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The Impact of Length of Relationship on Conflict Communication and Relationship Satisfaction in Couples

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The impact of length of relationship on conflict communication and relationship satisfaction in couples.

by

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Program of Study Committee:
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Abstract

Variables such as relationship duration are often overlooked when trying to intervene with dissatisfied couples, making it important to evaluate the significance of such variables on overall relationship satisfaction. This study looked at the impact of length of relationship on conflict communication and relationship satisfaction. Hierarchical regression analyses revealed no significant relationship between length of relationship and relationship satisfaction for either males or females. However, length of relationship did impact males' perceptions of conflict communication which in turn significantly predicted relationship satisfaction. This finding indicates that conflict communication should be further researched for its impact on relationship satisfaction.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Positive interpersonal relationships are important to the overall mental health because humans require social connections to thrive (Luong, Charles & Fingerman, 2011). Intimate relationships are a specific type of interpersonal relationship that have become prominent in most cultures as necessary for interpersonal support and individual well-being (Berscheid, 1994). However, over time many factors have been found to impact the level of satisfaction that is experienced in these important relationships. Negative factors that can impact intimate relationships from external sources, individual differences, or from misunderstandings within the couple all play a role in how well a relationship is able to provide the necessary support and social interaction needed by most people (Berscheid, 1994).

This study examined the influence of length of relationship on conflict communication and overall relationship satisfaction among couples. I also evaluated whether or not the effects of these variables on the quality of relationships varied by gender.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Communication in Relationships

Communication is a central part of intimate relationships reflected by both communication skills and communication behaviors (Burleson & Denton, 1997).

Communication skills are defined as the ability to accomplish "communicative goals during the course of an interaction" (Burleson & Denton, 1997, p. 887). Communication behaviors are verbal actions by the speaker that are perceived by others (Burleson & Denton, 1997).

While there are a number of ways to evaluate communication styles, skills, and behaviors, one of the most prominent models related to communication within couples has been developed by Gottman (1993). He found that there are four negative communication behaviors that are harmful to couples that he labeled as "criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling" (Gottman, 1993, p. 9). Happy couples exhibit three of these negative communication behaviors, but do not exhibit contempt. That type of behavior is only found among unhappy couples (Domingue & Mollen, 2009). One form of communication that is found among happy couples has been termed "positive sentiment override" which is characterized by the partners interpreting negative communication tactics as neutral because of the overall positive quality of the relationship (Domingue & Mollen, 2009). This study focused on each partners' responses on the Communication Patterns Questionnaire Demand/Withdraw subscale to assess their perception of whether communication within their relationship was satisfactory during conflict.

Communication and Conflict

Gottman (1993) found that there were three phases of conflict discussions between partners: agenda building, arguing, and negotiation. The three phases are expressed differently based on the conflict approach of the couple. One conflict approach that has been linked to dissatisfaction with the relationship is the “demand/withdraw pattern” which is characterized by one partner engaging in conflict while the other avoids conflict. A study conducted by Caughlin and Vangelisti (2000) examined why married couples engage in the demand/withdraw pattern. They found that the personality traits of neuroticism and agreeableness in men were indicative of the use of this pattern during conflict with the other member of the couple while other personality traits predicted the use of different patterns of conflict. One’s orientation toward conflict also plays a role in the presence of the demand/withdraw pattern within the relationship (Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2000). Argumentativeness on the part of the husband or the wife was correlated with the presence of the demand/withdraw pattern based on both observational and retrospective measures (Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2000).

These findings indicate that individual characteristics of both partners will impact how conflict, specifically the demand/withdraw cycle, will be handled within the relationship. It is therefore important to consider the responses of both partners separately as well as together to accurately gauge the impact of these factors on the pattern of communication within the couple.

Communication and Gender

Communications are interpreted differently based upon one’s gender (Burlison, 2003). How a person interprets both verbal and nonverbal communication is dependent upon their gender and the gender roles they subscribe to (Ickes, 1993). While

communication regarding conflict has an impact on the overall satisfaction of the couple, such communication impacts each member of the couple in different ways depending upon their gender. A study conducted by Burleson examined differences in the types of communication that are valued based upon gender. Both men and women valued expressive and affect-oriented skills. Although some sex differences were present in the importance of ego, conflict management, and comforting skills, none of these significantly impacted how communication was interpreted for either sex (Burleson, 2003). In contrast, a study conducted by Clark (2011) found that the interpretation of communication was very different based upon gender. Clark reported that numerous aspects of communication, including the value placed on good communication skills and confidence in one's ability's to communicate, varied significantly between male and female members of the couple. Once again, however, there were also similarities between the genders regarding what was considered to be effective communication.

