

Need for informational and procedural support in marriage disputes

The influence of self-efficacy on the relationship between dependency and need for informational and procedural support

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Abstract

This study tries to answer the question if self-efficacy has an influence on the relationship between dependency and the need for informational and procedural support in marriage disputes. During a divorce the dependency and self-efficacy have an influence on the control that people feel they have over the situation. This control influences the need for informational and procedural support. This study also focuses on the dependency asymmetry, the participants perceive themselves as being more dependent on their partners than their partners are dependent on them. We expect that as the dependency asymmetry increases, the need for informational and procedural support increases, but particularly when self-efficacy is low.

A survey among 378 participants who wanted to divorce or were in the middle of a divorce process showed that dependency indeed had a significant relation with the need for informational and procedural support. There was a significant influence of self-efficacy on this relation. However, interaction between dependency asymmetry, self-efficacy and the need for informational and procedural support was not significant.

Most adults claim that their marriage is their most important relationship (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001). Despite this, more and more marriages end up in divorce. In the Netherlands the Central Bureau of Statistics showed that in 2013, of all the registered marriages, 38,1% ended in divorce. In comparison, in 1990 this percentage was 28,1% (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2015). In the USA the percentage for divorce lies around 50% for all first-marriages. This percentage gets even higher for second- and third-marriages (divorce statistics, 2014). A divorce is a process that can cost people and society a lot of money, with the increasing number of divorces the costs that come with all these divorces rises to the billions (Schramm, 2006).

When people divorce they can have a need for support. These needs can be for emotional, relational, informational or procedural support. This study will focus on trying to find factors that influence the need for informational and procedural support that people have during a divorce. These are the more practical needs and are the needs that contribute the most to the rising costs that come with a divorce. This can help people during their divorce and to help understand what can be improved during the process of the divorce.

A marriage creates a relationship in which two parties are dependent on each other for certain needs. These needs can be emotional, material or physical. Control over these needs can lead to control and power over the other person in the relationship. The more control or power that one party has in the relationship, the more dependent the other party in the relationship is (Emerson, 1962). This makes dependency a relevant variable in divorce negotiations.

A divorce and the divorce negotiations can be a stressful events for the parties involved. Increasing self-efficacy can help people better cope with stressful situations (Bandura, 1982). Namely when self-efficacy increases, the perceived control that people have over a situation increases (Thuen & Rise, 2006). Self-efficacy also influences whether or not

people believe that they are capable of finding a solution without third-party help. People that do not believe that they are able to find a solution without third-party help, have a higher need for third-party support.

This study will focus on the relationship between the perceived dependency and the need for informational and procedural support and the influence that self-efficacy has on this relationship. This leads to the question central in this study: *Does self-efficacy have an influence on the relationship between dependency and the need for informational and procedural support?* As shown in the following model:

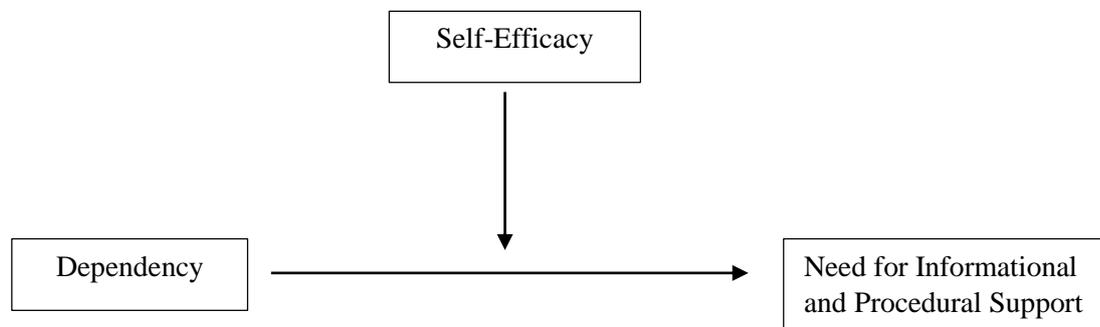


Figure 1. Moderation model of dependency, self-efficacy and need for informational and procedural support.

