

“IT WORKS FOR US.”:
THE DYNAMICS OF INFLUENCE AND INTIMACY WITHIN COUPLES

by

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B.A., Brigham Young University – Hawaii, 1999
M.S., Pittsburg State University, 2004

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

School of Family Studies and Human Services
College of Human Ecology

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2011

Abstract

The goals of this study were to investigate the definitions of influence and closeness from the perspectives of the couples, the techniques or approaches couples use to share influence and maintain closeness in their relationships, the themes associated with different relating styles, ways couples handle discrepancies and incompatibilities, and the relationship issues associated with specific relating styles. Eight married couples residing in northeast Kansas were interviewed for this study. The participants were selected through a screening survey distributed to a university student body to collect basic demographics and couple relating styles. The eight couples were chosen because the relating styles they reported were diverse enough to provide the needed maximum variation and a general representation of the sample pool. A style of relating model – couple map was created to help couples visualize how they relate to their partners in terms of influence and closeness. This study begins to fill the gap in the research by creating an integrated model to understand couple relational patterns and by giving voice to couples and allowing them to share their experiences on how they share influence and maintain closeness in their relationships. Through the lens of Symbolic Interaction Theory and Social Exchange Theory, this study sheds light on the cognitive and behavioral strategies couples use to relate to each other while striving to meet personal and mutual needs for influence and closeness in their marriages.

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Karen S. Myers-Bowman

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To my sisters and brothers back home, "Thank you. It is great to know that you will always be there for me."

Dedication

To my mother,
who taught me to never give up
no matter what the circumstances may be.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Influence and intimacy are the two domains with which couples commonly struggle because intimacy is as highly valued as influence and is much desired to establish a sense of closeness, compatibility, and stability in couple relationships. Couples generally want the best for each other and like to be helpful and needed by their partners. They feel appreciated when their partners respect their well-intended advice and are willing to accommodate their needs. When the accommodation is mutual, the couples feel their personal influence is acknowledged by their partners. This acknowledgement reinforces the bond between the couples and increases their intimacy and relationship satisfaction. However, a struggle may exist between meeting personal needs and the needs of partners. Compromising with a deal that is not appealing or only satisfies the partner's needs tends to decrease the intimacy one feels toward the partner. Conversely, refusing a deal valued by the partner can hurt the partner's feelings and create distance in the relationship. Resultant tug of war provides a challenge for couples. For some of them, this involves an art that they will gradually master; for others, it is a disaster that will gradually drive them apart. How do couples balance influence and intimacy in their relationships? When do they yield? When do they exert their influence on their partners? What drives them to certain decisions and how do they achieve their balance? These questions deserve attention in the field. Unfortunately, despite a wealth of findings on marital satisfaction, the dynamics of couple relationships remains less traversed than factors that can be clearly defined, quantified, or measured. In addition, research effort has been limited on finding determinants for successful or unsuccessful couple relationships. The fact that one couple can respond to an issue rather differently than another increases the challenge to researchers. The wide range of relationship issues also results in various levels of impact to couples depending issues affecting their lives at the time.

Importance of Understanding Couple Interaction

Why is it important to explore the dynamics of couple interaction? What can it add to the knowledge of the field? Here are the reasons:

First, research shows that factors associated with relationship satisfaction are diverse and extensive. Couples report to be affected by different issues in dissimilar ways. For example, communication has consistently been raised by married couples as the most common problem in counseling (Cleek & Pearson, 1985; Miller, Yorgason, Sandberg, & White, 2003; Whisman, Dixon, & Johnson, 1997). Along with communication, power struggles, unrealistic expectations, decision-making and problem-solving issues, finance, sexual intimacy, lack of loving feelings, conflict of values and roles, extramarital affairs, household management issues, jobs, in-laws, jealousy, and several other issues are also listed as common problems (Geiss, & O’Leary, 1981; Whisman et al., 1997). Clearly, not every couple is affected by all or the same issues, but each does report a set of issues particularly salient to them. The factors associated with relationship satisfaction depend on the individual characteristics and perceptions of the partners. This implies that the dynamics between partners can be overlooked if researchers are too focused on *issues* instead of *couple interaction*.

Second, relationship satisfaction is a rather personal business. Individual perspectives are difficult to investigate if participants are directed through a series of prescribed responses and are given little room to address individual differences. For example, quantitative research shows that marital satisfaction is associated with cognition, affect, interactional patterns, social support, couple’s backgrounds, characteristics, life stressors, and transitions (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000). Despite the long list of factors researchers have explored, couples do not respond to each and every factor the same way. Quantitative studies are good at showing a general trend among couples, but not at capturing individual differences. Additionally, research effort focused on drawing connections between multiple factors and relationship satisfaction may increase the knowledge about the factors that contribute to relationship satisfaction for couples, but does not directly define how couples interact with each other and why they interact in certain ways.

Hidden Dynamics of Influence and Intimacy

Researchers have studied several important determinants of relationship satisfaction among couples. Although the determinants were examined separately in studies, researchers often used the findings to imply couple interaction. The following is a discussion on how these determinants may be associated with a less explored area – the dynamics of influence and intimacy among couples.

Negativity. Negativity refers to negative attributions or negative interpretations for partner behaviors (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987) followed by automatic physiological arousal before interacting with the partner (Levenson & Gottman, 1985). In other words, physiological arousal during conflicts is generally led by cognition and affect (Levenson & Gottman, 1985). Some researchers have found that compared to dissatisfied couples, the physiological systems of satisfied couples have greater synchrony (Thomsen & Gilbert, 1998). The rise and fall in negative mood between couples may mirror for several days with marital satisfaction acting as a buffer for negative mood or stress (Saxbe & Repetti, 2010). Conversely, mindfulness, or “an awareness of what is taking place,” led to lower emotional stress and higher relationship satisfaction (Barnes, Brown, Krusemark, Campbell, & Rogge, 2007, p. 482). Recent studies have revealed a correlation between marital deterioration with long-term negativity (Karney & Bradbury, 2000) and negative personality (Caughlin, Huston, & Houts, 2000). Evidence has indicated that distressed couples demonstrate less affection, care, and positive emotions or gestures in marriage. They exchange more negative verbal and nonverbal behaviors (Matthews, Wickrama, & Conger, 1996). Nonverbal negative affect also was found to be predictive of subsequent marital dissolution (Rogge, Bradbury, Hahlweg, Engl, & Thurmaier, 2006). A longitudinal study has revealed that negative affect during conflict predicted early divorcing while the lack of positive affect predicted later divorcing for married couples (Gottman & Levenson, 2000). On the other hand, enhancing intimacy, rather than avoiding conflict, was associated with increases in positive feelings in couple relationships (Laurenceau, Troy, & Carver, 2005). These findings may suggest that intimacy enhances couple relationships while lack of conflicts does not. Lastly, Escudero, Rogers, and Gutierrez (1997) have reported that clinic couples’ negative affects are strongly associated with domineering behaviors while non-clinic couples tend to demonstrate an ability to negotiate in neutral affect-control position. They concluded that relationship control and affect are key components of relational processes that need to be investigated in combination in order to comprehend couple relationships fully. In summary, literature was clear on the fact that negativity is reciprocal. Although studies did not explicitly discuss negativity’s association with influence and intimacy, an interplay of intimacy and influence does appear to be hidden behind the reciprocal cycle within couples.

Social Support studies generally focused on spousal support and the support obtained outside of the marital relationship. The interest on social support emerged as researchers found

that overt conflict is surprisingly low in typical marriages (McGonagle, Kessler, & Schilling, 1992) and that conflict and problem-solving behaviors do not directly link to marital outcome (Bradbury et al., 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Perceived spousal support was found to be an important predictor of marital and individual functioning while inadequate spousal support was linked to depression and increased stress (Dehle, Larsen, & Landers, 2001; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998). According to Cutrona (1996), support from the spouse can “prevent emotional withdrawal and isolation that can otherwise erode the marital relationship” (p. 174). They also pointed out that support from spouse can keep conflicts from escalating. In other words, the emotional intimacy gained through spousal support strengthens the bond within couples and eases the couples through difficult times. Studies on relationship influence in relation to social support have not been found in the literature. However, social support was often included in studies on partner violence and was found to be manipulated by the abusers to gain control over their partners. Details of violence in relation to couple interaction will be discussed after this section. Overall, spousal support appears to be more related to intimacy than to influence in the relationship and, at the least, has a mediating effect on the outcome of couple interaction.

Violence has been an important determinant of couple relationship outcome. A common belief was that females were the sole victims in violent relationships. However, Williams and Frieze (2005) reported that men were victims sometimes and that the most common type of violence was mutually mild, followed by mutually severe. Compared to men, women tended to experience greater distress and detriment to marital satisfaction. Lawrence and Frieze (2005) focused on gender differences and discovered that wives were more likely to use aggression in the early years of marriage than husbands and were as likely as husbands to use tactics that were severely aggressive. In addition, they found that physical aggression perpetrated by husbands predicted marital discord whereas aggression perpetrated by wives predicted marital dissolution. Emotional intimacy (which involves positive affect, active listening, and self-disclosure) has been found to be a strong protective factor against violence in relationships (Prager & Buhrmester, 1998). Nevertheless, violence closes off positive affect and decreases emotional intimacy between partners (Marcus & Swett, 2002). Although the above evidence demonstrates the impact of violence on relationship satisfaction and outcome, the hidden dynamics of influence and intimacy in couple interaction is overlooked in most studies. This does not mean that researchers are not noticing the dynamics of couple interaction. Some researchers noted that

the need for relationship control of individuals with anxious personality was found to be an attempt to keep partners attached and maintain the intimacy desired. Additionally, when one has an anger temperament and has a high need for relationship control, violence may be used to control the outcome of the relationships (Follingstad, Bradley, Helff, & Laughlin, 2002). Apparently, couples do use strategies to balance influence and intimacy to keep their relationship in check.

As the above determinants of relationship satisfaction are interpersonal factors and are more likely to be included in the actual process of balancing influence and intimacy, the following determinants are context factors and are more likely to be in the background mediating the outcome of this balancing act. Partners' background and characteristics, life stressors, and transitions have all been found to be important context factors and determinants of relationship satisfaction. How these determinants may affect the balancing act of power and intimacy between partners are discussed below.

Partners' background and characteristics are important in understanding partner differences and individual perspectives. Gender, SES, attachment patterns, and family of origin among other factors have been found to contribute to couple relationship outcome. For example, research on intergenerational transmission effects revealed that the negative impact of parental divorce is especially detrimental to women. Women with divorced parents are less committed to marriage and tend to have lower relationship-confidence and, therefore, are more at risk for divorce (Whitton, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2008). Nevertheless, a study on premarital couples showed that parental divorce was predictive of men's lower appraisals of partner relational efficacy and facilitated the view of an undesirable marriage (Segrin & Taylor, 2006). In other words, parental divorce may affect males and females differently but the likelihood of marital dissolution may increase for both groups. Along the same lines, history of parental divorce was found to increase an individual's ability to appraise his/her spouse's relational efficacy. While Segrin and Taylor (2006) investigated the impact of parental divorce on partner appraisal, Simpson, Ickes, and Grich (1999) studied this ability from the perspective of attachment. Data collected from a group of young dating couples suggested that anxious-ambivalent individuals are more likely to perceive relationship-threatening situations with accuracy which facilitates greater distress and higher levels of insecurity. Among women, the sensitivity negatively impacted perceived closeness of the relationship; among men, the

relationship was more likely to end after a four-month period. The researchers speculated that no history of parental divorce or a secure attachment can serve as a buffer or provide the couple a dose of idealization to prevent their bond from evolving into a relationship-threatening situation (Segrin & Taylor, 2006; Simpson et al., 1999). As mentioned previously under violence factor, control may be used as a way to keep partners attached in order to preserve perceived intimacy. The above findings imply that past experience and personality characteristics can limit or distort individual perspectives and consequently affect how couples interact with each other.

Life stressors. Just as experience and characteristics may affect individual perspectives, life stressors may affect couples' perceptions and behaviors and cause them to relate in different ways. For example, stressors tend to trigger negative moods (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Schilling, 1989). Couples who are distressed are more likely to reciprocate negative behaviors than couples who are not distressed (Gottman, 1979). Additionally, stressors like economic and work-related issues tend to put a strain on a marriage (Bradbury et al., 2000). Story and Repetti (2006) reported that perceived daily job stressors were associated with marital interaction at home. They found that increased marital anger and withdrawal often followed negative social interactions at work and couples tended to be tense, impatient, and have more conflicts on those days. Although life stressors may not directly relate to the couples' struggles with influence and intimacy, the link between life stressors and negative mood and reciprocity of negative behaviors may intensify couples' struggles for influence and intimacy.

Transitions. Research shows that stages of relationship impact married couples and their relationship satisfaction (Rollins & Feldman, 1970). In other words, family developmental transitions (e.g., newlywed, entering into parenthood, launching adult children, empty nest, retirement) can cause considerable stress and affect relationship quality (Storaasli & Markman, 1990). Couples at different developmental stages were found to be susceptible to different stressors. According to Storaasli and Markman (1990), "exterior problems" such as how to set boundaries with relatives and friends, jealousy issues, and religious values are more intense at the premarital stage when couples are still forming their relationship identity (p. 92). Problematic areas tend to shift from exterior to interior issues after marriage. For example, communication, sex, and recreation issues increase in intensity during early marriage and upon entering parenthood when roles are being redefined and the couples are adjusting to the changes in their lives. During the child bearing and rearing years, things can become complicated. According to

Heaton (1990), children can increase stability in marriage, especially when children are young and no more than four children are in the household. However, stability in marriage often decreases when children become teenagers or when children are greater in number. As the family life cycle progresses from midlife to old age, couples emptying their nests may experience significant improvement in marital happiness. According to Mitchell and Gee (1996), couples may view child launching as a transition that leads to greater intimacy and alone time for the couples. All things considered, developmental transitions in marital process present couples challenges that need to be worked through as well as opportunities for changes and growth in order to adjust to new roles and life styles. Olson and Gorall (2003) observed couples' changes over time and reported that couples adjusted their levels of flexibility and connectedness between them to accommodate the demands of life. They concluded that "these changes often occur without specific planning. However, couples can negotiate the type of relationship they want and be more proactive in creating the type of relationship they both prefer" (p. 526). Flexibility and connectedness of families and couples share similarities with the ideas of influence and intimacy. Olson and Gorall (2003) believe that how couples relate to each other is negotiable and it is possible to create a type of relationship that both partners prefer.

Perhaps the research most relevant to couples' struggles of influence and intimacy is the study of couple *relational patterns*. One of the most commonly discussed relational patterns or interactional behaviors between couples is the demand-withdraw cycle. Traditionally, the demand-withdraw pattern was presented with wives as the presumed pursuers and husbands the presumed distancers (Christensen, 1990; Mornell, 1979). Christensen and Heavy (1990) proposed that the one who owns the problems (or desires for change) tends to be the one who demands or initiates the demand/withdraw cycle. Their research results showed that the demandingness of wives and the withdrawingness of husbands were correlated with decreased marital satisfaction. While the demand-withdraw pattern remained popular, Gottman (1993) observed different conflict patterns in terms of positive/negative speaking and listening behaviors among marital couples and created a typology to delineate types of stable (validators, volatiles, and avoiders) and unstable (hostile and hostile/detached) marital relationships. According to Gottman (1993), each type of marriage has its advantages and disadvantages, with validating marriage being the most stable and ideal. Nevertheless, other couples may adopt different types of marriages to achieve a "balance between positive and negative" in their

marriages (p. 13) and may not be more at risk of marital dissolution. Overpowering negativity and “high levels of complaining, criticizing, defensiveness, contempt, and disgust” (p.14) were found to be most dysfunctional while controlled negativity and avoidance were not. Previous studies on negativity only revealed negativity as a determinant of relationship satisfaction. By studying couple interaction, Gottman (1993) was able to understand more about how negativity impacts couple relationships. In conclusion, study of relational patterns is the only line of research that has looked directly into couple interaction and touched on the dynamics of influence and intimacy within couples.

Need of a Study

Some important issues emerged from previous studies on determinants of marital satisfaction for couples. *First*, although power and intimacy have been identified to be the core contents of family relationships (Emery, 1992), researchers do not always identify or acknowledge them in their studies. *Second*, despite the effort researchers put forth to explore how multiple aspects could affect marital relationship, the dynamics of couple interaction were often left out or treated as a separate research topic. *Lastly*, typologies may be useful to bridge the gaps between theory, research and practice (Olson, 1981) but the field has been struggling with few typologies or models to guide the research. The usefulness of having family typological models is best explained by Olson and Fowers (1993): “Typologies apply a multivariate approach which can more adequately capture the complexity of dyadic relationships than research focusing on one or two traditional dimensions of marriage (e.g., global satisfaction or power)” (p. 1).

Among the determinants, one subject that has inspired researchers to focus on couple interaction and strive for developing models and typologies to guide the studies is perhaps couple relational patterns. Unfortunately, researchers’ approaches to couple relational patterns have been sporadic and disintegrated. Some researchers have focused on withdraw-distance patterns and studied how couples handle control and intimacy (Christensen, 1990; Mornell, 1979) while others investigated conflict styles and examined how couples balance positives and negatives in marriage (Gottman, 1993). Some researchers discovered distinct themes such as closeness to husband's family, closeness to wife’s family, role orientation, and perceived problems in couple relationships (Goodrich, Ryder, & Rausch, 1968) and reported that couples varied greatly on

each theme based on early experiences while other researchers such as Olson and Fowers (1993), studied individual and marital functioning among couples and categorized them into five groups: vitalized, harmonious, traditional, conflicted, and unvitalized. These researchers were able to identify vitalized and harmonious couples which have high relationship qualities while other groups have strengths and weaknesses in different areas. As the above examples have shown, researchers' approaches to couple relational patterns have been disintegrated and generally not investigated on influence and intimacy factors simultaneously. Thus, this study will examine the interplay of influence and intimacy and how couple's relational styles may affect their relationship satisfaction.

Chapter 2 - Review of Literature

Influence and intimacy in couple relationships are popular research topics. However, early researchers generally investigated couple relationships through the lens of *power* struggle. *Influence* was later introduced by Gottman and Silver in 1999, shifting the focus from examining how couples compete for dominance and control, to exploring how accepting influence from each other affects the outcome of couple relationships. Despite the diverse approaches, researchers tended to focus on power or intimacy while the dynamics between the two factors were rarely investigated. It by no means indicates a lack of interest in this area. On the contrary, quite a few theoretical models were developed in the past to explain the struggles of power and intimacy in interpersonal, family, and marital settings.

This study is focused on investigating how couples balance influence and intimacy to accommodate each other's needs in their relationships. Because past studies were on power and control before Gottman and Silver (1999) proposed influence as the new approach, this review of literature will investigate *power* and *intimacy* and the relational models and theoretical perspectives that can be integrated to generate a new model appropriate to couples in romantic relationships to guide this study.

The effect of power and intimacy on couple relationships was often investigated separately instead of simultaneously in early research. It is not surprising because each of them is a complex concept. The definitions of power and intimacy have carried different notions in various areas of studies. Researchers have tried to research, analyze, and examine them in diverse contexts across the spectrum of couple relationships. The goal of this study is not to integrate all the approaches and findings researchers have exhausted to create a comprehensive research design; instead, the goal of this study is to set the well-used quantitative approach aside and create a qualitative venue that allows couples to speak for themselves and to tell their stories: How do they experience power and intimacy in their relationships? How do they balance their needs in these two domains? How do they accommodate their differences and relate to each other? What types of cognitive and behavioral strategies do they use? In order to accomplish this task, it is necessary to review what has been done in the field in terms of power and intimacy in couple relationships.

Power in Couple Relationships

Studies on power in couple relationships can be traced back to the 1960s when women started to enter the workforce and contribute to economic resources. Their contribution in their homes was accompanied by an increase in their decision-making power in their marriages (Gillespie, 1971). Amidst the rise of women's status, Blood and Wolfe (1960) proposed the family resource theory, which acknowledged that the power structure between husband and wife was shifting from the traditional roles relative to economic resources. The focus on decision-making power was popular among researchers at that time (e. g., Heer, 1962; Hill, 1965; Schlesinger, 1962), but the power in family includes more than just decision-making. In 1966, Hallenbeck theorized a typology of power which defined five types of power that are implicit in interpersonal relationships but definitely are maneuvered when power is at play. According to Hallenbeck (1966), *reward power* is one's ability to provide rewards for those being influenced; *coercive power* is one's ability to mediate punishments to those being influenced; *legitimate power* is one's belief that the powerful person has the authority to control one's behaviors and opinions; *referent power* is one's identification with the powerful one; while *expert power* is one's belief that the powerful person has superior knowledge and skills than oneself. These bases of power can be used to understand social power but have limited applicability in family relationships. Safilios-Rothschild (1970) carefully inspected Hallenbeck's theory when she studied family power structure from research conducted between 1960 through 1969. She concluded that familial power includes "the outcome of decision-making, the patterns of tension and conflict management, or the type of prevailing division of labor" (p. 540). In other words, power in the family needs to be studied both through the dynamics of power sharing and the management of resources.

Similar to Safilios-Rothschild's (1970) approach, Rollins and Bahr (1976) recognized that power involves broader contexts than merely individual. They emphasized that "power is not conceived as an attribute of an individual but as a characteristic of social interaction between two or more persons" (p. 620). Rollins and Bahr developed a theory to integrate the perceived resources, authority, and attempts at control to explain the role of power in marital relationships. They concluded with four assumptions: First, power is a relative concept. Therefore, *relative power* instead of *individual power* should be explored in marriages. Second, authority, resources, and power are associated with the perceptions of the husbands and wives. Third, power and

control are only relevant when conflict arises between the goals of spouses. Fourth, power and control vary from one marital area to another. These assumptions are applicable to couple relationships because power is also a relative concept in couple relationships. Authority, resources, and power are dependent on perceptions of couples. Power and control are only perceived to be relevant when there is conflict between the goals of couples. Lastly, different issues and areas are associated with different levels of power and control for couples.

Along the line of perceived control, Rothbaum and his colleagues proposed that people use both behavioral and cognitive strategies to gain and sustain a sense of perceived control over their environment (Rothbaum, Weisz, & Snyder, 1982). This is done by “bringing the environment into line with their wishes (*primary control*)” or “bringing themselves into line with environmental forces (*secondary control*)” (p. 5). In other words, when changing the environment to fit personal needs does not work, or in situations when such attempts may fail, people change their own perceptions or expectations to fit with the environment, so they can gain a sense of control over the circumstances. Rothbaum et al. (1982) believed that there are four types of control: predictive, illusory, vicarious, and interpretive control. Each type of control can be achieved through primary and secondary control strategies. *Predictive control* refers to one’s attempts to predict success or failure to change the situation. When attributions to one’s ability to control the outcome is high and success is predicted, one will actively facilitate change (primary). When attributions to one’s ability to control the outcome is low and failure is predicted, one will avoid change to preserve oneself from harm (secondary). *Illusory control* concerns one’s attempts to “influence chance-determined outcomes” (p.12), e.g., believing effort can bring luck (primary), or to “associate with chance” (p.12), e.g., believing luck is on one’s side without necessary effort (secondary). *Vicarious control* refers to one’s attempts to manipulate or imitate (primary) or to associate with (secondary) powerful others in order to gain control over a situation. *Interpretive control* is about one’s attempts to understand the problems at hand in order to understand and resolve them (primary) or to give them meaning and accept them (secondary). In summary, primary control strategies are about actively manipulating “environmental circumstances” to meet one’s needs while secondary control strategies are about manipulating one’s “internal cognitive/affective states in order to reduce the psychological impact of events” (Heaps, 2000, p. 2).

Seeing power as an integral part of interpersonal relationships, especially in close relationships, Dunbar (2000, 2004) revised the theory of relationship power by Rollins and Bahr (1976) and proposed Dyadic Power Theory. Dunbar acknowledged that power is based on resources and is under the influence of cultural definition on sex roles. She concurred with the idea that power is a relative concept between the partners and that perceived control in a relationship has important consequences on relational satisfaction. Although Dunbar emphasized the importance of perceived control in the relationship, the discrepancy between perceived and desired power and its potential impact on relationship satisfaction was not covered in her theory. Nevertheless, at the time Dyadic Power Theory was well accepted in general, Burger (1992) proposed the cybernetic theory, stating that people have desired levels of control in their lives and will seek to reach and maintain the desired state. Stets (1993) adopted the cybernetic theory when she studied partner-control behaviors in dating relationships and learned that just as cybernetic theory posits, when there is a discrepancy between desired and perceived levels of control on partners, participants generally feel dissatisfied and want to eliminate the discrepancy. In the meantime, most studies continue to use the concept of equity in decision-making and housework/resource sharing to imply how couples balance their power in their relationships. Along the equity lines, studies have shown that egalitarian couples tend to have high levels of relationship satisfaction (Grey-Little & Burks, 1983; Brezsnayak & Whisman, 2004) and that relationship satisfaction is positively correlated with perceived equity mostly among women and the levels of feeling advantaged mostly among men (Buunk & Mutsaers, 1999).

As one can see, power means different things to different individuals. For some, power is manifested through how resources are held and shared; for others, power is about who makes the decision or has control over the relationship outcome. Relationship satisfaction is associated with subjective perceptions of how power is defined and achieved.

Intimacy in Couple Relationships

Compared to power, intimacy is a broader and more complex concept. While Waring and colleagues (Waring 1984; Waring & Chelune, 1983) identified nine components in marital intimacy including conflict resolution, affection, cohesion, sexuality, identity, compatibility, autonomy, expressiveness, and desirability; others defined intimacy in terms of mutual sharing like self-disclosure, sharing of hurt feelings (Frey, Holley, & L'Abate, 1979; Gilbert, 1976) and

need satisfaction in emotional, social, sexual, intellectual, and recreational aspects (Clinebell & Clinebell, 1970; Schaefer & Olson, 1981). In summarizing different types of intimacy, Clark and Reis (1988) proposed that intimacy mainly involves two types: the disclosure of personal information (emotional intimacy) and the demonstration of affection and caring (physical intimacy). Even though intimacy is the core of romantic relationships, it was not until later that researchers like Moss and Schwebel (1993) reviewed literature in the field and determined to develop a “parsimonious, widely applicable definition of intimacy” (p. 31). Their extensive research ended up with 61 unique definitions which could be categorized into general, multidimensional, and operational definitions. Most of the definitions were subjective with some definitions too broad and some too narrow. Drawing from the predominant themes of all definitions in the field, Moss and Schwebel proposed that “intimacy in enduring romantic relationships is determined by the level of commitment and positive affective, cognitive, and physical closeness one experiences with a partner in a reciprocal (although not necessarily symmetrical) relationship” (p. 33).

Their work facilitated multiple studies in the field (e.g., Holt, Devlin, Flamez, & Eckstein, 2009; Patrick & Beckenbach, 2009; Larson, Hammond, & Harper, 1998), yet researchers still used different variables to imply intimacy, love, or closeness between couples. To investigate the general approach and trend in the field, Marston and his colleagues (Marston, Hecht, Manke, McDaniel, & Reeder, 1998) reviewed related studies and pointed out that definitions of intimacy used in research tend to focus on three components: self-disclosure (e.g., communication), expression of affection (e.g., physical closeness), and behavioral interdependence (e.g., attachment).

Despite the fact that intimacy is generally desired in romantic relationships, researchers (Harper & Elliott, 1988; Schaefer & Olson, 1981) believed that the ideal amount of intimacy does not exist because what is ideal varies from one person to another. According to Harper and Elliott (1988), marital adjustment and satisfaction are correlated with the discrepancy between desired and perceived amount of intimacy in the marriage. As long as one desires low levels of intimacy and the marriage is meeting these needs, one can be as happy as individuals in highly intimate relationships. Nevertheless, in the same study, Harper and Elliott also noticed curvilinear correlations between marital intimacy and marital adjustment, implying that couples who are too distant or too close are more susceptible to marital dissatisfaction than couples that

are less extreme. They also found that wives are more likely to be impacted by the discrepancies between perceived and desired amounts of intimacy than their husbands.

Apparently, not only does intimacy have a more fluid and sophisticated definition than power, it also has less straight-forward impact on relationship satisfaction. Couples have been found to have more diverse expressions of intimacy when compared to power. Although relationship satisfaction is also associated with subjective perceptions on how intimacy is desired and achieved, couples who are too distant or too close to each other are not as happy as couples who are not extreme in their levels of intimacy.

Couples' Struggle for Power and Intimacy

The phenomenon of couples struggling for both power and intimacy is frequently cited in the literature (e.g., Betchen & Ross, 2000; Johnson & Greenman, 2006). Achieving an intimate relationship requires couples to risk increasing their vulnerability by progressively moving toward each other and forming a close bond. Couples may reduce the intensity of the closeness through creating a mutual space from time to time (Betchen & Ross, 2000). This phenomenon was identified by Fogarty (1976) as the pursue-withdraw cycle. Couples seek the equilibrium of power and intimacy by way of negotiating their influence over their relationship, managing their own display of affection or bargaining distribution of tangible or intangible resources, be they trivial or major. Couples become frustrated when there is a perceived lack of intimacy and unequal influence in their relationships (Felmlee, 1994; Sprecher, Schmeekle, & Felmlee, 2006). Researchers in the 1990s believed that wives tend to demand and nag while husbands tend to withdraw and avoid confrontation and that this demand-withdraw pattern can set off a cycle that deteriorates the marital relationship (Bradbury et al., 2000). Recent studies, however, discovered that the demand-withdraw pattern is initiated by the partner who wants change regardless the gender of the partner (Vogel, Murphy, Werner-Wilson, Cutrona, & Seeman, 2007). Follow-up research revealed that there were no significant differences between husbands' and wives' demand/withdraw behaviors when discussing husbands' issues. Nevertheless, when discussing wives' issues, husbands were more likely to withdraw while wives were more likely to demand (Heavey, Layne, & Christensen, 1993; Klinetob & Smith, 1996). Wife-demand-husband-withdraw patterns have been found to be associated with deminished marital

satisfaction (Heavey et al., 1995), whereas husband-demand-wife-withdraw predicted an increase in the wives' marital satisfaction (Heavey, Layne, & Christensen, 1993).

In a relationship that involves pursue-withdraw cycles, the pursuers may use emotional drama to replace intimacy while the distancers use power struggle instead (Shaddock, 1998). In addition, the vulnerability and intimacy one feels in an emotional involvement may also trigger one's need to exert some degrees of control over the relationship in order to maintain a sense of balance. The principle of least interest has been used to describe how individuals who were less emotionally involved perceived themselves as having more control over their relationships (Waller & Hill, 1951). Thus, power and intimacy are similar to two competing or complementary forces frequently balanced by couples in their relationships, yet, the nature and process of this delicate interplay within couples still needs to be further explored.