Length of Relationship

A study conducted by Glass and Wright (1997) focused on the role of extramarital sex, length of marriage and marital satisfaction. Length of marriage did impact marital satisfaction although it was less important than extramarital sex. Other studies conducted by Blood and Wolfe (1960), Bowerman (1957), Burr (1970), and Pineo (1961) examined the effect of length of marriage on marital satisfaction over time. These studies found that while children are in the home perceptions of one's partner are less favorable than prior to having a child or following the child leaving home (Glass & Wright, 1997). Although all of these studies examined length of relationship, none evaluated the impact length of relationship had on conflict communication and relationship satisfaction.

Communication and Relationship Satisfaction

Communication patterns, particularly those surrounding how conflict is handled, can be indicative of couple satisfaction with the relationship (Heavey, Larson, Zumtobel & Christiansen, 1996). Numerous studies have found relationships between how conflict is handled and the level of satisfaction with the relationship. Kurdek (1994) reported that frequent conflict about power and intimacy was more indicative of relationship satisfaction levels than any of the other studied content areas (i.e., social issues, personal flaws, distrust, personal distance). Gottman and Krokoff (1989) found that while some conflicts resulted in reduced satisfaction at the time of the altercation it did not necessarily equate to overall dissatisfaction with the relationship (Smith, Heaven & Ciarrochi, 2008). Results presented by Noller and White (1990) indicated that couples who were able to openly discuss conflictual topics in a positive way experienced higher levels of relationship satisfaction than couples who withdrew or avoided conflict and who were more negative than positive during conflict (Smith et al., 2008).

While these studies have found relationships between conflict communication styles and relationship satisfaction, it is important to note that one variable that was controlled in all of these studies was age. By contrast, the current study will evaluate whether or not age affects conflict communication and relationship satisfaction when combined with the length of the relationship.

Relationship Satisfaction

Satisfaction with the relationship is another complex variable that has been examined in numerous ways in previous studies. For instance, the impact of attachment styles in infancy on future adult relationship satisfaction has been explored by Banse

(2004) who found a correlation between attachment style at infancy and later relationship satisfaction as an adult. Acitelli (1992) found that increased husband relationship awareness was indicative of increased relationship satisfaction for the couple as a whole, a finding that has been replicated by others (Byers, 2005; Cordova, 1993; Driver & Gottman, 2004). Results presented by Kachadourian, Fincham, and Davila (2004) indicated that individuals who were willing to forgive their partners for transgressions were ultimately more satisfied with the relationship. Cramer (2002) examined conflict management behaviors and relationship satisfaction, finding that the lack of resolution during conflict was a primary determinant of relationship dissatisfaction whereas conflict avoidance appeared to play a much weaker role in determining overall relationship satisfaction (Cramer, 2002). These findings suggest that the demand/withdraw pattern, which often leads to lack of resolution of the conflict, may significantly impact relationship satisfaction.

Gender and Relationship Satisfaction

One factor that is sometimes overlooked when studying relationship satisfaction is the perception of each member of the couple based upon their gender. Kirkpatrick and Davis (1994) examined the impact of gender roles on long-term relationship stability. They found that the gender roles that were adopted had a direct impact on stability of the relationship, with traditional gender roles being indicative of stability. The stability of the relationship was measured by assessing the level of satisfaction reported by each member of the couple along with other measures of stability including attachment and length of the relationship (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994). Rochlen and Mahalik (2004) examined women's perceptions of their male partners' gender roles and the influence that

perception had on her relationship satisfaction. They found that the woman's perceptions were significantly related to her level of satisfaction with the relationship (Rochlen & Mahalik, 2004). Burn and Ward (2005) examined men's conformity to the masculine role and relationship satisfaction. The more men conformed to traditional masculine roles the lower the level of relationship satisfaction reported by both the men and women in the relationship (Burn & Ward, 2005). Based upon these studies it can be seen that gender differences directly impact relationship satisfaction within the couple.

Purpose and Hypotheses

The purpose of this study was to determine how length of relationship impacted conflict communication and relationship satisfaction. The significance of the study comes from the fact that length of time in a relationship is a characteristic of that is unchangeable. Determining how this variable affects conflict communication and relationship satisfaction could impact how practitioners help couples restructure unsatisfying relationships prior to relationship dissolution. Four hypotheses will be tested as part of the investigation: 1) length of relationship will positively affect the couples ability to communicate effectively about topics of conflict; 2) length of relationship will positively affect relationship satisfaction; 3) gender will positively affect the ability to communicate about conflict, with females being more likely to communicate regarding a problem in the relationship and less likely to withdraw than men; and 4) gender negatively affects relationship satisfaction with males reporting higher levels of relationship satisfaction than females.

