect to go to exactly the same places or to have quite the same freedom of action as a man.	.27*
AWS 8	Drunkness among women is worse than drunkness among men.	.24*
AWS14	Economic and social freedom is worth far more to women than acceptance of the ideal of femininity, which was set up by men.	.06*
AWS15	There are many jobs in which men should be given preference over women in being hired or promoted.	.21*
Cronbach's Alpha = 0.84		

* Removed item

Table 3: Quality of Alternatives Items Together with Their Corrected Item-Total Correlations and Cronbach's Alpha Values

Item	Quality of alternatives subscale	Corrected item-total correlations
IMS16	The people other than my partner with whom I might become involved are very appealing.	.53
IMS17	My alternatives to our relationship are close to ideal (dating another, spending time with friends, or being on my own, etc.)	.57
IMS18	If I weren't dating my partner, I would do fine; I would find another appealing person to date.	.60
IMS19	My alternatives are attractive to me (dating another, spending time with friends, or being on my own, etc.)	.69
IMS20	My needs for intimacy, companionship, etc., could easily be fulfilled in an alternative relationship.	.63

Table 3: Quality of Alternatives Items Together with Their Corrected Item-Total Correlations and Cronbach's Alpha Values

Item	Quality of alternatives subscale	Corrected item-total correlations
Cronbach's Alpha = 0.81		

Table 4: Investment Size Items Together with Their Corrected Item-Total Correlations and Cronbach's Alpha Values

Item	Investment size subscale	Corrected item-total correlations
IMS26	I have put a great deal into our relationship that I would lose if the relationship were to end.	.78
IMS27	Many aspects of my life have become linked to my partner (recreational activities, etc.), and I would lose all of this if we were to break up.	.80
IMS28	I feel very involved in our relationship, like I have put a great deal into it.	.85
IMS29	My relationships with friends and family members would be complicated if my partner and I were to break up (e.g., my partner is friendly with people I care about).	.58
IMS30	Compared to other people I know, I have invested a great deal in my relationship with my partner.	.69
Cronbach's Alpha = 0.89		

Table 5: Commitment Level Items Together with Their Corrected Item-Total Correlations and Cronbach's Alpha Values

Item	Marital satisfaction level subscale	Corrected item-total correlations
IMS31	I want our relationship to last for a very long time.	.87
IMS32	I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner.	.85
IMS33	I would not feel very upset if our relationship were to end in the near future.	.39
IMS34	It is likely that I will date someone other than my partner within the next year.	.55
IMS35	I feel much attached to our relationship; I feel very strongly linked to my partner.	.83
IMS36	I want our relationship to last forever.	.91
IMS37	I am oriented toward the long-term future of my relationship (for example, I imagine being with my partner several years from now).	.86
Cronbach's Alpha = 0.91		

Table 6: Satisfaction Level Items Together with Their Corrected Item-Total Correlations and Cronbach's Alpha Values

Item	Satisfaction level subscale	Corrected item-total correlations
IMS 6	I feel satisfied with our relationship.	.92
IMS 7	My relationship is much better than others' relationships.	.85
IMS 8	My relationship is close to ideal.	.87
IMS 9	Our relationship makes me very happy.	.91
IMS10	Our relationship does a good job of fulfilling my needs for intimacy, companionship, etc.	.92
Cronbach's Alpha = 0.96		

In summary, results from reliability analyses indicated that six items from the Attitudes toward Women Scale (AWS1, 3, 7, 8, 14, and 15) had a Corrected Item-Total Correlation (I-T) of less than .33 and that their deletion would increase the overall Cronbach's alphas for that particular scale. Thus, these items were deleted prior to the computation of the factor and the rest of the analysis. After removing these items, the factor score of gender role attitude was represented by nine items, the factor score of quality of alternatives was represented by five items, the factor score of investment size was represented by five items, the factor score of commitment was represented by seven items, and the factor score of marital satisfaction was represented by five items.

The computed Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all five scales were adequate and ranged from .81 to .96. Each of the factors was, then, computed by summing across the items that make up that factor, and their means and standard deviations calculated.

Factor Score Means and Standard Deviations

Table 7 presents the means and standard deviations for the five computed factors, based on the nationality of husband which was further categorized into 'Thai' and 'Foreigner'.

Table 7: Means and Standard Deviations for the Five Computed Factors Based on Nationality of Husband

Variable	Nationality of husband	Mean	Std. deviation	Mid-point
Gender Role Attitude	Thai	2.18	0.65	2.50
	Foreigner	2.23	0.53	2.50
Quality of Alternatives	Thai	4.25	1.59	5.00
	Foreigner	3.75	1.26	5.00
Investment Size	Thai	5.70	1.70	5.00
	Foreigner	6.15	1.56	5.00
Commitment	Thai	7.25	1.59	5.00
	Foreigner	7.74	1.30	5.00
Marital Satisfaction	Thai	6.39	1.84	5.00
	Foreigner	6.97	1.76	5.00

Table 7 presents the means and standard deviations as well as the mid-points of the five computed factors, based on the nationality of the participants' husbands. The mean scores of investments size, commitment, and marital satisfaction were above the mid-points for the respondents in both groups. This suggests that respondents in both groups have a high level of investment size, high level of commitment, and high level of marital satisfaction. The mean scores of genders role attitude and quality of alternatives were below the mid-points. This suggests that respondents leaned toward traditional gender role and believed that the quality of their alternatives was low.

Path Analysis to Test the Hypothesized Path Model

In order to aid the interpretation of results, only path coefficients that are statistically significant ($p < .05$) were included in the cited figures.