Despite limited knowledge and inconsistent definitions and terms used in this area, power and intimacy in human relationships have been studied both explicitly and implicitly from various perspectives in the past. In couple relationships, power generally refers to an individual's ability to exercise control or exert influence in the relationship (O'Connor, 1991; Blanton & Vandergriff-Avery, 2001) while intimacy mostly refers to emotional closeness and self-disclosure within couples (Horst & Doherty, 1995). Power and intimacy in couple relationships have been studied in terms of powerfulness/powerlessness and relational power (O'Connor, 1991), power and closeness (Murstein & Adler, 1995), control and intimacy (Horst & Doherty, 1995), autonomy and intimacy (Goodman, 1999), influence and emotional connection (Gottman & Silver, 1999; Gottman & DeClaire, 2001), positional power and relational power (Blanton & Vandergriff-Avery, 2001), as well as relationship power and attachment (Rogers, Bidwell, & Wilson, 2005).

Powerfulness/powerlessness and relational power. O'Connor (1991) studied three different aspects of marital power: powerfulness/powerlessness, relational power, and structural power resources. In her study, powerfulness/powerlessness referred to the wives' experiences of control over valued resources within the marital relationship. Relational power was defined as the intensity and emotional dependence of one partner on the other. Structural power resources were the resources (e.g., education and occupation) shared and/or earned in the relationship. After conducting 60 in-depth interviews with women who were married, white, and between 20 to 42 years old in North London, O'Connor discovered that over a third of the sample perceived

themselves as having power, one third felt powerless, and the remaining third reported roughly equal power in their marital relationship. Within the qualitative nature of the responses from wives, O'Connor measured the "intensity and direction of power" (p. 828) and whether they expressed their views in "absolute terms and relative to" the husbands' (p. 829). Although intimacy was not directly dealt with in the research, relational power did have a slight connection to intimacy as O'Connor was examining how much the couples rely on each other's presence and support to deal with various situations. The principle of least interest was confirmed in this study. When people are less emotionally dependent on their spouses, they perceive themselves as having more relational power. The husbands were found to be almost twice as likely as wives to have stronger relational power. Emotional dependency was higher within the couples when they shared family responsibilities (e.g., the husbands' involvement with childcare, the wives' participation in full-time jobs). By studying powerfulness/powerlessness and relational power, O'Connor was able to identify four types of relating in couples from female participants: high mutual dependence, high dependence on husband, high dependence on wife, and low mutual dependence. Interestingly, 65% of women in high mutual dependence marriages felt powerful within their relationships, compared with 55% of those who had low dependence on husband, 20% among women who had low mutual dependence marriages, and 16% of those who had high dependence on husband. O'Connor concluded that powerfulness is likely to be experienced in balanced dependence between partners, and in the partners who had the least interest in the marriage. Although the principle of least interest was explored in the context of relational power in her study, she suggested that the principle of high mutual interests in marriage needs to be studied in future research because it may impact how powerfulness is defined in the marriage.

Power and self-disclosure. Murstein and Adler (1995) studied gender differences in power and self-disclosure in 20 dating and 20 married couples. Power was measured by examining how much influence one partner had over the decision about the activities the couple mutually engaged in and how decisions were carried out. Intimacy was measured in the context of self-disclosure on personal emotions and achievements and was directly linked back to relative perceived power in the couple relationship. Historically, dating men have been found to have more power than dating women because the society expects men to initiate a date and take the lead (Murstein, 1986; Peplau & Campbell, 1989). Murstein and Adler (1995) found this to be true in their sample but they found that after marriage, women were found to have more power

than men. Although women disclosed more about their own feelings than men in the marriage, it was not found to be correlated with a lack of perceived power. Men also were not found to disclose their own accomplishments more than women. However, the men and women who perceived themselves to be powerful in their relationships perceived themselves to disclose achievements more than their less powerful partners.

Control and intimacy. Based on clinical experience with couples, Horst and Doherty (1995) proposed a Family FIRO Model to analyze couple relationships from the perspectives of inclusion, control, and intimacy. Inclusion refers to bonding and caring that does not involve self-disclosure. Intimacy refers to “mutually self-disclosing interactions” (p. 65). Control refers to one’s ability to assert influence, dismiss, or collaborate in the relationship. Horst and Doherty (1995) argued that imbalance of power between couples inhibits intimacy. Even though couples may pursue strong emotional intimacy, they experience it more often during courtship than during marriage because they tend to settle into “gender-scripted roles of husband and wife” after marriage (p. 81). The prescribed roles create power distance and thus inhibit intimacy. To fix it, the couples need to learn to balance their power and to increase their emotional connectedness and intimacy. However, women and men use different bonding strategies that may sometimes create conflict. Horst and Doherty (1995) pointed out that “for [men], sex implies inclusion, and self-disclosing conversation implies intimacy; for [women], self-disclosing conversation implies inclusion, and sex implies intimacy” (p.77). Therefore, when a husband initiates sex to connect to his wife, his wife may refuse because she prefers to have verbal connection before engaging in intimate sexual activity. Horst and Doherty also believe that to complicate the matters even further, “cultural gender norms dictate that sexual activity enhances a man’s status, and increases a woman’s vulnerability” (p. 78). Therefore, when men connect through sexual activity, they are participating in a “status-enhancing activity”; and when women connect through self-disclosure, they are engaging in a “voluntary show of vulnerability” (p. 78), which means the bonding strategies they use may impact their sense of control in the marriage in very different ways. In addition, the gendered arrangement in the household prescribed by the culture may create a barrier for partners to connect to each other. Horst and Doherty (1995) believed that the barrier can be removed by helping husbands see “the link between fair household work and a mutually rewarding and exciting intimate sexual relationship” (p. 81) and by helping wives understand that not being able to achieve deep emotional connection through self-disclosure does not imply

a personal failure as a woman. Horst and Doherty concluded that couples need to learn to break through the “implicit gender contract” (p. 82) and work on inclusion, and then on balancing control and intimacy.

Autonomy and intimacy. After conducting an extensive review of literature on autonomy and intimacy, Goodman (1999) concluded that autonomy is related to an effort ranging from interpersonal control to “consolidate individuality” (p. 85) while intimacy is related to a variety of qualities or behaviors related to self-disclosure, friendship, companionship, sensitivity, empathy, warmth and caring, and involvement in activities with one’s partner. Goodman examined long-term marital stability among 180 men and women and measured autonomy by examining partners’ perceived acceptance and respect of personal decisions and opinions of the participants. Intimacy was measured by examining participants’ desire to share problems and please the other partner, and the quality of their time together. Goodman (1999) discovered that even though intimacy was positively related with long-term marital satisfaction while hostile control was negatively related to it, intimacy was not the most important predictor of marital satisfaction or problems. A better predictor is actually the discrepancy between perceived and desired levels of intimacy (Harper & Elliott, 1988). Intimacy and avoidance of hostile control were rated of higher importance than autonomy to long-term married couples. Autonomy was not found to predict marital satisfaction, yet served as a negative predictor of marital problems. According to Cunningham and Antill (1994), cohabiting couples have greater needs for autonomy than married couples, suggesting the balancing act of autonomy and intimacy may be somewhat different within cohabiting couples and married couples.

Influence and emotional connection. Perhaps the longest ongoing research and most publications on power and intimacy within couples was done by Gottman and his colleagues (e.g., Gottman, 1979; Gottman, 1993, Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998; Gottman & DeClaire, 2001; Gottman & Levenson, 2000; Gottman & Silver, 1999). Their research on marital interaction has been growing and expanding since they initially published related studies in the 70s, and defined the two terms *influence* (Gottman & Silver, 1999) and *emotional connection* (Gottman & DeClaire, 2001) which have emerged and been consistently used in their work. Instead of viewing influence as how much power one partner has over the other, they examined the perspective of how one partner accepts or rejects influence from the other partner in order to balance the power shared in the relationships. Based on years of observation and research,

Gottman and his colleagues found that “the happiest, most stable marriages in the long run were those where the husband treated his wife with respect and did not resist power sharing and decision making with her” (Gottman & Silver, 1999, p. 101). They learned that how couples express and respond to negativity from each other has a crucial impact on their marital well-being. They noticed that wives tended to match husbands’ negativity while husbands tended to escalate it. Gottman and his colleagues believed that using criticism, contempt, defensiveness, or stone-walling to escalate a conflict was a sign of a man’s resisting his wife’s influence. This resistance and escalation tended to lead to marital instability. In addition to the focus on accepting influence from partners, Gottman and Silver (1999) also pointed out the importance for partners to “turn toward each other” (p. 79) in order to establish an emotional connection between them. Couples who turned toward each other “react[ed] in a positive way to another’s bids for emotional connection” (Gottman & DeClaire, 2001, p. 16). Gottman and his colleagues learned that it does not matter whether couples show their love through grand romantic gestures, and they concluded that “real-life romance is fueled by a far more humdrum approach to staying connected” (Gottman & Silver, 1999, p. 80). In other words, they found that couples who stay happily together are those who stay engaged in each other’s life consistently, even in very small ways.

Positional power and relational power. Based on a feminist perspective, Blanton and Vandergriff-Avery (2001) examined couple relationships in terms of positional power (one’s capacity to use his or her status and resources to influence his or her partner) and relational power (one’s capacity to affect his or her partner through the intimate relationship). Even though O’Connor (1991) defined relational power as the intensity and emotional dependence between couples and that a higher relational power indicated a lower emotional dependence, Blanton and Vandergriff-Avery (2001) believed relational power is one’s capacity to affect his/her partner through the intimate relationship and that women are more likely to have higher relational power than men. They based their assumption on the conclusion made by Lips and Colwill (1978) that women may have considerable relational power in interpersonal relationships but their relational power does not go beyond the relationship itself. According to Blanton and Vandergriff-Avery (2001), positional power is usually defined by the culture as masculine and relational power is usually defined as feminine. While Friedan (1981) contended that both men and women need resources such as status, identity, and security, from outside of marriage and through marriage,

Blanton and Vandergriff-Avery (2001) pointed out that women are usually encouraged to pursue greater positional power than men and are counseled to claim greater relational power. This tends to make women feel overwhelmed by their heavy responsibility in the relationship and isolate men further away from the center stage.

Relationship power and attachment styles. Rogers et al. (2005) combined the concepts of relationship power (Cromwell & Olson, 1975) with attachment styles (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) and studied the satisfaction with relationship power between dating couples. Relationship power is a broad concept that encompasses *resources* brought into the relationship as one's base of power (power base) to *tactics* one adopts to gain power in the relationship (power process) to whether one's *decision* is being carried out within the relationship (power outcome). After examining four attachment styles (preoccupied, secure, fearful-avoidant, and dismissing avoidant), Rogers et al. found that perceived level of power was not predictive of abusive behavior in their sample. Instead, individuals who were dissatisfied with their level of relationship power tended to be abusive to their partners. The results also showed that individuals with insecure attachment styles were more likely to be abusive than the other groups because of their need to assert control over their relationships.

Need of a Relational Model for Couples

The quest to study the interplay of power and intimacy in romantic relationships is not new to researchers, but the approaches to this issue lack comparable perspectives and consensus on definitions. Despite this, researchers have studied the relational styles associated with increased or decreased relationship satisfaction. With regard to power, some researchers have identified resources that were adopted or controlled by the partners in the relationship while others focused on the ways control was asserted and whose decisions eventually transpired. Similarly, when discussing intimacy, some researchers have brought in measureable behaviors such as self-disclosure, shared problems, and time spent together while others have examined perceived closeness or emotional dependence between the partners. In addition to definition issues, the level of research focus has been problematic. Due to the difficulty in recruiting both partners, researchers may have studied power and intimacy in couple relationships from one partner's perspective on an individual level and then drawn implications to project relationship outcomes.

The Circumplex Model of Marital and Family was developed by Olson, Russell, and Sprenkle (1983). They examined family functioning in terms of flexibility and adaptability, which are fundamentally related to power and intimacy, yet on a systems level. A need exists to combine current theoretical approaches and create an integrated view on couple relating styles and relationship outcome. There also is a need to bridge the gap that past research has somehow failed to span – the gap between power versus intimacy perceived in the couple relationship on the individual level and flexibility versus adaptability perceived in the families on the systems level. Practitioners, researchers, and scholars can be greatly benefited by a model that allows them to study how the levels of power and intimacy jointly affect the quality of couple relationships.

Although power and intimacy were generally presented in the literature with multiple implications; in most cases, researchers referred to the level of influence a partner has over an intimate relationship when the term power was used and referred to the level of closeness a partner feels towards the other partner when the term intimacy was used. To prevent confusion, *relationship influence* and *couple closeness* were used as the main foci of this study. Not surprisingly, research that specifically examined relationship influence and couple closeness simultaneously was sparse in couple research. Missing was a model or theoretical perspective specifically developed to examine relationship influence and closeness within couples. A lack of connection of couples' relating styles with existing relationship theory, such as attachment theory was noted, and no research findings were available on whether such a model would be useful in helping couples. Consequently, the following section will delineate the conceptual framework used within this study, review relational models that incorporate influence and closeness in different fields, and discuss a new relational model developed by me. The goal of this study was to fill the gaps of contemporary research and create a model to explain couple relating styles in terms of relationship control and couple closeness.

Relational Models Related to Influence and Closeness

Interpersonal Circles

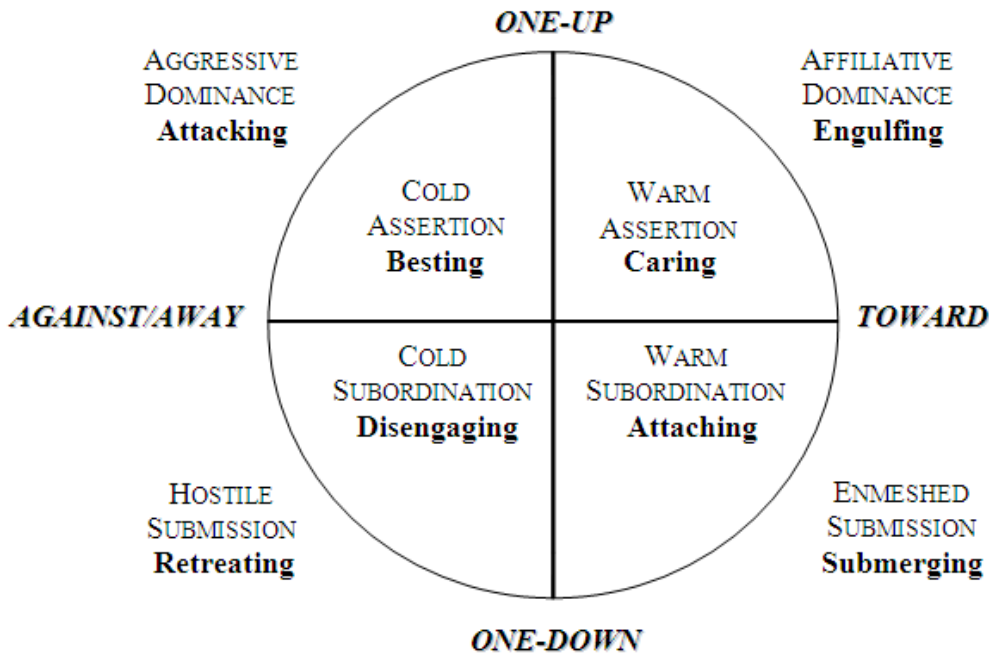
As early as 1975, McClelland recognized the importance of studying interaction of influence and closeness and their impact on interpersonal relationships. Wiggins and Holzmuller (1981) proposed that influence and closeness, specifically termed as control and affiliation by

him, are the two basic interpersonal dimensions. Henry (1988) also indicated that when people interact, they are simultaneously determining a dominance hierarchy and how closely they are affiliated.

A more recent interpersonal model was proposed by McLemore (2003) to describe conventional and toxic styles of relating to others. McLemore proposed that the two extremes on a control continuum are “one-up” and “one-down.” One-up means “acting assertively,” while one-down means “deferring to someone else” (p. 39). McLemore perceived closeness as an indicator of emotional warmth. However, instead of using warm and cold, he adopted Horney’s (1945) three fundamental approaches to others: moving toward, moving away, and moving against. He explained that moving toward means showing affection, moving away indicates emotional coolness, and moving against implies coldness and eventually aggression or hostility.

As Figure 1 shows, McLemore’s (2003) model blended one-up versus one-down with moving toward versus away and generated a circle with four conventional (inner) modes of relating to others. He identified the strategy an individual uses in warm assertion mode (one-up/toward) as caring, warm subordination (one-down/toward) as attaching, cold subordination (one-down/away) as disengaging, and cold assertion (one-up/away) as besting. According to McLemore, healthy people are flexible in choosing these postures and are able to take an appropriate stance based on the interpersonal circumstance. As for dysfunctional person-to-person interaction, which McLemore referred to as “interpersonal toxicity,” he blended one-up versus one-down with toward versus against. On the same interpersonal circle, he generated four toxic (outer) modes of relating to others. He identified the strategy one uses in affiliative dominance mode (one-up versus toward) as engulfing, enmeshed submission (one-down versus toward) as submerging, hostile submission (one-down versus away) as retreating, and aggressive dominance (one-up versus away) as attacking. Turning toward, at this point, is no longer a type of emotional warmth that is healthy and pleasant, instead, it represents enmeshment or suffocating closeness. He believed that these four toxic modes of relating to others may be “an exaggerated or rigid form of normal behavior” or a character trait that is unrelated to an individual’s need for closeness (p. 84.)

Figure 1. Conventional and Toxic Modes/Strategies of Relating to Other People

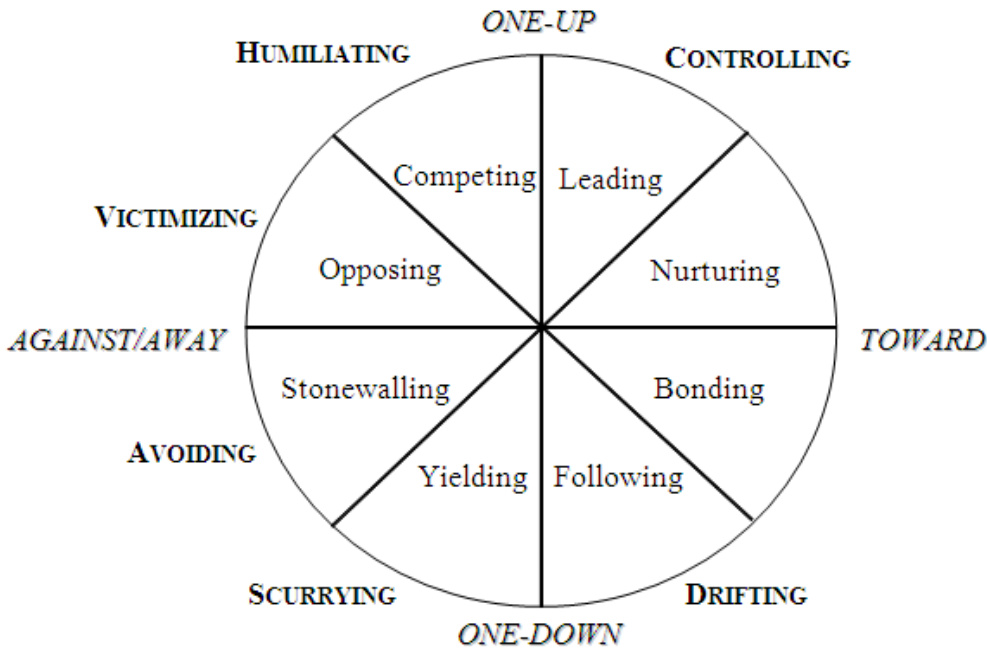


Note.

1. Conventional modes/strategies are in inner circle. Toxic modes/strategies are in outer circle.
2. Words in capital letters indicate behavioral mode. Words in bold indicate strategies.

McLemore (2003) believed that each general mode of relating can be expressed through two styles. Therefore, eight conventional styles of relating to others can be generated because caring (warm assertion mode) can be expressed through leading and nurturing, attaching (warm subordination mode), bonding and following, disengaging (cold subordination mode) yielding and stonewalling, and besting (cold assertion mode) opposing and competing. Eight toxic styles of relating to other people also can be generated because engulfing (affiliative dominance mode) can be expressed through controlling and intruding, submerging (enmeshed submission mode) through freeloading and drifting, retreating (hostile submission mode) through avoiding and scurrying, and, attacking (aggressive dominance mode) through humiliating and victimizing. Figure 2 illustrates the interpersonal styles of relating that McLemore proposed (p. 96).

Figure 2. Conventional and Toxic Styles of Relating to Other People



Note. Conventional styles of relating are in inner circle. Toxic styles are in outside circle.

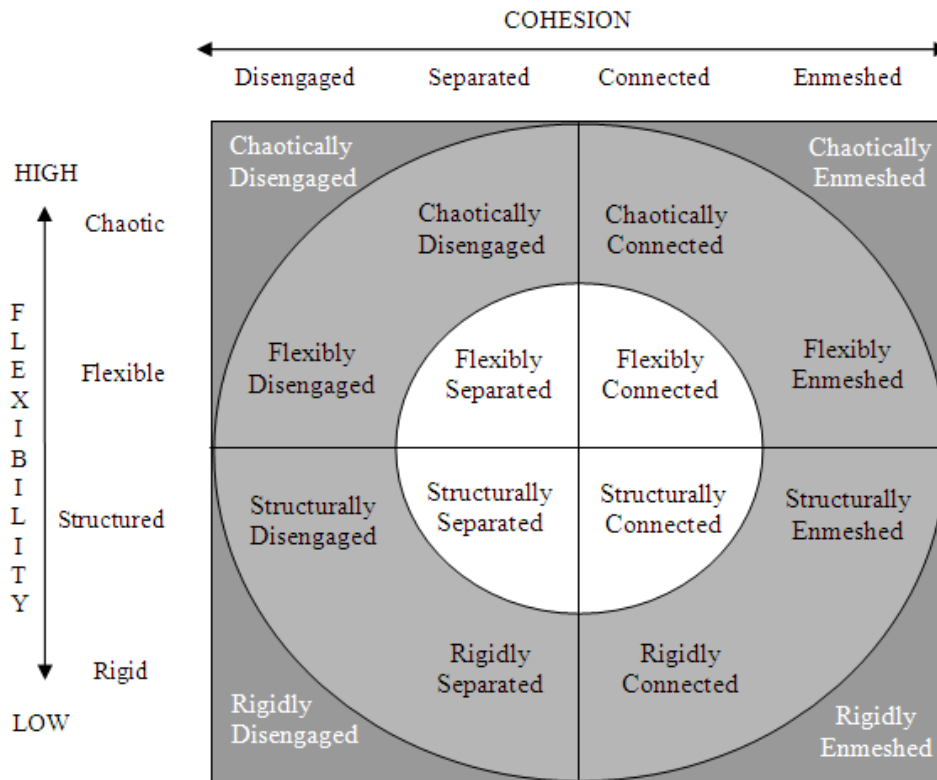
McLemore (2003) explained that a high control style tends to invite or reinforce a low control style in a partner, while a moderate to high control style tends to complement a low to moderate style. For example, in conventional styles, controlling tends to reinforce drifting while victimizing tends to reinforce avoiding. For toxic interpersonal styles, leading tends to invite following while opposing tends to invite stonewalling.

Circumplex Model – Couple & Family Map

The Circumplex Model developed by Olson and his colleagues (Olson, Sprenkle, & Russell, 1979; Olson et al., 1983) mapped out family dynamics by using cohesion and flexibility as interacting dimensions. The close resemblance of cohesion and flexibility to closeness and control is evident with a closer examination of the definitions of these terms. Olson (1996) defined the levels of family cohesion as how a system balances its separateness versus togetherness. As Figure 3 shows, levels of cohesion range from disengaged (very low) to separated (low to moderate) to connected (moderate to high) to enmeshed (very high), with separated and connected representing optimal family functioning. He further defined family

flexibility as “the amount of change in its leadership” on a continuum ranging from rigid (very low) to structured (low to moderate) to flexible (moderate to high) to chaotic (very high), with central levels of flexibility implying healthy marital and family functioning (p.4).

Figure 3. Circumplex Model: Couple & Family Map



Note.

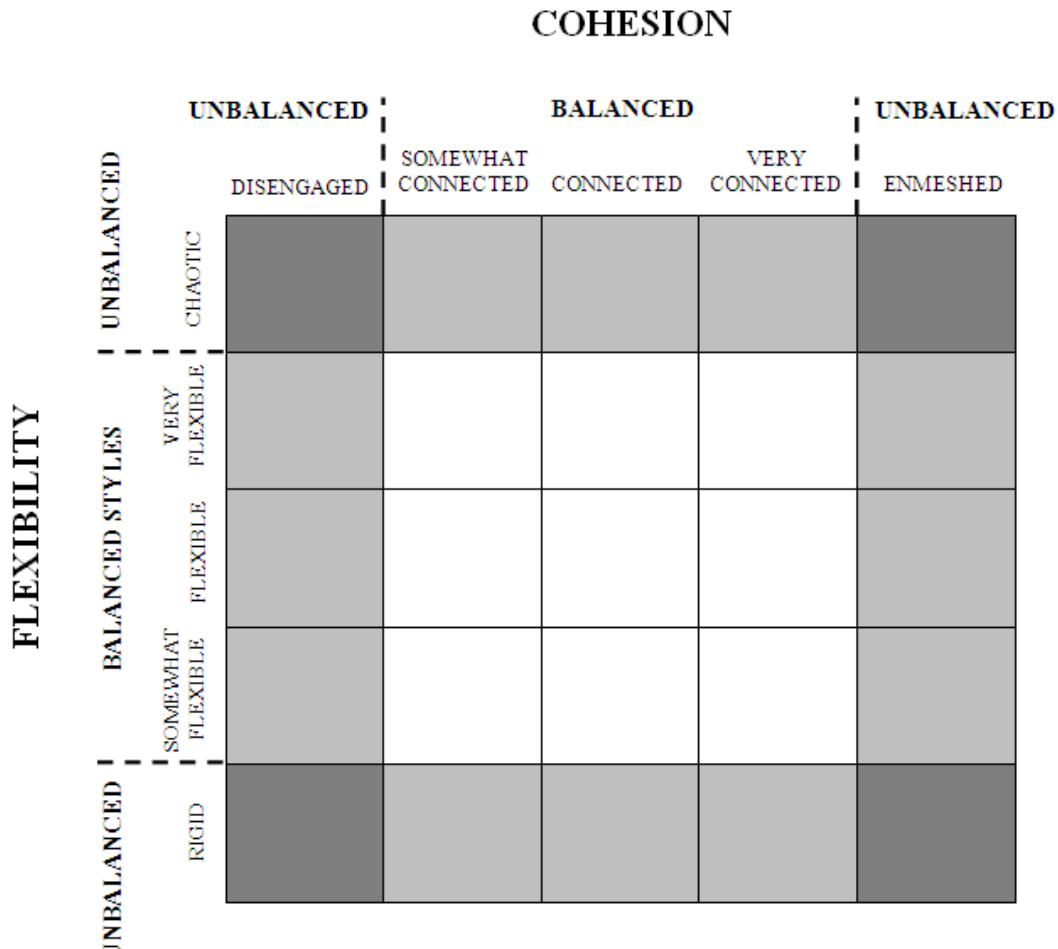
1. Source: Olson, 1996, p. 4
2. Innermost circle indicates balanced/optimal functional areas. The middle circle (shaded area) indicates mid-range areas. The areas outside of circles indicate unbalanced areas.

To express how a family functions during the first few years of marriage, Olson and Gorall (2003) integrated systems theory and family developmental theory to demonstrate the changes couples make in terms of the flexibility and connectedness in their relationship. They proposed that during the dating period, the couple’s relationship is characterized by *very flexible/very connected*. The newlywed period is the time that the couple enjoys maximum time

together; therefore, their relationship is likely to be *flexible/overly connected*. By the time the honeymoon effect diminishes, the couple becomes *somewhat flexible/connected*. When a baby arrives, previously established routines are disrupted and the focus of the couple shifts from the couple relationship to a family relationship which includes the baby, thus, the family becomes *very flexible/somewhat connected*. By the time the child is four years old and more independent, the family will function at a *flexible/connected* level. According to the researchers, to adapt to stress in the family life cycle, it is appropriate for families to shift into different levels of flexibility and connectedness in order to cope with and transition through changes. They suggested that balanced families (average levels of flexibility and average levels of connectedness) function better than unbalanced families (extreme levels of flexibility and extreme levels of connectedness). Olson and Gorall (2003) emphasized the importance of communication in this model. They believed that balanced families tend to have more positive communication skills than unbalanced families.

Olson and Gorall (2003) revised the graphic representation of the Couple and Family Map and added additional levels representing couples in the average (mid) range to provide a “more useful assessment of couple and family systems” (p. 515). Therefore, the new version of the Couple and Family Map is called the Circumplex Model and is no longer 4 x 4 but 5 x 5 with additional levels showing average levels of cohesion and average levels of flexibility (See Figure 4). The old and new models are exactly the same except the new model includes average levels of functioning. Olson and Gorall (2003) also labeled balanced and unbalanced areas to make the model easier to understand and use than the previous model.

Figure 4. Couple and Family Map– Revised Version



Source: Olson and Gorall, 2003, p. 517

Attachment Theory – Self and Other Model

Adult attachment style (Bartholomew, 1990) which developed from the attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973) is a popular approach to examining/explaining how members of couples relate. Two interacting dimensions in the adult attachment style are anxiety attachment and avoidance attachment. Anxiety attachment refers to one’s fear of being abandoned and the feeling of not being loved enough. It is associated with one’s comfort in seeking closeness with others based on a personal perception of self-worth (Koski & Shaver, 1997). Avoidance attachment refers to one’s fear of being intimate or losing self-control. It is associated with one’s beliefs about how other people are likely to provide comfort for self (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2004). Individuals who have a positive self-regard (low anxiety) and a positive perception of

others (low avoidance) tend to feel secure in their relationships, and are socially self-confident and successful. Insecure individuals are labeled as fearful (high anxiety and high avoidance), dismissing (low anxiety and high avoidance), or preoccupied (high anxiety and low avoidance). Each insecure type has different interpersonal issues and has difficulty in forming and maintaining close relationships (McClellan & Killeen, 2000; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2004). Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) developed a four-category model to describe attachment styles among young adults, with behavioral characteristics listed under each style (Figure 5). According to Koski and Shaver (1997), secure attachment is associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction than insecure attachment is. They believed that in order for one to feel satisfied in a relationship, one's relationship-related needs must be met and attachment-related security must be present in the relationship.