Chapter 3: Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 64 heterosexual, cohabiting couples who were recruited through a notice in the *Inside Iowa State* online newsletter as well as through the *Ames Tribune*. The oldest participant was born in 1927 and the youngest in 1984. The couple with the longest relationship had been together for 53 years whereas the shortest reported relationship length was six months. The number of children each couple had ranged from zero to six with the age of the children ranging from infants to middle-aged adults.

Demographic Characteristics

Demographic characteristics of participants through a series of questions on the original survey as can be seen in the Appendix. Information regarding income was collected on an individual basis where each partner was asked about his or her income independent of their partner. Individuals indicated their income using a variety of categories that ranged from “Less than \$10,000” to “greater than \$70,000.” Follow-up questions related to income asked whether the partner’s income was greater than, less than, or equal to the respondent’s income. Information regarding religion, ethnicity, and marital status were gathered separately from each member of the couple. The number, age, and gender of the children were also indicated separately by each member of the couple; the participants also indicated their relationship to each of the children. Length of relationship was measured as the total time in the current relationship, with the data rounded to indicate the number of years in the relationship.

Measures

Communication Pattern Questionnaire. The Communication Pattern Questionnaire (CPQ) is a “35-item self-report measure that addresses spouses’ behavior during three stages of conflict: (a) when some problem in the relationship arises, (b) during a discussion of a relationship problem, and (c) after a discussion of a relationship problem” (Heavey et al., 1996, p. 796) that was originally created by Christiansen and Sullaway (1984). The questions are answered using a 9 point Likert-type scale that ranges from “Very Unlikely” to “Very Likely” (Heavey et al., 1996). Christiansen and Shenk (1991) subsequently created three subscales based on the items included in the CPQ: Mutual Constructive, Demand/Withdraw, and Mutual Avoidance/Withholding (Domingue & Mollen, 2009). This study utilized the Demand/Withdraw subscale which consists of eleven questions such as, “When this issue or problem arises, both members avoid discussing the problem” (Domingue & Mollen, 2009). Scores on this subscale appear to be reliable, with a coefficient alpha of .77 being reported in previous studies and a coefficient alpha of .75 being found for this sample (Domingue & Mollen, 2009). Further reliability analyses were conducted separately for the two members of the couple revealing coefficient alphas of .73 for females and .78 for males for the measure.

Relationship satisfaction. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) was employed to assess the level of satisfaction with the relationship. The DAS was created by Spanier (1976) and consists of 32 Likert-type questions. Scores on four different subscales are computed based on the individual’s responses to these items. The subscales are Dyadic Consensus, Satisfaction, Cohesion, and Affectional Expression (Spanier, 1989). Scores on the Satisfaction subscale were employed in the current study. This subscale consists of ten questions including, “Do you ever regret that you entered into this relationship?”

Scores on this subscale appear to be reliable, with coefficient alpha of .94 being reported in previous studies (Spanier, 1976); a coefficient alpha of .86 was found for this sample. Further reliability analyses were conducted separately by gender revealing coefficient alphas of .87 for females and .86 for males on this measure.

Procedure

This study used secondary data that were originally collected for a study examining power dynamics in daily processes and relationship satisfaction. Criteria for inclusion in the sample were simply that the couple must be cohabitating or married and involved in an intimate relationship with one another. Survey respondents, after seeing the advertising notices in the university or local paper, e-mailed or called the researchers and a time was arranged for the questionnaire to be completed. A limitation of these data is that all of the participants were self-selected individuals who received \$30 for participating.

The survey contained questions regarding the division of labor in the household, communication regarding areas of conflict, relationship satisfaction, personality characteristics of self and partner, division of decision-making power, and demographic characteristics. Upon arrival at the research site participants were given the survey with the understanding that their partners would not see their responses to the questions. Each member of the couple was led to a separate room to complete the survey. Informed consent was obtained from participants prior to completing the survey.

Chapter 4: Results

Descriptive characteristics of participants are presented in Table 1 separately for the male and female members of the couples. On average participants reported an average income between \$30,000 to \$40,000 for each member of the couple. On average males were approximately one year older than their partners. Male and female partners did not necessarily describe their marital status identically; 53 females and 58 males described themselves as being married. Fifty-nine females (92%) and 62 males (97%) described themselves as Caucasian, and 51 females (80%) and 49 males (77%) described themselves as being Christian. On average participants reported 1.6 children in the family, although three couples were not in agreement regarding the number of children in the family.

There was a small difference between male ($M = .37$) and female ($M = .34$) members of the couple on the Communication Patterns Questionnaire on overall perception of the prevalence of the demand/withdraw cycle within their conflict resolution styles, although the difference was not statistically significant, $t(63) = .96, p = .34$. Differences between male ($M = .20$) and female ($M = .09$) were also found on the Dyadic Adjustment Satisfaction Scale although once again this difference was not statistically significant, $t(63) = .46, p = .65$.