In the next section, the constructs of the model will be further explained and the hypotheses will be set.

Need for support

When somebody is in a situation or is having a problem which they cannot solve without the help of others, whether it be emotional, practical or physical, that person is likely to have a need for third-party support. Giebels and Yang (2009) distinguish three types of third-party help: relational, emotional and procedural help. Firstly, relational help is focused on the relationship between the two parties in conflict and the way they treat each other. This type of third-party support is focused on maintaining or repairing this relationship. Secondly, emotional third-party help is focused on the emotions that a party experiences. This is focused on each individual within the conflict. This type of help can give parties comfort and make them feel understood. This can be seen as social support, such that people feel that they are surrounded by people that support and advise them (Quick, Quick, Nelson & Hurrell, 1997). Lastly, procedural help is focused on setting the main issues aside from the minor issues of the conflict, structuring the conflict and setting guidelines that the parties can follow to help come to a solution. This type of third-party support increases parties' perceived procedural justice, they perceive the solution as more fair (Folger & Konovsky, 1989).

Procedural help corresponds with what Chen, Lim, Mojaverian and Morling (2012) label as problem-focused support. Two types of support fall under this category. Firstly instrumental support, which helps a person deal with the problem via a practical solution. It involves providing people with resources to help solve the problem. (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Simpson, Winterheld, Rholes & Orina, 2007). Secondly, informational support involves giving advice how to cope with the problem (Taylor, 2007). These two types of support can help people in the process of divorce and the divorce negotiations. As mentioned above, the focus of this study will be on the need for informational and procedural support. How much need people have for informational and procedural support is the dependent variable in this

study. This study will try to find what influences the need that people have for informational and procedural support during divorce and divorce negotiations.

Dependency

When people decide to register a romantic relationship, whether via a marriage, a registered partnership or a cohabitation agreement, it creates mutual dependency between the two parties involved. According to Emerson (1962), it is unavoidable that people can influence and control the other party in this relationship, by having control over the desires and wishes of the other person. In this study dependency is regarded as the opposite of power, being dependent on another person referring to a lack of power over that person (Emerson, 1962).

When people want to end a registered romantic relationship (i.e. divorce), this involves a process of negotiations about the arrangements parties need to make about their life after the divorce. These negotiations could be about things such as custody rights and alimony. Power that a person has over another person can influence the way these negotiations go. Galinsky, Gruenfeld and Magee (2003) showed that having power made participants more likely to act in given situations. They also showed that in social context, people with high power were more likely to act, even if their actions could have negative social consequences. Other research showed that having power in negotiations leads those with a lack of power to make lower levels of demand, especially when the person with high power made threats (De Dreu, 1995). Having high power in divorce negotiations is very important and could lead to higher need for support for the person who has low power in the divorce negotiations.

Shestowsky (2004) showed that people with low power in conflict negotiations had a high preference for solutions that would give them more control over the negotiations, mostly through rules that were set before the process or more information about what the other party

wants. This could mean that in divorce negotiations the party with lower power has more desire for control over the situation and thus, to try to gain control over the situation, a higher need for informational and procedural support.

This study will try to show that when people have a high perceived dependency on their spouse, that during divorce and divorce negotiations, their need for informational and procedural support increases. This leads to hypothesis 1: *As dependency on the other person increases, the need for informational and procedural support increases during a divorce process.*

Self-efficacy

Perceived self-efficacy is, according to Bandura (1982), the judgments a person makes whether he or she is capable of performing a given action in a prospective situation. Simply put, self-efficacy is the confidence that someone has in his or her own abilities in a certain situation. The perceived self-efficacy that people have during the divorce and divorce negotiations are focused on a scale that balances between whether people believe that they are capable of finding a solution for their problems on their own or whether they need help for every step along the way. Having higher self-efficacy leads to having more perceived control, which according to Thuen and Rise (2006) can lead to reduced helplessness and reduction of depression. This could mean that people who have a higher self-efficacy during divorce negotiations have a reduced helplessness and feel more capable of finding a solution on their own.