Figure 5. Model of Adult Attachment

		MODEL OF SELF (Dependence)	
		Positive (Low)	Negative (High)
MODEL OF OTHER (Avoidance)	Positive (Low)	<p>SECURE</p> <p>Comfortable with intimacy and autonomy</p>	<p>PREOCCUPIED</p> <p>Preoccupied with relationships</p>
	Negative (High)	<p>DISMISSING</p> <p>Dismissing of intimacy Counter-dependent</p>	<p>FEARFUL</p> <p>Fearful of intimacy Socially avoidant</p>

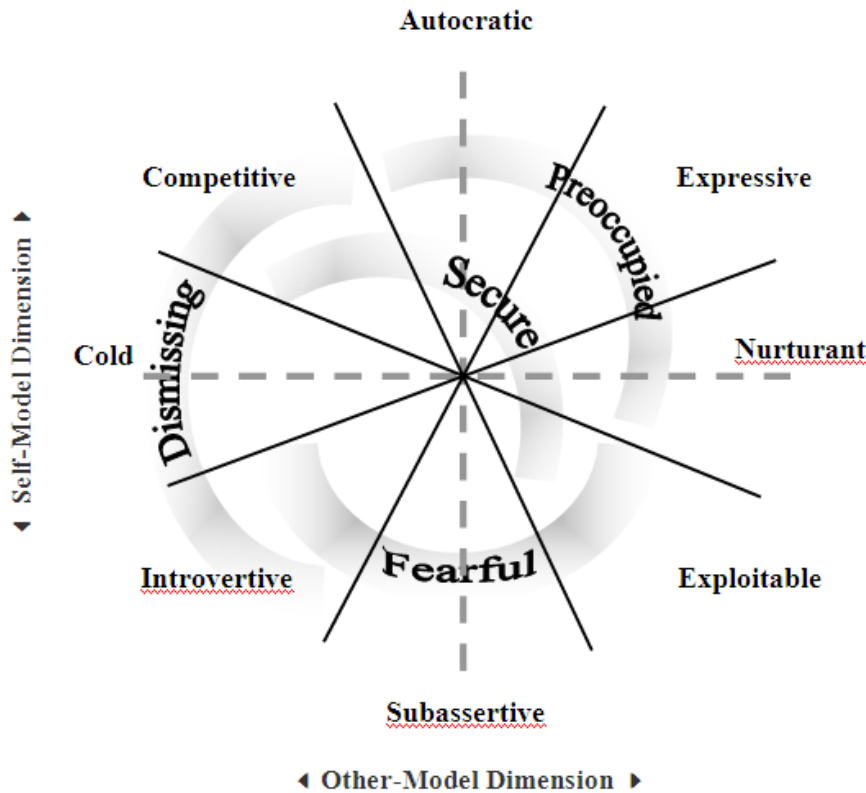
Source: Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991, p. 227

To further validate the Four-Way Category Model of Adult Attachment, Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) collected interpersonal profiles for four attachment groups from 77 college students. Each student was administered a set of paper-and-pencil attachment measures, an adult attachment interview, a peer attachment interview, and a family attachment interview. All self-reports and reports of close same-sex friends and family members were collected, analyzed, and plotted on a two-dimensional model for each attachment style (See Figure 6).

The Self-in-Relation-to-Other Model displays a vertical dimension that represents the self-model dimension and a horizontal dimension that represents the other-model dimension. Each attachment pattern defines a distinct and consistent profile of interpersonal issues, with the secure type demonstrating a moderate tendency toward being competitive, autocratic, expressive, nurturant, and exploitable; the preoccupied type involves a high level of being expressive, followed by moderate to high tendency to be competitive, autocratic, introverted, and exploitable; the dismissing type demonstrate a high tendency of being cold, and moderate to high tendency to be competitive and introvertive; and the fearful type involves being high in subassertive, followed by moderate to high tendencies of being introvertive and exploitable.

As discussed above, the anxiety dimension refers to one's fear of being abandoned and the feeling of not being loved enough. It is reflected through one's comfort in seeking closeness with others. Avoidance attachment refers to one's beliefs about how other people are likely to provide comfort for self. It is associated with one's fear of being intimate or losing control. Therefore, the attachment model is a theoretical model associated closely with autonomy versus closeness (Bartholomew, 1997; Waldinger, Seidman, Liem, Allen, & Hauser, 2003), or in other words, relationship/personal control versus closeness.

Figure 6.Attachment Patterns Shown in Self-in-Relation-to-Other Model



Note. Attachment patterns and interpersonal problems associated with the patterns were organized and highlighted on this model based on Bartholomew’s (1991, 1997) research results.

Creating an Integrated Relational Model for Couples

Researchers acknowledge the importance of developing models to explain interpersonal interaction, close relationships, and how couples and/or families function as a system. As shown above, the Interpersonal Circles, the Couple & Family Map, and the Self and Other Model are all valuable perspectives in understanding interpersonal and family relationships. Unfortunately, these approaches are scattered on different levels and the visual representations used by the researchers vary from a circular model to a Circumplex Model to an intersecting continua. It is important to note that circular representations were used to serve a special function. According to Kiesler (1983, 1985), an interpersonal circle defines a circular array of segments, implying it is “without beginning or end” (p. 186). LaForge and Suczek (1955) indicated that circumplex implied “a positive correlation for interpersonal behaviors that are adjacent on the circumference,

and a negative correlation on the ones that are opposite on the circle” (cited in Kiesler, 1983, p. 187). However, a circular model such as McLemore’s (see Figure 2) has two major limitations: First, it is unable to account for gradual changes in behavior along a continuum. Second, the duplicate meanings of moving toward, in conventional relationships (refers to closeness) and in toxic relationships (refers to enmeshment) are rather confusing.

On the other hand, the use of continua in the Marriage and Family Map by Olson and his colleagues (Olson, Sprenkle, & Russell, 1979, Olson et al., 1983) to represent 16 marital and family functioning levels is particularly effective in describing human behaviors. The model maps out balanced and unbalanced functioning levels and is sensible and easy to follow for its users. Given that the Interpersonal Circles, the Couple & Family Map, and the Self and Other Model are all founded on the basis of influence and closeness, integrating them into a relational model for couples becomes possible and appropriate.

The following sections focus on my creation of an integrated relational model for couples. The strategies for creating a model of styles for control and relatedness in romantic relationships include three steps: First, McLemore’s (2003) definitions of Conventional and Toxic Styles of Relating to Other People were borrowed and integrated into the format of Olson’s (1996) Circumplex Model to create a taxonomy. Second, common love stories proposed by Sternberg (1996, 1998) were applied to the taxonomy to demonstrate how the taxonomy can be used toward understanding and improving romantic relationships. Third, based on the findings from Sternberg (1998, 2000), implications for relationship satisfaction were generated and discussed. Fourth, the model was connected with attachment theory to check the model’s compatibility with attachment patterns and test its usefulness in understanding and explaining couples’ interaction.

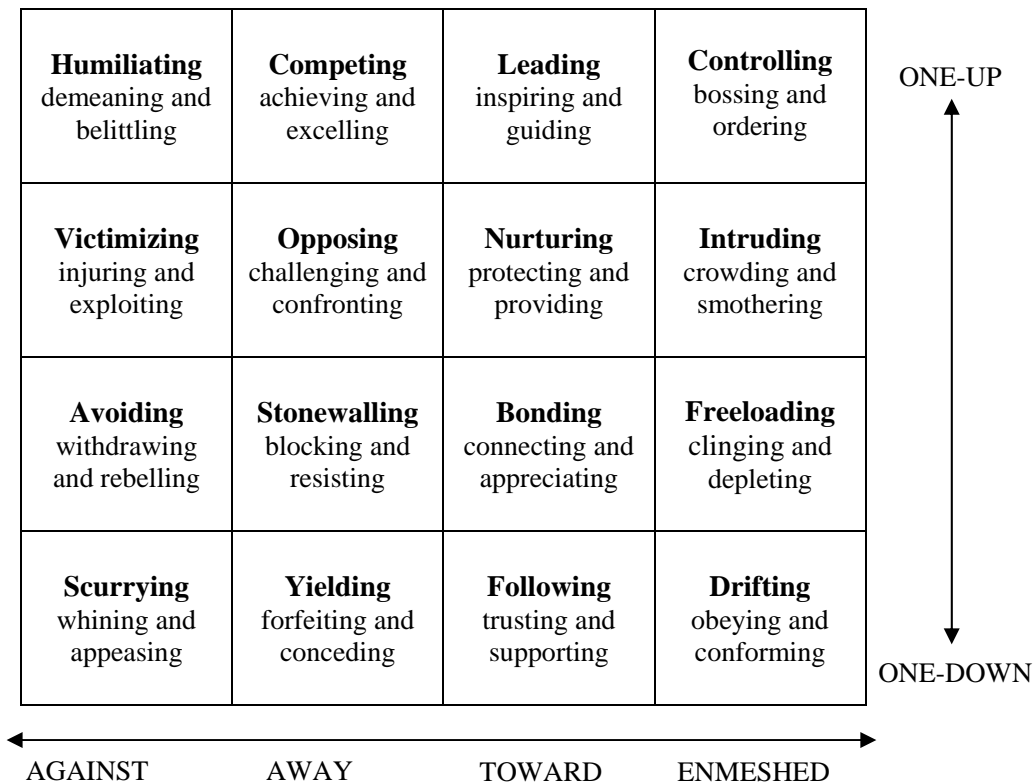
Step 1: Constructing a Taxonomy for Couple Relational Styles

As Figure 7 illustrates, a taxonomy that resembles the layout of Olson’s Circumplex Model can be created by adopting the interpersonal styles and their related definitions developed by McLemore (2003). The columns on either side indicate toxic styles of relating to other people, the columns in the middle indicate conventional styles of relating to others. From this taxonomy, the interaction between degree of closeness on one continuum, and the change in degree of control on the other continuum can be visualized. The circles that indicate optimal or mid-range functioning areas in Olson’s Circumplex Model were left out on purpose, based on a change in

the definition of optimal functioning specific to romantic relationships, which will be discussed later.

Despite the fact that Olson and Gorall (2003) inserted an average level of functioning in Family Map to enhance its usefulness in assessing couples and families, the 4 x 4 graphic representation was used in this study because this model translates better to McLemore's (2003) interpersonal circles without the average levels of functioning. Therefore, the layout of Olson's previous Couple and Family Map was used to merge with McLemore's (2003) definitions of interpersonal styles to generate a better visual representation for couple's relating styles.

Figure 7. The Taxonomy of Styles of Relating in Romantic Relationships



Romantic relationships differ from interpersonal or family relationships in the way that romantic partners tend to desire more connection and intimacy than people in other types of relationships. While Olson (1996) proposed that optimal functioning areas were the central areas where both separateness and connectedness are accepted as long as the system is flexible and structured, separateness is not necessarily optimal for couples who long to feel close, connected

and in love. Similarly, half of McLemore's (2003) conventional styles of relating to other people emphasized moving away as normal and acceptable, but these styles may not be favored by couples who are in romantic relationships.

Although Olson (1996) and McLemore (2003) asserted that individuals are generally adaptable in their interpersonal approaches, I contend that couples are more likely to struggle with their different expectations and put forth a consistent effort toward a perceived ideal style of relating than individuals in non-romantic relationships. Horney (1945) indicated that even though moving toward, away, and against other people are three attitudes that are normal and desirable in human relationships, when people are in a "neurotic framework," these attitudes become "compulsive, rigid, indiscriminate, and mutually exclusive" (p. 89). Romantic relationships are characterized by intensity and couples' insecurity, especially when incompatibility and conflict arise. Couples may fall into a certain relating style by choice or be forced into it because they lack the knowledge to break away from a repetitive and toxic interaction style.

In the next section, Sternberg's (1996) love stories are described and applied to the taxonomy to generate implications for styles of relating in a romantic relationships model.

Step 2: Transforming the Taxonomy to Couple Relational Model

Sternberg (1996) believed that love "revolves around a storylike nature of both real and ideal love relationships" (p.61). Love stories, like other stories, have plots, themes, and characters. He indicated that the interactions between individuals may shape and modify the stories one has and affect what one brings to the relationship (Sternberg, 1998).

After reviewing Sternberg's (1998) common love stories, I noticed that there is usually one style or a set of main styles of relating between couples in each of these love stories. His collection of love stories was chosen to provide implications for styles of relating in romantic relationships for several reasons.

First, Sternberg (1996) believed that expectations of love stories can affect the interaction of a couple. Similarly, desired or ideal styles of relating to partners discussed in this paper are also likely to influence (or even be influenced by) the relationships in reality. Implications from his love stories could be very useful to identify styles of relating in romantic relationships. Second, although he indicated that his taxonomy of love stories was tentative because there was a possibility that more stories had not been captured, his research was still one of the most comprehensive collections on types of romantic relationships. Third, in almost all of the stories

Sternberg (1996, 1998) discovered, he provided a story type and diagnosis for each and listed components that could be used to determine the degree of relationship control or relatedness an individual may have. Fourth, Sternberg (1998) collected findings indicating which stories were perceived to be ideal or satisfactory to most couples. These findings can be used to generate implications on what styles of relating are associated with higher satisfaction than other styles of relating in close relationships.

Sternberg (1996, 1998) categorized love stories into five types: asymmetrical, object, coordination, narrative, and genre. The list of diagnoses of each story was reviewed and searched for keywords indicating a possible degree of relationship control or relatedness. Usually, a style of relating was obvious among a set of diagnoses in a story; however, sometimes a style of relating could not be clearly identified. In that case, one or two most possible styles of relating associated with the story were postulated. For example, in a police story, the main characters are an officer and a suspect. One main diagnosis about an officer was: "I believe it is necessary to watch your partner's every move to maintain some degree of order in your relationship." One main diagnosis about a suspect was: "My partner often calls me several times during the day to ask exactly what I am doing" (Sternberg, 1998, p. 68). Since the rest of the diagnoses were basically about the same behavioral pattern, there was a strong indication of one-up versus one-down in control paired with enmeshed relating style. The determination was easy.

Some love stories were more challenging than the police story. For example, in a humor story, the main characters are a comedian and an audience. One main diagnosis about a comedian was: "I admit that I sometimes try to use humor in order to avoid facing a problem in my relationship." For an audience, one main diagnosis was: "I think taking a relationship too seriously can spoil it; that's why I like partners who have a sense of humor" (Sternberg, 1998, p. 204). From a comedian's perspective, joking could be viewed as an obstacle to closeness because joking was used to avoid dealing with a problem in the relationship. But from the audience's perspective, joking was actually appreciated and perceived as an effort toward a positive relationship. In this case, the decision was made to define the degree of relatedness as toward-away, and the degree of control as moderate-high for a comedian and low-moderate for an audience.

Based on the above procedure, Sternberg’s (1998) collection of love stories were analyzed and organized by their types, themes, as well as implication on degree of control and relatedness as delineated in the following tables.

Table 1. Asymmetrical Stories

Name of Story (theme)	Implication on Degree of Relationship Control	Implication Degree of Relatedness
1. Teacher-Student (leading and learning the partner)	Teacher: <i>one-up</i> Student: <i>one-down</i>	<i>toward</i>
2. Sacrifice (love is self-giving to partner)	<i>one-down</i>	<i>toward</i>
3. Government (one governs the other: someone is in charge!)	Governor: <i>one-up</i> Governed: <i>one-down</i>	<i>away-against</i>
(power-sharing is essential to close relationships)	Democratic: <i>moderate-high</i>	<i>toward-away</i>
(both partners are power-avoiding: no one make decisions or solve problems)	Anarchic: <i>one-down</i>	<i>away</i>
4. Police (enforce the laws of the relationship: watch every move of the other partner)	Officer: <i>one-up</i> Suspect: <i>one-down</i>	<i>enmeshed</i>
5. Pornography (one partner degrades and debases the other partner)	Subject: <i>one-up</i> Object: <i>one-down</i>	<i>against</i>
6. Horror (one terrorizes and controls the other)	Terrorizer: <i>one-up</i> Victim: <i>one-down</i>	<i>against</i>

Note. Asymmetrical stories are based on the belief that “asymmetry between partners should be a fundamental basis of a close relationship” (Sternberg, 1998, p.49).

Table 2. Object Stories

Subtype: Person as Object		
Name of Story (theme)	Implication on Degree of Relationship Control	Implication Degree of Relatedness
7. Science-Fiction (being “bizarre” is valued: partner is unpredictable and distant)	Alien: <i>low-moderate</i> Human: <i>low</i>	<i>away</i>
8. Collection (collection is valued: a story of detachment)	Collector: <i>low-moderate</i> Collectible: <i>low</i>	<i>away-against</i>
9. Art (physical attractiveness is essential: love is gone when attraction is gone)	Admirer: <i>moderate-high</i> Work of Art: <i>low-moderate</i>	<i>away</i>
Subtype: Relationship as Object		
Name of Story (theme)	Implication on Degree of Relationship Control	Implication Degree of Relatedness
10. House and Home (certain living standard is important: tending house as a way to love)	Caretaker: <i>moderate-high</i> Care Recipient: <i>low-moderate</i>	<i>toward</i>
11. Recovery (one has the power to rescue and recover the other)	Codependent: <i>one-up</i> Recoverer: <i>one-down</i>	<i>enmeshed</i>
12. Religion (salvation from mutual belief: united by similar religious beliefs)	Coreligionists: <i>moderate-high</i>	<i>toward</i>
(salvation from another person: one has the power to save the other)	Savior: <i>one-up</i> Salvation Seeker: <i>one-down</i>	<i>toward-enmeshed</i>
13. Game (competition is exciting, one may win or lose in the relationship)	Winner: <i>one-up</i> Loser: <i>one-down</i>	<i>against</i>

Note. Object stories focus on the idea that either persons or relationships are valued for their functioning as objects but not for themselves (Sternberg, 1998).

Table 3. Coordination Stories

Name of Story (theme)	Implication on Degree of Relationship Control	Implication Degree of Relatedness
14. Travel (love is a journey: partners change and grow together)	Travelers: <i>low-moderate</i>	<i>toward</i>
15. Sewing and Knitting (love is a construction by two designers working together)	Tailors: <i>moderate-high</i>	<i>toward</i>
(one designer and one who appreciates the design)	Tailor: <i>one-up</i> Client: <i>one-down</i>	<i>toward</i>
16. Garden (love needs to be nurtured – with two nurturers)	Gardeners: <i>moderate-high</i>	<i>toward</i>
(love is to nurture the other person)	Gardener: <i>moderate-high</i> Flower: <i>low-moderate</i>	<i>toward</i>
17. Business (love is a business partnership: the focus on business tend to draw partners away from each other)	Business Partners: <i>moderate-high</i>	<i>away</i>
(love is running a business with one being the employer and one being the employee)	Employer: <i>one-up</i> Employee: <i>one-down</i>	<i>away-against</i>
18. Addiction (addicted to partner: one can not live without the other)	Addict: <i>moderate-high</i> Codependent: <i>low-moderate</i>	<i>enmeshed</i>

Note. Coordination stories are based on the notion that “love is viewed as evolving as partners work together to create or maintain something” (Sternberg, 1998, p. 135).

Table 4. Narrative Stories

Name of Story (theme)	Implication on Degree of Relationship Control	Implication Degree of Relatedness
19. Fantasy (the right person can make one's life happily ever after: the depth of love may turn out to be a fantasy as well)	Idealistic ideal Prince: <i>one-top</i> Princess: <i>one-down</i>	<i>away</i>
(one can work with the right person and live happily ever after)	Realistic ideal Prince: <i>moderate-high</i> Princess: <i>low-moderate</i>	<i>toward</i>
20. History (now is an accumulation of past events: happy memories from the mutual past is important)	Historians: <i>low-moderate</i>	<i>toward</i>
(the historical personage is more significant and more important in the relationship: happiness is from the distinguished historical roots)	Historian: <i>one-down</i> Historical Personage: <i>one-up</i>	<i>away</i>
21. Science (love can be analyzed: one can change the relationship or the other based on a scientific analysis)	Scientist: <i>one-up</i> Object of Study: <i>one-down</i>	<i>away</i>
22. Cookbook (love needs to follow the right recipe – both parties can find and share)	Cooks: moderate-high Chefs: moderate-high	<i>toward</i>
(love needs to follow the right recipe – one party will find and share, the other will follow)	Chef: <i>one-up</i> Cook: <i>one-down</i>	<i>toward</i>

Note. In narrative stories, partners believe that love story is prescriptive and should follow a specific storyline (Sternberg, 1998).

Table 5. Genre Stories

Name of Story (theme)	Implication on Degree of Relationship Control	Implication Degree of Relatedness
23. War (love is a battlefield, conflicts are good: satisfaction is in a good fight)	Warriors Winner: <i>one-up</i> Loser: <i>one-down</i>	<i>away-against</i>
24. Theater (love is how you act it out: relationship is scripted and artificial)	Actor: <i>low-moderate</i> Fan: <i>low-moderate</i>	<i>away-against</i>
25. Humor (love is strange and funny: diffuse conflict, avoid confrontation, and may maintain distance in a relationship)	Comedian: <i>moderate-high</i> Audience: <i>low-moderate</i>	<i>toward-away</i>
26. Mystery (love should be mysterious and exciting: goal – do not let the other partner figure out what the mystery is)	Sleuth: <i>low-moderate</i> Mystery figure: <i>low-moderate</i>	<i>away-against</i>

Note. In genre stories, “the mode or way of being in the relationship is key to the existence and maintenance of the relationship” (Sternberg, 1998, p. 193).

Step 3: Implications for Relating Styles in Romantic Relationships

Sternberg's findings (1998, 2000) revealed the popularity of certain love stories, gender differences in choice of love stories, and relationship satisfaction associated with some love stories. His findings are discussed and implications are drawn through styles of relating perspective in this section.

Implications on Popularity

Popularity of a love story was determined by the number of individuals who participated in the story. The higher the number of individuals who chose to participate in a love story, the more popular the chosen story was believed to be.

Finding #1: Stories that were most popular were travel, garden, and humor stories (characterized by roughly equitable in control and mainly moving toward in relatedness).

Finding #2: The least popular stories were horror, collectibles, and autocratic government stories (characterized by one-top versus one-down in control paired with moving away- against in relatedness).

Based on the above findings, these implications can be made on the style of relating in romantic relationships.

Implication #1: Roughly equal and about average in control paired with mainly moving toward relating styles in romantic relationships are most popular among couples.

Implication #2: Unbalanced control paired with moving away or against relating styles in romantic relationships are least popular among couples.

Implications on Gender Differences

Sternberg's findings (1998, 2000) indicated a gender difference in choice of stories in actual relationships.

Finding #3: In actual relationships, males were more likely to participate in art, collectibles, and pornography stories (characterized by unbalanced control paired with moving away- against in relatedness) than females.

Finding #4: In actual relationships, females were more likely to participate in travel stories (characterized by moderate-high control paired with moving toward in relatedness) than males.

Finding #5: For ideal relationships, males were more likely to hope to have art, collectibles, and pornography stories (characterized by unbalanced control paired with moving away- against in relatedness) than females.

Finding #6: For ideal relationships, females were more likely to hope to have business stories (characterized by moderate-high control paired with moving away in relatedness) than males.

Implications and propositions from these findings are as follows.

Implication #3: Males were more likely to be involved in relationships that were associated with moving away or against paired with unbalanced control relating styles than females.

Implication #4: Females were more likely to be involved in stories that were equitable in control paired with a moving toward relating style.

Implication #5: Relationships associated with moving away or against paired with unbalanced control relating styles were more likely to be perceived ideal by males than females.

Implication #6: Relationships associated with moderate-high control paired with moving away in relatedness were more likely to be perceived ideal by females than males.

Implications on Relationship Satisfaction

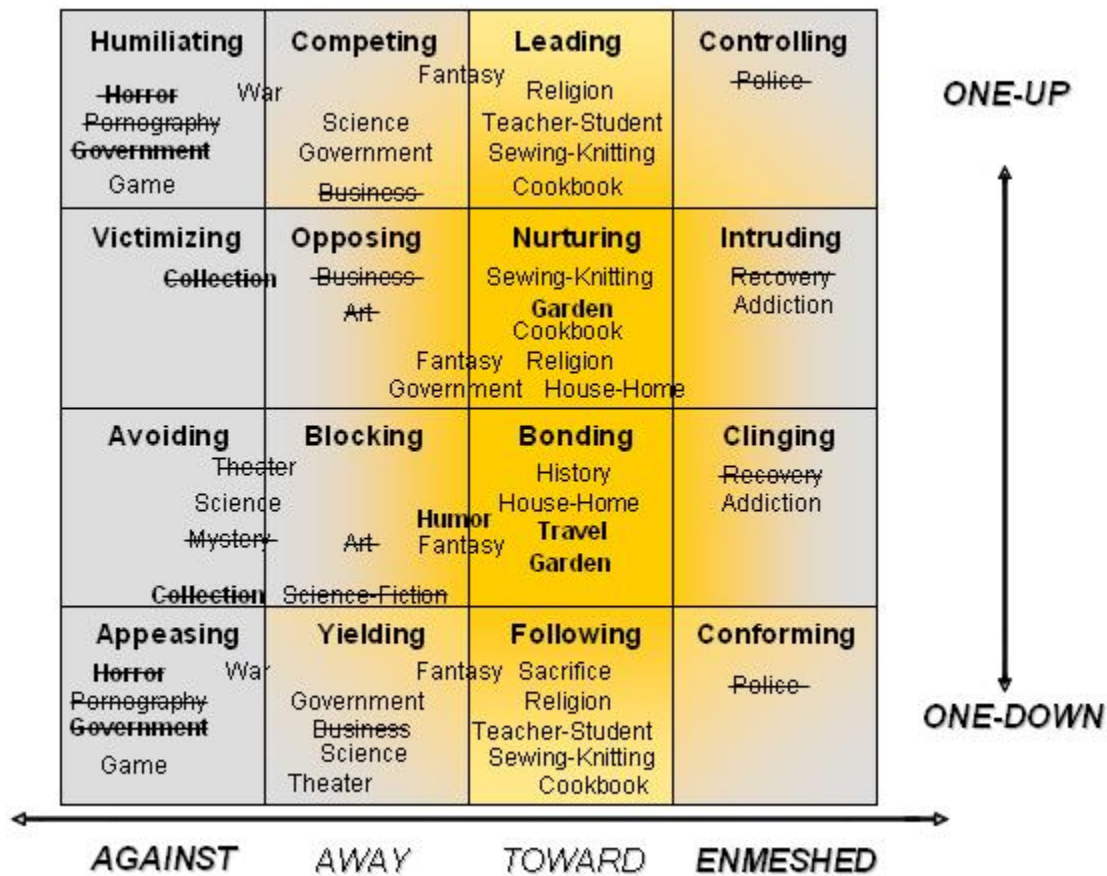
Finding #7: Business, collection, autocratic government, horror, mystery, police, recovery, science fiction, and theater stories were found to be associated with decreased satisfaction in close relationships.

Most of the stories mentioned in this finding share the characteristic of keeping unhealthy emotional distances (moving away or against or becoming enmeshed). The last implication can be drawn as follows:

Implication #7: People with relating styles that maintain unhealthy emotional distances (moving away or against or becoming enmeshed) in their close relationships have lower satisfaction with the relationships.

The implications above showed that stories with moving toward combined with a moderate to high or low to moderate relationship control approaches were found to be more popular than others. Therefore, these relating styles can be assumed to be ideal to couples in romantic relationships. Stories related to moving against, away, and enmeshed relating styles, regardless of the levels of control in the relationships, appear to be associated with decreased satisfaction.

Figure 8. Styles of Relating in Romantic Relationships Model with Sternberg’s Common Love Stories and Ideal Relating Styles Identified



Note.

1. The brighter the color of an area, the more popular the area is.
The darker the color of an area, the less popular the area is.
2. Stories that are stricken through are stories associated with low satisfaction.
3. Popular stories are in bold letters without a strikethrough line.
Least popular stories are in bold letters with a strikethrough line.

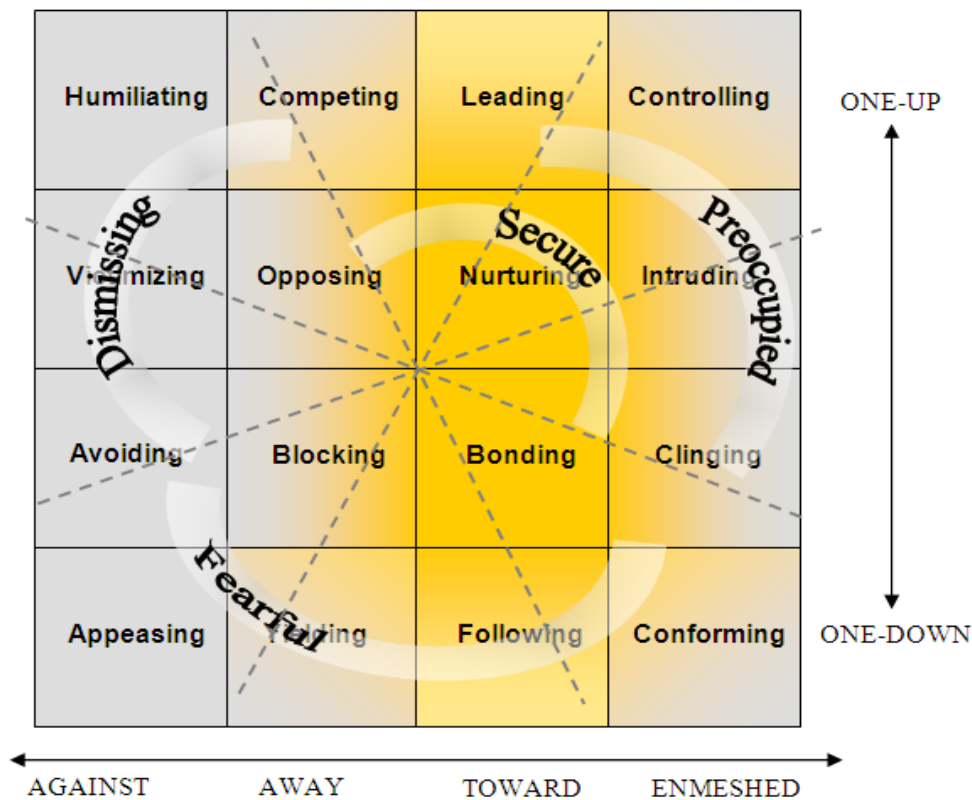
Based on the implications drawn from Sternberg’s (1998, 2000) findings on love stories (see Figure 8), couples in romantic relationships can be assumed to prefer “turning toward” relating styles regardless of their levels of relationship control. However, it is important to know that the findings from love stories are generally based on small samples so the implications should be treated as a reference instead of an established research result. It is also possible that

different individuals may choose or may be stuck at different levels of influence and closeness, depending on their personality or personal preferences, as studies on attachment theory tend to point out how individuals may choose or be stuck with certain attachment patterns.