The correlations among the relationship variables (i.e., length of relationship, CPQ, and DAS) and between these variables and the demographic variables are presented in Table 2 separately for male and female members of the couple. The strongest relationship was found between the CPQ and the DAS for both men and women, with higher scores on the Communication Pattern Questionnaire Demand/Withdraw subscale

being associated with lower scores on the Dyadic Adjustment Satisfaction Scale. Length of relationship was significantly related to scores on the CPQ for men but not for women. We predicted that length of relationship would be positively related to the couple's ability to communicate effectively about topics of conflict. These results indicate support for this prediction for male but not for female members of the couple.

Prediction of Relationship Satisfaction

Hierarchical regressions analyses using the demographic and relationship characteristics as well as the measure of communication to predict relationship satisfaction were conducted separately for male and female members of the couple. Tables 3 and 4 present the results of the regression analyses for female and male members of the couple, respectively. For females the demographic variables that were entered in Model 1 were as a group non-significant predictors of relationship satisfaction, $F(5,54) = 1.17, p = .34$. None of the individual predictor variables were found to be statistically significant predictors. Model 2 added length of relationship as a predictor of relationships satisfaction which was found to be non-significant. Model 3 added the communication measure as a predictor of relationship satisfaction. This variable was a highly significant predictor, accounting for 14% of the variance in relationship satisfaction after controlling for the other predictor variables. As expected high scores on the communication measure were associated with lower levels of relationship satisfaction.

The results for male members of the couples were nearly identical to the findings for females. For males the demographic variables that were entered in Model 1 were as a group non-significant predictors of relationship satisfaction, $F(5,56) = 1.70, p = .15$.

None of the individual predictor variables were found to be statistically significant predictors. As was true for females length of the relationship was not a significant predictor of satisfaction. The communication variable was a highly significant predictor of relationship satisfaction, accounting for 18% of the variance in satisfaction after controlling for the other predictor variables. Once again high scores on the communication measure were associated with lower levels of relationship satisfaction.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Results of the analyses indicated a significant relationship between responses to the communication patterns questionnaire and overall relationship satisfaction for both male and female members of the couple. These results are consistent with our hypotheses. By contrast, there was no significant relationship between length of relationship and relationship satisfaction for either male or female members of the couple, which contradicted our hypotheses. One possible explanation for these results is that the relationship between length of relationship and relationship satisfaction, with the highest levels of satisfaction being reported by individuals prior to having children (i.e., early in the relationship) and following children moving out of the home (i.e., later in the relationship). Analyses were also conducted testing for a non-linear relationship between length of the relationship and satisfaction, with the results indicating that there was no significant quadratic or cubic relationship between these two variables.

Based upon the analyses, it is apparent that the impact length of relationship has on overall relationship satisfaction is minimal. However, length of relationship does impact male perceptions of the occurrence of the demand/withdraw pattern when working through conflict. This result suggests that length of relationship may affect relationship satisfaction indirectly by affecting conflict communication for men but not for women. Possible reasons for the lack of a significant relationship between length of relationship and relationship satisfaction could be related to the small sample size, the generational differences between sample participants, the number of children still in the home with a large number of participants, or because the amount of demand/withdraw

interactions that are present in younger couples may be counterbalanced by the lack of demand/withdraw interactions in the older participants.

The present findings clearly indicate that the ability to communicate regarding conflict in the relationship is an important determinant of relationship satisfaction. Previous research has also indicated that the resolution of conflict is directly related to how satisfied each partner is with the relationship (Heavey, Larson, Zumtobel & Christensen, 1996; Kurdek, 1994; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Noller & White, 1990). Length of relationship does play a factor in how well males communicate during conflict. However, the strength of the relationship is not strong enough to indicate that it is a cause or even a primary component of conflict communication. Additional analyses were conducted to determine if any of the demographic variables or length of relationship were significant predictors of conflict communication, with none of these variables were significant predictors of conflict communication.

Some interesting discrepancies were found involving the association between length of relationship and number of children for male and female members of the couple. As noted previously, three couples did not agree on the number of children in the family and 33 of the couples were not in agreement regarding the length of the relationship, with the discrepancies varying from one month to three years. It is likely that many of these discrepancies come from disagreement as to how to define when the relationship began (i.e., did the relationship begin when the couple began dating or does cohabiting represent the initiation of the relationship).

These findings indicate that conflict communication and the demand/withdraw pattern are indicative of overall relationship satisfaction. These conflict communication

issues can be addressed in therapeutic settings when working with couples. These results also indicate that other characteristics of the couple (e.g., length of relationship, religion, number of children, ethnicity, and marital status) did not play as important role in overall satisfaction with the relationship. Given that these are not issues that can be changed in a clinical setting this is an important result for clinicians working to change satisfaction levels with couples. This study found that only the presence or absence of the demand/withdraw cycle was predictive of relationship satisfaction. As a result, clinicians can assume that changeable factors such as conflict resolution styles can impact and change relationship satisfaction if these variables are able to be addressed.