As stated in the section above this study will try to show that, when people have a high perceived dependency on their spouse, during a divorce their need for informational and procedural support increases. In addition, this study will also try to show that self-efficacy influences this relationship. When parties consider their self-efficacy to be low, the need for informational and procedural support rises faster when dependency on the other person

increases. In contrast when parties consider their self-efficacy to be high, the need for informational and procedural support rises slower when dependency on the other person increases. That is because, when people have high self-efficacy, they believe that they are capable of finding a solution without third-party help. This is because they have a higher perceived control over their actions. Dependency on the other person leads to a higher need for informational and procedural support, but high self-efficacy makes people believe that they can find a solution for the problem without third-party help which leads to a lower need for informational and procedural support. So hypothesis 2 is: *As self-efficacy increases, the positive relationship between dependency on the other person and the need for informational and procedural support is attenuated.*

Dependency Asymmetry

As mentioned above by Emerson (1962), power in a relationship depends on a party having control over the needs of the other party. However the other party involved can also have control over the needs of the first party. This creates tension in a relationship.

Dependency asymmetry refers to the balance of power between the two parties involved. The more imbalanced this relationship is, one party is heavily dependent on the other party while the other party is not dependent on the first party, the bigger the dependency asymmetry.

People who experience dependency asymmetry feel more dependent on the other party than that they perceive the other party to be dependent on them. This leads to a perceived loss of control over the situation (ShimanTov-Nachlieli, Schnabel & Nadler, 2013). As mentioned above, Shestowsky (2004) showed that people who experience a loss of control over a situation have a preference for solutions that gave them more control, mostly through rules that were set before the process or more information about what the other party wants. Thus we expect the experience of dependency asymmetry to lead to a higher need for informational and procedural support.

As mentioned above we expect self-efficacy to influence the relationship between dependency and the need for informational and procedural support. Based on that, we expect self-efficacy to also have an influence on the relationship between dependency asymmetry and the need for informational and procedural support. So we expect that a high dependency asymmetry leads to a higher need for informational and procedural support in marriage disputes and that self-efficacy influences this relation. This leads to hypothesis 3: *As the dependency asymmetry increases, the need for informational and procedural support increases but particularly when the self-efficacy is low.* We expect the relation between the own dependency and the need for informational and procedural support to be stronger when the other's dependency is perceived to be low, but particularly when the self-efficacy is relatively low instead of high.

Method

Participants & Procedure

The data was collected using an online survey within a larger project following partners through divorce (Van Dijk, Zebel & Giebels, in preparation).

The participants were visitors of the site of the Dutch Legal Aid Board, rechtwijzer.nl and were asked before entering the site if they wanted to participate in a survey by the University of Twente. The participants intended to divorce or were already in the middle of the process of getting divorced or terminating a cohabitation agreement. 378 people participated in the study (n=378), of which 27% was male and 73% was female. The participants had a mean age of 42 years with a range of 23-80.

Variables

Dependency Asymmetry

The independent variables dependency and dependency asymmetry were assessed with two items. One item was directed at the perceived dependency of the participant on the (ex-)partner, namely: “To what extent do you depend on your (ex-)partner?”. The other item was directed at the perceived dependency of the (ex-)partner on the participant according to the participant, namely: “To what extent does your (ex-)partner depend on you?”. These two items together measure the dependency asymmetry as perceived by the participant. This study focuses on dependency and the dependency asymmetry component. These items were measured using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = “not at all” to 7 = “to a very large extent”. The dependency asymmetry will be measured using an interaction between the two items.