Step 4: Connecting Relating Styles with Attachment Patterns

The next step for this study was to connect the model with attachment theory, to check its compatibility with attachment patterns, and test its usefulness in understanding and explaining couples' interactions. Figure 9 integrated the styles of relating model in terms of control and relatedness and adult attachment styles to display how couple relating styles can be connected with attachment patterns.

Figure 9. Styles of Relating Model Combined with Attachment Patterns



The visual representation shown in Figure 9 depicts how individuals with different attachment patterns are likely to function in close relationships. The secure pattern is different from other attachment patterns in that its interpersonal problems are not concentrated on a few

more problematic issues; instead, all of the interpersonal problems are similarly elevated between the lower average to higher average range with no one issue extremely different from the others, suggesting that the secure pattern is probably associated with moderation in one's behavior, and flexibility in approaching and dealing with interpersonal issues interchangeably. For this reason, secure individuals fall into optimal functioning areas and are more likely to be nurturing, bonding, or opposing to their partners. Preoccupied individuals fall into controlling, intruding, clinging, and leading relating styles and tend to demonstrate a variety of extreme interpersonal relating styles, ranging from one-up or enmeshed with the partners. Fearful individuals appeared to be rigid in their level of relationship control. Their relating styles may be yielding, following, appeasing, or conforming and they are almost always being submissive to others. Lastly, dismissing individuals seem to practice disengaging others. Their styles of relating may be competing, humiliating, victimizing, and/or avoiding, and mainly focus on turning against others.

As I attempted to piece together the research findings and models related to influence and closeness within couples, it became clear that researchers have been trying to understand the unique dynamics between couples through observations and quantitative measurements. According to the interpretations above, styles of relating in the romantic relationship model is compatible with attachment theory. Different attachment patterns can be placed on the model and provide reasonable and meaningful interpretations of couple relating styles. The interpersonal problems associated with each attachment pattern go along with different styles of relating as well. The styles of relating in the romantic relationships model was, therefore, used in this study to examine how couples balance influence and closeness in their relationships.

As mentioned previously, using control or power to describe couple relationships strikes a negative tone, so does one-up and one-down, or dominance. Couples may find it inapplicable to their relationship or feel offended by such expression. Although the styles of relating in the romantic relationships model is meaningful theoretically, the visual representations of relationship influence and couple closeness domains needed to be revised to make them less threatening and more applicable to the participating couples. Further revision of the model for study participants will be discussed in the *Measures* section. The next section will focus on the conceptual framework and theories that guided this study.

Conceptual Framework

It is common to find partners who do not see things eye to eye once in a while or work on an issue in the relationship as a couple but perceive and interpret that issue completely different from each other. Social constructionism in qualitative inquiry emphasizes the tendency of human nature in “constructing knowledge about reality, not constructing reality itself” (Shadish, 1995, p. 67). As Patton (2002) stated, “the world of human perception is not real in an absolute sense, as the sun is real, but is ‘made up’ and shaped by cultural and linguistic constructs” (p. 96), and is more so when it comes to perceived relationship satisfaction. Instead of upholding a truth that applies to everyone in a romantic relationship, social constructionists have proposed that people construct multiple realities based on their backgrounds and their understanding about the situations and thus creating *multiple truths* to any reality. There is no one truth that is truer or better than the other because they are just different ways to conceptualize the reality and are equally valid to different individuals (Patton, 2002). Social construction guides the researchers to explore an issue from the perspectives of their research participants. It also guides the researchers to interpret the contexts and facts as their research participants would interpret them.

A Constructivist Approach

Constructivism is an approach based on subjective reality. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), constructivism has the following primary assumptions:

First, “‘truth’ is a matter of consensus among informed and sophisticated constructors, not of correspondence with objective reality” (p. 44). One way to understand how this assumption works among couples is to study how couples describe their relationships. Research shows that couples use a variety of themes to describe their love stories. Couples co-create their storylines, plots, and characters and the details are generally unique and different from couple to couple (Sternberg, 1996, 1998). It does not matter whether other couples are using the same storylines, what matters most is that the couples believe in their stories, thus their stories are their reality.

Second, “‘facts’ have no meaning except within ‘some value framework, hence there cannot be an ‘objective’ assessment of any proposition” (p. 44). Although couples share an intimate partnership and some even have an extensive history together, they are still separate individuals with different backgrounds and values. One partner may come from a family or

culture that portrays conflict as necessary and healthy while the other perceives conflict as unnatural and destructive. When conflict does happen, as it will inevitably in any relationship, couples with contradicting values are bound to have very dissimilar views on what is going on and these views will directly impact their relationship satisfaction.

Third, “‘causes’ and effects do not exist except by imputation” (p. 44). As constructivism posits, reality is subjective. “What is defined or perceived by people as real is real in its consequences” (Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p. 572). The connections between causes and effects are drawn by the couples and they base their attributions on past experiences, backgrounds, and individual points of view. These attributions are personal and are affected by the contexts in which the couples live.

As a result, in order to understand how couples perceive and interpret their relating styles, this study needed to be sensitive in capturing couples’ personal thoughts, views, strategies, and stories. Both symbolic interaction and social exchange theories focus on individual perception and its impact on personal behaviors. These two theories were used to help guide this study.

Symbolic Interaction Theory

Symbolic Interaction Theory posits that people define situations based on their personal experiences and perspectives. They learn and create meanings through interactions with other people (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Therefore, two people in the same situation may perceive and interpret the situation very differently. Symbolic Interaction Theory is grounded on the idea that “what humans define as real has real consequences” (White & Klein, 2002, p. 60). In other words, personal interpretations and meanings create a facet of reality that is unique and significant for each individual.

One overarching theme in Symbolic Interaction Theory emphasizes the importance of the meaning in human behavior. The assumptions developed from this theme are particularly relevant to couple relationships. First, “people will react to something according to the meaning that the thing has for them” (Ingoldsby, Smith, & Miller, 2004, p. 84). Couples bring in different experiences, assumptions, and expectations to their partnerships. Their respective knowledge is the basis of how they make meaning out of a situation as well as how they evaluate and respond to it. Second, “[people] learn about meaning through interactions with others” (Ingoldsby et al., 2004, p. 84). Although couples look at their relationships from different lenses, they continue to

learn and adjust their perspectives through their interactions with their partners and with people outside of their relationships. How they understand and interpret their situation is a combined product of making sense of symbols, social norms, and roles evolving around their relationships. Third, “as people come into contact with different things and experiences, they interpret what is being learned” (Ingoldsby et al., 2004, p. 85). The partnership opens up opportunities to negotiate differences and handle difficult issues that couples may never have had to face before they established their relationships. They will interpret what is being learned and choose to settle their issues one way or the other. It is inevitable for couples to have different opinions. Consequently, it is important to explore and understand the dynamics of couple interaction through carefully studying how couples perceive their relationships and how they balance and accommodate each other’s needs.

Social Exchange Theory

The basic concept of Social Exchange Theory is that interpersonal relationships revolve around “the exchange of resources valued by the participants” (Ingoldsby et al., 2004, p. 55). Like Symbolic Interaction Theory, Social Exchange Theory posits that people make decisions based on their own perception and interpretation of a situation. However, Social Exchange Theory takes a step further and applies economic principles to human interactions to explain how people may choose to act or react in a certain way based on the anticipated cost and reward of a situation with the resources that are available to them. There are four basic assumptions in Social Exchange Theory. First, “people are motivated by self-interest” (Ingoldsby et al., 2004, p.56); in other words, they “seek rewards and avoid punishments or costs” (p. 56). Couples may not purposefully operate on the principles of gaining from their relationships, but it is quite common for couples to seek the things they desire in the relationships and avoid things they perceive undesirable. For some individuals, sacrificing some influence in the relationships is worthwhile if they can gain some closeness to their partners. For others, the sense of control is not something that can be compromised but the areas of their influence are negotiable. It all depends on their own definitions of rewards and costs. Second, “individuals are constrained by their choices” (Ingoldsby et al., 2004, p. 56). Couples make choices based on the alternatives they perceive to be available to them. This perception is limited by past experiences. Since this study focused on understanding the couples’ motivations in balancing their influence and closeness in the

relationships, studying the choices the couples made and their perceptions while making decisions, may shed light on their motivation. Third, “humans are rational beings” (Ingoldsby et al., 2004, p. 56). Although couples may make decisions that seem irrational to outsiders, according to Social Exchange Theory, couples seek solutions that lead to the least cost, based on what they perceive to be the least cost. Fourth, “social relationships are also characterized by interdependence” (Ingoldsby et al., 2004, p. 56). This assumption is regulated by the “expectations or norms of reciprocity and fairness” (p. 56). It is rather common to see and expect reciprocity within couple relationships. Couples may not set out to give something in order to gain something in return. But the effort, the time, and the emotions they invest in their partners, appear to indicate that they do expect to see mutual effort in return. On the other hand, when partners perceive they have profited in one area, they may seek to return the favor or give something to another area to strengthen their bond. In summary, it is very appropriate to use Social Exchange Theory to explore and understand how couples balance and negotiate influence and closeness in their relationships.

Study’s Contribution to the Field

The goals of this study were to investigate the techniques or approaches couples use to balance their relating styles in terms of relationship influence and couple closeness, the themes associated with different relating styles, ways couples handle discrepancies and incompatibilities, and the relationship issues associated with specific relating styles. Research tends to study influence and closeness in couple relationships separately. The definitions and foci also change from study to study. Conceptual models related to influence and closeness on the interpersonal level and family system have been developed, but a theoretical model on the couple level which helps professionals understand how couples relate to each other currently is lacking.

This study begins to fill the gap in the research by creating an integrated model to understand couple relating styles and give voice to couples and allow them to share their experiences on how they balance influence and closeness in their relationships. Through the lens of Symbolic Interaction Theory and Social Exchange Theory, this study helps identify the cognitive and behavioral strategies couples use to relate to each other while striving to meet mutual needs for influence and closeness.

Chapter 3 - Methods

This study examined the relationships of couples to further the understanding on how couples balance influence and closeness in their relationships. In order to capture a variety of relating styles in romantic relationships and to facilitate the selection of couples for interviews, a short screening survey was used to collect preliminary data. The preliminary data were used to select eight couples displaying a variety of relational styles. In-depth interviews were then conducted with the selected couples to explore the relating issues and details of couple interactions.

Rationale for Qualitative Methodology

The purpose of the study was to explore how couples balance influence and closeness in their relationships and how relationship issues may be associated with their relational patterns. Past research in this area mostly relied on quantitative methods based on standardized instruments with limited flexibility in exploring insights and individual interpretations among the respondents. Qualitative methods, however, can allow researchers to study couple interactions in depth without preconceived ideas regarding how couples may describe their relationships. According to Patton (2002), open-ended interviews facilitate the collection of “in-depth responses about people’s experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings, and knowledge” (p. 14) and allow researchers to “understand the world as seen by the respondents” (p. 21). The need to understand and explore how couples negotiate their relating styles and relationship issues makes qualitative inquiry a perfect match for the goals of this study.

Qualitative inquiry can be employed from various perspectives and approaches. Each perspective or approach leads to a set of unique strategies to meet the needs of the purposes, questions, and situations of a study. The following sections discuss the research questions of this study and the strategies used to collect and analyze the data for the study.

Research Questions

The styles of relating in terms of influence and closeness are important indicators of relationship satisfaction among couples. Levels of relationship influence and couple closeness vary from couple to couple. Compatibilities of couples’ relating styles can impact relationship satisfaction. Research has implied that compatible styles of relating are those in which the

partners are roughly equal in influence, those in which one partner is high and one is low in influence, or those in which partners are roughly equal in closeness. Incompatible styles of relating refer to couples in which both partners are high in influence or in which one is high and one is low in closeness (Sternberg, 1998, 2000). Discrepancies in partners' desired and perceived styles of relating also affect relationship satisfaction (Harper & Elliott, 1988). Couples may use different interacting and reasoning strategies to balance influence and closeness in their relationships. Last but not the least, studies have presented multiple definitions for closeness and influence, but further clarification is still to be desired. There is no way of knowing what definitions couples are using without checking what they mean by influence or closeness. Therefore, it is important to investigate the following research questions:

1. How do couples define influence and closeness?
2. How do couples share influence and maintain closeness?
3. How do discrepancies in relating styles affect couple relationships?
4. How do compatibilities in relating styles affect couple relationships?
5. How are relationship issues associated with influence and closeness?

Participants

Eight married couples residing in northeastern Kansas were included in this study. The youngest couple was 24 and 23 years old and the oldest couple was 43 and 41 years old. The mean age for husbands was 31.8 and for wives was 31.3. The length of marriage varied, with one couple being married for only six months, four couples 2-4 years, two couples 8-11 years, and one couple 17 years. Among all couples, three wives were 1-3 years older than their husbands while the rest of the husbands were at least two years older than their wives. The couples were recruited from a university student body, so at least one partner in each pair was a student or had just completed a degree. Four out of eight couples had one partner who was working on or had finished a graduate degree. Five wives had a higher education than their husbands (e.g., some college/technical/vocational and BA, BA and MA). Five out of eight couples were childless. Two couples had one child and one couple had three children.

Sample Recruitment

The goal of the data collection was to interview at least eight couples with maximum variation in their relating styles. Maximum variation is a purposeful sampling strategy that

prevents “one-sidedness of representation” of a research topic (Patton, 2002, p. 109) and facilitates the selection of “information-rich cases for study in depth” (p. 230). In order to create a sample pool big enough for maximum variation sampling, email invitations were sent to students at a large public university through the university E-Note services. The email invitation with the link to an online screening survey was distributed to 9,202 undergraduate and graduate students in the colleges of arts and sciences, education, and human ecology to collect data on basic demographics, relating styles, and relationship satisfaction. Criteria for study participation were given in the invitation so students who were not in a romantic relationship or did not live with a current partner would know this survey was not intended for them. Respondents who were interested in the couple interview were asked to create a 6-digit secret code with their partners in advance. They were then asked to guide their partners to visit the same link and complete a copy of the survey separately. Consent for a couple interview was included at the end of the screening survey. If respondents agreed to participate in the couple interview, they were directed to a separate web page to submit their contact information. If participants did not wish to participate in the couple interview, they were prompted to close the browser to end the survey. The survey took approximately 5-10 minutes for each participant to complete.

Four hundred and five surveys were initiated by the email recipients, 222 surveys that were recorded as never finished in the survey system were dropped, yielding 183 valid entries in the end. Because this study focused on couples who lived together and both agreed to a couple interview, surveys that could not be matched as a couple or matched but did not reside together, and entries which indicated either one or both partners did not want to participate in the interview were all dropped from the sample, thus 15 couples remained as possible participants. Except for three couples, the couples were white and predominantly married. Consistent with research findings of the past (Sternberg, 1998, 2000), most couples in the sample pool clustered around common styles of relating and reported to have at least mid-high levels of closeness with their partners. Although a small sample may have led to few couples with diverse relating styles, the fact that 12 out of 15 couples in the sample identified themselves with higher than average levels of closeness suggested that “informational redundancy” had occurred consistently (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 202). Considering that couples with extreme relating styles may be difficult to find, maximum variation was believed to be achieved in this sample pool.

Selection of Interview Sample

To facilitate the selection process of couple interview candidates, four relating groups were formed based on levels of couple closeness because there were more distinct variations of closeness but less variations in relationship influence across couples: extremely high levels of closeness (four couples), high levels of closeness (seven couples), and mid-high levels of closeness (two couples). The remaining two couples placed themselves in noticeably different levels of closeness and influence than the rest of the respondents. Both couples had one partner with mid-high levels of influence and the other with mid-low or low levels of influence. Both pairs also differed considerably from each other in terms of closeness. One partner reported experiencing lower than average levels of closeness while the other partner reported experiencing average or mid-high levels of closeness at best. Relating styles of the couples will be presented with description of participants in the next section.

One thing unique about the couples in this sample was that no two couple's relational patterns were exactly alike. Since couples were asked to assess the relationship separately and filled out the online screening survey privately, the couples had to determine where they were in the relationship, where they desired to be, their partner's placement in the relationship, and where they saw their partner wanted to be based on personal perceptions. The combinations and variations were innumerable, thus even when couples identified themselves in similar areas, their perceptions about their relationships and their partners still differed in many ways when compared with other couples with similar styles of relating.

In order to achieve maximum variation, couples who appeared to be particularly compatible or incompatible, or had discrepancies in their perceived and desired relating styles, or had different levels of relationship satisfaction despite having similar styles of relating were extended the couple interview invitation. Not all couples invited agreed to be interviewed. When that happened, the next couple in the group was contacted and invited. Two pairs of couples from each group agreed to the couple interview. Thus a total of eight couples were included in the study.

Description of Participants

The list of couples below is ordered by closeness, from the closest to the farthest, as reported by couples in their screening surveys. In the surveys, participants were asked to report

their individual perception without discussing it with their partners. So the closeness and influence the couples reported were based on their personal opinions at that time. The survey figure on the top right by each couple's description was plotted according to the separate reports from each participant. F represents wife's perceived relating style. FD represents wife's desired relating style. M represents husband's perceived relating style. MD represents husband's desired relating style. The interview figure on the bottom right by each couple's description was couple's joint report during the interview.

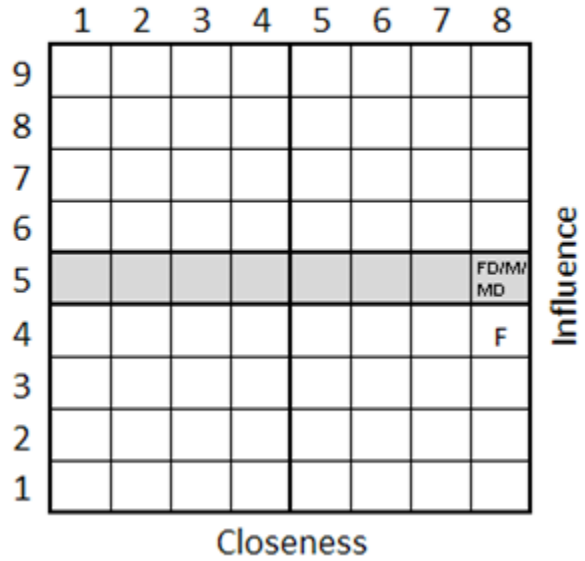
Due to the dynamic nature of couple interactions, the relating styles reported by couples during the interviews were somewhat different from their survey results. The following description of participants and their relating styles were based on the couple's reports in the interview. Data analysis, results, and discussion were also based on couple's reports in the interview.

Greg and Gracie

Greg (29 years old) and Gracie (24 years old) met each other at a bar when Gracie was in town to spend time with her friends for a special occasion. Greg was very attracted to Gracie and started his pursuit immediately. Gracie moved into town and started her master’s program at the university and to get to know Greg better. The couple was married for about six months at the time of the interview and still seemed very much like newlyweds in their honeymoon stage. They do not plan to have children any time soon and do not think children need to happen in order to make them happy. They said that they recognize what they have is special and they want to keep it that way. Both Greg and Gracie identified themselves to be rather close to each other and equal in their relationship, and that is how they desire to relate to each other.

Survey

Styles of Relating



Interview

Styles of Relating

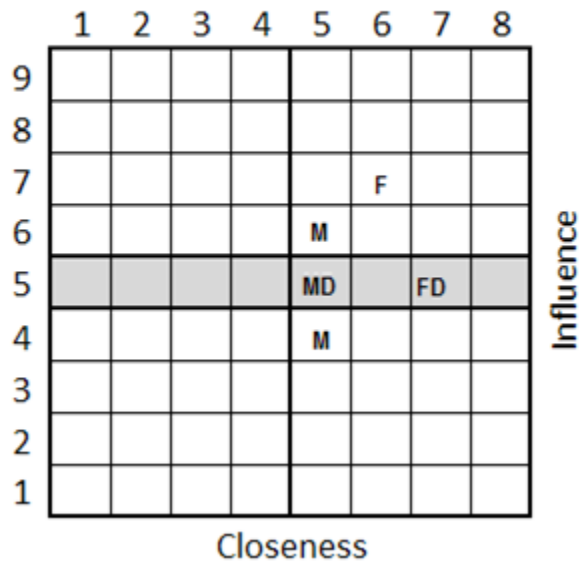


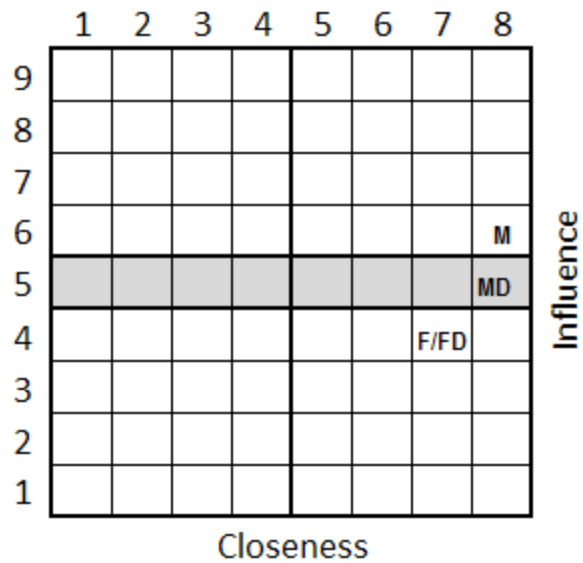
Figure 10. Relating Styles for Greg and Gracie

Danny and Deirdre

Danny (36 years old) was originally from the west coast and Deirdre (39 years old) was from the east coast. Both of them were divorced when they met each other four and a half years ago through friends on an online dating website. They got married within a year and relocated for Danny’s military assignment. Deirdre reported that Danny has ADHD and the issue has added immense stress to their marriage. The couple went through marital counseling before and had read numerous self-help books, trying very hard to make their marriage work. At the time of interview, Deirdre is working on her master’s degree. She reported that dealing with Danny’s ADHD and lots of dogs they own, they do not plan to have children in the future. Both Danny and Deirdre identified themselves to be equal and very close to each other. They also reported that their relating styles matched what they desired for their relationship.

Survey

Styles of Relating



Interview

Styles of Relating

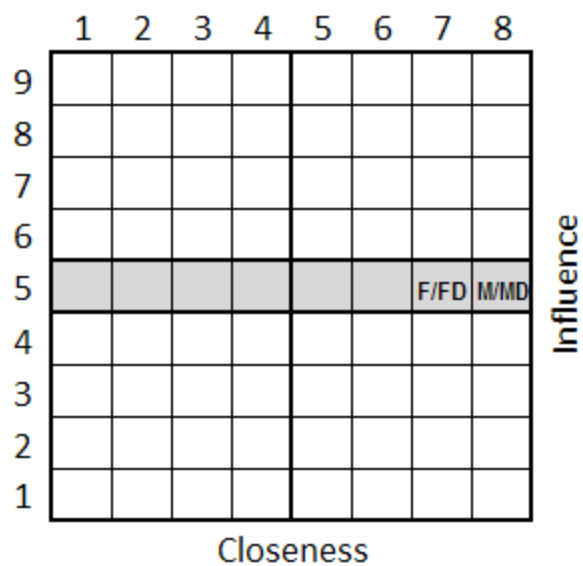


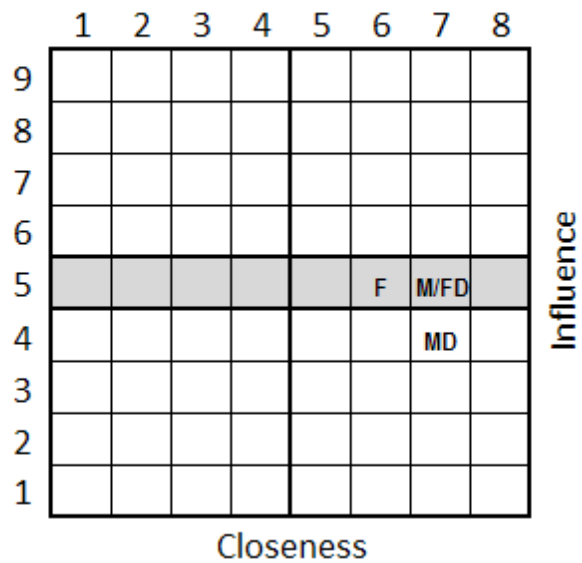
Figure 11. Relating Styles for Danny and Deirdre

Adam and Amanda

Adam (24 years old) and Amanda (23 years old) were married for a little over two years. They considered themselves completely opposite but somehow they ended up together and reported to balance each other pretty well. At the time of interview, Adam was graduating while Amanda had earned a BA degree and had been teaching. The couple was planning to move to where Adam’s family lived but Amanda was feeling a little stressed. She had to leave her job and move with Adam to a city she had never been to before, taking on a clerical position and attempting to locate another teaching job. Adam was very busy working on his degree for the past few years so Amanda had been feeling left out. In the interview, Amanda identified herself to be only somewhat close to Adam, although she preferred to be extremely close to him. She also reported to have less influence in their relationship and desired to be Adam’s equal. Adam identified himself to be very close to Amanda and had less influence in the relationship, but he felt that the way he related to Amanda worked well for him.

Survey

Styles of Relating



Interview

Styles of Relating

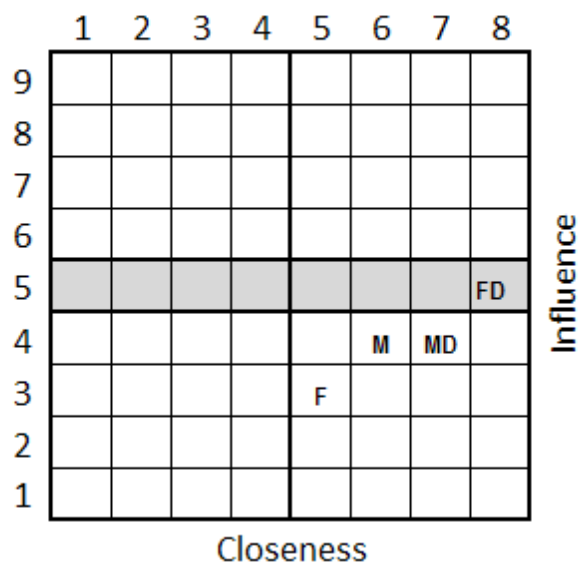


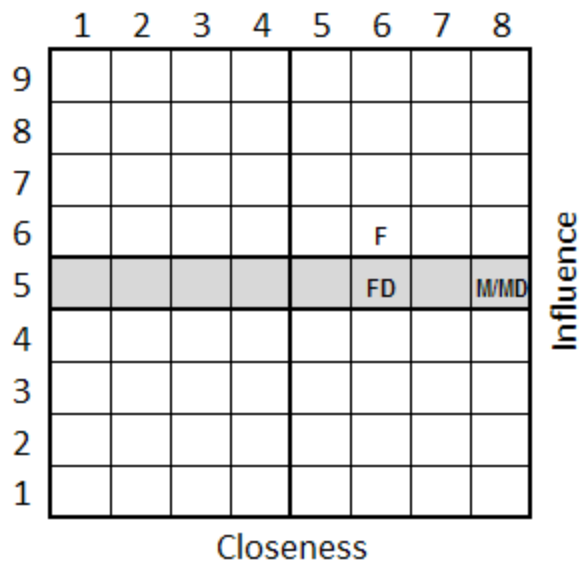
Figure 12. Relating Styles for Adam and Amanda

Chad and Carrie

Chad (43 years old) and Carrie (41 years old) met each other when they were both stationed overseas. Carrie left the military after they got married 17 years ago so they could start a family while Chad remains in the army. The couple relocated to their current residence for Chad’s military assignment. They survived multiple deployments in their marriage and had been living in the same town for seven years. Carrie was a graduate teaching assistant in the university and was expecting to graduate soon. Chad was planning to retire from the military when Carrie graduated. They had a nine year old son, Cade, and both of them were very devoted into raising him and looking forward to sharing an important part of his life in the future. Chad reported to feel equal and extremely close to Carrie. Carrie identified herself to be equal and very close to Chad in the relationship. Both of them were happy with how they related to each other.

Survey

Styles of Relating



Interview

Styles of Relating

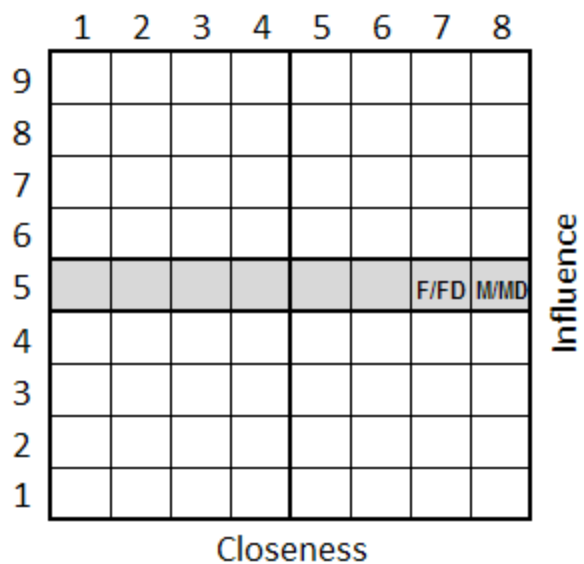


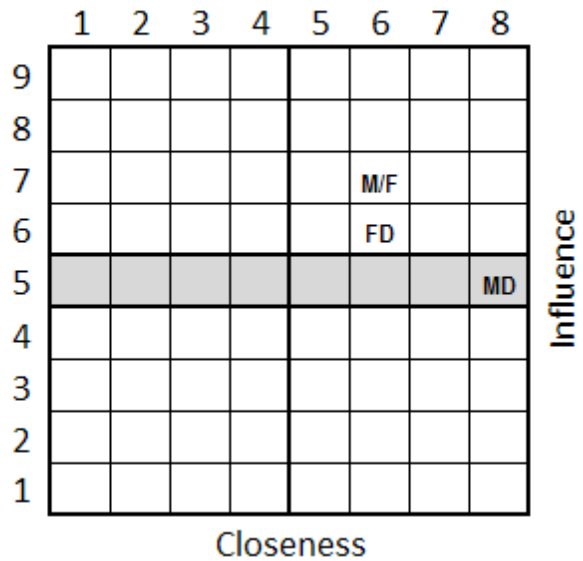
Figure 13. Relating Styles for Chad and Carrie

Henry and Hazel

Henry (40 years old) was a police officer who often worked on night shifts. Hazel (38 years old) was working on her doctoral degree. Henry’s father was in the navy, so Henry had lived all over when growing up. The couple met each other at a bar in town through friends. They had been married for eight years and had a six year old son together. At the time of interview, they reported having to frequently shuffle their schedules and juggle various tasks to meet the needs of everyone in the family. Much of the stress and struggle was due to Henry’s constantly changing work shifts and Hazel’s busy schedules both at work and school. Henry identified himself as holding equal influence with Hazel in the relationship while Hazel felt she had less influence in their marriage. Hazel reported to feel extremely close to Henry while Henry felt very close but desired to be extremely close to Hazel.