Future research should examine other measures of communication within a relationship to understand their role in relationship satisfaction. Research should also evaluate variables that may impact when the demand/withdraw pattern starts to emerge within relationships and how soon there is a decline in relationship satisfaction following the emergence of this style of conflict communication. An independent analysis on how each partners' perception of the presence of the demand/withdraw cycle on the other partner's relationship satisfaction would also be helpful.

One limitation of this research involves the analysis of the relationships among these variables separately for male and female members of couple. Separate analyses for males and females were conducted due to possible non-independence of data from members of the same couple. Future research should conduct analyses using methods such as multilevel regression analysis that will permit taking into account the non-independence of the data collected from the two members of the couple. These methods of analysis would permit a direct examination of whether or not the relationships among

these variables (e.g., communication patterns and relationship satisfaction) vary by gender. Another limitation of this study is the self-selected nature of the participants. It is possible that only happy couples volunteered to participate in the investigation. Participants volunteered to participate in the study knowing that a small financial stipend would be paid to each member of the couple. Also, all of the participants were Iowans which is reflected in the lack of diversity of the sample. As a result the data may be biased due to the demographic characteristics of the couples who volunteered to participate.

In conclusion, the results of this study indicate that the pattern of communication within the couple is an important predictor of relationship satisfaction. The results did not support our prediction that length of relationship would also be an important predictor of relationship satisfaction. Length of the relationship was found to be a significant predictor of perceived communication patterns within the relationship, but only for male members of couple. These results clearly indicate the importance of enhancing communication within couples as a method for enhancing relationship satisfaction.

Table 1
Study Variables by Gender

Variables	N	Males			Females		
		Mean	SD	Percent	Mean	SD	Percent
Income	64	5.68	1.98		5.52	2.14	
Age	64	45.20	12.82		43.69	1.59	
Number of Children	64	1.61	1.60		1.59	1.59	
Length of Relationship	64	12.50	11.65		12.99	11.55	
CPQ	64	0.37	6.15		0.34	5.85	
DAS	64	0.20	6.31		0.09	7.02	
Ethnicity - Caucasian	64			97%			92%
Religion - Christian	64			80%			77%
Marital Status - Married	64			91%			93%

Table 2
Correlations between variables for male and female participants

	Length of Relationship	CPQ	DAS	Number of Children	Income	Marital Status	Ethnicity	Religion
Male	1	.10**	-.02	.43**	.49**	.25**	.12	.19
Female	1	.08	.03	.15	.06	.33	-.02	.20
CPQ								
Male	.10**	1	-.42**	-.10	.14	.16	-.18	.03
Female	.08	1	-.45**	.13	.19	.12	.09	.24
DAS								
Male	-.02	-.42**	1	.23	-.03	-.17	.21	-.15
Female	.03	-.45**	1	-.13	-.15	-.11	-.124	-.20

*p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 3
 Prediction of Relationship Satisfaction for Females

	b	SE	β	t-value	R ²	ΔR^2
Model 1:					.10	.10
# of Children	-.34	.62	-.09	-.63		
Income	-.504	.46	-.15	-1.08		
Caucasian	-.26	4.89	-.01	-.05		
Married	-1.32	2.61	-.07	-.51		
Christian	-3.74	2.92	-.20	-1.28		
Model 2:					.11	.01
Relationship length	.08	.09	.13	.91		
Model 3:					.25	.14**
CPQ	-.51	.16	-.41	-3.15**		

*p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 4
 Prediction of Relationship Satisfaction for Males

	b	SE	β	T	R ²	ΔR^2
Model 1:					.12	.12
# of Children	-.69	.54	-.18	-1.28		
Income	.24	.45	.08	.54		
Caucasian	7.41	4.51	.21	1.64		
Married	-2.46	2.81	-.12	-.88		
Christian	-2.09	2.04	-.14	-1.02		
Model 2:					.13	.01
Relation Length	.05	.09	.09	.55		
Model 3:					.31	.18**
CPQ	-.47	.12	.45	-3.81**		

*p < .05. **p < .01.

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Appendix

Original Survey used to collect data

Code # _____

Date _____

Overall survey instructions: Please complete the following questions to the best of your ability. Your partner will not see your answers. You may skip any question that you do not wish to answer or that makes you feel uncomfortable.

During a typical working week, who is responsible for each of the following tasks?
(Circle the appropriate number.)