Self-efficacy

The moderating variable is self-efficacy. This variable signifies the perceived self-efficacy that a participant has in resolving the problems that emerge after a divorce. The variable was measured using six items, e.g. “I have confidence that I am capable of resolving new and complicated problems that can arise during my divorce” and “I have confidence that I am capable of negotiating and coming to agreements with my (ex-)partner”. These six items were used to measure the self-efficacy related to divorce solutions. The six items were based on the Problem Solving Inventory (PSI) from Heppner and Peterson (1982) and adapted specifically to divorce situations. A 6-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 = “not at all” to 6 = “certainly”. Reliability analysis showed that the variable had a high internal consistency ($\alpha=0.86$). The mean of these six items was used to create the self-efficacy scale.

Need for informational and procedural support

The dependent variable is need for informational and procedural support. It was measured using an instrument that was based on three subscales, namely: the need for emotional support e.g. “I would like to share my experiences with other people”; the need for relational support e.g. “I would like to make sure that the other party gives me what I am entitled to”; and the need for informational and procedural support e.g. “I would like to know possible solutions for my problems”. These items were based on Giebels and Yang (2009); Schnabel and Nadler (2008); Chen, Lim, Mojaverian and Morling (2012); Nils and Rimé (2012) and Wetzler, Zeelenberg and Pieters (2007). Factor analysis showed that the variable indeed consisted of three components. The only item that did not correlate with the subscale it was designed in was the item that was part of the need for relational support: “I would like to maintain or repair the contact with my (ex-)partner”. To measure these items a 7-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 = “not at all” to 7 = “to a very large extent”. This study focuses on the need for informational and procedural support. The subscale of need for

informational and procedural support consisted of nine items. Reliability analysis showed that the subscale the need for informational and procedural support had a high internal consistency ($\alpha=0.86$). The mean of these nine items was used to create a new scale.

Control variables

Sex, age and whether participant had any children younger than twenty-one were added to the analysis as control variables. For “sex”, being male was coded as 0; female as 1. For “children under the age of 21”, having children under the age of 21 was coded as 1; not having children under the age of 21 was coded as 0. These three control variables were selected because they are key characteristics that can make a difference in the way participants handle the divorce.

Results

First, the correlations between the three control variables “sex”, “age” and “children under 21”, the independent variables “own dependency” and “other dependency” and “self-efficacy” and the dependent variable “need for informational and procedural support” were measured. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of participants, mean, standard deviation and Spearman’s rho correlation coefficients

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Sex (0 = male)	0.73	.44	-					
2. Age	42.24	9.54	-.15**	-				
3. Children <21 (0 = no)	.74	.44	.05	-.11*	-			
4. Own Dependency	4.37	2.05	.17**	-.08	.18**	-		
5. Other Dependency	3.75	1.98	-.24**	.04	.17**	.01	-	
6. Self-Efficacy	4.08	1.03	-.04	.08	.02	-.20**	.05	-
7. Need for Informational and Procedural Support	5.39	1.09	.06	-.05	.02	.34**	-.04	-.19**

N = 378

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

The numbers show that own dependency has a mean that is above the middle of the scale (M = 4.37). This mean was significantly different from the middle of the scale ($t(377) = 3.51$, $p = .00$), so in general participants perceive themselves as being relatively dependent on their (ex-)partner. The mean of dependency of the other party was slightly lower than the own dependency (M = 3.75). There was a significant difference between the scores that participants filled in for own dependency and for the other’s dependency ($t(377) = 4.29$, $p = .00$). Which means that in general participants perceived themselves as more dependent

on the other party than the other party being dependent on them. The mean of need for informational and procedural support is relatively high ($M = 5.39$). This means that, in general, participants had a high need for informational and procedural support. However the mean of self-efficacy is also relatively high ($M = 4.08$). There also is a significant correlation between self-efficacy and need for informational and procedural support ($\rho = -.19$). Which means that participants in general have a high perceived self-efficacy in finding solutions for problems that arise from a divorce, but they also in general have a high need for procedural and information support.

Another significant correlation is between sex and perceived own dependency ($\rho = .17$). There is also a significant correlation between sex and perceived other dependency ($\rho = -.24$). When looking at the difference between men and women, the mean for own dependency for men is relatively low ($M = 3.75$) compared to the mean for women for own dependency ($M = 4.60$). This is a significant difference between the own dependency score between men and women ($t(376) = -3.59, p = .00$). For other's dependency, the mean for men is relatively high ($M = 4.50$) compared to the mean for women on other's dependency ($M = 3.47$). This is a significant difference between the other's dependency score between men and women ($t(376) = 4.62, p = .00$). This means that there is a significant difference between the perceived own and other's dependency of men and women. Men perceived themselves as being less dependent on their partner and their partner as being more dependent on them, while women perceived themselves as being more dependent on their partner and their partner as being less dependent on them.

There is a significant, but weak effect between self-efficacy and dependency ($\rho = -.20$). The two independent variables should not have a high correlation, so this suggests that these variables are distinct concepts. This is important to validate the model. If the variables correlate too strongly they might not be separate variables.

There is a significant correlation between dependency and the need for informational and procedural support ($\rho = .34$). However there is no significant correlation between own dependency, the level of dependency on the (ex-)partner that participants perceive, and other dependency, the level of dependency of the (ex-)partner on the participant as perceived by the participant.

Testing hypotheses

Second, the model and the hypotheses were tested using a hierarchical multiple regression analysis. The results of these regression analyses are displayed in Table 2. In step 1 the relation between the control variables and the dependent variable need for informational and procedural support was tested. In step 2 the relation between the independent variables “own dependency”, “other dependency” and “self-efficacy” and the dependent variable was tested. In step 3 the two-way interaction between the independent variables were added to the model. Finally, in step 4 the three-way interactions between the three independent variables and the dependent variable were added to the model.

Table 2. Regression analyses

	ΔR^2	B	p
Step 1	.02		
Intercept		5.39	.00
Sex		.14	.28
Age		-.01	.07
Children <21		.03	.85
Step 2	.14**		
Intercept		5.39	.00
Sex		-.01	.91
Age		-.01	.15
Children <21		-.08	.51
Own Dependency		.15	.00
Other Dependency		-.02	.58
Self-Efficacy		-.18	.00
Step 3	.01		
Intercept		5.42	.00
Sex		-.04	.77
Age		-.01	.20
Children <21		-.09	.47
Own Dependency		.16	.00
Other Dependency		-.03	.33
Self-Efficacy		-.18	.00
Own x Other Dependency		-.00	.71
Own x Self-Efficacy		.06	.02

	Other x Self-Efficacy	-.01	.85
Step 4		.00	
	Intercept	5.42	.00
	Sex	-.04	.74
	Age	-.01	.20
	Children <21	-.10	.43
	Own Dependency	.16	.00
	Other Dependency	-.03	.28
	Self-Efficacy	-.19	.00
	Own x Other Dependency	-.00	.84
	Own x Self-Efficacy	.05	.04
	Other x Self-Efficacy	-.01	.84
	Own x Other x Self-Efficacy	-.01	.37

Dependent Variable: Need for Informational and Procedural Support

*p<.05, **p<0.001 Table made with centered predictors

There is no significant relation between the control variables on the dependent variable of need for informational and procedural support. Sex ($B = .14$, *ns*), age ($B = -.01$, *ns*) and children <21 ($B = .03$, *ns*) have no significant influence on need for informational and procedural support.

The expected positive relation between dependency and need for informational and procedural support was significant ($B = .15$, $p < .01$). This means that hypotheses 1: *As dependency on the other person increases, the need for informational and procedural support increases* is confirmed. There is also a significant negative relation between self-efficacy and

need for informational and procedural support ($B = -.18, p < .01$), which means that when self-efficacy decreases the need for informational and procedural support increases.

After the two independent variables have been combined, the interaction effect of the model was tested. It showed that there is a significant influence of self-efficacy on the relationship between dependency and need for informational and procedural support ($B = .05, p < .05$). Figure 2 shows this interaction between the own dependency and the self-efficacy, predicting the need for informational and procedural support. It shows during low own dependency the need for informational and procedural support is lower during high self-efficacy than during low self-efficacy.

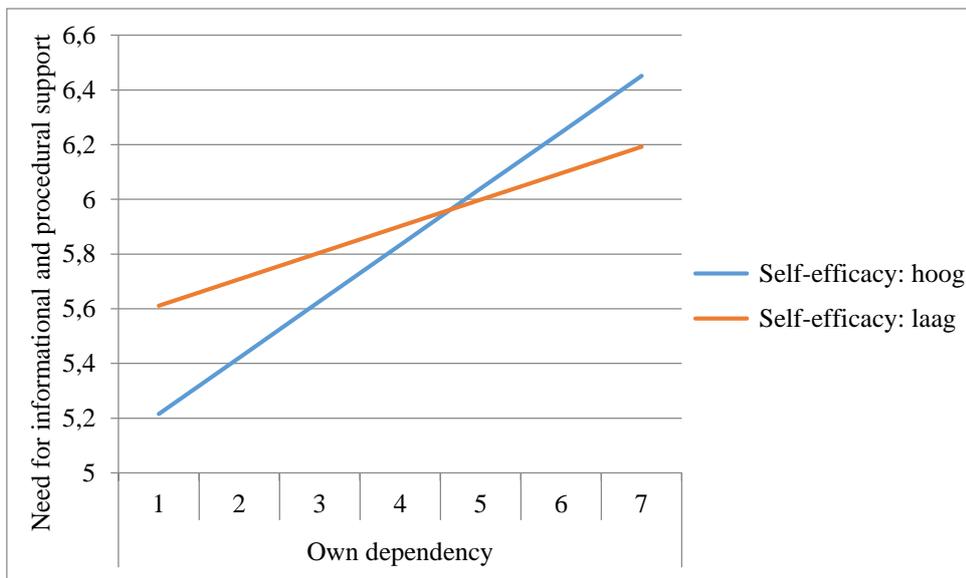


Figure 2. Interaction pattern of own dependency and self-efficacy, predicting the need for informational and procedural support

However, the need for informational and procedural support increases faster during high self-efficacy compared to when self-efficacy is low, which means that when the own dependency is high the need for informational and procedural support is higher during high self-efficacy than during low-self-efficacy. This pattern of results contradicts with hypotheses 2 and means that hypotheses 2: *As self-efficacy increases, the positive relationship between dependency on*

the other person and the need for informational and procedural support is attenuated is rejected.

Lastly, Table 2 shows that, in comparison to own dependency ($B = .15, p < .01$) other dependency has no significant relation with the dependent variable need for informational and procedural support ($B = -.02, ns$). Self-efficacy still has a significant relation with the dependent variable ($B = -.18, p < .01$). There is no significant relation between the interaction between own and other dependency and the dependent variable ($B = -.00, ns$). The influence of self-efficacy on the relation between own dependency and need for informational and procedural support is still significant ($B = .06, p < .05$).

There is no significant influence of self-efficacy on the relation between the interaction between the own and other dependency and the need for informational and procedural support ($B = -.01, ns$). Which means that hypotheses 3: *As the dependency asymmetry increases, the need for informational support increases but particularly when the self-efficacy is low* is rejected.

Discussion

This study has tried to find some explanations for the process that takes place during divorce negotiations. The level of need for third-party support that people have in marriage disputes influences the way the divorce negotiations go. This study has tried to find factors that influence the level of need for informational and procedural support that people have. This was done by looking at the perceived dependency of the participant on the (ex-)partner, the dependency asymmetry in the relationship as perceived by the participant and the self-efficacy of the participant. Then the relation between these variables were analyzed and the hypotheses that were set were tested.

The first hypotheses stated that dependency has a positive relationship with need for informational and procedural support. The higher the dependency the more need for informational and procedural support. This is confirmed by the results of this study. Based on the analysis it can be said that there is a significant relationship between the dependency on the other party and the need for informational and procedural support. The more dependent a person is on the other party the more need for informational and procedural support this person will have.

The second hypothesis stated that self-efficacy of the participant would influence the relationship between dependency and need for informational and procedural support. The higher the self-efficacy of the participant the more attenuated the relationship between dependency and need for informational and procedural support becomes. When looking at the results, there is a significant influence of self-efficacy on the relationship between dependency and need for informational and procedural support. However, this is a reinforcing influence. When self-efficacy became higher, people who had high dependency got a higher need for informational and procedural support. This is not corresponding to the expectations of this study. However this could be explained by the fact that people with higher self-efficacy are

better at coping with problems. Specifically, people with higher self-efficacy have higher problem-focused coping, meaning they can better deal with problems causing reduced psychological distress for them (Chesney, Neilands, Chambers, Taylor & Folkman, 2006). This could explain why people who have a relatively high dependency and relatively high self-efficacy have a higher need for informational and procedural support. Because the people with high self-efficacy can better cope with the problem situation in comparison to people with low self-efficacy. They are also more capable of realizing that they are in need of help to solve the situation, compared to people with low self-efficacy. Especially because they are aware that they have a high dependency on the other party in the conflict. This could be interesting to take into account when performing a follow-up study into the role of self-efficacy in marriage disputes.

The third hypothesis focused on the dependency asymmetry that can be present in a relationship. It focused on a three-way interaction between the dependency asymmetry, self-efficacy and the need for informational and procedural support. The results of this study found no significant evidence for this three-way interaction.

Follow-up studies can take some of the findings and shortcomings of this study into account. For the dependency asymmetry, there was no correlation or significant relation found between the own dependency and the other dependency. So there was no significant relation between how dependent people perceived themselves to be on their partner and how dependent they perceived their partner to be on them. This could be explained by the fact that this study focuses on the subjective dependency, we had participants put in the scores for their own dependency but also for the other dependency. The absence of a relation between the two could be due to the fact that the subjective dependency that people feel is already answered in the own dependency. A follow-up study could try to find couples and have each of them fill in their own dependency score. However it might be difficult to find the same number of people

that participated in this study. It will also be a time and resource consuming process. Another limitation of this study is that the model presented in this study does not factor in other variables that play a part in the process of a divorce. We recognize that this model cannot explain the whole process of a divorce, but that it focuses on certain aspects of this process. These are things to consider when performing a follow-up study into this subject.

Another interesting result of this study was that there is a significant difference between the perceived own and other's dependency of men and women. Men feel less dependent on their partner than women and also perceive their partner as being more dependent on them than women. However, research shows that this difference is not due to sex, but due to masculinity and femininity (Bornstein, Bowers & Bonner, 1996; Alonso-Arbiol, Shaver & Yárnoz, 2002). This could be interesting to take into account when doing further research into marriage disputes between same sex couples.

This study has shown that dependency is a influencing factor on need for informational and procedural support in marriage disputes. Further it has raised some interesting questions on the role of self-efficacy and dependency asymmetry. The model presented in this study can be used and can be expanded when follow-up studies will be performed. This in term will hopefully help better understand which factors influence the need for informational and procedural support, which can help provide better solutions in marriage disputes.

Concluding, self-efficacy does seem to have an influence on the relationship between dependency and the need for informational and procedural support. However, results from this study suggest a different kind of influence than what was expected. Follow-up studies can use the model and the results of this study to improve their research.

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