Survey

Styles of Relating



Interview

Styles of Relating

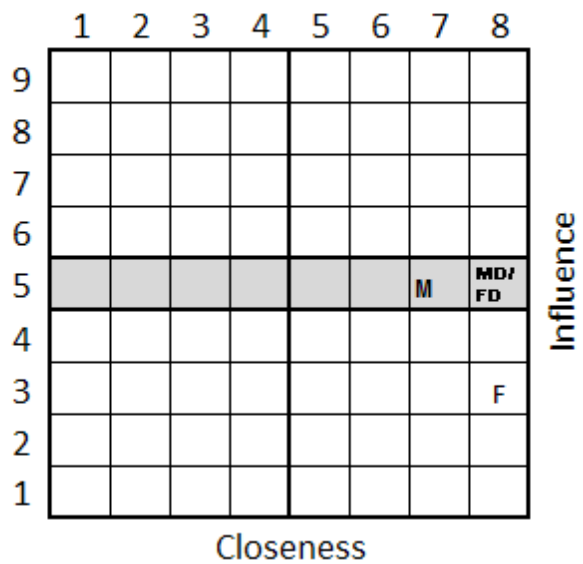


Figure 14. Relating Styles for Henry and Hazel

Brandon and Bridget

Both Brandon (24 years old) and Bridget (25 years old) had just finished their master’s degrees. At the time of interview, the couple was moving to where Brandon had made plans to attend a university for a one-year program. Bridget was looking for work to support Brandon’s education. When Brandon is done with his program next year, he plans to work and support Bridget for her doctoral program. Brandon and Bridget were married for two years. Bridget said that it was challenging for her to live with a man at the beginning. She got anxious easily and liked to be in control. Between the two of them, Brandon was the one who was laid back and tried to get Bridget to do fun things together so she could relax and calm down. Brandon reported feeling extremely close to Bridget and had less influence than she in their relationship. The couple was comfortable with the fact that Bridget needed a lot more control and autonomy (very close but not too close) in the relationship. Both of them indicated that they were where they would like to be in terms of influence and closeness.

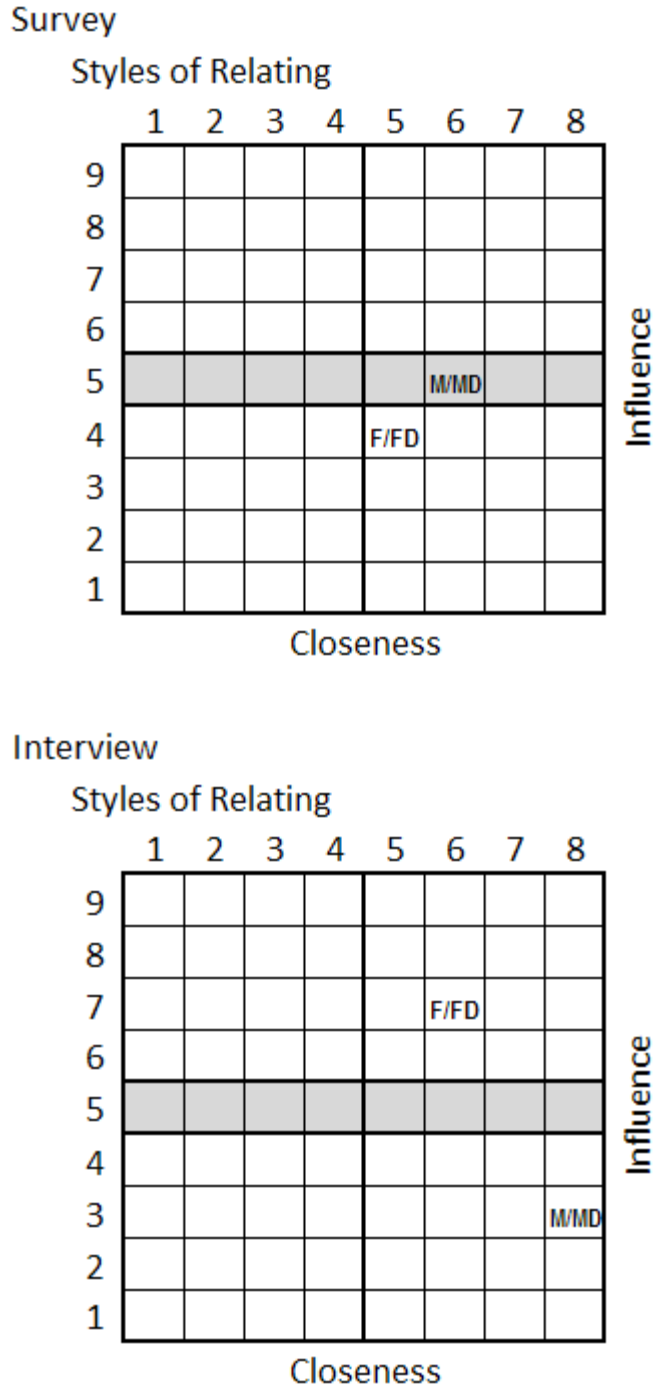


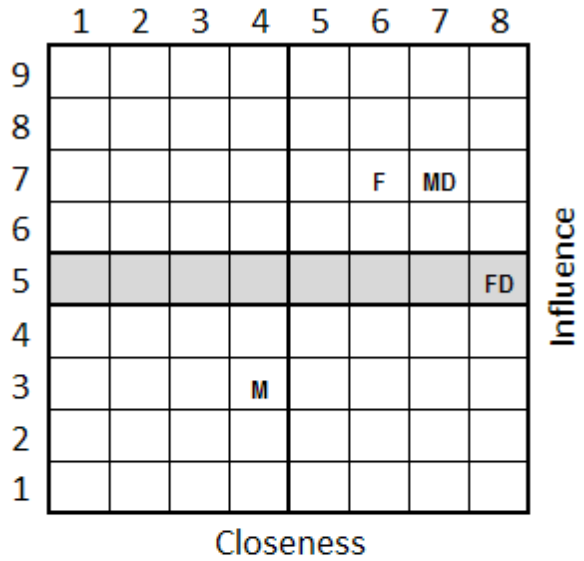
Figure 15. Relating Styles for Brandon and Bridget

Ethan and Ella

Ehan (32 years old) and Ella (30 years old) met each other when they were both undergraduate students in a university back home and got married at their early 20's. Ethan started his doctoral program soon after their marriage. In order to support Ethan's education, Ella had been teaching. At the time of interview, the couple was planning a move to where Ethan would start his postdoctoral position. Ethan and Ella said that they bickered a lot. The couple used to be very active outdoors but busy schedules and lack of outdoor activities kept them from doing things they enjoyed the most. They reported having arguments constantly because both of them were very opinionated and strong willed. During the interview, Ethan reported feeling somewhat distant from Ella and was holding more power in the relationship. Ella, on the other hand, felt quite close to Ethan and did feel she had less influence in the relationship. Both Ethan and Ella desired to become extremely close to each other. Ella desired to become equal with Ethan, but Ethan desired to have less influence in their relationship.

Survey

Styles of Relating



Interview

Styles of Relating

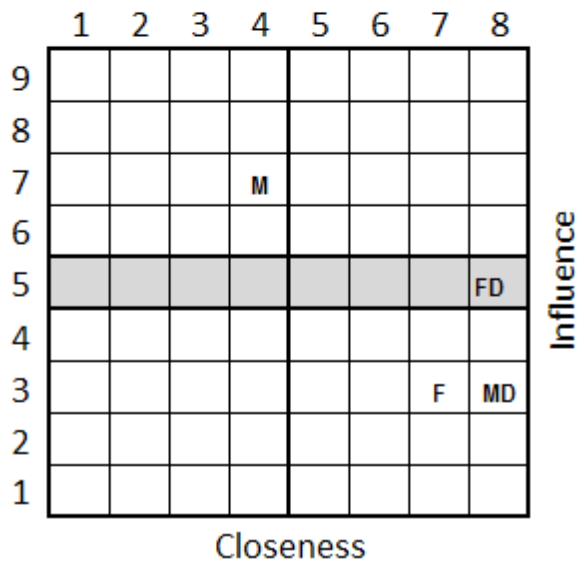


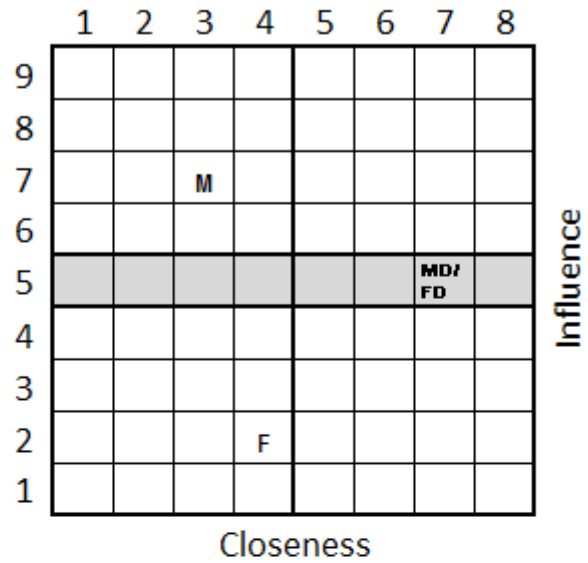
Figure 16. Relating Styles for Ethan and Ella

Felix and Fay

Felix (27 years old) and Fay (30 years old) met each other at a bar. Fay was raising Felicia (10) as a single parent when she met Felix. She started pursuing Felix because she was very attracted to him. The couple got married about four years ago and had two more children together (Forrest 4; Freddy 1). Felix was a construction worker and seldom home. Fay was working on her teaching license and expected to graduate with a bachelor's degree in a year. The couple reported multiple issues and tremendous stress from dealing with extended families and parenting a household of young children. Both Felix and Fay desired to be very close and to be equal in their relationship. However, Felix identified himself as having much less influence and feeling distant to Fay. Fay identified herself higher in influence than Felix and feeling close to him.

Survey

Styles of Relating



Interview

Styles of Relating

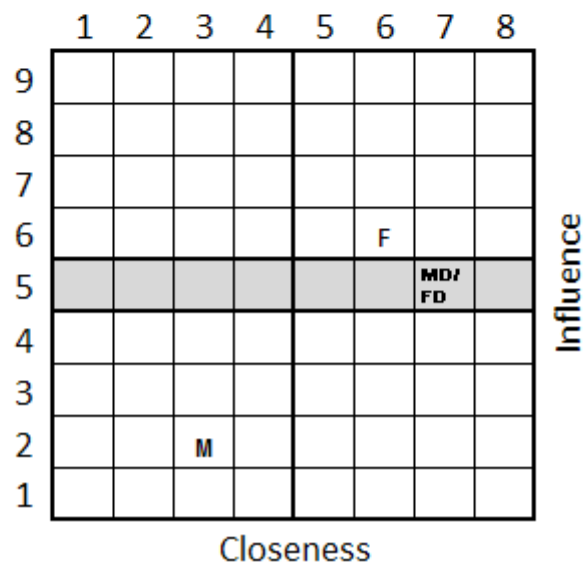


Figure 17. Relating Styles for Felix and Fay

Measures

Three scales and a model were used in the study. The Styles of Relating Scale was used to collect information on perceived and desired relationship influence and couple closeness from survey respondents. The Relationship Assessment Scale also was used to assess relationship satisfaction of the survey respondents. The Styles of Relating Model – Couple Map was designed for the couple interview to facilitate couple discussion of how influence and closeness were balanced in their relationships. The Dyadic Consensus Subscale also was used in the couple interviews to explore relationship issues.

Styles of Relating Scale

The Styles of Relating Scale (SRS) was developed to help survey participants estimate their levels of couple closeness (4 items) and relationship influence (4 items) in this study.

Couple closeness items were adapted from The Inclusion of Other in the Self scale (IOS; Aron, Aron & Smollan, 1992). The original one-item scale used seven pairs of circles depicting varying levels of closeness in romantic relationships to measure how close one was to his or her partner. The seven pairs of circles presented the lowest level of intimacy with the circles barely touching each other, to the highest level of intimacy with the circles literally overlapping each other. Therefore, for the purpose of the study, the visuals of this scale were modified into eight pairs of circles to include four pairs of varying couple distances (non-overlapping circles) and four pairs of varying couple closeness (overlapping circles) in order to correspond to the couple closeness dimension in the styles of relating model (See Attachment: Styles of Relating-Couple Closeness).

To measure couple closeness, respondents were asked how close they are (i.e., perceived closeness) and how close they desire to be with their partners (i.e., desired closeness) on an 8-point Likert-type scale, ranging from two circles clearly apart (1) to two circles almost literally overlapping each other (8). High scores reflect a perceived/desired high closeness in the relationship while low scores reflect a perceived/desired high distance in the relationship. To measure respondents' perception on partners' closeness to them, respondents were asked to rate how close they perceive their partners are to them and how close they perceive their partners desire to be with them using the same scale. High scores reflect that respondents perceive their

partners are very close or desire to be very close to them while low scores reflect the respondents perceive their partners are very distant or desire to be very distant to them.

The relationship influence items incorporated the same concept from the couple closeness items by using pairs of different sizes of squares representing Self and Partner to depict varying levels of influence in the relationship. The respondent was directed to choose from the lowest level of influence with the Self square almost twice as small as the Partner square, to the highest level of influence with the Self square almost twice as big as the Partner square. A pair of squares equal in size was included to allow participants to identify themselves as equal in influence in their relationships (See Attachment: Styles of Relating-Relationship influence).

To measure relationship influence, participants were asked to rate how much influence they have in their relationship and then how much influence they desire to have on an 9-point Likert-type scale, ranging from the Self square being overshadowed by Partner square (1) to the Self square overshadowing Partner square (9). High scores reflect a perceived/desired high influence in the relationship while low scores reflect a perceived/desired low influence in the relationship. To measure respondents' perception of partners' relationship influence, respondents were asked to rate how much influence they perceive their partners currently have in the relationship and how much influence they perceive their partners desire to have using the same scale. High scores show the respondents perceive their partners as high in influence (or as desiring to be high in influence) while low scores reflect the respondents perceive their partners as low in influence (or as desiring to have less influence) in their relationship.

Relationship Assessment Scale

The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS: Hendrick, 1988) measures relationship satisfaction for close relationships. The scale contains seven questions that are scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from low satisfaction (1) to high satisfaction (5) which yields a total score from 7-35. Higher scores indicate greater relationship satisfaction. The scale has been found to be correlated significantly with measures such as love, self-disclosure, and commitment and can be used to discriminate couples who are at risk of breaking up. According to Hendrick (1988), RAS is correlated .80 with Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976; Spanier & Thompson, 1982) and has an alpha reliability of .86.

Styles of Relating Model – Couple Map

The Styles of Relating Model – Couple Map was adapted from the Styles of Relating in Romantic Relationships Model shown in Figure 8. Two major changes were made to the original model to make it more appropriate and easier to use in interviewing couples. On the closeness dimension, instead of using labels such as against, away, toward, and enmeshed, three pairs of circles were used to represent the lowest level of closeness (two circles clearly away from each other), the middle level of closeness (two circles placing side by side), and the highest level of closeness (circles literally overlapping each other.) On the influence dimension, instead of using labels such as one up and one down, three sets of squares were used to represent the highest level of influence (Self square overshadowing Partner square), the middle level of influence or equal in influence (Self and Partner squares equal in size), and the lowest level of influence (Self square being overshadowed by Partner square.) The couple map was used to help interview participants visualize their perceived and desired styles of relating and facilitate their discussion on how they interact with each other within their relationships.

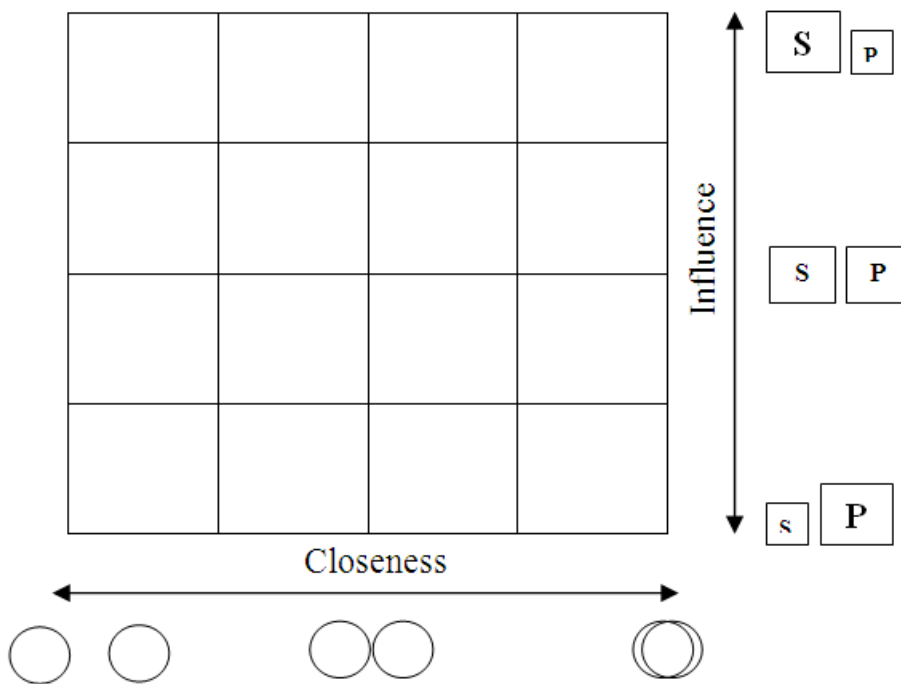


Figure 18. Styles of Relating Model – Couple Map

Dyadic Consensus Subscale

The Dyadic Consensus Subscale was used during the interview to encourage couples to discuss issues important to their relationships. Dyadic consensus reflects issues and conflicts that couples experience in their relationships and is a subscale of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976). DAS has an alpha of .96 as a total score and has four subscales: dyadic satisfaction (.94), dyadic cohesion (.81), dyadic consensus (.90), and affectional expression (.73). The Dyadic Consensus Subscale measures the degree to which the married or cohabiting couple agrees on matters of importance to the relationship. The 15-item subscale covers areas of potential conflict and consensus between couples which include handling family finances, friends, and making major decisions. The results yield a score which ranges from 0 to 75, with higher scores indicating more consensus between the couple and lower scores indicating more disagreements between the couple than average couples (Fischer & Corcoran, 1994; Graham, Liu, & Jeziorski, 2006; Spanier, 1976). The Dyadic Consensus Subscale was chosen to be included in this study because it helps to capture a variety of relationship issues which are pertinent to this study.

Procedure

Interviews were face-to-face and conducted at locations chosen by the couples. Most couples preferred to be interviewed at a private location on university campus (e.g., a classroom in the university library, a conference room in an academic building). A few couples chose to be interviewed in their own home. They were informed that the interview was to explore and ascertain how they share decision making together and stay close as a couple. They were told they would be given open-ended questions and could choose to respond to or skip any questions freely. All interviews were audio-taped and video-taped under the couples' agreement for transcription and data analysis. Couples were informed that the recordings and researcher's notes were for analytical purposes and would only be accessible to the research team. The average length of interview was 1.5 hours. Couples were interviewed together, free of children and with minimal distractions.

At the beginning of the interview, couples were asked to read the informed consent (see Appendix B) and sign it if they agreed to be interviewed. The interview guidelines, which include how the interview would proceed in general and issues that might emerge during the

interviewing process, were explained to the couples. Couples were informed that the interview was not counseling and should be seen as an open discussion that allowed them to share their feelings and thoughts from their own perspectives. If at any point during the interview, one (or both) of them felt uncomfortable about the issues being discussed, they could choose to skip the topics or discontinue the interview. Relationship enrichment and counseling referral information were available and offered to couples at the end of interview for them to use at their own discretion.

Interview

(Script) Thank you for participating in this study. The purpose of the study is to find out how couples relate to each other and how their relationship satisfaction is associated with it. In this interview, I'll ask you how you generally share decision making together and stay close as a couple. The responses you give me will be anonymous and only be used to understand how couples work things out in their daily lives. The interview questions may prompt you to think about things that you've never thought before. This will be a good opportunity for both of you to learn more about each other. I am not looking for perfect answers. There are definitely no right or wrong things to say. Your responses only reflect your personal opinions. It is normal for each of us to think differently, even for couples. So take your time when you respond to a question. Feel free to ask me questions when you need clarification.

Your participation is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw or to skip any questions if you want to. In order for me to analyze and study the results, it is necessary for me to audio- and video-tape our interview session. Your identity will not be attached to the recordings, and no one else will be able to listen to or view the recordings unless they are part of the research team. All recordings will be destroyed when the project is done.

Opening – getting basic information:

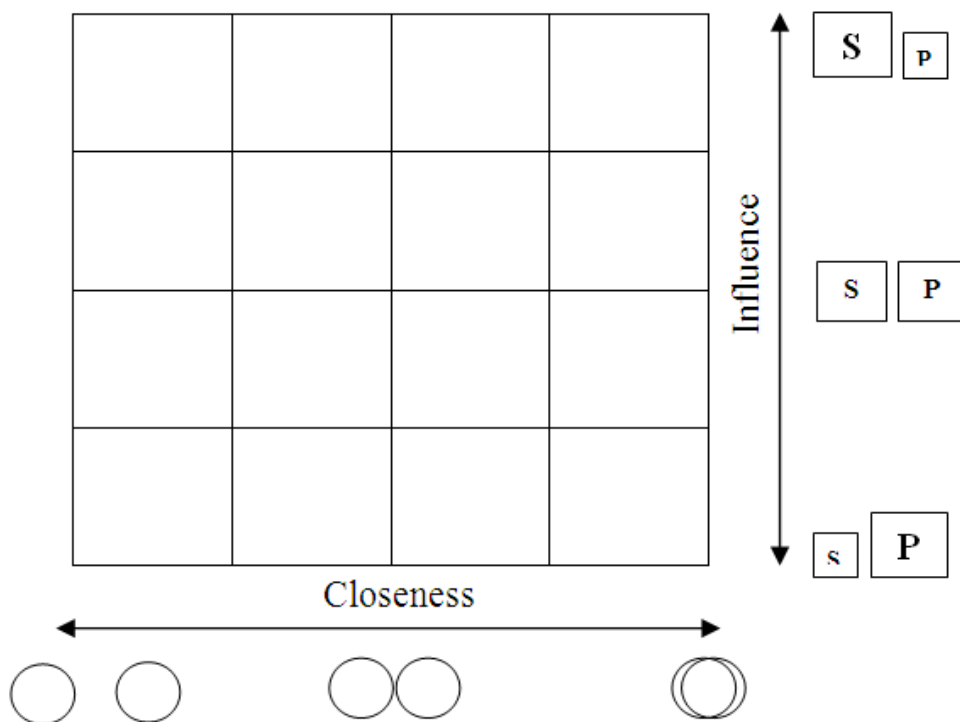
1. How did you meet each other?
2. What were the qualities that attracted you to each other? How about now? (If the qualities are not the same, ask them why.)
3. How compatible would you say you are for each other and in what ways?
4. In your relationship, what were some happy or positive moments in the past that you still think about regularly?
5. In your relationship, what were some challenging moments in the past that you still think about regularly?
6. What are some positive things happening right now in your relationship?
7. What are some challenging things happening right now in your relationship?

Research Question #1: How do couples define influence and closeness?

(Address to both partner.)

1. Between the two of you, who has more influence on decision making for things concerning both of you?
How do you determine that? Can you give me some examples?
How did it turn out to be this way?
Do you do things to balance the situation? If yes, what do you do to balance the situation?
2. Between the two of you, who does more to keep you close as a couple?
How do you determine that? Can you give me some examples?
How did it turn out to be this way?
What do you do to stay close to each other?
Do you do things to stay close? If yes, what do you do to stay close to each other?

Present the Style of Relating Model – Couple Map to the couple and give each partner a pencil and paper for note-taking.



(Script) This picture shows you different ways that couples may balance their influence and closeness in their relationship. In some relationships, one person may have a lot of influence (*point to the influence dimension and stop at top of the line*) and whatever he or she says can pretty much determine the outcome while the other partner follows most of the time. In some relationships, couples feel like they are pretty equal and are close to each other (*point to the closeness dimension and stop at middle of the line*). Couples may hold different perspectives on how much influence and closeness they share in their relationship, so now I am going to ask a series of questions to one of you first to get an overall idea on how each of you personally sees yourself relate to your partner. Then I will ask the other person the same set of questions. After the rotation, you will have a chance to discuss your thoughts together. Feel free to write down anything you want to talk about while listening to my interview so you won't forget your ideas. Now, who should I ask first?

Research Question #2: How do couples share influence and maintain closeness?

(Address to one partner.)

1. Typically, in your relationship, where are you on this picture?
2. How do you determine that this is where you belong?
3. How comfortable do you feel about being at this spot? *(If uncomfortable, ask: What keeps you here?)*
4. How long have you been here?
5. Can you think of a time you were not at this spot?
6. Where were you on this picture at that time?
7. Where would you rather be back then?
8. How did you get yourself out of there?
9. Back to now, is there a spot you would rather be? Where do you want to be?
 - So that is where you want to be (*point*). Tell me why you prefer to be there.
 - What gets in the way for you to go “there”?
 - Are you doing things to move yourself there? What are they?
 - How would things be different if you are there?

(Switch to the other partner and ask the same list of questions.)

Research Question #3: How do discrepancies in relating styles affect couple relationships?

(Address to both partners.)

1. When you listen to each other talk about where you personally feel you are on this picture, how does it reflect your experience and observation of each other?
2. What are some of the things that make you agree or disagree with this picture?
3. If you are to plot down where the other person is on this picture, where would you plot him or her?
4. What do you feel about the differences between you?

Research Question #4: How do incompatibilities in relating styles affect couple relationships?

(Address to both partners.)

If both partners are high in relationship influence, ask the couple:

1. Both of you rate yourself as high in relationship influence. How does this work in your relationship?

If both partners desire to be high in relationship influence, ask the couple:

1. Both of you desire to be high in relationship influence. How does this work in your relationship?

If one partner is high in closeness and the other is low in it, ask the couple:

1. One of you is higher in closeness than the other. How does this work in your relationship?

If one partner desires to be high in closeness and the other desires to be low in closeness, ask the couple:

1. One of you wants to be higher in closeness than the other. How does this work in your relationship?

(Continue to question 2-4)

2. Do you see yourselves as compatible to each other in this area? How so?
3. How do you meet or balance each other's needs or balance the differences between you?
4. Comparing yourselves to average couples, do you find yourselves happier, about the same or not as happy?

Research Question #5: How are relationship issues associated with relationship influence and couple closeness?

Give couple a copy of the couple consensus list. (See Attachment: Dyadic Adjustment Scale – Dyadic Consensus Subscale). Address to both partners.

(Script) Here is a list of issues that are common in couple relationships. You have seen this in your survey. I would like you to determine how much you agree or disagree on each issue as a couple. Please make your decision together and circle the number that best describes your situation for each item.

1. Why are these issues important to you?
2. Are there some issues, in your opinions, related to influence, closeness, or to both influence and closeness for you as a couple?
3. Does having consensus on these issues or not affect how much influence and closeness you feel as a couple? How so?
4. Are there some issues more important to one of you than the other, including the ones that are not circled? *(If yes, ask: How do you work things out?)*
5. What are some issues you are less likely to agree with each other? How do you deal with your differences?

Closing – address to both partners.

(Script) Now we are entering the last section of the interview. I have a few more questions to wrap up our discussion today.

1. What are your hopes and dreams for your relationship?
2. What is the motto you follow to build a successful relationship? If you don't have a motto, then the question is: What is an ideal relationship to you?
3. Were there any questions that I should have asked but missed out or questions that I shouldn't have asked and should probably consider taking them out in the future?
4. Will it be okay for me to contact you again if I need a bit more information or some clarifications for the sake of this study?

Analysis

Data analysis for the study involved inductive and deductive strategies. This study was based on a model integrated from several theoretical perspectives and the goal was to understand how couples balance influence and closeness in their relationships. Therefore, styles of relating in terms of influence and closeness were the key concepts obtained deductively from the literature. How couples decide what relating patterns to use, how they handle discrepancies and incompatibilities of their relating styles, and how they manage their relationship issues to balance their needs and wants in terms of influence and closeness as an individual and as a couple – these questions call for inductive strategies.

Inductive analysis requires a researcher to explore and manage data content carefully and creatively. For example, recurrent issues and unfinished business can be grouped under relating themes; negotiating or balancing strategies can be grouped under relating processes; and ideas and effort regularly brought up by couples can be identified as sensitizing concepts. The researcher needs to build connections and processes between concepts to capture connections between strategies and couples' balancing acts. The identified relating themes, patterns, processes, and emerging concepts help to answer the overarching research question of how couples negotiate influence and closeness in their relationships. The strategies and rationalizations couples use to handle discrepancies and incompatibilities in their relationships can explain how and where couples direct their effort to gain balance. The respondents' approach to relationship issues provide further details on contextual variables, personality characteristics, relationship dynamics and how these factors link to couples' perceptions and decisions and eventually affect their balancing strategies.

The results of inductive analysis rely heavily on a researcher's sensitivity and intuitiveness. Within this process the researcher can be influenced by personal biases or experiences, so important concepts within the data may be overlooked or distorted. In order to prevent this, two co-analysts were used in this study. The co-analysts viewed the videotapes and listened to the audio tapes. They read the transcriptions and case summaries – everything the researcher had collected and generated. Each member of the research team (one researcher and two co-analysts) used cross-case analysis to identify common themes, processes, and concepts across couples. Case comparison is often used in qualitative study to gather commonalities of experience within and between cases and allow the overarching themes and patterns to emerge

from the data. Once the research team members completed a case analysis separately, they used emails to discuss, compare and contrast their individual findings and analyzed the results as a team. This procedure was repeated until the research team believed all possible themes, processes, and issues had been addressed and clarified to the best of their ability. Member checks were used when clarification or feedback was needed from the participants to ensure the results of the study indeed speak for the participants and from the participants' perspectives. The triangulation of using multiple analysts and feedback from research participants helped to ensure the reliability of the procedure and validity of the results because the data and findings were examined and cross-examined by analysts and research participants from all possible angles (Patton, 2002).