5 = Me always
4 = Me more
3 = My partner and me equally or both
2 = My partner more
1 = My partner always
n/a = Does not apply

1. Mow lawn	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
2. Trim and/or edge lawn	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
3. Plant and tend flower/vegetable garden	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
4. Water lawn and garden	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
5. Service lawn and garden tools	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
6. Trim bushes, fertilize lawn	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
7. Wash clothes	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
8. Put clean clothes away	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
9. Iron clothes	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
10. Indoor painting	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
11. Outdoor painting	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
12. Physical upkeep of house exterior	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
13. Household repairs	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
14. Household remodeling	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
15. Put on storm windows/screens	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
16. Put dishes in dishwasher/wash dishes	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
17. Empty dishwasher/dry or put dishes away	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
18. Clean stove, counters, and table	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
19. Balance checkbook	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
20. Pay bills	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
21. Prepare income tax form	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
22. Make major financial decisions	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
23. Clean bathroom	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
24. Vacuum rugs	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
25. Wash floors	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
26. Dust furniture	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
27. Change bedding	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
28. Make beds	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
29. Care for indoor plants	n/a	1	2	3	4	5

5 = Me always
4 = Me more
3 = My partner and me equally or both
2 = My partner more

1 = My partner always
n/a = Does not apply

30. Empty garbage	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
31. Check and add gas, oil, water, battery fluid to 5 vehicle	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
32. Decide when vehicle needs servicing/take to garage 5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
33. Buy/have vehicle tires changed	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
34. Wash/wax car	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
35. Wash windows and drapes/curtains	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
36. Wash walls	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
37. Clean refrigerator and stove	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
38. Shampoo rugs and furniture	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
39. Polish floors	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
40. Buy clothes for self	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
41. Buy clothes for other family members	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
42. Make dental and doctor appointments	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
43. Take children to dentist/doctor	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
44. Stay with children when sick	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
45. Care for family pets	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
46. Take care of preschool children	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
47. Discipline children	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
48. Arrange for child care	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
49. Organize family recreation/entertainment	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
50. Keep in touch with relatives and friends	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
51. Plan meals/buy food	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
52. Prepare meals	n/a	1	2	3	4	5

The following are questions concerning yourself and your current relationship. Please respond to them using the scales provided. If you are not sure if an item pertains to you or your partner, please estimate your answer. Please be as forthright as possible on all of your answers.

The following questions have different answers. Please read the questions and answers carefully. Please indicate below approximately how often the following items occur between you and your partner based on this scale:

0 = All the time
1 = Most of the time
2 = More often than not
3 = Occasionally
4 = Rarely
5 = Never

- _____ 1. How often do you discuss or have you considered separation or terminating your relationship?
- _____ 2. How often do you or your partner leave the house after a fight?
- _____ 3. In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?
- _____ 4. Do you confide in your mate?
- _____ 5. Do you ever regret that you entered into this relationship (or lived together)?
- _____ 6. How often do you and your partner quarrel?

_____ 7. How often do you and your partner "get on each other's nerves?"

Use the scale below for question 8:

- 0 = Never**
- 1 = Rarely**
- 2 = Occasionally**
- 3 = Almost Every Day**
- 4 = Every Day**

_____ 8. How often do you kiss your mate?

9. The numbers on the following line represent different degrees of happiness in your relationship. The middle point, "happy" represents the degree of happiness of most relationships. Please indicate below which best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Extremely Unhappy	Fairly Unhappy	A Little Unhappy	Happy	Very Happy	Extremely Happy	Perfect

Degree of happiness, based on the scale above (please circle): 0 1 2 3 4 5 6

10. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about the future of your relationship?
(Please circle the number)

- 5** I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and would go to almost any length to see that it does.
- 4** I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and will do all I can to see that it does.
- 3** I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and will do my fair share to see that it does.
- 2** It would be nice if my relationship succeeded, but I can't do much more than I am doing now to help it succeed.
- 1** It would be nice if it succeeded, but I refuse to do any more than I am doing now to keep the relationship going.
- 0** My relationship can never succeed, and there is no more that I can do to keep the relationship going.

Below is a list of problems and complaints that people sometimes have. Please answer each item as carefully and accurately as you can by placing a number by each one which shows how much discomfort that problem has caused you during the last 2 weeks. Please be sure to answer all the questions using the following scale:

- 0 = Not at all
- 1 = A little bit
- 2 = Moderately
- 3 = Quite a bit
- 4 = Extremely

HOW MUCH WERE YOU DISTRESSED BY:

- _____ 1. Nervousness or shakiness inside
- _____ 2. Suddenly scared for no reason
- _____ 3. Thoughts of ending your life
- _____ 4. Feeling lonely