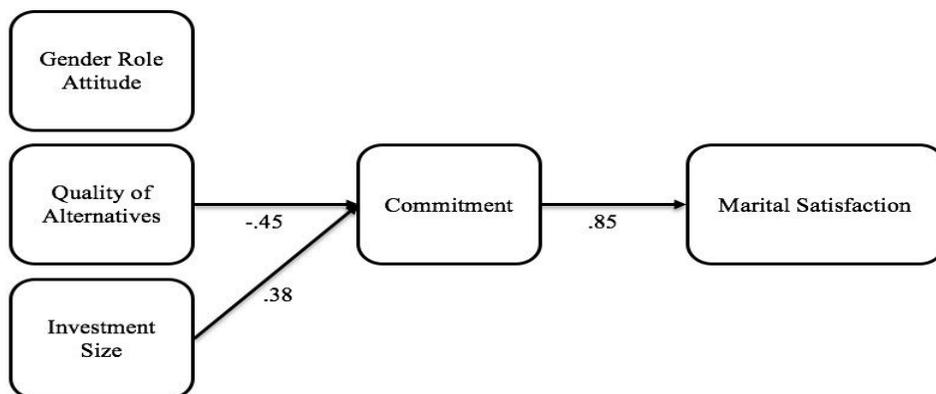


Figure 2: Path Model of Marital Satisfaction as a Function of Direct and Indirect Influences of Gender Role Attitude, Quality of Alternatives, Investment Size, Being Mediated by Commitment among Thai Women Who Married Thai Men

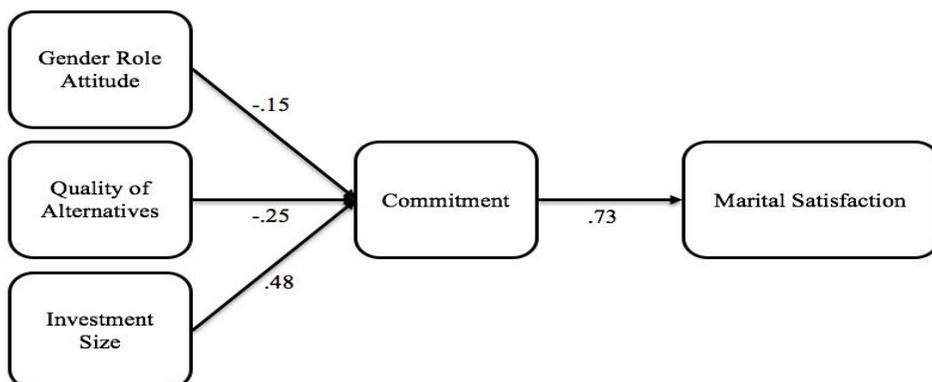


Figure 3: Path Model of Marital Satisfaction as a Function of Direct and Indirect Influences of Gender Role Attitude, Quality of Alternatives, Investment Size, Being Mediated by Commitment among Thai Women Who Married Foreign Men

GLM MANOVA to Test for Differences between Groups

The Pillais F shows no significant group difference (i.e., between Thai women married to Thai men and Thai women married to foreigners) on the five dependent variables combined, $F(5,194)=1.866$, $p>.05$. However, *Tests of Between-Subjects effects* showed significant ‘husband’s ethnicity’ effect for three of the 5 DVs. Thus, (1) Thai women married to foreigners expressed significantly higher marital satisfaction ($M=6.974$) than Thai women married to Thai men ($M=6.386$), $F(1,198)=5.348$, $p<.05$, (2) Thai women married to Thai men perceived higher quality of alternatives ($M=4.248$) than Thai women married to foreigners ($M=3.746$), $F(1,198)=6.135$, $p<.05$, and (3) Thai women married to foreigners expressed greater commitment to their marriage ($M=7.7414$) than their counterparts who are married to Thai men ($M=7.2543$), $F(1,198)=5.626$, $p<.05$.

Discussion

The results indicate a strong direct relationship between commitment and marital satisfaction. They also indicate that commitment has an important mediating role between gender role attitude, quality of alternatives, investment size, and marital satisfaction. This may be because commitment evokes positive marital processes such that Thai women who are more committed tend to be more caring, accommodating, and forgiving. This, in turn, elicits pro-relationship behaviors from their husbands, thus, increasing their level of marital satisfaction (Miller, 1997; Rusbult, 1983; Stanley & Markman, 1992). The findings suggest that it is possible to increase marital satisfaction, and that it is possible to do it single-handedly by increasing commitment. Within the scope of this study, increasing commitment can be achieved by lowering the quality of alternatives (e.g., pay less attention to the alternatives, denigrate their appeal, ward off threats to the marriage, appreciate the good qualities of the husband, recognize the benefits of the current marriage, etc.), increase the investment size (e.g., invest more time and effort into the marriage, build trust and willingness to accommodate, etc.). Furthermore, commitment can be increased by simply making a decision to devote oneself to the marriage (Johnson, 1991).

The findings also indicate that Thai women who married foreign men are happier with their marriage than Thai women who married Thai men. However, it does not imply that foreigners are better husbands than Thai men or that marrying a foreigner will make a woman happier. If a woman rates nationality of husband very high in her mate selection and minimizes the importance of other characteristics, she is susceptible to a big disappointment in life.

The researcher recommends future efforts to consider a similar study using a larger sample size in order to increase the level of power analysis and generalizability. A longitudinal study is also recommended as this method might reveal trends and give insights into the relationship between variables over time and clarify the direction of causal relationships.

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