Researcher as Measurement Tool

In a qualitative study, the most important measurement tool is the researcher (Patton, 2002). Knowing that the assumptions and values a researcher holds may affect how the data is collected and framed in the analysis, it is important for me, as a researcher, to “report any personal and professional information that may have affected data collection, analysis, and interpretation” (p. 566). Before I discuss the results of the study, I would like to use this opportunity to discuss my role in the study, the assets and training I brought with me into the interview, and clarify my experiences and values relevant to this research.

As a family life educator, I believe that families are socially constructed. I take couples' words as their reality. I assume that they are doing their best dealing with what they have at hand and respect their perceptions and understanding of their situation. The experiences of the couples are considered valid in their own perspective and assumed to be the product of social construction.

To ensure that the data collection procedure was consistent, I carefully followed the interview schedule designed for the study so that not one couple was guided or treated in the interview differently than the others. In this light, this study can be seen as well-controlled as it addressed several important issues in couple relationships. However, these issues were limited to what I could identify from the literature so far. Bound by the standard format, the study could be insensitive to the issues that may also be pertinent to influence and closeness but are not recognized as relevant to the present study.

Since in-depth communication on the couple relationship may stir up emotions, discussions, even conflicts between partners sometimes, the strengths I brought into the study are that I am a licensed professional counselor and am experienced in counseling couples. I closely monitored the interviews and redirected the focus of discussion if I sensed something could cause unwanted ripple effects for the couples after our meeting. My utmost responsibility was to protect the participants and their relationships from being negatively affected by the discussions in the interview. Whenever conversations appeared to be too heated for couples to discuss, I navigated them to a topic that was safe for them to discuss. Therefore, the results of the study are limited to what couples can bring up to the table and talk about amicably.

As an Asian, I am aware that there are differences in cultural expectations and customs between the United States and my own country. To minimize the risk of me overlooking subtle but meaningful gestures and cultural expressions, I faithfully and carefully transcribed all recordings word for word and used triangulation, such as co-analysts and member-checks, to ensure the results were examined from every angle possible. Instead of viewing the results within cultural context, I treated every piece of information as both important to the couples and to the advancement of the knowledge in the field.

I do believe that relationship influence and couple closeness go hand in hand in an intimate relationship regardless of couples being verbal or explicit about them or not. It may not be a negotiation or a competition for most couples, but it is a dance and a balancing act that involves both partners. I believe that the dance is an art of self and relationship preservation. Partners engage in the dance to balance personal and mutual needs.

Chapter 4 - Results

Using qualitative, cross-case analysis, common themes regarding how couples defined and balanced closeness and influence were revealed. Symbolic Interaction Theory and Social Exchange Theory were used as the lens through which the data were viewed and analyzed. Research results facilitate the understanding of cognitive and behavioral strategies these couples used and how they related to each other while striving to meet mutual needs for influence and closeness. The findings are organized and displayed under coordinating research questions (RQs) in the following chapter. Some quotes are repeated because they are associated with more than one theme.

RQ 1: How do Couples Define Influence and Closeness?

To understand how couples define influence and closeness and to avoid communicating preconceived notions on what they should be, clarifying questions were presented at the beginning of the interview to find out what influence and closeness meant to couples.

Definition of Influence

Couples were first asked, “Between the two of you, who has more influence on decision making for things concerning you both?” and then, “How do you determine that?” Couples were encouraged to talk about specific things they did as examples and explained how their interactions were related to influence based on their personal perceptions. Here are the common expressions used by the couples in the sample:

Chad: *There are certain, certain aspects of it where you can take this, shield this responsibility and I can do this responsibility, but, but in the, ultimately there's an equal say.*

Amanda: *I think we both have equal, because we both bring different ideas. Sometimes I think I'm right but then he talks about it and he's right.*

Deirdre: *I always defer to him. I'm very, hot-headed. But I like to defer to him.*

Carrie: *I've become so independent that I'm doing the childcare, the housework, the outside, going to school, working, you know uh, and it's hard to make that shift of, letting, giving up that control.*

Adam: *Do you have any intention to let me have my way?*

Henry: *We share decisions but in a way separately.*

Bridget: *The big things we really talk out and discuss ahead of time but small things he usually just lets me do.*

General themes across couples' responses revolved around one's ability to exert influence in the relationship, or in other words, how much say one had or was allowed to have over decisions concerning both partners. Couples referred to the ability to take on a responsibility, to defer decision making, to have one's way, to contribute different ideas, and to be respected as an important decision maker as influence. In other words, couples see influence as the ability to assume and perform responsibilities, to voice individual opinions, to make an impact on one's partner and the relationship, and to have control and share decision making in the relationship.

Definition of Closeness

Couples were asked, "Between the two of you, who does more to keep you close as a couple?" and then, "What makes you say so?" Two types of closeness emerged from couples' responses: emotional and physical closeness. The differences between the two can probably be best explained as being and doing. Emotional closeness (being) focuses on the affective and cognitive bond shared by the couple. It involves a wide range of qualities, values, and virtues that are treasured by the couple. Physical closeness (doing) focuses on the activities that increase physical closeness and cement the intimacy between partners.

The following quotes showed that being close and doing things to keep each other close are two separate concepts for Adam and Amanda:

Adam: *Emotionally, we're somewhat close to here; but physically, normally, we're apart a lot.*

Amanda: *I'm the type of person that wants to be close, really, really close. Um, spend a lot of time together, talk about everything.*

Similarly, Hazel commented about talking to keep each other close while Henry said the sense of being close to her was enough for him:

Hazel: *I'm probably more on conversation. And discuss, not discussing, but just talking.*

Henry: *Yeah, I'm very comfortable with just, not talking and just, being, you know?*

Additional expressions related to emotional closeness among couples helped clarify its definition. For example, Henry described closeness as a “*sense of friendship,*” being “*open and honest*” and having no “*secrets,*” and a sense of “*vulnerability that comes with being so open and honest.*” Brandon explained how he gauged closeness: “*I took this as when we ARE TOGETHER, how much we interact with each other and how well we get along, so, I see it as really, really close to each other and we're always talking things out.*” In other words, Brandon is describing a sense of emotional closeness that came from being able to get along, talk things out and reach out for each other. However, his comments also emphasized what he and Bridget do together to increase physical closeness. The following quotes from members of two different couples focused more on doing things with and for each other, and through doing things together to keep each other close.

Ethan: *Closeness is doing something with them, like going out, going hiking, going biking, um, you know, going camping.*

Carrie: *We do stuff for each other. Um, you know, like I'm, when I know he's had a hard week, um, like, I'll cook like a special meal.*

Couples named certain activities and terms to represent closeness. However, their comments sometimes implied deeper connections or elements that were more likely to be neglected because these elements were generally expected in couple relationships. These elements include trust, mutual respect, commitment, and devotion as parts of the solid foundation for closeness. For example, Carrie was impressed by Chad’s “*wanting to stay home and do stuff together*” because this made her feel that they were “*one family.*” Bridget believed that she and Brandon were close because: “*We respect each other's space. Um, we always consult each other when we want to make decisions.*” Bridget and Brandon did not directly mention “*trust*” until they talked about sharing influence in their relationship. However, there was no doubt that trust was vital in keeping them close because they mentioned it several times during their interview.

Taken all together, couples’ responses involved affective (e.g., affection, caring), cognitive (e.g., openness, vulnerability), and physical closeness (e.g., spending time together, doing things together). Responses from the couples evolved around a central theme that closeness is a sense of togetherness, commitment, and attachment and a combination of different types of closeness that couples shared.

RQ 2: How do Couples Share Influence and Maintain Closeness?

To help couples visualize how they relate to each other, a copy of the Styles of Relating Model – Couple Map was introduced to each couple in the interview. After a couple understood how to identify themselves on the map, they decided who would respond to a series of questions related to personal relating style first. When one partner was being interviewed, the other partner was asked to observe and keep notes of personal comments. Then the same procedure was repeated for the other partner. The couples were asked to talk about things such as where they saw themselves on the map, how they determined this placement, how comfortable they felt about being in that spot, whether there was a place they would rather be on the map and where it would be, as well as their experience of having the specific relating styles identified in their relationships.

Ways Couples Share Influence

Every couple shares influence a bit differently when compared to other couples. At least half of the couples in the sample divided areas of decision making to facilitate the process. Most couples shared influence based on personal needs and interests, individual strengths, and situational factors; but despite the division, they discussed major decisions. A few couples did not report any type of division in decision making. They handled decision making through discussions, persuasions, and debates.

Personal Needs and Interests. Couples divided areas of decision making when one or both partners had special needs or interests for handling certain decisions. This happened when one partner was more concerned about or more interested in the outcome of some decisions than the other partner. It also could happen when one partner had a strong personality and desired some things to be handled in a certain way. For example, Bridget reported having a very hard time adjusting to married life. She put in tremendous effort establishing boundaries, setting up rules to split chores and handling finances. It was important for her to maintain the structure she established. Being in charge of “*day-to-day*” decision making calmed her down. She and Brandon still talked through “*big decisions*”. Because Brandon “*usually doesn't care about small decisions*” and Bridget did, to meet her personal needs, Brandon let Bridget make “*day-to-day*” decision making in their relationship. Similarly, for Henry and Hazel, Henry was more interested in building a comfortable lifestyle than Hazel. This included purchasing expensive furniture and

investing in interior decorations. The couple used personal interests to divide decision making. This was evident through Hazel's following statement: *"There are so many things that I just don't care about, you know. It's just, I'm not, I'm not that invested in some of the decisions that he makes."* Hazel said that she usually just went along with Henry *"because it's easier."*

Individual Strengths. Couples divided areas of decision making based on personal strengths and skills. When one partner was more knowledgeable or experienced in a certain area, decision making related to that area was deferred to him or her. For example, Chad and Carrie were at ease using what they called *"the strength model."* They worked as equals and focused on finding the *"best course of action."* They reported that Carrie was a teacher, so her opinions weighed more than Chad's opinions when it came to their son's education. Chad was good with finances, so he was the one who conducted financial research, laid out *"courses of actions,"* so they could make decisions as a couple. *"Like she will do, you know, 60/40, or 70/30, everyone still has a say, it's just one decision will be weighted more than the other. That, it works well."* According to Carrie, *"it's a strength-model—who's best in doing what."*

Situational Factors. Couples also divided areas of decision making to adapt to situational changes. In this sample, situational factors included deployments, work, and availability. For example, when one partner was away a lot due to work, the other partner naturally was left in charge of most day-to-day decision making independently. One example is Felix and Fay. Felix was a construction worker and often on the road. Fay explained, *"I'm home more of the day and um...you know, when it comes to... bills stuff like that, I'm the one to talk to. I'm the one who deals with the schools. I'm the one who deals with the gymnastics."* Same thing happened to Chad and Carrie during Chad's employment. Carrie learned to be independent: *"I'm... doing the childcare, the housework, the outside, going to school."* The division of decision-making responsibilities was arranged to adapt to situational factors.

Debates and Persuasions. A few couples were highly engaged with each other in decision-making, whether the decisions were big or small. They did not report a specific division in decision-making. For them, decisions could be made through amicable discussions sometimes; but more often they were made through persuasions and debates. Ethan said that he and Ella both had *"strong personalities"* and *"strong opinions."* Their decision-making followed a win-lose process: *"If I disagree with her opinion, I'm not gonna cave in because she wants it done that way. She's gonna have to prove to me that I'm wrong and that it needs to be done her way."* He

said, *“That’s just the way it is, and vice versa.”* Ella explained: *“We constantly discuss, debate, until we have analyzed absolutely everything. We don’t just (snapped her fingers), done, it just happened. We both have to have our input and our two cents.”*

As shown above, most couples shared influence in a way that worked for them. Be it personal needs and interests, individual strengths, or situational factors, the division was to facilitate the decision-making process. Despite the division, these couples still made major decisions together. However, there were a few couples who did not report any type of division in decision-making. They handled decision-making through discussions, persuasions, and debates.

Ways Couples Maintain Closeness

Results showed that couples used a variety of ways to maintain closeness. Although couples defined closeness through both emotional and physical closeness, they did not specify what exactly they did to maintain emotional and physically respectively. Instead, ways that couples used to maintain closeness were reported to impact closeness as a whole.

Henry cited the importance of being completely *“open”* and *“honest”* with each other to form a *“solid friendship.”* He and Hazel allowed themselves to be *“vulnerable”* in front of each other by admitting their mistakes and making amends when they hurt the other person’s feelings. Bridget and Brandon focused on accepting each other the way they were and accommodated each other’s needs. They trusted each other and knew that neither of them would *“make a big decision without consulting”* each other. Adam and Amanda gained a sense of satisfaction from being able to *“think of things”* the other person *“would never think of”* or *“complete each other’s sentences.”* Deirdre talked about commitment and supporting each other’s goals:

No matter what decision he makes, if he said I want to deploy, I want to go. I’m heart-broken when he leaves but I support him. Because this is his life, I would never tell him to leave the military because I want him to do it. And I just want him to do the same thing for me, every accomplishment, to be there, to support.

Adam and Amanda talked about their precious memories and were contented that they were able to *“learn from each other”* and *“work through things.”* The memories couples shared, good or bad, added meanings to their togetherness and strengthened the attachment and commitment they had for each other.

While emotional closeness emphasizes the affective and cognitive connection between partners, physical closeness focuses on things that couples do together to maintain their closeness. Greg and Gracie said that they cooked, gardened, walked their dog together, and shared their work load equally. The most important thing for them was to spend time with each other. Some couples engaged in certain activities that both partners enjoyed doing, such as hiking and camping together, having fun with friends, taking mini vacations and having adventures together. Some couples observed what their partners needed and tried to meet those needs. Adam understood that his busy schedule took away a lot of couple time Amanda desired so when he was home, he tried to “*put her first*” and “*make her happy.*” Similarly, Carrie, Amanda, and Fay all mentioned that they “*cook a special meal*” when their husbands had a tough day at work. Chad and Carrie were shy in showing affection in public, so they showed affection “*more on a private mode*” and through little relationship rituals, such as starting the day with “*a kiss goodbye*” before going to work and ending the day with a kiss, “*love you, good night*” before going to bed.

Both husbands and wives in this sample reported that they enjoyed doing things and having fun together. Wives were more likely to report feeling close if they could tell anything and everything to their husbands. They also were more likely to use spending time together, paying attention to the partner’s needs, and doing things for the partner as ways to increase closeness. Husbands were more likely to report feeling close if they felt emotionally close to their wives. They generally prefer doing fun things together as opposed to spending time talking.

In summary, maintaining closeness involves expressing affection and appreciation as well as striving to maintain a sense of togetherness between partners. It involves being a couple (emotional closeness) and doing things together (physical closeness). Couples focused on establishing and maintaining a strong sense of togetherness, commitment, and attachment by strengthening the bond and closeness they shared in their relationships. They did so by using various affective and cognitive approaches and physical activities.

The Integral Nature of Influence and Closeness

Results from this study showed that couples were monitoring and observing how they related to each other through influence and closeness simultaneously.

For example, despite the fact that Danny and Deirdre liked to debate and prove who was right, they reported making an effort to stop themselves when a deadlock was in sight.

Danny: *If it gets too serious, um, and I realize that it's not gonna go anywhere, I'll crack a joke or, you know, something else and I just, I'll drop it.*

Deirdre: *Yeah, he's good with this. We both do that.*

Greg and Gracie pointed out that they helped each other bounce back on bad days. They took turns to do it, depending on “*whose needs [were] greater*” on those days. Gracie explained:

There are plenty of days, especially for me, where I feel like, because of, because I'm a student, because I'm a GTA, because I'm working and doing all of the, these days were on the days I feel more stressed out, I feel like I DO put myself first and that might mean that I try to do homework while he tries to make dinner on his own.... I put myself a little higher on those days and on those days I don't feel as close.... And there are days when, I guess it will be the opposite where the days were, he has had a bad day and I'm working a little harder to try and make his day better.... But that (pointed to equal influence and mid-high closeness on the Couple Map) would be the good days.

When couples competed for influence at the expense of their closeness, they recognized it and pointed it out as a potential problem in their relationships. For example, Ethan and Ella reported that they bickered a lot. They compared their own marriage with Ethan’s parents and reported that Ethan’s parents would “*think about each other*” and “*support each other*” although they liked “*nitpicking each other or putting each other down.*” The couple shared their thoughts:

Ethan: *They're funny about it.*

Ella: *They're not doing that too bad. Not as bad as us. (Ethan: “No.”) If we keep that up then it might get worse. You know, it might get, (Ethan: “Yeah.”) we might get sick of each other.*

Sometimes couples may bargain for closeness through competing for influence. For example, Fay felt Felix rarely complimented her effort in maintaining the household and caring for their young children and said:

I'd get resentful. You know, I'd get REALLY angry. Um, because I clean the house, cook dinner, did all these, picked up the dinner, did the dishes you know and I've, I've done all of this work and there's no thank you, there's no compliment, there's no the house looks nice. You know, no, I'm not necessarily doing it because it has to be done. But I just don't

feel like it's appreciated. And it, you know, I'll spend the rest of the night, picking fights with him. I, I do, I will fight with him for the rest of the night.

Henry expressed his frustration about Hazel not being interested in initiating sexual intimacy with him. Hazel related her frustration to not being able to get Henry to participate more in housework. Due to exhaustion, she felt less interested in initiating sexual intimacy. She explained that if Henry would help around the house more, it would allow her to reserve some energy to initiate sexual intimacy between them. Henry responded:

Well, I, I guess, you know, the s, the same as vice versa. I'll feel more, if she initiates it and she demonstrates more affection, I might be more apt to do some household chores around here.

In summary, sharing influence and maintaining closeness are deeply embedded in the ways that partners interact with each other. It was common to find couples negotiated their influence in a way that preserved their closeness, or to find that couples used their influence to bargain for or demand the kind of closeness they desired.

RQ 3: How do Discrepancies in Relating Styles Affect Couple Relationships?

Members of the couples were asked to comment whether their partners' accounts reflected their personal experiences and observations in the marriage. They were also asked to talk about the ways they agreed or disagreed with their partners' description of the relationship. If they believed their partners should be placed at a different location on the Couple Map, they were invited to do so and to comment about the discrepancies in their perceptions.

Discrepancies may come in different forms. It can be a gap between the degrees of closeness or influence identified by the husband and wife on the Couple Map or the gap between one's perceived and desired styles of relating. A gap between a husband's and wife's positions on the closeness dimension on the Couple Map (e.g., husband rated being distant from wife while wife rated being close to husband) implies that the couple experienced closeness somewhat differently from each other. A conflicting view in influence between husband and wife (e.g., husband rated both equal in influence while wife rated having less influence than husband) implies that the couple had different perceptions on the way they shared influence. A gap between one's perceived and desired styles of relating (e.g., wife perceived herself to be

somewhat close to husband but she desired to be very close to him) implies that the wife wished for a different styles of relating with her husband than she currently perceives in the relationship.

Naturally, most partners talked about the same map from different views than their spouses. Some participants found it interesting to see that they used different concepts to describe influence and closeness. Some were surprised to see their partners identified themselves at unexpected spots on the Couple Map. During the whole discussion, participants were encouraged to exchange opinions with their partners, clarify their personal perspectives, discuss what their relating styles meant to them, and share their feelings.

What are the causes for discrepancies and how do the discrepancies affect couple relationships? Results showed that autonomy issues, personalities and family backgrounds, differences in perspectives, and different definitions in influence and/or closeness were commonly reported by couples to create discrepancies in their perceived and desired relating styles. The effects of discrepancies will be discussed separately at the end of this section.

Discrepancies Due to Autonomy Issues

Discrepancies due to autonomy emerged from the couples' responses. Several participants commented on how they felt about the visual representation of closeness on the map. Out of all eight couples, three couples and three additional wives described the overlapping circles on the Couple Map as being "*too close.*" Husbands did not comment about it, but all wives expounded on this topic. For example, Fay explained that: "*I don't really want to lose who I am, to become one person.*" Carrie pointed out that she and Chad had very "*distinct personalities,*" overlapping would be "*suffocating.*" She believed that they "*do a lot of things together*" but they also "*do separate things.*" To Bridget, overlapping circles symbolized "*interdependency.*" She said that she and Brandon could "*function without each other.*" She determined their level of closeness based on "*how much time [they] spent together and how much freedom [they] had from each other.*"

More wives than husbands pointed out their concerns about overlapping circles and a loss of individuality. Some wives deliberately placed themselves away from extreme closeness (overlapping circles) and ended up placing themselves on lower levels of closeness than their husbands. Chad accepted that Carrie had her personal view on autonomy but questioned the gap between their levels of closeness:

I can get up in the morning and, and set the alarm clock and get up, get up and be dressed and out of the door, and in the car and driving away, and she's, she would be standing at the door, "Where is my goodbye kiss?" I'll be like (blowing a kiss), "I'll see ya, got to go to work." So that's why I kind of thought from this because, you know, the majority of the time, she initiates the goodbye kiss, but (Carrie: "That, Yeah, you're right. You're right.") So that's why I thought that.

Chad and Carrie discussed their gap in describing closeness and attributed the discrepancy to their different perceptions of the visual representations on the Couple Map other than the way they actually related to each other. Bridget and Brandon simply acknowledged that they had different opinions. It was not “*offensive*” to either of them because they were “*both very happy*” in their relationship.

Discrepancies Due to Personalities or Family Backgrounds

Differences in personalities and family backgrounds were common reasons cited by couples to explain why they differed in their ratings of influence or closeness in their relationships. For example, Bridget had a high need to be in control of things. This resulted in her having more influence than Brandon in their relationship. Bridget said that she was more likely to be “*much more stressed out normally*” than Brandon was and that Brandon was “*usually good about giving in*” regarding the things she found important. The couple made arrangements to allow Bridget to be in charge of the “*day-to-day decisions.*” As a result, despite the fact that Brandon preferred to be equal with Bridget, he had less influence in their relationship.

Adam and Amanda noted how their personalities and family backgrounds affected their perceptions and expectations on closeness. Amanda reported being “*more needy*” than Adam was and also needing “*a lot of attention*” from him. Adam believed that family backgrounds had something to do with their different needs. He said that Amanda’s family spent “*a lot of time together*” while his family was “*always busy in stuff.*” On the other hand, if Adam was “*not busy with [his] hands or doing something,*” he got “*agitated.*” Due to the different needs in closeness, the couple had a discrepancy in their reports of their closeness dimension.

Due to different family backgrounds and strong personalities, Ethan and Ella disagreed with each other a lot and debated point to point on various issues. The main area of conflict for them was household chores. Because of family upbringing, Ethan said that it was “*heavily*

ingrained” in him how their house should be clean. Ella’s family was completely the opposite. Therefore, while Ethan strived for “*a cleaner household,*” Ella maintained that she was “*not that uptight*” about it. The couple was locked in power struggles often. Ethan reported that they were “*not as close*” as they would like to be. He also stated that he had become “*the driving force of the relationship*” that dominated their relationship, so he had more influence than Ella in their relationship despite Ella wanting to be equal with and closer to him.

Discrepancies Due to Different Perspectives

Many couples have indicated discrepancies due to different perspectives on influence and closeness in their relationships. These discrepancies were not caused by autonomy issues or personalities or family backgrounds, but by how they saw their relationships from different angles. For example, Deirdre believed that she had less influence when compared to Danny in their relationship. She said that she “*wasn’t working up till now*” so she “*gave Danny a little more power.*” Danny disagreed and said there were times he “*deferred to her.*” He believed that Deirdre should not think that he was higher in the relationship; instead, she should think that she was as close as he saw them in their relationship and should not “*compare themselves with other couples.*”

As a police officer, Henry had to work on night shifts regularly. At the time of the interview, Hazel was working on her PhD. Their son, Hayden, was six years old. Although Henry believed they were equal in the relationship, Hazel perceived herself as having less influence due to the irregularities in their lives. Henry attributed their lack of “*normalcy*” to his work schedule and believed that “*it’s just the nature of the beast.*” Hazel was surprised that Henry did not feel “*a bit more in charge*” or “*influencing [their] lives more.*” Henry’s following comment explains how influence can mean a lot more than decision-making for couples and why couples’ perspectives on how they relate to each other can be rather diverse:

But I think, you know, with our relationship, not just decisions, but a lot goes with, you know, the time spent with Hayden, I mean, definitely falls on you more than it does me. I guess that’s why I feel like, there’s a little bit of balance there that, there’s something I influence more and somethings you influence more and it just kind of equals out.

Needless to say, most couples found themselves having different perceptions and expectations on influence and closeness as they explored these areas in depth.

Discrepancies Due to Different Definitions in Influence and/or Closeness

Adam and Amanda had a discrepancy in their relating styles due to different definitions. They both put each other higher in influence than self and they had a gap between how they saw their closeness. Adam noticed that Amanda interpreted closeness by “*the amount of time they spent together*” (physical closeness) and influence by “*the activities*” they did together while he interpreted closeness based on emotional closeness and influence based on “*who influenced the decisions.*” Their discrepancies in relating styles were attributed to using different definitions to gauge influence and closeness. For Ethan and Ella, they did not see eye to eye on what defines closeness and what activities would increase closeness for them. Here is a part of the conversation they had on this subject:

Ethan: *Closeness is doing something with them (Ella: “Yeah.”), like going out, (Ella: “And I agree.”) going hiking, (Ella: “I like to go and do things, too”) going biking, um, you know, going camping but out, just out to the lake doesn’t count.*

Ella: *Yes it does.*

Ethan: *Not for me.*

Ella: *So, for me it’s, it can be anything, (Ethan: “Going a trip, yeah.”) it doesn’t have to be major. It can be, you know.*

Ethan: *Sitting, sitting in the room and talking (Ella: “Yeah.”) doesn’t cut it for me, that’s not...*

Ella: *But it does for me.*

What Ella cared about was spending time with Ethan. It did not matter what they did together. Spending time talking about each other’s day was enough. But Ethan wanted to do things together. “*Chitchatting*” was not what Ethan felt comfortable with and was not counted by him as a way to build closeness between them. Their discrepancies in relating styles were explained by their different definitions and expectations for closeness.

Effects of Discrepancies in Relating Styles

Autonomy issues, personalities and family backgrounds, different perspectives, and different definitions in influence and/or closeness were commonly reported by couples to cause discrepancies in their styles of relating. The effects of these discrepancies varied from couple to

couple. However, couples generally accepted that they had differences in perceptions and expectations due to autonomy issues without too many negative feelings about them. For example, Brandon understood where Bridget was “*coming from.*” As he gauged their closeness, he focused on “*when we ARE TOGETHER, how much we interact with each other and how well we get along*” and that he and Bridget were “*really, really close to each other.*” Like Brandon and Bridget, differences due to autonomy issues were often seen as individual differences and not perceived by the couples to affect the nature of their relationships. Couples still reported that they were “*happy together*” and that the discrepancy was “*not offensive*” to them. In this sample, six out of eight wives acknowledged their needs to have a sense of autonomy and individuality in their marriages. Some couples pointed out that the visual representation of overlapping circles were simply “*too close*” for them and that their discrepancies in closeness with their partners were just reflecting that perception.

Unlike autonomy issues, which were seldom discussed between partners, personalities and family backgrounds were more often talked about and considered “*understood*” by couples. However, differences in personalities and family backgrounds were more difficult to change and took a longer time to find common grounds. As discussed above, Bridget had more influence than Brandon in their relationship. Although Brandon preferred to be equal with Bridget, being naturally “*easygoing,*” he decided “*to merely support*” Bridget when she became anxious and focus on doing things to help “*soften the blow*” for her. Amanda rated the closeness she and Adam had in their relationship to be only above average, lower than what Adam had expected. Adam and Amanda understood that they “*showed and received love in a different way.*” Even though Amanda would rather have Adam “*spend time*” with her, Adam would rather “*give [her] gifts.*” They attributed their struggles in closeness to a lack of time and different definitions and expectations on influence and closeness. In this sense, they accepted their differences and said that they had learned to compromise a lot. They reported that once Adam graduated and they had more time on their hands, they would be able to overcome the discrepancy because they both wanted to increase the closeness between them.

Different perspectives caught some couples by surprises. Danny did not share the same perspective Deirdre had about their relationship. Danny acknowledged Deirdre’s interpretation as how she perceived their relationship. He respected it because it was her “*reality.*” The couple then stopped pursuing this topic and left it at that. Both Henry and Hazel were unprepared to find

themselves seeing things rather differently from each other. Henry insisted that he treated Hazel as his equal but Hazel believed that she had less influence than Henry because his job determined her lifestyle. Henry and Hazel struggled with their different perspectives and neither of them was ready to change his or her view. In terms of influence, Henry explained that what Hazel said “*made sense*” and it did not make him “*upset or disappointed.*” However, since he could not change his work schedule, he could do nothing to help with the situation. In terms of closeness, Henry felt less close to Hazel than Hazel to him. Henry described an incident in their past when Hazel confided her feelings to another man instead of him. Henry commented that there were “*still things to be worked through*” for him so he was not ready to become closer to her just yet. Hazel expected that Henry would “*feel a little less close*” to her and believed that she had been “*humbling*” herself to “*get back to his good graces.*” It was not surprising for her to hear how Henry felt. In terms of influence, she understood that Henry could not change his schedule, so this was something she had to endure until he retired. Both of them felt that they were doing the best they could and there was nothing more they could do.

Differences in definitions suggested that couples might have fundamental differences from each other. For Adam and Amanda, they “*showed and received love in a different way.*” They accepted their differences but it was difficult for Amanda because she naturally needed to have more physical closeness than Adam. In terms of influence, Adam was surprised that they used different things to gauge influence. Adam commented that he and Amanda both “*picked each other [as having] a greater influence.*” He took this as an indication that both of them “*always want each other to be happy more than anything*” and interpreted their discrepancy as “*probably good in some ways.*” On the other hand, Ethan and Ella’s discussions on this topic ended up in a standstill because neither of them was willing to accept influence and ideas from the other. Different definitions in influence and/or closeness, in both cases, could be traced back to personal needs and personality differences. Couples reported that the differences are hard for them to change.

In summary, most couples reported not being bothered too much by their discrepancies in relating styles. They reported that they are still relating to each other the way they desired. Couples believed that discrepancies due to personal needs, personality differences, and definitions in influence and closeness are difficult to change. A few participants had discrepancies between their perceived and desired relating styles in addition to discrepancies in

relating styles with their partners. This means that they did not see things eye to eye with their partners and they also desired to relate to their partners in a way different from their current style. To have discrepancies in multiple ways was not common for most couples. In this sample, partners who related to each other one way but desired to relate to each other in another were more likely to have at least one partner who reported to be unhappy or hesitated in saying he or she was happy with the relationship. Discrepancies between perceived and desired relating styles are pertinent to compatibility issues for couples. These results will be presented next.