- ___ 5. Feeling blue
 ___ 6. Feeling no interest in things
 ___ 7. Feeling fearful
 ___ 8. Feeling hopeless about the future
 ___ 9. Feeling tense or keyed up
 ___ 10. Spells of terror or panic
 ___ 11. Feeling so restless you couldn't sit still
 ___ 12. Feelings of worthlessness

<i>Instructions:</i> Listed below are several areas that couples make decisions on. Please consider each of these areas and indicate the extent to which you and your partner agree on these things even before any discussion takes place, and also indicate who usually makes the final decisions in these areas.												
	Extent to which you and your partner agree						Who makes the final decision after discussion					
	Do Not Agree	1	2	3	4	5	I Make			Partner Makes		
1. Where you live and whether you should move.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
2. What job you take and whether you should change or quit a job.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
3. How many hours you work.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
4. What job your partner takes and whether he/she should change or quit a job.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
5. How many hours your partner works.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
6. How many children there should be in your family.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
7. When and how to praise or punish your children.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
8. How much free time to spend together with your partner.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
9. How to spend your free time with your partner.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
10. How to spend your free time apart from your partner.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
11. How your partner spends free time apart from you.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
12. How much time to spend with children.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
13. When to have social contacts with friends.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
14. Which friends to see.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
15. When to have social contacts with relatives.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
16. Which relatives to see.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
17. How to spend money on large purchases.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
18. How to spend money on small purchases.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
19. When to take vacation.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
20. How to spend vacation time.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
21. Whether to attend church, and if so, which church to attend.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
22. How to follow or practice religion at home.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
23. When to have sex.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
24. How to have sex.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5

Next, we would like you to indicate how important it is to you that you personally decide what you and your partner do in each of these areas, and how satisfied you are with your contribution in making these decisions.

	How important is it to you that you decide						How satisfied you are with your contribution to decisions					
	Not					Very	Unsatisfied			Satisfied		
	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
1. Where you live and whether you should move.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
2. What job you take and whether you should change or quit a job.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
3. How many hours you work.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
4. What job your partner takes and whether he/she should change or quit a job.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
5. How many hours your partner works.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
6. How many children there should be in your family.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
7. When and how to praise or punish your children.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
8. How much free time to spend together with your partner.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
9. How to spend your free time with your partner.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
10. How to spend your free time away from your partner.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
11. How your partner spends free time apart from you.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
12. How much time to spend with the children.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
13. When to have social contacts with friends.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
14. Which friends to see.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
15. When to have social contacts with relatives.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
16. Which relatives to see.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
17. How to spend money on large purchases.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
18. How to spend money on small purchases.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
19. When to take vacation.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
20. How to spend vacation time.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
21. Whether to attend church, and if so, which church to attend.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
22. How to follow or practice religion at home.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
23. When to have sex.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
24. How to have sex.	n/a	1	2	3	4	5	n/a	1	2	3	4	5

Read each item below to see if it describes how your partner usually treats you. Then circle the number that best describes how strongly you agree or disagree with whether it applies to you. Circling a one (1) indicates that you do not agree at all, while circling a five (5) indicates that you strongly agree. **Your answers are confidential and will not be shared with your partner.**

	I do not agree at all			I strongly agree	
1. My partner never admits when she or he is wrong.	1	2	3	4	5
2. My partner is unwilling to adapt to my needs and expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
3. My partner is more insensitive than caring.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I am often forced to sacrifice my own needs to meet my partner's needs.	1	2	3	4	5
5. My partner refuses to talk about problems that make him or her look bad.	1	2	3	4	5
6. My partner withholds affection unless it would benefit her or him.	1	2	3	4	5
7. It is hard to disagree with my partner because she or he gets angry.	1	2	3	4	5
8. My partner resents being questioned about the way he or she treats me.	1	2	3	4	5
9. My partner builds himself or herself up by putting me down.	1	2	3	4	5
10. My partner retaliates when I disagree with him or her.	1	2	3	4	5
11. My partner is always trying to change me.	1	2	3	4	5
12. My partner believes he or she has the right to force me to do things.	1	2	3	4	5
13. My partner is too possessive or jealous.	1	2	3	4	5
14. My partner tries to isolate me from family and friends.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Sometimes my partner physically hurts me.	1	2	3	4	5

Please read the list of statements in each column and select the column (A or B) that **most** applies to you.

Column A	Column B
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefer to deal with facts • Tend to remember details • Prefer specific answers to questions • Like jobs that produce tangible results • Like clear directions and instructions • Are literal in the use of words • Focus on present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefer to deal with concepts and ideas • Tend to see the big picture • Prefer broad answers to questions • More interested in the steps along the way than the final product • Like open-ended directions and instructions • Are imaginative and figurative in the use of words • Focus on the future

Of the above statements, which column most applies to you?

Please circle either A or B.

A

B

Please read the list of statements in each column and select the column (A or B) that **most** applies to you.