RQ 4: How do Compatibilities in Relating Styles Affect Couple Relationships?

The purposes of research question 4 were to explore how compatible couples describe themselves in the way they relate to each other and to investigate how happy they feel when comparing themselves to average couples.

Relating Styles and Compatibilities

- Three couples (*C, D, G*) in the sample reported being roughly equal in influence – all couples reported that they were “*compatible.*”
- Two couples (*A, H*) were somewhat unequal in influence – both couples reported having conflicting views, but were “*not incompatible.*”
- Three couples (*B, F, E*) showed the pattern of one high and one low in influence –
Couple B reported that they were “*compatible.*”
Couple F reported that both partners desired to be equal and were working on it; therefore, they were “*not incompatible.*”
Couple E reported being “*incompatible in influence*” due to personality clashes.
- Three couples (*B, C, G*) reported slight discrepancies due to divergent perceptions of autonomy as being in conflict with closeness. Otherwise they felt close to each other – all reported being “*compatible.*”
- Three couples (*D, H, A*) were slightly apart from each other –
Couple D reported that the differences were caused by different perspectives, but they were “*compatible.*”
Couple H reported working on it. Both partners desired to be close; therefore, they were “*not incompatible.*”

Couple A reported they were “*incompatible in closeness*” due to personality differences between partners.

- Two couples (*E, F*) reported feeling rather distant from each other—both couples reported “*working on it.*” They desired to be close and therefore were “*not incompatible*” or “*just harder to be compatible.*”

Table 6 presents the couples by the order of closeness reported in the screening surveys, from the closest to the farthest. None of the relating styles reported by couples during the interviews were identical to the styles couples reported individually in their screening surveys. However, the results from the surveys and the interviews are consistent. Couples who reported that they were close or distant in the surveys still reported the same relational patterns in their interviews. Table 6 shows the perceived and desired styles of relating in terms of influence and closeness identified by each couple on the Couple Map. Results have been translated into highs and lows to enhance the readability in a table format. Levels of influence reported by each participant range from low¹, low², low³, low⁴, equal, high⁵, high⁶, high⁷, high⁸, depending on how much influence one perceived or desired in his or her relationship. Higher numbers indicate more influence experienced in the relationship. Levels of closeness each participant reported range from low¹, low², low³, low⁴, high⁵, high⁶, high⁷, high⁸, depending on how much closeness one perceives and desired in his or her relationship. Higher numbers indicate more closeness experienced in the relationship. Table 6 also notes how compatible the couples reported they were. The relationship satisfaction (RS) was based on couples’ reports on how happy they felt when they compared themselves to average couples. Couples were not advised on what average couples were like. They were only asked to take their best guess and then explain to whom they were comparing themselves. Most couples compared with “*average couples [they] knew.*”

Findings in Table 6 show several interesting patterns: A majority of the participants preferred to be roughly equal in influence and with closeness at least higher than average. The discrepancy or the gap between perceived and desired relating styles is the most important determinant of relationship satisfaction. Participants with perceived relating styles matched (or roughly matched) with their desired relating styles generally reported being happier in their relationships than average couples. The combination of one high and one low in influence was not considered ideal for most couples but could work if matched with desired relating styles. No

couples from this sample reported both partners to be high in influence. Participants were more likely to point out that they had less influence than their partners rather than to point out they had more influence than their partners. Couples did not report incompatibilities unless there were irresolvable differences. They preferred to say that they were “*working on it*” even when they had been struggling with their differences for a period of time.

Table 6. Perceived and Desired Relating Styles, Compatibilities, and Relationship Satisfaction among Participating Couples

Couple	Influence			Closeness			RS
	Perceived	Desired	Compatible?	Perceived	Desired	Compatible?	
Greg	equal	-	yes	high ⁵	-	yes	happier
Gracie	equal	-	yes	high ⁷	-	yes	happier
Danny	equal	-	yes	high ⁸	-	yes	happier
Deirdre	equal	-	yes	high ⁷	-	yes	less
Adam	low ⁴	-	conflicting but not incompatible	high ⁶	high ⁷	working on it	happier
Amanda	low ³	equal	conflicting but not incompatible	high ⁵	high ⁸	no	less
Chad	equal	-	yes	high ⁷	-	yes	happier
Carrie	equal	-	yes	high ⁸	-	yes	happier
Henry	equal	-	conflicting but not incompatible	high ⁷	high ⁸	working on it	happier
Hazel	low ³	equal	conflicting but not incompatible	high ⁸	-	yes	happier
Brandon	low ³	-	yes	high ⁸	-	yes	happier
Bridget	high ⁶	-	yes	high ⁶	-	yes	happier
Ethan	high ⁵	low ³	no	low ⁴	high ⁸	working on it	less
Ella	low ³	equal	no	high ⁷	high ⁸	working on it	less
Felix	low ²	equal	not incompatible	low ³	high ⁷	working on it	less
Fay	high ⁵	equal	not incompatible	high ⁶	high ⁷	working on it	happier

Note. 1. RS - relationship satisfaction.

2. “-“ in the desired column indicates “the same” with the adjacent perceived column.

3. Range of relationship influence - low¹, low², low³, low⁴, equal, high⁵, high⁶, high⁷, high⁸

4. Range of couple closeness - low¹, low², low³, low⁴, high⁵, high⁶, high⁷, high⁸

Most couples reported having a compatible style of relating in the interview. One couple reported incompatibility in influence due to personality clashes that resulted in power struggles. One couple reported incompatibility in closeness due to personality differences that resulted in different levels of desired closeness between partners. Despite various challenges and frustrations reported in their relationships, couples all reported a desire to stay together and “*make [their] relationship work.*” Three common themes emerged from the couples’ responses: “It works for us,” growth, and commitment and attachment.

“It works for us.”

The first sign for couples to know that they are compatible is that they work well as a team, regardless of whatever reasons make them think so. When couples work well together, there is no mistake that they feel compatible with each other. Bridget believed that her relationship with Brandon “*functions very well*” because they were able to “*work through things without getting too upset.*” They were also “*very happy together*” and “*rarely have arguments.*”

Carrie believed that she and Chad “*make a good team.*” Chad said that they had the same “*core values*” and “*backgrounds.*” Carrie said that their marriage had “*gotten a lot easier over the years*” because they had figured out “*those rules of who stands at the door and waves goodbye*” and “*how things work*” in the family.

For Danny and Deirdre, despite their disagreement on how they related to each other, Deirdre believed that “*There’s something there makes it work.*” Danny agreed and added that although they often argued with each other, the most important thing was that they had the same “*core values.*” Even though they argued, they both had “*a sense of humor*” and knew when to “*break each other down*” when things got “*too serious.*”

Greg and Gracie said that their relationship “*works*” because they “*balance each other out*” in good times and bad times and took turns to take care each other. Like Brandon and Bridget, they “*hardly fight at all.*” Greg was “*very laidback*” so Gracie was usually the one to “*push him to confront things that normally he’d just let slide.*” She felt that they “*get on really well with each other and communicate really well.*”

Growth

All couples had ups and downs in their marriage. Some partners struggled with multiple challenges in their marriage, some struggled with each other. As they looked back, they saw

themselves grow as a couple and reported that they have learned a lot from each other. Ethan and Ella reported constant power struggles in their relationship. Ethan said that they both had “*very strong personalities*” and that they both had to “*compromise a lot*” in their relationship. But he did not think they were “*incompatible*.” It just meant that it would be “*harder*” for them. Ella agreed with Ethan and added, “*We have learned a lot. There’s just still more to go. It’s not that it’ll be perfect.*” They did not have a straight answer for compatibility, but they had worked hard on their relationship and they intended to keep it going.

Adam and Amanda provide another example of growth. As mentioned earlier, they struggled with different perspectives on closeness. During the interview, Adam and Amanda reported some major events that could have broken them up, but each time they overcame their difficulties and remained together. In the following quote, Adam pointed out the progress they have made:

We've been together for five years. I think, um, we BOTH have gotten MUCH better at receiving (turned to look at Amanda) love. (Amanda nodded her head.) Um, I mean, we've gotten ourselves to this spot because I think there was a time where it was probably about same amount of time I'm spending with you now. (Amanda said: Um-hum.) But you felt a lot more apart from me. (Amanda said: Um-hum.) So I think we get better, just with understanding that's how each other, you know, that's how she is, she just, needs to be at home. You know, needs to be doing that, you know.

Adam’s account showed that he and Amanda accepted that they were different. But instead of focusing on their differences, they focused on the fact that they did better day by day and grew together as a couple.

Commitment and Attachment

From the thoughts and feelings couples shared about their relationships, another prominent theme centered around commitment and attachment. Despite challenges and frustrations, couples all expressed a desire to make their relationship work. There was a strong sense of togetherness. For example, Felix and Fay had opposite opinions on how to share influence and maintain closeness in their relationship. When Fay said that they were “*way off*” from being compatible, Felix immediately asked her: “*For what? For the last 6 years or for over a longer period of time? I mean, it can change.*” As the couple continued to discuss their

struggles in the relationship, Fay said: “*The fact that we’re both committed to a solution is half the battle. Neither one of us is willing to give up.*” The same commitment and attachment Felix and Fay had for each other could also be found in other couples who struggled to make their relationships work. Danny and Deirdre reported a major breakthrough after years of trying to get close to each other and get past their conflicts and personality clashes. Danny used an analogy to explain why he would not give up their relationship:

I took a lot from my, the, the, the first divorce, and because you think these are horrible and then when you are alone you are like, you know, it's like, yeah, my arm is always hurting, but after I cut it off now, I don't even have it anymore. So you know, I could have probably done a lot of things to, fix it. But now, you know, now there's nothing I can do because it's, it's gone. So, um, you know, it's, is it, is it, I mean, is it like cutting your arm? Is it bad enough that I need to cut it off? Or, can I fix it? Am I going to miss it?

Danny went on and talked about the importance of choosing a different path in order to preserve the relationship and “*keep [his] arm.*” Although it seems that Danny put emphasis on commitment and attachment because he had learned from his divorce, his sentiment regarding commitment was shared by many other couples in the sample. Knowing that couples are committed to their relationships, the last question is how they deal with relationship issues when they have disagreements with each other and how influence and closeness may be affected by different issues.

RQ 5: How are Relationship Issues Associated with Influence and Closeness?

Research question 5 was designed to explore what relationship issues are related to influence and closeness and how disagreements are associated with influence and closeness within couples. For these purposes, the participants were asked to respond to the couple consensus questionnaire (See Attachment: Dyadic Adjustment Scale – Dyadic Consensus Subscale). Fifteen potential relationship issues (or areas of consensus) were listed in the questionnaire, including handling finances, matters of recreation, demonstrations of affection, sex relations, etc. Couples were asked to discuss and decide on a single number for each issue on the questionnaire as a couple. After they completed the questionnaire, the couples were asked to highlight issues that were important to both of them and identify the ones that were important to only one of them. The last task and the most important task for the couples, was to discuss

whether having consensus on important issues affected how they shared influence or maintain closeness in their relationships.

Two couples reported that no issues on the list could affect or could be related to closeness or influence for them. Chad said that he and Carrie “*always agree on everything.*” Carrie agreed and explained that when she and Chad had different opinions, they were “*not really a disagreement*” because there were “*no major fights.*” Chad pointed out that in their relationship, “*nothing is taboo.*” Brandon and Bridget were the same. Bridget emphasized that they “*really don’t argue very much.*” Brandon also could not “*name any issues*” or disagreements that would be related to influence or closeness for them. Both couples concluded that they did not have enough disagreements for them to draw such a conclusion.

Nevertheless, within the remaining sample, two couples believed that some issues they picked were specifically related to influence and some to closeness while the rest of the four couples reported circumstances when both influence and closeness were related to or affected them at the same time. Couples’ responses are presented in two sections as follows: relationship issues related to influence or closeness and relationship issues related to both influence and closeness.

Relationship Issues Related to Influence or Closeness

Two couples believed that some relationship issues they picked from the couple consensus questionnaire were related to influence (e.g., handling finances and household chores) and some to closeness (e.g., demonstrations of affection, sex relations, and amount of time spent together). For Ethan and Ella, one of their main areas of conflict was about completing household tasks. They had heated discussions and debates over the years on how to split the chores and how to do them right and they never really reached an agreement. They also frequently debated on how to spend money. “*It took us a year and a half to buy a new mattress.*” Ethan said. “*We don’t have that much money, so we don’t like to just waste.*” Ella explained that the financial stress they had led to frequent arguments about how to spend time together and on what recreational activities to spend money on between them. Ethan and Ella believed that “*handling finances*” and “*household tasks*” were related to influence while “*amount of time spent together*” and “*matters of recreation*” were related to closeness.

Gracie also believed that “*handling finances*” was related to influence but unlike Ethan and Ella focusing on financial stress, she brought up times that she was not contributing to the income and its effect on how she perceived influence in her relationship with Greg.

Gracie: *I don't mean that it influences our closeness, but you know when you are the one that has the money in your bank account and I don't have money in the bank account.*

Greg: *But my money is your money. And you know I don't...*

Gracie: *But until now, I haven't had an access to your money until we got our joint banking account, I had to still come to you and say, I need this or I want this, can we get this? And to me, that's kind of demeaning in a little, a little bit. Cause it makes me feel like I have to request it.*

The conversation between Gracie and Greg showed how having no income and asking for money negatively impacted Gracie’s perception on her own influence in the relationship. Gracie continued and pointed out that, “*demonstrations of affection and sex relations are related to closeness and intimacy.*” Then she added, “*kind of everything relates to it because if it gets in your way, it's gonna get in your way all around.*” Although she picked “*demonstrations of affection*” and “*sex relations*” to be two issues mainly related to closeness, her last statement implied an overall effect of disagreements on closeness as well.

Relationship Issues Related to Both Influence and Closeness

Half of the sample reported circumstances where the issues they were discussing or arguing about became related to both influence and closeness in their relationships. For example, Hazel and Henry each identified an issue that was important to self but not considered an issue of great consequence by the other. These issues were “*household tasks*” for Hazel and “*sex relations*” for Henry. Hazel was upset with Henry that he “*makes the decision to NOT do household chores so it just defaults to me.*” Due to the stress from handling the majority of the household tasks, Hazel reported that she was “*a lot less likely to initiate sex or demonstrate affection*” because she just felt “*overwhelmed.*” Henry, coming from the opposite point of view, disagreed and replied, “*If she initiates it and she demonstrates more affection, I might be more apt to do some household chores around here.*” In Henry and Hazel’s case, they presented “*household tasks*” and “*sex relations*” as issues related to *closeness* but ended up struggling for

influence (e.g., power struggles) at the same time. The couple acknowledged that these issues did affect both their influence and closeness.

Amanda described the same dynamics in her marriage, with closeness associated with disagreement about certain issues, but with influence embedded in their conflicts. Amanda reported having difficulties “*coming to a compromise or talking about*” her “*philosophy of life*” and “*handling finances*” with Adam. The conflicts and differences between them made Amanda feel “*farther apart*” from Adam than they already were. The reason Amanda connected the disagreements with closeness was because she “*felt attacked as a person.*” When she and Adam had conflicts, she was inclined to think: “*You don't love me.*” “*You're attacking me.*” or “*You don't think that I'm right.*” Her responses showed that she felt threatened both in closeness and influence when Adam disagreed with her.

Deirdre and Danny emphasized having a consensus on “*aims, goals and things believed important*” and its relation to both closeness and influence for them. Deirdre said that she wanted Danny to understand “*what things are important*” to her and “*respect*” those decisions because “*It's about something BIG*” in her life, and she wanted to “*share that with him.*” Not only that, she expected Danny to do the same. Danny agreed: “*If she wanted to do something I was totally adamant a, about her not doing. Um, I mean that would tear everything apart.*” In other words, Danny and Deirdre believed that having an agreement on life goals not only would be associated with respecting the influence both partners had but also would be associated with maintaining the closeness between them.

Fay cited “*demonstration of affection*” as most important for her. From her point of view, this issue was related to both closeness and influence. Her constant struggles with Felix were that she expected Felix to show his appreciation by complimenting her effort. When Felix did not do so, she got “*resentful*” and would “*spend the rest of the night picking fights with him.*” Felix, on the other hand, believed that disagreement on parenting affected influence and closeness in their relationship. He said that Fay and he “*disagreed so much*” in parenting, because Fay went on and did parenting “*one-sided,*” he felt excluded and disrespected: “*I mean, what do you do in there? [I] don't need to be there.*”

Effects of Disagreement on Influence and Closeness among Couples

More than half of the couples indicated that handling finances, children, major decisions, and time spent together were important to them. Not all couples reported that having consensus on important issues was associated with influence or closeness for them, but six out of eight couples did believe that disagreements in important relationship issues were associated with influence and/or closeness in their relationships.

Results from this study showed that couples who believed their relationship issues were associated with influence and/or closeness reported a variety of issues, including household tasks, sex relations, philosophy of life, handling finances, goals and things believed important, demonstrations of affection, and children. There were reports on handling finances and household tasks and their relations to influence and reports on demonstration of affection and spending time together and their associations with closeness. However, only a few couples reported the connections. There is not a consistent pattern across couples indicating what relationship issues are definitely related to or will affect influence or closeness when couples have conflicts. In summary, despite a few couples who cited certain issues as more influence-oriented or closeness-oriented, the most common theme is this: It all depended on what the couples considered important and how they negotiated the issues. Extensive conflicts over a relationship issue tend to affect both influence and closeness in couple relationships. More importantly, for more than half of the couples, the importance of the issues and the way they negotiated disagreement perpetuated or mediated their conflict and further affected how influence was shared and closeness was maintained between partners.

Summary

Couples in this study provided an inside look at what influence and closeness meant to them and how they related with each other. Results showed that the definitions of influence and closeness are indeed complex and diverse because they can be different from one couple to the next and even between partners within couples. Although several similar strategies were adopted by couples to share influence and maintain closeness, couples were unique in how they perceived, experienced, and managed the dynamics of influence and closeness in their relationships. A strong sense of togetherness, attachment and commitment were reported between partners. They were generally accepting of the discrepancies in their relating styles and

demonstrated a high level of resiliency in handling relating styles that were incompatible or difficult. Disagreements on issues important to one or both partners have a direct impact on influence and/or closeness for couples.

Findings of this qualitative study are helpful in providing details about negotiation of influence and closeness in committed couples that have not been identified in quantitative studies. The results will be compared with literature in the following chapter. Applications of the findings for research and practice also will be discussed.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

The purposes of the study were to explore how couples share influence and maintain closeness in their relationships and how their relating styles are associated with their relationship issues and satisfaction. This chapter will highlight key findings, discuss the application of the Styles of Relating Model – Couple Map, and present strengths and limitations of the study along with implications for researchers, family life educators and couples.

Definitions of Influence and Closeness

This study set out to explore the dynamics of influence and closeness within couples. As literature revealed, influence and closeness were indeed complex concepts that involved multiple implications for couples.

Influence

Results from this sample showed that all couples shared influence in a unique way to fit their needs and circumstances. Contrary to the popular definition often used in studies, influence meant more than decision-making in the relationship to these couples. Findings from this study were consistent with many conclusions researchers have drawn in the past, indicating a sense of influence in couple relationships encompasses all of the following:

First, for couples in the sample, power indeed refers to an individual's ability to exercise control or exert influence in the relationship (O'Connor, 1991; Blanton & Vandergriff-Avery, 2001).

Second, just as Rollins and Bahr (1976) proposed, power is relative. In other words, couples observe how influence is shared in the relationship, and one's perception of influence is based on the outcome of these exchanges. Authority, resources, and power also were found to contribute to the perceptions of influence as proposed by Rollins and Bahr. Responses from the couples in this study showed that the spouse who assumed the leadership role in the relationship was perceived to have the authority over the relationship. Financial resources and the ability to contribute to family income were interpreted as relationship influence. Wives who were not able to contribute to finances reported perceiving that their partners had more relationship influence or deferred influence to their husbands.

Also consistent with Rollins and Bahr (1976), power and control were reported as relevant when conflict emerged between the goals of spouses. Findings from this sample showed that when couples rarely had conflicts or disagreements, they were unaware of or unfamiliar with power dynamics in the couple relationship. In addition, power and control were indeed found to vary from one marital area to another. This was confirmed by the different levels of influence couples reported in their relationship issues. For example, a wife might have more influence in children's education while her husband had more influence in financial decisions; or, a husband might have more say in interior decorations while his wife mostly went along with his plans.

Third, cybernetic theory was found to be applicable in explaining relationship satisfaction (Stets, 1993). Discrepancies between perceived and desired levels of influence and closeness indeed had an important effect on couples' perceived relationship satisfaction. Most partners interpreted influence and closeness somewhat differently from each other and the discrepancies between their perceptions were not consistently reported to negatively impact their relationship satisfaction. However, for those who reported discrepancies between their perceived and desired relating styles, or in other words, for a partner who was related to the spouse in one way but desired another relating style, relationship satisfaction was consistently reported to be negatively affected by the discrepancies.

Lastly, couples were found to adopt secondary control, or to engage in "bringing themselves into line with environmental forces" when they perceived themselves lacking the ability in "bringing the environment into line with their wishes (primary control)" (Rothbaum et al., 1982, p. 5). Spouses who struggled with their circumstances but could not change them reported to lower their expectations or try to give meaning to their relationships in order to view their frustrations in a different way. Nevertheless, responses from couples showed that although this strategy might help the frustrated partners cope with their situations, they still felt as though they had less influence in the relationship than their partners. Perhaps adopting secondary control strategies may increase one's personal control about the situation, at least temporarily, and thus increase one's ability to cope with the challenge; however, increased personal control does not necessarily transfer into shared relationship control.

There was a link between relationship influence and autonomy that did not surface until couples discussed their definitions for closeness. Results showed that when one's autonomy was

threatened, the lack of control and influence over personal life goals could lead to one's perception of having less overall influence than the partner in the relationship.

In summary, influence is based on one's ability to exert influence on the partner and the relationship, but the perceived levels of influence fluctuate with the outcome of couple interactions. The overall sense of influence extends from influence over the relationship to control over personal life goals – a concept more related to individuality and maintaining a certain distance from the partner. This suggests that individuality might be embedded in both influence and closeness, moderating how couples share influence and maintain closeness.

Closeness

Couples' descriptions of intimacy closely resemble the definition of intimacy Moss and Schwebel (1993) proposed: "Intimacy in enduring romantic relationships is determined by the level of commitment and positive affective, cognitive, and physical closeness one experiences with a partner in a reciprocal (although not necessarily symmetrical) relationship" (p. 33). All couples in the sample emphasized a strong sense of togetherness, commitment, and attachment. They reported exchanging positive affect and demonstration of affection/caring in a reciprocal fashion to maintain closeness between partners. Although a majority of the couples preferred a symmetrical relationship, there was one couple with an asymmetrical relationship (in which the wife held more influence than husband) who still reported to be very close and happy.

Closeness was described in categories of emotional closeness which involves the maintenance affective and cognitive closeness and physical closeness which involves doing activities together to increase intimacy. This is similar to affective, cognitive and physical closeness described by Moss and Schwebel (1993). Descriptors used by couples that fit under emotional closeness included openness, honesty, humility, vulnerability, trust and trustworthiness, acceptance and accommodation, mutual appreciation and respect, gentleness, commitment, devotion, support, loyalty, and a sense of growing in the relationship together. Descriptors used by couples that fit under physical closeness included giving attention, spending time together, pleasing one's partner, planning and doing things together, and demonstrating affection and caring. Couples gauged their levels of closeness based on the overall emotional (affective and cognitive) closeness and physical closeness they experienced in their relationships.

According to Moss and Schwebel (1993), a romantic relationship entails five components of intimacy: commitment, affective intimacy (e.g., love, caring, attraction), cognitive intimacy (e.g., values, hopes, shared personal information), physical intimacy (e.g., close physical proximity, expressions of affection), and mutuality (e.g., reciprocity). Results from this sample were consistent with the five components as defined by Moss and Schwebel, reflecting the complexity of intimacy and the fact that closeness was experienced through various channels and expressed through multiple approaches between partners.

Like influence, discrepancy between perceived and desired amount of closeness in the marriage is associated with relationship satisfaction. Findings from this study also revealed that husbands and wives may prefer different types of closeness. The different preferences between partners and not maintaining the type of closeness the other desired were found to negatively affect perceived closeness in couple relationships.

According to Harper and Elliott (1988), wives are more likely to be impacted by the discrepancies between perceived and desired amounts of intimacy than are their husbands. Results from this study appeared to support this finding. Wives who desired higher levels of closeness than they experienced did express their disappointment in this area and questioned their own happiness in their relationships while husbands did not seem to be bothered by their wife's perception nor question the accuracy of this perception. Also consistent with Harper and Elliott's findings, couples do not like to be too close to or too distant from each other. However, the problem with being too close was more than an issue of being stifled by the relationship; it was also perceived as a threat to individuality and may decrease one's ability in achieving personal control and goals.

In summary, closeness is determined by couples based on their levels of commitment and the outcome of reciprocating positive affect, affection, and caring. The sense of closeness involves emotional closeness and physical closeness, or the "feeling" of closeness and the "doing" of closeness. Like influence, the way couples balanced the closeness and distance was determined not only by personal preferences but also by the levels of individuality they personally desired.

The Dynamics of Influence and Closeness Within Couples

Ways Couple Share Influence

Decision-making was often examined in past research to understand how couples share influence in marriages and has been found to be divided within couples along traditional gender roles. According to Fox and Murry (2000), even though couples may view their relationships as equal, husbands' decisions tend to carry more weight than wives'. Other researchers believed that husbands would subtly use their power to direct the outcome of decision-making (Bartley, Blanton, & Gillard, 2005).

In this study, most couples reported sharing decision-making based on what worked best for them and it generally took them years of practice to figure this out. Common divisions of decision-making between partners was reported as based on personal needs/interests, individual strengths, or situational factors. These divisions were made for practical purposes and to meet the couples' preferences or circumstances. Some couples handled decision-making through discussions and debates and reported no division of decision-making. More than half of the sample reported being roughly equal in influence between partners regardless of how decision-making was divided. Seven out of eight couples reported desiring to become equal in influence eventually.

In terms of gender roles, couples were inclined to divide decision-making that matched their traditional gender roles. Wives were more likely to take on chores inside the house or be in charge of day to day decisions while husbands were mostly in charge of chores outside the house or made major decisions with wives. However, most couples made it a point to comment that they did not divide decision-making strictly based on gender roles. Some wives expressed a sense of satisfaction to have husbands willingly participate in cooking and cleaning at home and proudly announced that they mowed the lawns and worked in the yard with their husbands.

There was no evidence that husbands' decisions carried more weight than wives' in this sample. There also were no data supporting that husbands use subtle ways to direct the outcome of decision-making. However, some wives indicated that they preferred to defer some decisions to their husbands. They also reported having less influence when they did not contribute to household income. Some husbands described deferring decisions to wives, and those decisions were mostly household tasks-related (e.g., how to organize the household) or relationship-related

(e.g., what movies to watch together or which restaurant to go eat.) Husbands cited incidences like these as their effort to put wives first or as ways that their wives had more influence than they did in the relationships sometimes. In fact, husbands insisted that their wives were at least equal in their relationships if not having more influence than they were. This interesting interaction can be linked to positional and relational power. Blanton and Vandergriff-Avery (2001) described that positional power is usually defined by the culture as masculine and relational power is usually defined as feminine. They proposed that women are more likely to have higher relational power than men because they have more capacity to affect husbands through the intimate relationship, although their relational power does not go beyond the relationship itself. Findings from this study showed that positional power might still be considered masculine and relational power feminine because husbands seemed to defer relational power to wives while wives positional power to husbands. Perhaps based on this division, wives were more sensitive about not rightfully holding positional power when they were not contributing to financial resources and therefore were more likely to refrain from claiming equal influence. While husbands generally did not connect income with influence and insisted that despite how the wives felt, they were equal partners, wives did not acknowledge husbands' effort in deferring relational power to them. It seems that couples were aware of the unequal distribution of the other kind of power that was not culturally expected of them. Unknowingly, wives were more likely to be sensitive about not having equal positional power while husbands were more likely to feel not having equal relational power. In the husbands' effort to defer to their wives relational power and in the wives' effort to defer positional power to their husbands, they assumed that they were fair in sharing influence with their partners; in reality, they might not be sharing the kind of power their partners needed.

Generally, couples who could successfully work out a division system for decision-making seemed to cooperate well and reported that they were happy in their relationships. Despite dividing areas of decision-making and operating separately, couples made decisions that included the needs of their partners'. The decision-making system was a perfect example of the couples' effort to simultaneously address influence and closeness. There was a great amount of trust, respect, and mutuality in these relationships. Trust, respect, and mutuality also help couples look beyond the shifts in levels of influence between partners from time to time and focus on their togetherness. Not all couples shared influence by dividing areas of decision-making based

on personal needs/interests or individual strengths. As mentioned earlier, some couples divided decision-making due to situational factors, such as demanding or conflicting work schedules. Couples like these were inclined to be forced to split decision-making to adapt to their circumstances and were more likely to report issues and conflicts than couples who divided decision-making areas out of choice.

Gottman and his colleagues (1999) found that when husbands do not resist sharing power and decision-making with wives, their marriages were more likely to be happy and stable. This was supported by the couples in this study. Nevertheless, it was also found to be equally important for wives to share their influence when they did have more influence in their relationships. Inviting partners' influence and including their needs when making decisions is vital for a happy couple relationship.

Ways to Maintain Closeness

Participants kept their partners close in many ways. In maintaining closeness, they abided by the principle of reciprocity and facilitated a sense of togetherness and mutuality through expressing appreciation and demonstrating affection and caring. Most effort in maintaining closeness appeared to transfer into trust and affection and to facilitate the reciprocal cycle of closeness maintenance and influence sharing. Couples might not consciously maintain closeness in order to negotiate influence effectively, but the exchanges of kind acts increased trust, respect, and mutuality and thus facilitated influence sharing.

Rosenbluth and her colleagues (1998) reported that couples used reciprocity (or more specifically, mutual respect, commitment, and supportiveness) over time to facilitate relationship equality. Couples in this study expressed a preference for having equal influence and emphasized reciprocity to be crucial in their marriages. Therefore, findings from this study are consistent with Rosenbluth et al.'s research results. In addition, couples who reported that they were happier than average couples were more likely to focus on preserving their closeness and less likely to risk conflicts that could produce negative outcomes. They recognized their partner's effort in maintaining closeness and were able to cite things they did for each other. A high emphasis on reciprocity was helpful in keeping partners close. But it could also lead to power struggles and conflicts when couples perceived their affection and kind acts were not returned by

partners. The maintenance effort in closeness was so important that when it was perceived as missing in a relationship, it turned into a competition for influence for some couples.

Several participants in this sample mentioned the importance of autonomy. More wives than husbands emphasized their needs to have individuality in their marriages. Researchers have pointed out that “intimacy and autonomy are not opposite relationship qualities, but rather that they are independent aspects of well-functioning marriages” (Goodman, 2008, p. 86). Researchers have speculated that there is a great need for autonomy within cohabiting couples or couples who have more serious conflicts in their relationships (Cunningham & Antill, 1994; Goodman, 2008). The length of the marriages of couples in this study ranged from barely one year to seventeen years. There were no cohabiting couples to serve as comparisons but those who reported needing autonomy also reported being happily married. In addition, wives were the ones who specifically emphasized their need for autonomy. The expression of this particular need was triggered by the visual representation (overlapping circles) used in the Couple Map in this study. It may have given them the impression of an unhealthy, enmeshed relationship between partners. It also may be because women have traditionally been expected to sacrifice themselves for their marriages. As the role of a wife has evolved away from the dependent, submissive, and selfless image, wives in this study might be expressing their needs to be separated from that role in order to become someone who is independent, self-reliant, and able to handle equal influence in a marriage.

From the perspective of closeness, couples generally strive to work as a team – although some seem to be more successful than the others. It does not matter whether they divide decision-making and share influence with each other or debate and compete to influence the outcome of their decisions in the relationships, it is all part of their teamwork. The goal of the teamwork is to maintain the togetherness between partners. That is why sharing influence is so intricately connected with maintaining closeness in couple relationships. Even though trust, respect, and mutuality are all important elements of closeness, they are what make influence sharing effective and successful.

Taken all together, closeness is not merely an end product in couple relationships, it is also a factor that helps regulate relationship influence within couples. Although it may be unromantic for one to give and then demand something in return from the partner, no one wants to be the one who gives and gives and gets nothing in return to reaffirm the bond they share

together. The overarching principle behind all the effort that goes into maintaining closeness is reciprocity. Through giving and taking and giving back, couples keep bonding with each other and keep reaffirming that bond.

The Integral Nature of Influence and Closeness

Results from this study show that it is important to examine the dynamics of influence and closeness within couples at the same time when doing research. Just as Henry (1988) indicated, when people interact, they are simultaneously determining a dominance hierarchy and how closely they are affiliated. Findings from this study indeed support this idea. Although couples were not consciously determining a dominance hierarchy when they interacted with each other, in most cases there was ample evidence that they were monitoring and observing how they related to each other in terms of influence and closeness simultaneously.

The principle of least interest described that individuals who were less emotionally involved in relationships perceived themselves as having more control over their relationships (Waller & Hill, 1951). Naturally, participants would not have reported using this tactic even if they were doing so lest they hurt each other's feelings. However, power struggles were both observed and reported in the interviews with couples. When couples clearly did not see eye to eye with partners, they reported not being interested in the issues or indicated that they were just not as invested in them as their partners. The more their partners pushed, the more they minimized the importance of the issues. This fervent pursuit of proving who is right sets off the demand/withdraw cycle Christensen and Heavey proposed in 1990. This asserts that the one who owns the problems (or desires for change) tends to be the one who demands or pursues the issues. Findings in this study support this assertion: when discussing wives' issues, husbands were more likely to withdraw while wives were more likely to demand (Heavey et al., 1993; Klinetob & Smith, 1996) and vice versa. It also was found that in a relationship that involves a pursue-withdraw cycle, the pursuers may use emotional drama to replace intimacy while the distancers use power struggle instead (Shaddock, 1998). Couples who experienced power struggles indeed reported and demonstrated similar interactions in the interviews – the pursuers expressed how emotionally overwhelmed they were to be trapped in their circumstances and the distancers kept resisting dealing with the issues. Research showed that wife-demand-husband-withdraw patterns were associated with lower marital satisfaction (Heavey & Malamuth, 1995),

whereas husband-demand-wife-withdraw predicted higher marital satisfaction of the wives (Heavey et al., 1993). Due to a small sample, results from this study were not enough to confirm or refute these findings. However, results from this study did reveal the complexity of couple interactions. There were multiple ongoing pursue-withdraw cycles occurring within some couples. When a husband pursued his issue, the wife might withdraw or dismiss it or pursue her issue to redirect the pursue-withdraw cycle and vice versa. As for how a pursue-withdraw cycle affects relationship satisfaction, one wife pursued a household issue with her husband while her husband pursued the sexual intimacy issue with her and both reported to be happier than average couples. One husband pursued a household issue with his wife while his wife resisted and dismissed him. The husband expressed unhappiness in the marriage while the wife admitted that compared with average couples they were not happy but she still felt happy just to be with him. These results show that the perception of relationship satisfaction could change depending on the perspectives the couples used to examine their marriages. Nevertheless, full blown pursue-withdraw cycles were only reported by these two couples. Most participants reported accepting influence from their partners from time to time, so the power struggles were not as persistent.

Generally, it was not uncommon to find that couples negotiated their influence in a way that preserved their closeness, or to find that couples used their influence to bargain or demand for the kind of closeness they desired. Influence and closeness are inseparable in couple relationships. It is important to keep studying both influence and closeness in couple research instead of only focusing on one side of the interaction as researchers generally did in the past.

Discrepancies in Relating Styles in Relation to Relationship Satisfaction

Autonomy issues, personalities and family backgrounds, differences in perspectives, and different definitions in influence and/or closeness were commonly reported by couples to create discrepancies in their perceived and desired relating styles. Couples reported that they were still relating to each other the way they desired and believed that discrepancies due to personal needs, personality differences, and definitions of influence and closeness were more difficult to change than discrepancies caused by other factors. As long as the couples did not have discrepancies between their perceived and desired relating styles, the couples generally tried to overlook their differences and moved on with their lives.

Past studies showed that couples became frustrated when there was a perceived lack of intimacy and unequal influence in their relationships (Felmlee, 1994; Sprecher et al., 2006). Couples in this sample indeed preferred a rough balance in sharing influence and a rough balance in the effort of maintaining closeness between partners. When there was a perceived lack of closeness or unequal influence in their relationships, partners who desired more closeness or influence were the ones to express dissatisfaction. The ones who felt comfortable with less closeness or had more influence in the relationships generally felt happy and comfortable with how they related to their partners. It is reasonable that only the partners who own the problem experience and express dissatisfaction with the discrepancies in relating styles. However, attitudes towards the discrepancies and the ways the discrepancies were handled have been found to be crucial in this study as well. Most couples in this sample accepted their differences and tried to look at things in a positive way to preserve their closeness. There were a few couples having a difficult time reaching a compromise due to strong personalities and high levels of negativity in their relationships.

Gottman and his colleagues (1999) noticed that wives tend to match husbands' negativity while husbands tend to escalate it. They concluded that using criticism, contempt, defensiveness, or stone-walling to escalate a conflict is the sign of a man resisting his wife's influence and the resistance and escalation tend to lead to marital instability. In this study, both cases in which there were high levels of negativity between partners, husbands were the ones who escalated the conflict by criticizing their wives, showing contempt and being defensive during the interviews. Felix focused on complaining and only criticized when Fay appeared to dismiss his complaints, Ethan actively engaged in delivering top-down criticisms to Ella, especially when she challenged his facts during the interview. Interestingly in both cases, the wives seemed to separate their conflicts from their relationships and reported feeling close to their husbands. Discrepancies in perceived and desired closeness were only slight for these wives and they reported feeling happier than their husbands in their relationships. The wives' reports could be used to support Heavey et al.'s finding (1993) that husband-demand-wife-withdraw predicts an increase in the wives' marital satisfaction. But it also could be the wife's effort to preserve what was left in their closeness, or to avoid engaging in an issue she did not want change, or to save face in an interview setting. Both of the husbands, on the other hand, had strong feelings about the unbalanced influence (one husband high and wife low and one wife high and husband low) in

their relationships and reported feeling distant from their wives. Due to the large discrepancies in the perceived and desired influence and closeness in their relationships, both husbands reported being unhappy in their marriages.

Couples' perceptions of closeness were found to be crucial because these perceptions determined how closeness was expressed between partners. Couples reported to be happier and have less difficulty in sharing influence in their relationships when they had similar perceptions on closeness and similar preferences on what to do to increase closeness within them. However, more than half of the participants in the sample experienced closeness differently from their partners. When partners perceived the closeness between them differently or demonstrated and received closeness in different ways, they had a difficult time relating and feeling close to each other.

Researchers have emphasized the importance for partners to receive another's attempt to reconnect emotionally in a positive way (Gottman & DeClaire, 2001) and to "turn toward each other" (Gottman & Silver, 1999, p. 79) to establish an emotional connection between them. "Real-life romance is fueled by a far more humdrum approach to staying connected" (Gottman & Silver, 1999, p. 80). These comments were supported on all counts in this study. Couples who reported to be happier than average couples demonstrated positive interactions consistently in their reports and in their interviews. Instead of dwelling on their discrepancies and questioning each other's effort in maintaining closeness, these couples focused on the things they did well and emphasized their similarities. They accepted the discrepancies in their relating styles as they were and treated their differences as minor nuances in life. Not only did they look at things positively, they interacted with each other in positive manners. The two couples with high levels of negativity did not demonstrate positive outlooks like the happy couples did in the sample. They seemed to overlook little positive gestures from each other and spent more energy on bickering and defending themselves. They came to terms in the end after they exhausted each other with arguments back and forth. They understood the risks and expressed their concerns about the ways they interacted with each other. This shows that, in terms of marital satisfaction, couples' attitudes and approaches to discrepancies in relating styles are at least equally important, if not more important, than the discrepancies they had.

Compatibilities in Couple Relating Styles and Relationship Satisfaction

Most couples in this study reported having compatible relating styles. One couple reported incompatibility in influence due to personality clashes that resulted in regular power struggles. One couple reported incompatibility in closeness due to personality differences that resulted in different levels of closeness desired between partners. Despite various challenges and frustrations reported by all couples, a desire to stay together and make their relationships work was reported across the board. From couples' responses to whether they are compatible in terms of influence and closeness, some common themes emerged – “It works for us,” growth, and commitment and attachment – reflecting that couples felt most compatible when they worked well together and worked as a team. Being able to learn from each other and grow together despite the difficulties was reported to be a rewarding experience that strengthened the bond between partners. Commitment and attachment also were found to be important motivations for couples to keep working on their relationships.

Results from Sternberg's research (1998, 2000) implied that compatible styles of relating includes couples who have roughly equal influence, have one high and one low in influence, or who are roughly equal in closeness. Incompatible styles of relating are observed in couples with both partners high in influence or one partner high and one low in closeness. These implications were somewhat supported by the data from this sample. However, to address couples' situations more specifically, both perceived and desired styles of relating need to be considered at the same time. After integrating research implications with qualitative results from this sample, implications for compatibilities and incompatibilities in terms of influence and closeness in couple relationships should be reconsidered. The following statements are made to adjust implications drawn from Sternberg's studies to incorporate findings from this study (with italic words indicating additional findings from this study): Compatible relating styles are associated with couples who are roughly equal in influence, or have one partner high and one low in influence *if consistent with individual's desired levels of influence*, or who are roughly equal in *desired* closeness. Incompatible styles of relating refer to couples in which both partners *compete for* influence or when one partner is high and one is low in *desired* closeness.

Harper and Elliott (1988) reported that discrepancies in desired and perceived styles of relating were stronger predictors for relationship satisfaction than perceived intimacy. This appears to be consistent with couples' responses in this study. Despite the discrepancies in levels

of perceived closeness and/or perceived influence between partners, the couples focused their attention on the similarities in relating styles they desired to have and reported compatibilities based on that mutual goal. Two additional interesting findings were found in this study. First, no couples from this sample reported both partners to be high in influence. This may be due to interviewing the partners together. The couples had to determine who had more influence and who had less because it did not make sense otherwise. However, there was one couple with both husband and wife reporting to have less influence than the other in their relationship. The couple found it odd but recognized that their perceptions were subjective and then accepted it. Second, couples did not report incompatibility unless there were irresolvable differences. They felt more comfortable reporting incompatibility in a confined area, such as in closeness or in influence than overall incompatibility. Even when they had long-standing conflicts in relating styles, they reported that as not incompatible or as harder to be compatible.

Relationship Issues and Their Associations with Influence and Closeness

The results are mixed regarding how agreements and disagreements in relationship issues are perceived to affect influence and closeness in couple relationships. At least half of the sample described disagreements in a variety of issues affecting their influence and closeness at the same time. A few couples cited handling finances and household chores to be related to influence sharing and demonstrations of affection, sex relations, and amount of time spent together to be issues related to maintaining closeness in their relationships. A few couples reported that they rarely had disagreements and could not pinpoint any issues that impact their closeness or influence.

Finances and division of labor have been two popular research topics related to distribution of resources in marriage. Based on Blood and Wolfe's resource theory (1960), each partner has resources that are valuable to the other partner. The partner with valuable resources that the other partner needs has an advantage as the dominant one in the relationship (Kulik, 2011). Social contexts determine which types of resources are considered relevant to power (Kulik, 1999). Participants in the current study came with different family backgrounds, exhibited various individual strengths/needs, and described unique gender role expectations; therefore, the couples did not always agree on the meaning of each relationship issue and its relevance to influence and closeness. This leads back to Rollins and Bahr's (1976) assumptions

about power. Power indeed is a relative concept because authority, resources, and power are determined by the perceptions of both husbands and wives. In some cases, wives reported a preference to defer to their husbands and respect their influence, indicating they might still hold traditional gender norms that husbands should lead the families. However, these wives also expected an equal say in major decision-making and desired the same respect in return. Couples in this study generally associated particular relationship issues to influence and power when they had conflicting goals in those areas. This explained why couples who reported that they rarely had conflicts could not associate any issues with influence and closeness in their relationships because this concept had little relevance to their relationships.

Although some issues were perceived to be directly linked to influence or closeness by a few couples, a broad variety of issues were reported by couples to be important to their relationships. There are no apparent patterns regarding what issues are specifically related to influence or closeness. In many occasions, couples cited a certain issue to be related to influence, but, by the time they fully explained how the issue was related to influence, they had also described how the issue affected their closeness. For example, one husband named household chores to be an issue about which he and his wife had power struggles, but he then commented that because of their disagreements, and because he had to be the “drive” to “motivate” his wife in the relationship, he just could not feel close to his wife. Therefore, couples’ responses can be converged into one common theme: If an issue was important for both partners and the conflicts went on long enough, both influence and closeness in the relationship could be impacted.

Applications of Styles of Relating Model – Couple Map

The Styles of Relating Model – Couple Map provided a visual model on which partners could easily identify their relating styles and share their perceptions and thoughts about their relationships. The simplicity of the map empowered couples to define, explain, and understand the ways they relate to each other through influence and closeness. Because of these advantages, the Couple Map has great potential to be incorporated into marriage and relationship enrichment programs by family life educators and counselors.

Couple relating styles can be taught in individual and group settings. Although relating styles may be stable in the long run, couples generally have both good and bad times in their relationships that lead them to relate to each other in different ways. It is beneficial for couples to

explore their relationship assets and barriers and learn to emphasize strategies that works and can improve their relationships. In group settings, couples can easily exchange their experiences in sharing influence and maintaining closeness with other couples and learn different approaches to enhance their relating styles.

The Couple Map can be used by practitioners as a useful diagnostic tool to assist couples who seek counseling services. Traditionally, couples who seek counseling for problems in their relationships receive assistance in resolving conflicts they are willing to bring up to the surface level. It is the counselor's responsibility to find out the interaction patterns that are problematic between the partners and search for their inner conflicts. It takes great effort from a counselor to build a relationship of trust with a couple and prepare them mentally and psychologically until they are able to see their relationship from a new perspective. The Couple Map can help couples visualize their different relating styles immediately. Early recognition of unbalanced power in a relationship may reveal hidden agendas faster than a traditional probing and guiding approach. One of the most difficult jobs a counselor has to do is to confront clients with problems he or she identifies. Clients may feel threatened by the counselor's increasing confrontation and become evasive or resistant to further discussions. By using the Couple Map as a tool, the couples can find out their differences through their own perceptions and interpretations with a counselor at their sides who can gently guide them through the process. This opportunity to discuss important but implicit matters in romantic relationships can be very valuable to couples, practitioners, and family educators.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

Qualitative studies give participants the opportunities to express their voices and allow them to provide rich content and unique details that are essential to help researchers understand the research topic in great depth. This study not only fulfilled these purposes, but also exemplified the usefulness of adopting a visual model to encourage breadth and depth of discussions from participants.

As expected, the concepts of influence and closeness are complex. Therefore, to pin point exactly what couples mean when they use these terms proved to be rather challenging. In fact, influence was such a sensitive topic for couples that it was difficult to find the right words to describe how partners manage this concept. Couples with strong personalities sometimes

switched to “control” or “power” when they referred to influence. Others preferred using “balancing” or “sharing” when discussing influence and avoided using “negotiating” or “competing.” Information like this allowed me to take couples’ attitudes and reactions into consideration and to witness a qualitative difference between the following statements: “(Smile) We are happier than average couples.” and “(Long pause. No affect.) I guess we are happier than average couples.”

Naturally, this study has its limitations. Results on couple relating styles were mostly based on couples’ reports and partly from observing couples’ interactions during the interview. The assumption was that couples interacted with each other similarly in the interview rooms to how they related to each other in their own households. However, in an interview setting in which couples were sharing personal thoughts and details to a complete stranger, a certain level of social desirability may be expected. Judging from the way most couples were open about both positive and negative aspects of their relationships, they seemed to be rather truthful in doing their best to present how they interact with each other in general. Nevertheless, the study still may not have been able to capture a complete picture of couple interactions.

The small sample size may have limited the types of relating styles available for this study and the applicability of findings to a broader population. The limited research time available for this study prevents further investigation in various aspects, including asking the couples to compare their relating styles reported in the interview and survey and explain the differences between the two reports.

Implications for Researchers

Past studies often used decision-making as an important indicator for influence in couple relationships. Results of this study showed that although it is mostly true that decision-making is an important indicator of influence, when one does not bargain for the responsibility of decision-making and is forced into the position, it does not come with a sense of having more influence in the relationship. Closeness was found to best reflect the definition and components of intimacy proposed by Moss and Schwebel (1993), indicating closeness involves commitment, affective intimacy, cognitive intimacy, physical intimacy, and mutuality. Couples experienced influence closeness through various channels in their relationships. They also shared influence and maintained closeness using multiple approaches. The different perceptions of influence and

closeness between husbands and wives and differences in their preferences to share influence and maintain closeness suggest that there is still more for researchers to learn from couple interactions. Due to the complexity of these two dimensions, it is important for researchers to further clarify the definitions of influence and closeness with the participants in future studies and to investigate the dynamics of influence and closeness at the same time.

Based on the responses of these participants, it seems that husbands and wives are seeking an equal relationship these days. They preferred to use “balance” and “share” to describe the ways they negotiate their relating styles. However, there are still several gender specific assumptions embedded in couples’ discussions in the interviews, suggesting that researchers may need to look for subtle signs to understand how couples manage the assumptions that may keep them from approaching an equal relationship in order to fully understand the dynamics of couple interactions.

Autonomy emerged as important factor mediating the ways couples share influence and maintain closeness. At the same time, perceptions of enmeshment are not consistently reported across couples. Additional research could investigate how couples define and manage independence and interdependence in couple relationships in order to fully understand couples’ choices of relating styles.

Many couples in this sample reported that they adjusted the ways they related to each other to accommodate circumstances in their relationship when necessary. The recurrent shifts between good and bad times have been reported by couples to be normal fluctuations of couple relationships. Adjustments were usually made by both parties automatically to meet the demands of such changes in life. The differences in couples’ reported relating styles in surveys and in interviews suggest that partners frequently regulate influence and closeness between them. This is considered to be natural and typical. However, couples also appeared to be very stable in the ways they related to each other because no matter how their relating styles shifted between good and bad times, they rarely deviated from their general patterns. Close couples tended to remain somewhat close. Couples who had power struggles may have switched in and out of the dominant role but the dynamics remained the same. Based on the limited sample, closeness seems to more stable than influence in couple relationships. It is important for future research to study the differences between self-report and couple-report and their relations to relationship satisfaction. Researchers should also expand the definition of influence. In addition to decision-

making, positional, relational, and overall influence should all be included. With regard to closeness, both definitions of closeness and approaches to closeness should be studied because the perceptions of closeness include a combination of these two aspects.

Implications for Family Life Educators and Couples

Family life education (FLE) is about prevention and education (NCFR, 2011). Relationship enrichment programs designed for these purposes generally organize and disseminate findings directly from the research. This approach has always been considered ideal and reliable. However, two potentially problematic assumptions behind this approach emerged after reviewing the findings of this study, suggesting that these assumptions may need to be reevaluated. These assumptions are that majority of couples define basic relationship concepts similar to those described in the research, and the ways couples interact with each other can be categorized into certain patterns as discovered from the studies. Findings from this study reveal that the definitions of influence and closeness and the perceptions of relating styles vary from individual to individual. Despite the wealth of findings in influence and closeness, our understanding of their functions and dynamics in couple relationships is still limited. Relationship enrichment programs, if only focused on disseminating evidence may not be enough to address the unique circumstances and needs of couples.

Knowing that no two couples are exactly alike, it is important for family life educators to design relationship enrichment programs that help couples explore, recognize and respect differing values and help them understand how they relate to each other through both influence and closeness. Couples should also be taught to identify the underlying meanings of influence and closeness for themselves and be guided to explore the assets and barriers in their relationships.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that when couples are interacting, the dynamics of influence and intimacy are at work. The outcome of the sharing and maintenance of influence and closeness has a direct bearing on couples' relationship satisfaction. It is very important for the field to learn directly from couples how they meet each other's needs and accommodate their differences. One of the most important findings from this study is that successful relationships come in many forms. There is no perfect formula for couple relating styles and there is no ideal combination for

influence and closeness. A happy relationship operates on trust, respect, and mutuality in sharing influence and maintaining closeness. When these components are present, the relationship “works.”

She's good at certain things and I'm good at certain things. And I think, where she's lacking on certain things, I fill in; where I'm lacking, she fills in. And then if there's a gap and neither one of us is good at it, we'll work together. I mean, we'll do the best that we can. It may not be perfect but I think we can.

Danny

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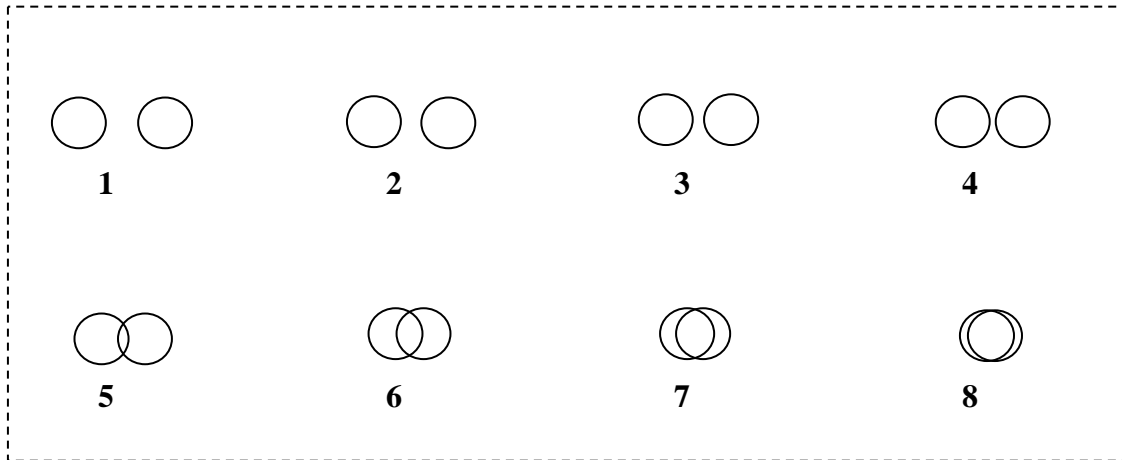
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Styles of Relating – Couple Closeness



How intimate is your relationship? Please take a look at all eight images above carefully and pick an image that portrays your relationship according to the following questions:

First, please rate yourself:

1. Generally, how close are you to your partner?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

2. Generally, how close do you desire to be with your partner?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Now, base on your perception, please rate your partner:

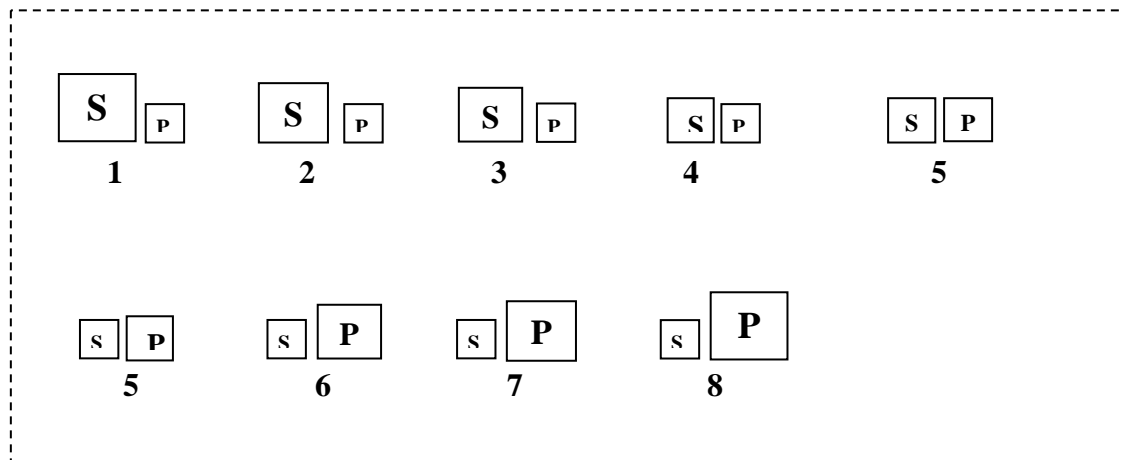
3. Generally, how close is your partner to you?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

4. Generally, how close does your partner desire to be with you?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Styles of Relating - Relationship Influence



Who has more influence to the partner/spouse in your relationship? Please take a look at all eight images above (**S** stands for Self and **P** stands for Partner) carefully and pick an image that portrays your relationship according to the following questions:

Please **CIRCLE** a number according to how you feel about your relationship with your partner:

1. Generally, how much influence do you have in your relationship?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

2. Generally, how much influence do you desire to have in your relationship?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Please **CIRCLE** a number according to how you feel about your partner in the relationship: (In this case, place *your partner* in Self position and *you* as the Partner.)

3. Generally, how much influence does your partner have in your relationship?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

4. Generally, how much influence does your partner desire to have in your relationship?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS)

For the following items, please think of your current relationship with the romantic partner you spend the most time with:

1. How well does your partner meet your needs?

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly		Average		Extremely well

2. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

1	2	3	4	5
Unsatisfied		Average		Extremely satisfied

3. How good is your relationship compared to most?

1	2	3	4	5
Poor		Average		Excellent

4. How often do you wish you hadn't gotten into this relationship?

1	2	3	4	5
Never		Average		Very often

5. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?

1	2	3	4	5
Hardly at all		Average		Completely

6. How much do you love your partner?

1	2	3	4	5
Not much		Average		Very much

7. How many problems are there in your relationship?

1	2	3	4	5
Very few		Average		Very many

Dyadic Adjustment Scale – Dyadic Consensus Subscale

Most couples have disagreements in their relationships. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list.

	Always agree	Almost always agree	Occasionally disagree	Frequently disagree	Almost always disagree	Always disagree
1. Handling finances	5	4	3	2	1	0
2. Matters of recreation	5	4	3	2	1	0
3. Religious matters	5	4	3	2	1	0
4. Demonstrations of affection	5	4	3	2	1	0
5. Friends	5	4	3	2	1	0
6. Sex relations	5	4	3	2	1	0
7. Conventionality (correct or proper behavior)	5	4	3	2	1	0
8. Philosophy of life	5	4	3	2	1	0
9. Ways of dealing with parents or in-laws	5	4	3	2	1	0
10. Aims, goals, and things believed important	5	4	3	2	1	0
11. Making major decisions	5	4	3	2	1	0
12. Amount of time spent together	5	4	3	2	1	0
13. Household tasks	5	4	3	2	1	0
14. Leisure time interests and activities	5	4	3	2	1	0
15. Career decisions	5	4	3	2	1	0

Appendix B - Interview Informed Consent

PROJECT TITLE: Shall We Dance? Finding the Balance of Influence and Intimacy within Couples

APPROVAL DATE: 03-01-2011

EXPIRATION DATE:03-01-2012

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Karen S. Myers-Bowman

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Wen-chi Chen, PhD Candidate

CONTACT NAME AND PHONE FOR ANY PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS:

Karen S. Myers-Bowman, Principal Investigator, (785) 532-1491 / karensm@ksu.edu

Wen-chi Chen, PhD Candidate, wchen@ksu.edu

IRB CHAIR CONTACT/PHONE INFORMATION:

- Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.
- Jerry Jaax, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance and University Veterinarian, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: The purpose of the research is to study how couples relate to each other and how their relationship satisfaction is associated with it.

PROCEDURES: At an agreed upon site or at your house and at a time that will be convenient for you, a researcher will ask you questions about how you and your partner balance influence and closeness in your relationship. Both partners are asked to be present because the purpose of the study is to obtain perspectives from both partners.

LENGTH OF STUDY: The interview will last approximately 1.5 hours.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED: You may feel some questions are sensitive or personal to you. You may choose to not answer one or more questions or to withdraw at any time. The researcher has counseling background and will terminate the interview when noticing the process may cause potential conflict or damage to the couple.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED: Many couples who have participated in similar interviews have enjoyed them. You can learn about yourself and your partner. You may find the interview presents a new perspective on how you can communicate about your interactions. You can help other couples by sharing your insights on couple relationships.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY: The investigator will keep your record and recording confidential. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity. All recordings will be destroyed

once the study has completed. Your records may be reviewed for audit purposes by authorized University faculty who will be bound by the same provisions of confidentiality.

TERMS OF PARTICIPATION: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is completely voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant.)

Participant #1 Name: _____

Participant #1 Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Participant #2 Name: _____

Participant #2 Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Witness to Signature: _____ **Date:** _____