Column A	Column B
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tend to talk first and think later • Feel energized from being around people • Approachable and friendly to strangers • Enjoy time spent with others • Like to work in groups • Prefer talking over listening • Have many friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tend to think before speaking • Spending time around people is tiresome • Not likely to talk to strangers • Enjoy time spent alone • Prefer one-on-one interactions • Prefer listening over talking • Tend to prefer a few close relationships

Of the above statements, which column most applies to you?

Please circle either A or B.

A

B

Please read the list of statements in each column and select the column (A or B) that **most** applies to you.

Column A	Column B
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefer to go with the flow, take things as they come • Enjoy exploring the unknown • Dislike planning tasks • Prefer to wait and see what happens • Like to keep options open • Do not like to make or adhere to schedules • Do not need things to be organized • Spontaneous, likes surprises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefer to have things planned and settled • Focus on what is known • Like to plan out what will happen next • Like to have things settled • Organized • Enjoy making to-do lists and adhere to them • Do not like surprises

Of the above statements, which column most applies to you?

Please circle either A or B.

A

B

Please read the list of statements in each column and select the column (A or B) that **most** applies to you.

Column A	Column B
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use facts and logic when making decisions • Think it's more important to be right than liked • Believe only those things that are logical and scientific • Remember numbers and figures more easily than faces • More firm-minded than gentle-hearted • Believe conflict is normal in relationships • Remain objective in situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More concerned with feelings when making decisions • It's more important to be liked than right • Believe that people's feelings are most important • Tend to remember faces more readily than facts and figures • More gentle than firm • Prefer harmony in relationships • Take things personally

Of the above statements, which column most applies to you?

Please circle either A or B.

A

B

Directions: No matter how well a couple gets along there are times when they disagree. We would like you to think of an issue that you see as the most problematic in your relationship with your partner. Possible issues include but are not limited to:

- a. Problems with their friends or family members
- b. Your needs in the relationship that aren't being met
- c. Sexual issues/problems
- d. Finances/money
- e. Problems with intimacy
- f. Problems with the amount of time you spend together or apart
- g. Feelings/emotions that you have not been able to express or that you feel your partner doesn't express
- h. Specific areas in the relationship where you want change
- i. Making decisions
- j. Housework or responsibilities

Feel free to select one of these or one of your own. Please write down the issue you choose in the space below and then answer the following questions about that topic.

Issue/Problem: _____

We are interested in how you and your partner typically deal with this problem in your relationship. Please rate each item on a scale of 1 (= very unlikely) to 9 (= very likely).

- A. WHEN THIS ISSUE OR PROBLEM ARISES,**
- | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|------|---|---|----------|---|---|---|------|--------|---|---|
| | Very | | | | | | | Very | | | |
| | | | | Unlikely | | | | | Likely | | |
| 1. Both members avoid discussing the problem. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | | |
| 2. Both members try to discuss the problem. | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 3. I try to start a discussion while my partner tries to avoid a discussion. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | | |
| 4. My partner tries to start a discussion while I try to avoid a discussion. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | | |

- B. DURING A DISCUSSION OF THIS ISSUE OR PROBLEM,**
- | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5. Both partners express their feelings to each other. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 6. Both partners blame, accuse, and criticize each other. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 7. Both partners suggest possible solutions and compromises. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |

- c. If you haven't been to couples (or marital) therapy and you considered going, what prevented you from going?

11. Household Income (please circle)

Less than \$10,000 \$10,001-20,000 \$20,001-30,000 \$30,001-40,000
 \$40,001-50,000 \$50,001-60,000 \$60,001-70,000 Greater than \$70,001

12. Currently, my income is _____ the income of my partner.

- a. greater than
 b. less than
 c. equal to

13. Currently, my education is _____ the education of my partner.

- a. greater than
 b. less than
 c. equal to

14. Currently, my job status would be classified as _____.

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| a. professional | e. semi-skilled |
| b. managerial | f. unskilled manual |
| c. clerical | g. student |
| d. skilled | h. unemployed |

15. Currently, my partner's job status would be classified as _____.

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| a. professional | e. semi-skilled |
| b. managerial | f. unskilled manual |
| c. clerical | g. student |
| d. skilled | h. unemployed |

Your interest in future studies:

Would you be willing to be contacted in the future for a follow-up to this study? (This may include a study similar to this one, or one-on-one interviews about your relationship.)

_____ YES

_____ NO

If YES, please provide your name, email address*, and phone number*

Name: _____

Email address: _____

Phone number(s): _____

***Note: Your personal contact information will not be used for any purposes other than to possibly contact you for future studies; your contact information will remain confidential and will not be sold to anyone.**

Researcher: If the couple is interested in future studies, write their code number below:
