

2006

Dimensions of Non-violent Couple Conflict: A Look at Joint Leisure and Relationship Satisfaction

Lori Michaud

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/etd>



Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Michaud, Lori, "Dimensions of Non-violent Couple Conflict: A Look at Joint Leisure and Relationship Satisfaction" (2006). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 446.

<http://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/etd/446>

This Open-Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine.

**DIMENSIONS OF NON-VIOLENT COUPLE
CONFLICT: A LOOK AT JOINT LEISURE AND
RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION**

By

Lori Michaud

B.A. University of Maine, 2005

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science

(in Human Development)

The Graduate School

The University of Maine

August, 2006

Advisory Committee:

Robert Milardo, Professor of Family Relations, Advisor

Sandra Caron, Professor of Family Relations/Human Sexuality

Renate Klein, Associate Professor of Family Studies

© 2006 Lori Michaud
All Rights Reserved

LIBRARY RIGHTS STATEMENT

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree at The University of Maine, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for “fair use” copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the Librarian. It is understood that any copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my permission.

Signature:

Date:

**DIMENSIONS OF NON-VIOLENT COUPLE CONFLICT:
A LOOK AT JOINT LEISURE AS
AN INFLUENCE ON RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION**

By Lori Michaud

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Robert Milardo

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Science
(in Human Development)
August, 2006

It is important to study relationships due to high divorce rates. This research study examines conflict, relationship rituals, and joint leisure activity and their correlations with relationship satisfaction. This study is based on 114 married and unmarried participants. With a bivariate analysis, this study found that when relationship satisfaction is high, relationship rituals and joint leisure activity is also high. It is likely the couple deals with conflict advantageously therefore, when given the opportunity to partake in relationship rituals and joint leisure activities, they are given the opportunity to connect, communicate and create shared meaning resulting in a positive experience and lower conflict levels. Means between demographic groups were also compared.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to offer my genuine thanks to Robert Milardo, Sandy Caron, Renate Klein, Phil Pratt, participants, faculty, staff, friends, Karen Kidder, my parents and family.

My advisor, Robert Milardo, you guided me through undergraduate and graduate school and supported my rapid work rate. You've taught me so much academically and introduced me to some great thinkers who I will continue to admire.

My committee members Sandy Caron and Renate Klein. Sandy, you are such an amazing teacher, thank you for your fantastic input and concern. Renate, I really enjoy reading your work and thank you for your great contributions along the way.

Phil Pratt, a super statistics teacher, thank you for all of your SPSS guidance.

To the participants in this study, thank you, obviously, without you, this would not have been possible.

Faculty and staff, thank you for your help in getting me where I am today.

To my friends, thank you for taking an interest in what I do and supporting me during demanding times.

To my part-time job boss, Karen Kidder, you are so wonderful and I truly appreciate all of your life assistance.

To my parents and family, you are incredible and I love you. Thank you for your strength, support and love. You are my heroes and I hope to continue to make you proud.

To all those I forgot to mention, past, present and future, my sincere thanks for your influence.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
Chapter	
1. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	1
Preview of Topics.....	1
Research Questions.....	2
The Domain of Non-Violent Couple Conflict.....	2
Non-Violent Couple Conflict May Lead to Divorce.....	3
The Topics Couples Have Conflict About.....	3
Couple Conflict Effects on a Couple.....	4
Parental Conflict Affects Children.....	5
Gender Differences Considerations in Couple Conflict.....	6
Demographic Considerations in Couple Conflict.....	7
Relationship Satisfaction and Conflict.....	10
Rituals and Joint Leisure Activities in a Relationship.....	11
Purpose and Hypothesis.....	13
2. METHODOLOGY.....	15
Participants.....	15
Instruments.....	17
Procedure.....	21

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	23
Hypothesis 1.....	26
Hypothesis 2.....	26
Hypothesis 3.....	27
Demographic Comparisons.....	28
Qualitative Measures.....	30
Limitations of this Study.....	31
Conclusion.....	31
REFERENCES.....	33
APPENDICES.....	38
Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer.....	38
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form.....	39
Appendix C: Questionnaire.....	41
Appendix D: Debriefing Form.....	53
BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR.....	54

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Description of the Sample.....	16
Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Relationship Measures.....	23
Table 3: Relationship Measure Correlations.....	25
Table 4: Demographic Comparisons.....	29

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Hypothesis.....	14
---------------------------	----

Chapter I

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is important to study relationship factors to promote healthier relationships in a society with such a high divorce rate. Conflict can negatively affect relationship satisfaction, which can lead to divorce or break up of a couple. As researchers in the social sciences, we must do something about this. Approximately fifty percent of first marriages will end in divorce (Ham, 2004). If we can figure out how to manage conflict, perhaps something can be done to promote healthier relationships and reduce the divorce rate. The research study I will conduct looks into relationship rituals, how partners spend their leisure time together and how these issues influence relationship satisfaction. Relationship rituals such as date nights can help couples relax, create shared meaning, spend quality time together and communicate—reducing non-violent couple conflict since quality time together, communication and appropriate levels of conflict are well-known factors of a successful relationship. Joint leisure activities are paired with lead to more positive interactions in the relationship (Gottman, 1999).

Preview of Topics

Couple conflict will be referred to as non-physically violent conflict. Non-violent conflict excludes physical violence between partners meaning no physical abuse such as hitting. Though forms of violence are often embedded in conflict and can not always be so neatly separated, this study focuses on everyday conflict over common domestic issues. Non-violent couple conflict is an ordinary occurrence in every relationship. I begin with the importance for research on the topic of couple conflict. First discussed will be couple conflict. This paper will then discuss couple conflict in regard to

demographic characteristics of couples such as sexual preference, relationship and parental status and relationship duration. To emphasize the significance of conflict, I will examine how conflict affects a couple's mental health, physical health and their relationship with each other. It's imperative that we consider individual and gender differences when addressing couple conflict through therapy and interventions. This paper will take a look at research on how non-violent couple conflict affects children. In addition, I compare successful and distressed relationships and constructive versus destructive conflict. Rituals and joint leisure activities as factors that influence relationship satisfaction will be reviewed. The research study conducted by the author about joint leisure activity, conflict level and relationship satisfaction will be described.

Research Questions

There is an abundance of literature on couple conflict. I address four primary research questions in the literature review. What is non-violent couple conflict? How does non-violent couple conflict vary among different demographic groups? How does non-violent couple conflict affect the couple and their children? How are rituals and joint leisure activities connected to conflict levels and relationship satisfaction? There are three research questions for this study. Is higher relationship satisfaction linked to lower conflict levels? Are rituals and joint leisure activities linked to lower conflict levels? Are rituals and joint leisure activities linked to higher relationship satisfaction?

The Domain of Non-Violent Couple Conflict

Relationship conflict is the mismatch of thoughts and goals between a couple. Relationship conflict is the belief that one and their partner's goals cannot be arrived at together (Klein & Johnson, 2000).

Non-Violent Couple Conflict May Lead to Divorce

Non-Violent couple conflict may lead to divorce. Though healthy and manageable conflict is helpful and necessary to a successful relationship (Gottman, 1995), less constructive modes of conflict may lead to divorce (Gottman & Levenson, 2000). In a 2000 study by Gottman and Levenson, predictors of marital stability were researched. Divorce in a couple was more likely five years after marriage and sixteen years after marriage. Conflicts were videotaped, analyzed and placed in two different conflict pattern categories to predict earlier or later divorce. Pattern one, which was high conflict, consisted of attack and defense and lead to earlier divorce. In this research, a second pattern, consisting of withdrawing from conflict, lead to later divorce. Couples that had a more positive affect during conflict were more likely to stay together (Gottman & Levenson, 2000).

The Topics Couples Have Conflict About

Hatch and Bulcroft (2004), in an article about long-term marriages and disagreements, used the National Survey of Families and Households to report that couples have frequent disagreements about finances, household labor, quality time together and intimacy. One of the most widely held subjects that couples have conflict about is the division of household labor. An unequal division of household labor could lead to conflict in a relationship if a member of the partnership is upset about the division. It is not so much key that the division be equal, but it is important that both members of a relationship feel the division is appropriate (Kluwer, Heesink, & De Vliert, 2000). If a member of the relationship feels they are doing all of the cooking, cleaning, shopping and child rearing, they may have negative feelings towards their partner and

their relationship (Kluwer, Heesink, & De Vliert), which may lead to conflict. A survey by Cubbins and Vannoy, 2004, reported that women who are dissatisfied with the division of household labor in their relationship are more likely to be dissatisfied with their relationship.

Couple Conflict Effects on a Couple

Conflict affects a couple's physical health. Heffner, Kiecolt-Glaser, Loving, Glaser and Malarkey (2004) conducted a study measuring blood pressure and cortisol levels during conflict. Conflict raises blood pressure and affects cortisol levels. Cortisol, an adrenal-cortex hormone is necessary for carbohydrate and protein metabolism and is a function of blood pressure. Cortisol levels can be affected by something like spousal support, which is a predictor of marital satisfaction (Heffner, Kiecolt-Glaser, Loving, Glaser, & Malarkey). High blood pressure is a cause of coronary heart disease, which may lead to heart attack (Vasan, Sullivan, Wilson, Sempos, Sundström, Kannel, Levy & D'Agostino, 2005). In Loving, Heffner, Kiecolt-Glaser and Malarkey's 2004 study of spousal support and marital satisfaction effects on physiological health these authors reported that negative interactions in a marriage could affect cardio, endocrine and immune systems.

Non-violent couple conflict affects a couple's mental health. Conflict can lead to withdrawal and depression. Beach, Dandeen and O'Leary (1990) report that fifty percent of depressed women also report difficulty in their marriage. Depression is linked to poor problem solving techniques (Marchand, 2004). A lack of or inability of relational skills linked to depression affects conflict in a marriage. A reduced ability to deal with the conflicts of marriage promotes further conflict. Studies show that depression is paired

with conflict and conflict is paired with depression. The cycles make it difficult to deal with depression and/or conflict since they are so entwined (Friedman, 2004; Marchand).

There is no doubt that high conflict can affect a couple's decision to separate or stay together. Rusbult's investment model tells us that the decision to stay together relies on satisfaction, investments and quality of alternatives. As mentioned earlier, conflict affects satisfaction (Panayiotou, 2005).

Parental Conflict Affects Children

Relationship conflict between parents affects children. After conflict, parents have less positive interactions with children, which can lead to adjustment issues for the child and make it harder to deal with future relationships. A child may search for romantic relationships since the parental relationship is inadequate to them (Doyle, Brengden, Markiewicz & Kamkar, 2003). Witnessing parental conflict and its second hand effects are emotionally damaging to children (Baum, 2004). Parental conflict affects the children involved. Since divorce rates are high in the United States, it is very likely that throughout the course of the divorce process, high parental conflict is present. It is important that we look at how parental conflict affects children. Children are impressionable and they learn many non-productive interactive patterns of conflict resolution from observing their parents. Parental conflict can continue to influence children after divorce. In the interviews of divorcees, Hopper (2001) found that most divorces have high conflict levels. This includes conflict about division of property, verbal conflict and conflict over who gets the children. Divorce can also lead to more severe conflicts such as kidnapping the children, threats, physical violence, destroying property, verbal abuse and stalking. It's believed that one third of couples still have

conflicts after their separation (Hopper, 2001). All of this greatly affects the children even if they aren't intimately involved in the conflict. When their parents are involved, the children are involved.

Adolescents learn about conflict from parents, friends and their own experiences (Siliman & Schumm, 2004). Social Learning Theory portrays that teenagers who grow up witnessing destructive conflict may have greater difficulty in future relationships because they are more likely to be less educated in the areas of relationships and less prepared for marriage. A research study conducted by Siliman and Schumm in 2004 reported that dating education in high schools is linked to more positive conflict coping skills.

Family components affect a child's grade point average in school. Children who come from families without divorce actually do better in school (Ham, 2004). Students with a dual-parent family have an average GPA of 3.41. Students who are reared by a single mother have an average GPA of 2.92. Children who are reared by a single father have an average GPA of 2.88. Children who come from remarried families have an average GPA of 2.86 (Doyle, Brendgen, Markiewicz & Kamkar, 2005). Grades are contingent on the amount of work the child puts in and the availability of the parents. If a parent simply does not have the time or is busy arguing or too stressed from a recent argument, they may not be as available to the child (Ham).

Gender Considerations in Couple Conflict

Marriage has different benefits for the husband and wife. The husband is known to get more psychosocial gain out of the marriage than his wife. Women are

psychologically and physically better off when in happier marriages. Men are better off if they are simply in a marriage (Faulkner, Davey & Davey, 2005).

Women and men deal with conflict differently. Faulkner, Davey and Davey (2005) analyzed data on marital satisfaction and conflict from the National Survey on Families and Households. These researchers did find some gender differences in marital satisfaction and conflict. Women usually approach their husband, ask them to talk about problems and deal with the conflict (Faulkner, Davey & Davey, 2005). Men usually avoid conflict. This is also known as the demand-withdraw pattern. Women usually pay more attention to the emotional aspects of conflict situations whereas men tend to be more task-oriented. Women most commonly suggest that there is a problem that needs deliberation (Faulkner, Davey & Davey, 2005). In dealing with marital conflict, we need to take into consideration individual and gender differences.

Demographic Considerations in Couple Conflict

The age of the couple affects conflict. Hatch and Bulcroft (2004) analyzed data from the National Survey of Families and Households and found that conflict decreases as age of the marriage increases. The couple gets accustomed to each other and learns how to deal with their conflict. A couple is more likely to stick out the marriage the longer they have been married. Older couples have lived a life together and their disagreements change over their lifetime (Hatch & Bulcroft). For example, a couple's disagreements range from which house to buy when they are in their 20's, to how much money to invest in their retirement plans when they are in their 40's and to where to retire when they are in their 60's. Later in life, there are no children to rear, a couple is more established in their routines as a couple and they don't have work stress with which to

deal. Older couples were raised more traditionally and to believe in marriage as an eternal institution so, they may be less inclined to divorce. As we age, we become more introverted (Hatch & Bulcroft). On the other hand, Hatch and Bulcroft found that conflict seems to increase depending on life stage. More stressful events such as retirement increase marital discord. The stress of retirement may briefly and temporarily lead to more negative interaction between partners (Hatch & Bulcroft). These findings however fascinating, may be a little biased. Older couples were able to survive early marriage and so it is difficult to compare them to younger couples that may or may not continue their marriage in the future.

Conflict levels differ in couples that have children versus those who have no children. Hatch and Bulcroft (2004) analyzed data from the National Survey of Families and Households and found that marital conflict can be high when a couple is in the parenting stage. This stage can be stressful because parents must stay in check with each other while keeping up with a busy family life, creating more opportunity for disagreement. What will the rules be? Who will be the “bad” guy? These constant issues can lead to higher levels of conflict (Hatch & Bulcroft, 2004).

Similar and dissimilar relationship qualities exist for homosexual and heterosexual couples. Due to some societal pressures, simply being a homosexual couple can lead to more negative interactions for the couple which is linked to higher conflict levels (Peplau & Spalding, 2000). There is stress related to coming out or hiding the relationship. However, it is also said that this factor is not as related to relationship satisfaction as was once suggested. Homosexual couples have fewer conflicts about the division of household labor (Peplau & Spalding). The couple will most likely be more

equal in the partition of tasks and choose to do the tasks in which they prefer rather than the typical male or female predetermined tasks. Homosexual and heterosexual couples have similar conflict levels and they also fight about similar issues, although homosexual individuals have fewer conflicts over finances than do heterosexual couples (Peplau & Spalding). This may be because homosexual couples usually have their own separate finances. Gay men report more conflicts about finances than do lesbian women. Homosexual relationship satisfaction is found to be equal if not better than heterosexual couples but, overall, the relationship qualities between homosexual couples and heterosexual couples are similar (Peplau & Spalding).

There are similarities and dissimilarities in couple conflict among married and cohabiting couples. There is a trend for couples to cohabit before marriage or simply to cohabit with no marriage. A longitudinal study by Willetts (2006) finds that there are no significant differences between the two kinds of couples. The occurrence of conflict is basically the same between those couples who are married and those who are cohabiting. It was previously believed that couples who cohabited had more commitment issues than those who married and that's why they chose to cohabit rather than marry. The relationship quality of cohabiting couples, which is partially factored by conflict levels, was thought to be lower than that of married couples. However, we see from the recent research of Willetts, that conflict levels do not differ considerably between cohabiting and married couples (Willetts).

The socioeconomic status of a couple affects their conflict level. Cunradi, Caetano and Schafer (2002) researched socioeconomic statuses and intimate partner violence. Couples with yearly household incomes ranging from less than \$4,000 to more

than \$100,000 were interviewed. The findings imply that the lower the socioeconomic status, the higher the chance of intimate partner violence. Intimate partner violence includes conflict. There are more stressors associated with lower socioeconomic status such as money issues when attempting to pay bills. These stressors lead to more negative interactions, which lead to conflict (Cunradi, Caetano & Schafer).

Relationship Satisfaction and Conflict

There are some identifiable factors to a successful marriage. Gottman explores some of the lesser-known factors of a working marriage. Gottman says that if there are five times as many positive interactions as there are negative interactions in a relationship, it means that the relationship is stable (Gottman, 1995). Conflict can be good or bad and it is important to look at both types of conflict. Conflict is something that is bound to occur in all relationships. Not all conflict has negative consequences. Gottman identifies four characteristics of conflict that have negative consequences to a relationship. Gottman refers to these characteristics as *the four horsemen* and they include: criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling. These four characteristics interrupt communication and lead to less positive interactions in a relationship (Gottman). Less severe and well-managed conflict is tolerable for a relationship and is even permissible for children to witness. When children observe their parents during a disagreement that is dealt with advantageously, they will learn conflict coping skills by viewing the coping skills of their parents. Conflict is an important part of a relationship to work out problems. Conflicts that occur too often or are not dealt with efficiently are the type of conflicts that are detrimental to a relationship (Cummings & Wilson, 1999).

In a recent study about relationship and sexual satisfaction, Byers (2005) uses a relationship satisfaction questionnaire to look at relationship satisfaction contents. Byers also uses the Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction to assess sexual satisfaction. Byers finds that good communication and shared meaning is linked to higher relationship satisfaction as well as sexual satisfaction (Byers).

Relationship satisfaction is negatively affected by conflicts about both major and minor issues. To assess relationship satisfaction about major and minor issues, Cramer (2002) used the Relationship Assessment Scale and a survey he built about consensus over issues. Regardless of severity of conflict, conflict was connected to relationship satisfaction (Cramer, 2002). Cramer (2001) measured relationship satisfaction with the Relationship Assessment Scale and compared it to the findings of a consensus measuring scale. The more the participants disagreed about something such as recreation, the more the participants believed that disagreements were destructive to a relationship. Negative conflict reduced relationship satisfaction and increased the belief that disagreements are destructive to a relationship (Cramer, 2001).

Relationship Rituals and Joint Leisure Activities

Relationship rituals and joint leisure activities are correlated with relationship satisfaction. Gottman says that rituals are very important to relationships. Whether the ritual be a kiss goodbye, dinner together nightly or a yearly weekend getaway, it helps people connect and bond. Gottman suggests going on dates as part of his rituals for connection in marriage (Gottman, 2001). There is a negative correlation between problem areas and relationship satisfaction. Problems in relationships negatively affect relationship satisfaction and are often prophetic of divorce (Henry & Miller, 2004). A

study on problem areas in relationships stated the number one reported problem area was leisure activities (Henry & Miller, 2005). Shumway and Wampler (2002) talk about the Couple Behavior Report (CBR). Some of the most important factors in sustaining a relationship are having everyday conversations, talking about the times the couple had together and participating in activities they both enjoy all of which are sampled by the CBR (Shumway & Wampler).

Gottman (2001) says that a shared ritual creates strong bonds in relationships. Rituals encourage connections between people. When committed to a ritual, a couple will be more inclined to stay in touch with each other (Gottman). When a couple first starts dating, they do many activities together to connect and get to know each other. Couple rituals lead to more intimate feelings in the relationship. Reestablishing special time together will reestablish intimacy (Ellison, 2000).

Members of a relationship who participate in many activities independently have a decreased relationship satisfaction. Therefore, joint activities in a relationship yield higher relationship satisfaction. Berg, Trost, Schneider and Allison (2001) looked at relationship satisfaction and leisure time together and how it is influenced by gender. They found the number of hours their participants spent in joint leisure per week to be a mean of 24.19 for males and a mean of 24.56 for females. Assuming a 40-hour workweek, approximately 25 hours of leisure time together per week is about one third of free time. The mean leisure satisfaction for males was 3.78 and 3.85 for females on a scale of one to five. Leisure satisfaction was at a moderate to high level. On a scale of one to nine, the mean relationships satisfaction was 7.65 for men and 7.96 for women. Relationship satisfaction was also at a moderate to high level. These variables were

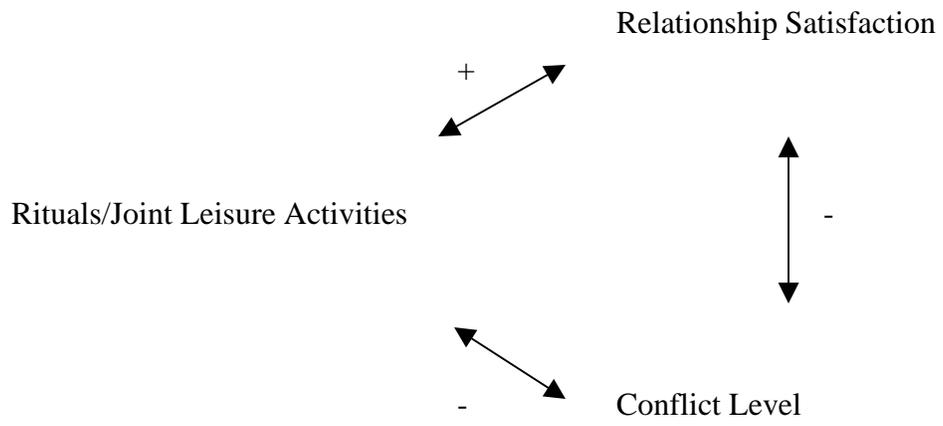
correlated such that the higher the leisure satisfaction score, the higher the relationship satisfaction score. Therefore, it seems leisure satisfaction is indeed connected to relationship satisfaction (Berg, Trost, Schneider, & Allison). Rituals performed during or after conflict can be a way to show care for each other even though conflict exists. Rituals also show belief in working out the conflict (Gottman, 2001).

Purpose and Hypothesis

This literature review leads to the hypothesis that rituals and joint leisure activities are positively linked to relationship satisfaction. The purpose of this study is to learn about conflict levels and relationship satisfaction and how relationship rituals and joint leisure activities influence them. Non-violent conflict excludes physical violence between partners meaning no physical abuse such as hitting. This study focuses on just everyday conflict over common domestic issues. I will be using a sample of university students who are in long-term relationships of five months or more. I have three hypotheses. Hypothesis 1: higher relationship satisfaction will be linked to lower conflict levels. Hypothesis 2: a higher number of relationship rituals and joint leisure activities will be linked to lower conflict levels. Hypothesis 3: a higher number of relationship rituals and joint leisure activities will be connected to higher relationship satisfaction. Figure 1 represents these three hypotheses and their proposed correlational directions. It is important to note that the relationships between key variables may be reciprocal and this is depicted in the figure.

I will also examine demographic differences even though I do not include any specific hypothesis regarding parenting stage, sexual preference, relationship classification or relationship duration hypotheses.

Figure 1: Hypothesis



Chapter 2

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Participants were recruited via the University of Maine's email system FirstClass. Volunteer participants are students of the University of Maine. Participants were required to be married, cohabiting or in a long-term serious relationship of five months or more. Table 1 presents the description of the sample.

Table 1: Description of the Sample

(N=114)	Frequency	%	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
Age					
Participant's Age	—	—	23.62	5.91	18-52
Partner's Age	—	—	24.49	6.26	18-50
Relationship Duration	—	—	3 y & 9 mo	3.92	5mo-29y
Under Five Years	89	78.1	—	—	—
Over Five Years	25	21.9	—	—	—
Relationship Classification					
Casual	3	2.63	—	—	—
Going Steady	32	28.07	—	—	—
Engaged	24	21.05	—	—	—
Cohabiting	38	33.33	—	—	—
Married	17	14.91	—	—	—
Gender					
Female	87	76.3	—	—	—
Male	26	22.8	—	—	—
Transgender	1	0.9	—	—	—
Sexual Preference					
Heterosexual	108	94.74	—	—	—
Gay	2	1.75	—	—	—
Lesbian	2	1.75	—	—	—
Transgendered	2	1.75	—	—	—
Parental Status					
Not a Parent	100	87.7	—	—	—
Parent	14	12.3	—	—	—
Number of Children	—	—	1.39	0.49	1-2
1	9	60	—	—	—
2	5	40	—	—	—
Age of Children	—	—	10.28y	7.62	2mo-24y

Participants of all ages over 18, genders and sexual preferences were welcome to partake in this study. It wasn't significant to this study to also survey the partners of the participants. The goal was to obtain one hundred people to participate in this study. One hundred and fourteen people participated in this study. The majority of the participants were female, dating less than five years, going steady, engaged or cohabiting, in heterosexual relationships and childless.

Instruments

The email system FirstClass and SurveyMonkey.com were used to distribute participant materials. Various FirstClass student folders such as the Liberal Arts folder and the Engineering folder were emailed with an advertisement about the study and the link to the survey website. SurveyMonkey.com is a web-based software program used for distributing questionnaires and it consists of an intuitive wizard interface for creating survey questions, tools for distributing surveys via email and tools for analyzing and viewing results. SPSS and Excel were used to analyze and organize collected data. One relationship satisfaction, two conflict questionnaires, and two ritual and joint leisure activity questionnaires were based on Gottman's (1999) work. The Crawford Huston Relationship Satisfaction Questionnaire on relationship satisfaction was based on Crawford's (2002) work. I altered some of the questions in the questionnaires to fit the study such as changing "marriage" to "relationship" and "spouse" to "partner." I used six assessment questionnaires and used an additional set of six questions I created producing a total of 118 questions.

The demographic information section consists of nine questions. The items ask for the participant's age, partner's age, participants gender, partner's gender, relationship

status such as casual dating, married, cohabiting, going steady or engaged, parental status, number of children and age of children. Table 1 describes the sample.

The Crawford Huston Relationship Satisfaction Questionnaire consists of ten questions and was used to assess relationship satisfaction. Questions 10 through 19 made up the Crawford Huston Relationship Satisfaction measure. Each item was scored on a scale of one meaning, “extremely dissatisfied” to nine meaning “extremely satisfied.” A sample question from this questionnaire is “how satisfied are you with how well the two of you talk over important and unimportant issues.” True is worth one point and false is worth two points. Some couples may not encounter events such as childrearing in question number 12 and that is why “non-applicable” is also an option. Non-applicable responses are given a score of zero but this does not affect the mean score since answers are added and divided by the valid n. The highest score possible is two (higher relationship satisfaction) and the lowest is one (lower relationship satisfaction). A high score on this scale means a higher relationship satisfaction.

The Weiss-Cerreto Marital Status Inventory consists of thirteen questions and is used to assess relationship satisfaction. I omitted three questions about contacting nonprofessionals and professionals about divorce and legal matters, leaving the questionnaire with ten questions. I also omitted the part of the questionnaire that asks when an issue became a problem since it seems like more of an appropriate tool for counseling analysis and not so much for this study’s relationship satisfaction analysis. Questions 20 through 30 made up the Weiss-Cerreto Marital Status Inventory. Participants answered true or false to each of the eleven items. A sample question from this questionnaire is “I have made specific plans to discuss breaking up with my partner.”

A true answer is given a score of one and a false answer is given a score of false. A score of two is the highest score possible (higher relationship satisfaction) and a score of one is the lowest score possible (lower relationship satisfaction). A high score on this scale means a higher relationship satisfaction.

Gottman's Four Horsemen Questionnaire is a thirty-three-item questionnaire used to assess conflict levels. Questions 31 through 63 made up the Gottman's Four Horsemen Questionnaire. Participants answered true or false to each of the items. A sample question from this questionnaire is "I feel attacked or criticized when we talk about our disagreements." A true answer is given a score of two and a false answer is given a score of one. A score of two is the highest score possible (higher conflict level) and a score of one is the lowest score possible (lower conflict level). A high score on this scale means a higher conflict level.

Gottman's Areas of Disagreement Scale is a twenty-item questionnaire that assesses conflict levels. I omitted the part of the questionnaire that asks when an issue became a problem since these items are more appropriate as a counseling tool rather than a measure of conflict. Questions 64 through 83 made up the Gottman's Areas of Disagreement Scale. Participants answered on a scale of zero to ten for each of the items. Zero yields no disagreement in a particular area and ten yields high disagreement in a particular area. A sample question from this questionnaire is "how much do you disagree about money and finances?" Zero is the lowest score possible (lower conflict) and ten is the highest score possible (higher conflict level). A high score on this measure means a higher conflict level.

The Distance and Isolation Questionnaires Part D. Self-Test: Do You Lead Parallel Lives is a seventeen-item questionnaire to assess relationship rituals and joint activity (Gottman, 1995). Questions 84 through 100 made up the Distance and Isolation Questionnaires part D Self-Test: Do You Lead Parallel Lives measure. Participants answered yes or no for each of the items. A sample item from this questionnaire is “we don’t eat together as much as we used to.” A yes response is given a score of one and a no response is given a score of 2. One is the lowest score possible (lower level of relationship rituals and joint leisure activity) and two is the highest score possible (higher level of relationship rituals and joint leisure activity). A high score on this scale means a higher level of relationship rituals and joint leisure activity.

The Shared Meaning Questionnaires: Honoring Each Other’s Dreams is a thirteen-item questionnaire used to assess relationship rituals and joint leisure activity. Questions 101 through 112 made up the Shared Meaning Questionnaires: Honoring Each Other’s Dreams measure. Participants answered true or false for each item. A sample item from this questionnaire is “we see eye-to-eye about the rituals that involve family dinnertimes in our home.” A true response is given a score of two and a false response is given a score of one. One is the lowest possible score (lower level of relationship rituals and joint leisure activity) and two is the highest possible score (higher level of relationship rituals and joint leisure activity). A high score on this scale means a higher level of relationship rituals and joint leisure activity.

For each of the measures described above, I calculated the average score per item across all items for which there was a valid response. In this way, I was able to correct for missing values. For instance, the Shared Meaning Scale consists of thirteen items. A

respondent's total score on this scale is based on the average score per item. Although most respondents answered all questions, occasionally, an item was left blank. This procedure essentially corrects for missing values.

The additional six items created by the author made up questions 113 through 118. The additional items include two questions rated on a scale of very dissatisfied to very satisfied. The questions are: "How satisfied are you with your relationship?" and, "What is your conflict level?" The next four questions ask what sort of relationship rituals and joint leisure activities do the participants partake in and how many per week. I will not give the findings in detail, I simply wanted to get a qualitative idea of relationship rituals and joint leisure activities but the end result was redundant to this study.

Procedure

Participants read my recruitment email through various email folders in FirstClass. For example, I posted notices in the Liberal Arts and Engineering folders. Participants responded on the SurveyMonkey website. The web link lead participants to an informed consent form, the questionnaire and a debriefing form. The six measures are individually quantitatively scored through SPSS. Scores are computed by adding the response and then dividing by the valid N to factor in non-applicable responses and skipped questions. Mean scores, standard deviations and ranges of conflict levels, relationship satisfaction and joint leisure activities and rituals were calculated. A bivariate analysis was computed for conflict levels, relationship satisfaction and joint leisure activities and rituals to test for possible correlations. Demographic information was also compared to look for possible similarities and dissimilarities across groups on

the measures of satisfaction, conflict and leisure activities. I constructed these demographic variables on which to compare respondents. Relationship length compares relationships under five years and relationship over five years. Relationship status compares unmarried couples to married couples. Parental status compares couples with children and couples without children. I chose not to compare homosexual couples to heterosexual couples because the sample only included four homosexual couples and that is an insufficient number to conduct a meaningful comparison. I did not measure socioeconomic status because I took into consideration the population—university students most likely will not have a large range in income. I did not compare male and female participants because I am comparing types of couples. I ran an independent sample t-test for relationship length, relationship status and parental status.

The three hypotheses are: higher relationship satisfaction will be linked to lower conflict level—a negative relationship, higher number of relationship rituals and joint leisure activity will be linked to lower conflict levels—a negative relationship, and higher relationship satisfaction will be linked to a higher number of relationship rituals and joint leisure activity—a positive relationship. I do not include any specific hypotheses for the demographic comparisons but I will report the findings and refer to the literature reviewed earlier.

Chapter 3

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Means, standard deviations and ranges were computed for the six measures.

There are several issues of note in the descriptive statistics presented in Table 2. The mean on the Crawford measure indicates moderate levels of relationship satisfaction and the mean on the Weiss measure indicates high levels of satisfaction. The two measures of conflict indicate relatively high levels of conflict for the Four Horsemen measure but low levels on the Areas of Disagreement measure. The mean score on the Areas of Disagreement scale is 3.08, on a scale ranging from 0 (no disagreement) to 10 (high disagreement). On average, participants were indicating some conflict but overall, relatively low levels on this measure. As we will see in the bivariate correlations that follow the satisfaction and conflict measures are non-redundant and sample distinct but related dimensions of satisfaction and conflict respectively. Finally both measure of relationship rituals and joint leisure activity indicate high levels of relationship rituals and joint leisure activity.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Relationship Measures

	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Range
Relationship Quality				
Crawford Scale	106	5.34	1.08	2.38-8.13
Weiss Scale	103	1.83	0.18	1.20-2
Conflict Level				
Four Horsemen	101	1.79	0.18	1.03-2
Areas of Disagreement	87	3.08	1.46	1-7.55
Rituals and Joint Leisure				
Parallel Lives	94	1.87	0.17	1.18-2
Shared Meaning	92	1.70	0.16	1.08-2.07

A bivariate analysis found all correlations of the six measures to be significant, and these correlations are presented in Table 3. The correlation between the Weiss and the Crawford scales (both measuring relationship satisfaction) is $r = .38$ and the correlation between the Shared Meaning and the Parallel Lives scales (both measuring rituals and joint leisure) is $r = .21$. Since the correlations are moderate, we may infer that the two measures of construct are not identical but measure different aspects of satisfaction, conflict and leisure respectively. Each measure seems to have face validity in relation to the correlations. If the measures measuring the same relationship area were highly correlated, they would be redundant. The remaining correlations presented in Table 3 test each of the hypothesis and they are discussed in turn.

Table 3: Relationship Measure Correlations

	Weiss Relationship Satisfaction	Four Horsemen Conflict Level	Areas of Disagreement Conflict Level	Parallel Lives Rituals and Joint Leisure	Shared Meaning Rituals and Joint Leisure
Crawford Relationship Satisfaction	0.38**	-0.43**	0.37**	0.45**	0.26*
Weiss Relationship Satisfaction	—	-0.63**	0.42**	0.52**	0.36**
Four Horsemen Conflict Level	—	—	0.55**	0.5**	0.45**
Areas of Disagreement Conflict Level	—	—	—	0.44**	-0.41**
Parallel Lives Rituals and Joint Leisure	—	—	—	—	0.21*

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis 1

This hypothesis states that higher relationship satisfaction will be correlated with lower conflict levels. In all cases, the hypothesis is confirmed. The measures of relationship satisfaction are negatively correlated with the measures of relationship conflict. The Four Horsemen measure is negatively correlated with the Crawford satisfaction measure ($r = -.43$, $p < .01$) and the Weiss satisfaction measure ($r = -.63$). This means as relationship satisfaction increases, conflict decreases as predicted, although we cannot infer a casual direction.

Contrary to the hypothesis, the measures of satisfaction are positively correlated with the Areas of disagreement scale (see Table 3). In this case, an increase in levels of satisfaction is paired with an increase in the areas of conflict. This measure assesses everyday conflict and perhaps these individuals are able to deal with such conflicts more efficiently in a way that does not negatively affect their evaluations of their relationships (Gottman, 1995). Everyday conflicts may not affect relationship satisfaction as gravely as the kind of pernicious conflict assessed by the Four Horsemen scale, which includes more destructive types of conflict (Gottman).

Hypothesis 2

This hypothesis states that lower conflict levels will be paired with a higher number of rituals and joint leisure activity. In this study, little evidence suggests that lower conflict levels are linked to a higher number of relationship rituals and joint leisure activities. Only one measure correlates in the predicted direction. Shared rituals and leisure is negatively correlated with Areas of Disagreement ($r = -.41$) and this is consistent with the hypothesis. However, the Parallel Lives measure is positively

correlated with Areas of Disagreement ($r = .44$). This indicates that increases in conflict are paired with increases in leisure. Similarly, the measure of the Four Horsemen is positively correlated with both measures of leisure (see Table 3).

This measure assesses everyday conflict and perhaps these individuals are able to deal with such conflicts more efficiently in a way that does not negatively affect their evaluations of their relationships (Gottman, 1995). Relationship rituals and joint leisure activity may give a couple who can deal with conflict efficiently the opportunity to connect, communicate and create shared meaning. However, for couples with difficulty with conflict, relationship rituals and joint leisure activity may also provide opportunity for couples to have conflict and continue to not deal with it effectively.

Hypothesis 3

This hypothesis states that higher relationship satisfaction is paired with a higher number of relationship rituals and joint leisure activity. In this study, all of the evidence suggests that higher relationship satisfaction is paired with a higher number of relationship rituals and joint leisure activity. All four of the correlations are significant and in the predicted direction and range from .26 to .52 (see Table 3).

Relationship rituals and joint leisure activities are important factors in sustaining a relationship (Shumway, 2002). Relationship rituals and joint leisure activities create connections, bonds and shared meaning which are linked to higher relationship satisfaction (Gottman, 2001).

Demographic Comparisons

An independent sample t-test was conducted for relationship length (under five years and over five years), relationship status (married and unmarried) and parental status (children and no children). (See Table 4).

A significant difference was found for relationship length. Relationships of fewer than five years scored a higher level of relationship rituals and joint leisure activity with the Parallel Lives scale. The literature suggests that older couples are able to work through issues and have survived hardships, which lead them to be an older couple (Hatch & Bulcroft, 2004).

For relationship status, a marginally significant difference was found. Married participants scored higher on the Weiss scale than unmarried respondents. Significant differences existed for the Parallel Lives measure. Unmarried couples participated in more relationship rituals and joint leisure activities. Perhaps the married couples in this study are at a later stage of career life and have less time for relationship rituals and joint leisure activities. The literature suggests a similarity between married and cohabiting couples (Willettts, 2006). The findings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Demographic Comparisons

	Crawford Relationship Satisfaction	Weiss Relationship Satisfaction	Four Horsemen Conflict Level	Areas of Disagreement Conflict Level	Parallel Lives Rituals and Joint Leisure	Shared Meaning Rituals and Joint Leisure
Relationship Length						
Under 5 yr	5.37(1.07)	1.84(0.18)	1.73(0.26)	3(1.39)	1.89(0.15)	1.67(0.19)
Over 5 yr	5.21(1.13)	1.81(0.19)	1.72(0.28)	3.34(1.72)	1.8(0.2)	1.65(0.19)
Significance	t(104)=0.62	t(101)=0.48	t(99)=0.13	t(85)=0.38	t(92)=2.14**	t(90)=0.5
Relationship Status						
Unmarried	5.35(1.09)	1.82(0.19)	1.8(0.19)	3.09(1.41)	1.88(0.16)	1.69(0.14)
Married	5.19(1.04)	1.9(0.12)	1.76(0.15)	3.19(1.78)	1.79(0.19)	1.74(0.23)
Significance	t(102)=0.56	t(99)=-1.73*	t(97)=0.83	t(83)=-0.23	t(90)=1.99**	t(88)=-1.04
Parental Status						
Children	5.53(1.09)	1.88(0.12)	1.75(0.17)	3.48(1.9)	1.78(0.2)	1.77(0.13)
None	5.31(1.08)	1.82(0.19)	1.8(0.18)	3.01(1.38)	1.89(0.16)	1.69(0.16)
Significance	t(104)=0.71	t(101)=1	t(99)=-1	t(85)=1.08	t(92)=-2.14**	t(90)=1.94**

*Marginally Significant, $p < 0.1$

**Significant, $p < 0.05$

Significant differences were found for parental status. Participants without children scored higher on the Parallel Lives measure. However, a significant difference was also found for the Shared Meaning measure where participants with children scored higher. Perhaps being parents creates more shared meaning for the couple but these participants may still lead parallel lives due to the added busyness of raising a child (Hatch & Bulcroft, 2004).

Overall, not many significant differences were found in the demographic comparisons. Perhaps the groups are truly generalized as some literature suggests or perhaps larger groups of participants would show greater differences. At most, only 21.93% of participants were in the comparison group to the majority. This may not be a sufficient number to detect grand significant differences.

Qualitative Measures

Participants reported levels of somewhat to very satisfied with their relationship and somewhat to very low levels of conflict. The most common relationship rituals reported were: kissing goodbye, kissing hello, giving each other a high five, cuddling, saying, "I love you," watching television together and doing laundry together. Participants reported engaging in relationship rituals seventy-five plus times a week. Common responses for joint leisure activities were: going to the movies, bowling, attending parties, napping together, going to the gym together, taking walks, playing video games, going to concerts/shows, reading, eating out, cooking together and shopping. Participants reported engaging in joint leisure activities twenty plus times a week.

Limitations of this Study

The population available was university students and sampling the general population may have yielded different results. It would have been interesting to have the ability to compare means of additional demographic groups such as sexual preference, homosexuals with heterosexuals or across groups differing in culture and socioeconomic status. Certainly, separating destructive and constructive conflict measures may have also lead to different results (Gottman, 1999).

Conclusion

It is important to study relationships due to the high divorce rates of today. Relationship education is very necessary. Relationship education in high schools is linked to more positive conflict coping skills (Silliman, 2004). All men and women are unique and men and women differ in conflict coping strategies. People in different demographic groups may differ across different domains. These are important factors to consider in couples counseling (Faulkner, 2005).

Having low levels of conflict is not necessarily linking to negative outcomes like lowered satisfaction. On the other hand, negative conflict tactics like being defensive or stonewalling are linked to lowered satisfaction. These findings suggest that the experience of low levels of conflict is not necessarily harmful but destructive tactics are.

I attempted to examine if joint leisure could lower conflict levels and raise relationship satisfaction. My findings lead me to infer that when relationship satisfaction is high, it is likely the couple deals with conflict advantageously therefore, when a couple is given the opportunity to partake in relationship rituals and joint leisure activities, they are given the opportunity to connect, communicate and create shared meaning resulting

in a positive experience. Constructive conflict dealt with advantageously is helpful to a relationship (Gottman, 1995) and is even okay for children to witness and learn from (Cummings, 1999). These findings are important because we learn that simply spending more time together will not heal a relationship because relationships are complex and contain many facets.

REFERENCES

- Baum, N. (2004). Typology of post-divorce parental relationships and behaviors [Electronic version]. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 41, 53-79.
- Beach, S. R. H., Sandeen, E. E., & O'Leary, K. D. (1990). *Depression in marriage*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Berg, E. C., Trost, M., Schneider, I. E., & Allison, M. T. (2001). Dyadic exploration of the relationships of leisure satisfaction, leisure time, and gender to relationship satisfaction. *Leisure Sciences*, 23, 35-46.
- Berscheid, E. & Peplau, L. A. (1983). The emerging science of relationships. In H. Kelley et al. (Eds), *Close relationships*. San Francisco: Freeman.
- Bodenmann, G. & Shantinath, S. D. (2004). The couples coping enhancement training (CCET): a new approach to prevention of marital distress based upon stress and coping. *Family Relations*, 53, 477-484.
- Byers, E. S. (2005). Relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction: a longitudinal study of individuals in long-terms relationships. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 42, 113-118.
- Cramer, D. (2001). Destructive disagreement belief, disagreement, negative conflict, and relationships. *Generic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs*, 127(3), 301-317.
- Cramer, D. (2001). Relationship satisfaction and conflict over minor and major issues in romantic relationships. *The Journal of Psychology*, 136(3) (75-81).

- Crawford, D., Houts, R., Huston, T. & George, L. (2002). Compatibility leisure and satisfaction in marital relationships. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 64, 433-449.
- Cubbins, L. A. & Vanoy, D. (2004). Division of household labor as a source of contention for married and cohabitating couples in metropolitan Moscow [Electronic version]. *Journal of Family Issues*, 25, 182-215.
- Cummings, E. M. & Wilson, A. (1999). Contexts of marital conflict and children's emotional security: exploring the distribution between constructive and destructive conflict from the children's perspective. In Research Consortium on Family Risk and Resilience Summer Institute 199, *Conflict and cohesion in families: causes and consequences* (pp.105-129). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc. Inc.
- Cunradi, C. B., Caetano, R. & Schafer, J. (2002). Socioeconomic predictors of intimate partner violence among White, Black and Hispanic couples in the United States. *Journal of Family Violence*, 17, 377-389.
- Doyle, A. B., Brendgen, M., Markiewicz, D., & Kamkar, K. (2003). Family relationships as moderators of the association between romantic relationships and adjustment in early adolescence [Electronic version]. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 23, 316-341.
- Ellison, C. R. (2000). *Women's Sexualities*. Oakland, Ca: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

- Faulkner, R.A., Davey, M. & Davey, A. (2005). Gender-related predictors of change in marital satisfaction and marital conflict [Electronic version]. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 33, 61-83.
- Friedman, M. (2004). The so-called high-conflict couple: a closer look [Electronic version]. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 32, 101-117.
- Gottman, J. (1995). *Why marriages succeed or fail. . . and how you can make yours last*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Gottman, J. (1999). *The marriage clinic: a scientifically based marital therapy*. New York, NY: Norton & Company, Inc.
- Gottman, J. M. & DeClaire, J. (2001). *The relationship cure*. New York: Three Rivers Press.
- Gottman, J. M. & Levenson, R. W. (2000). The timing of divorce: predicting when a couple will divorce over a 14-year period. *Journal of Marriage & the Family*, 62, 737-745.
- Ham, B. D. (2004). The effects of divorce and remarriage on the academic achievement of high school seniors [Electronic version]. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 42, 159-178.
- Hatch, L. R. & Bulcroft, K. (2004). Does long-term marriage bring less frequent disagreements? Five explanatory frameworks [Electronic version]. *Journal of Family Issues*, 4, 465-495.

- Heffner, K. L., Kiecolt-Glaser, J. K., Loving, T. J., Glaser, R. & Malarkey, W. B. (2004). Spousal support satisfaction as a modifier of physiological responses to marital conflict in younger and older couples [Electronic version]. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 27, 233-254.
- Henry, R. G. & Miller, R. B. (2004). Marital problems occurring in midlife: implications for couples therapists. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 32, 405-417.
- Henry, R. G., Miller, R. B. & Giarrusso, R. (2005). Difficulties, disagreements, and disappointments in late-life marriages. *Aging and Human Development*, 61(3), 243-264.
- Hopper, J. (2001). The symbolic origins of conflict in divorce. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63, 430-445.
- Klein, R. C. A. & Johnson, M. P. (2000). Strategies of couple conflict. In R. M. Milardo and S. Duck (Eds.), *Families as Relationships* (pp. 79-97). John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Kluwer, E. S., Heesink, J. A. M., & Van de Vliert, E. (2000). The division of labor in close relationships: An asymmetrical conflict issue. *Personal Relationships*, 7, 263-282.
- Loving, T., Heffner, K. L., Kiecolt-Glaser, J. K., Glaser, R. & Malarkey, W. B. (2004). Stress hormone changes and marital conflict: spouses' relative power makes a difference [Electronic version]. *Journal of Marriage & Family*, 66, 595-612.

- Marchand, J. F. (2004). Husbands' and wives' marital quality: the role of adult attachment orientations, depressive symptoms, and conflict resolution behaviors [Electronic version]. *Attachment & Human Development*, 6, 99-112.
- Panayiotou, G. (2005). Love, commitment, and response to conflict among Cypriot dating couples: two models, one relationship [Electronic version]. *International Journal of Psychology*, 40, 108-117.
- Peplau, L. A., & Spalding, L. R. (2000). The close relationships of lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals. In C. Hendrick & S. S. Hendrick (Eds.), *Close Relationships: A Sourcebook* (pp. 111-123). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Shumway, S. T. & Wampler, R. S. (2002). A behaviorally focused measure for relationships: the couple behavior report (CBR). *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 30, 311-321.
- Silliman, B. & Schumm, W. R. (2004). Adolescents' perceptions of marriage and premarital couples education [Electronic version]. *Family Relations*, 53, 513-520.
- Umberson, D., Williams, K., Powers, D. A., Chen, M. D., & Campbell, A. M. (2005). As good as it gets? a life course perspective on marital quality. *Social Force*, 84(1), 487-498.
- Vasan, R. S., Sullivan, L. M., Wilson, P. W. F., Sempos, C. T., Sundström, J., Kannel, W. B., Levy, D. & D'Agostino, R. B. (2005). Levels of risk factors associated with heart attacks. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 142 (6), 123.
- Willems, M. C. (2006). Union quality comparisons between long-term heterosexual cohabitation and legal marriages. *Journal of Family Issues*, 27, 110-127.

Appendix A
RECRUITMENT FLYER

Are you in a RELATIONSHIP?

Students of UMAINE!

If you are 18 years of age or older and if you are married or live with your partner and are in a serious long-term relationship or five months or more, this is for you!

Please help me with my thesis study!

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Lori Michaud, a graduate student in the Department of Human Development at the University of Maine.

Purpose of Research: To learn about conflict levels, relationship satisfaction and how it is influenced by relationship rituals and joint leisure activities. Non-violent couple conflict excludes physical violence between partners meaning no physical abuse such as hitting. This study focuses on just everyday conflict over common domestic issues.

Your responses will be anonymous.

Please contact me via FirstClass for more information. Lori.Michaud@umit.maine.edu or go to this website:

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/Users/97751200/Surveys/57591939622/3ED2EB1B-3C65-477D-9758-823D4CD1558F.asp?U=57591939622&DO NOT COPY THIS LINK&Rnd=0.7312870389767041](http://www.surveymonkey.com/Users/97751200/Surveys/57591939622/3ED2EB1B-3C65-477D-9758-823D4CD1558F.asp?U=57591939622&DO_NOT_COPY_THIS_LINK&Rnd=0.7312870389767041) to take a questionnaire on relationship satisfaction, conflict level and relationship rituals and joint leisure activities.

Appendix B INFORMED CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Lori Michaud, a graduate student in the Department of Human Development at the University of Maine. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate. The purpose of this research is to learn about conflict levels and relationship satisfaction and how relationship rituals and joint leisure activities influence them. Non-violent conflict excludes physical violence between partners meaning no physical abuse such as hitting. This study focuses on just everyday conflict over common domestic issues.

What Will You Be Asked to Do?

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to take a conflict and relationship satisfaction assessing questionnaire and you will be asked about relationship rituals and joint leisure activities you and your partner partake in. It may take approximately fifteen minutes to half an hour to complete the questionnaire.

Risks

There is the possibility that you may become uncomfortable answering the questions. If you become really concerned and would like to talk with someone about relationship issues, you may contact the Safe Campus Project at: 581-2515, Spruce Run at: 1-800-863-9909 or the National Domestic Violence Hotline at: 1-800-799-7233.

Benefits

You will be given the opportunity to think of pleasurable activities and rituals you and your partner partake in together.

Confidentiality

Your name will not be on any of the documents. Data will be anonymous. You will be assigned a participant number to protect your identity. Data will be kept in the investigator's locked office. There will be no key linking your name to the data. Completed questionnaires will be kept for two months and then destroyed.

Voluntary

Participation is voluntary. If you choose to take part in this study, you may stop at any time during the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. (For an email survey: Return of the survey implies consent to participate).

Contact Information

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at (phone: 207-356-5646, email: Lori.Michaud@umit.maine.edu, address: P.O. Box 173, Stillwater, ME 04489, Campus Mail: Lori Michaud c/o Karen Kidder, 348 Boardman Hall). You may also reach the faculty advisor on this study, Robert Milardo, at (phone: 207-581-3128, address: 17 Merrill Hall, email: Robert.Milardo@umit.maine.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Gayle Anderson, Assistant to the University of Maine's Protection of Human Subjects Review Board, at 581-1498 (or email: Gayle.Anderson@umit.maine.edu).

Your return of this questionnaire via email implies consent to participate.

Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

Sample Questions from the Questionnaire

Sample 1:

Please circle the number that best describes your level of satisfaction with each area of your marriage/partnership during the past year.

Extremely Satisfied	Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	Extremely satisfied
---------------------	-----------------------------------	---------------------

1. Communication: How satisfied are you with how well the two of you talk over important and unimportant issues?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	N/A
--	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-----

Sample 2:

We would like to get an idea of how your marriage stands right now. Please answer the questions below by circling TRUE of FALSE for each item with regard to how things stand right now

9. I have discussed the issue of divorce or separation seriously or at length with my partner.

- (a) True
- (b) False

Sample 3:

Read each statement and select the appropriate response.

21. I don't have a lot of respect for my partner's position on our basic issues.

- (a) True
- (b) False

Sample 4:

This form contains a list of topics that many couples disagree about. We would like to get some idea of how much you and your spouse disagree about each area.

In the first column, please indicate how much you and your spouse disagree by placing a number from 0 to 10 next each item. A zero indicates that you don't disagree at all, and a 10 indicates that you disagree very much.

We disagree about

How much?

10. Jealousy.....

Sample 5:

Answer "yes" or "no" to each of the following statements, depending on whether or not you mostly agree or disagree.

6. Sometimes we can go for quite a while without ever talking about our lives.

- (a) Yes
- (b) No

Sample 6:

We want you to think about how well you and your partner have been able to create a sense of shared meaning in your lives together. When people become a couple, they create a new culture, and some partnerships also involve the union of two very different cultures. But even if two people are coming from the same regional, cultural, ethnic, and religious background, they will have been raised in two very different families, and their merging involves the creation of new culture.

7. We have the same values about entertaining in our home (having friends over, parties, etc.)

- (a) True
- (b) False

Sample 7:

Joint Leisure Activities

What sort of joint leisure activities (like going to the movies) do you and your partner partake in?

Appendix C
QUESTIONNAIRE
Demographic Information

Please fill in the appropriate response or circle the appropriate response.

1. Your Age: _____
2. Partner's Age: _____
3. Your Gender: Male Female Transgender
4. Partner's Gender: Male Female Transgender
5. Relationship Status: Casual Going steady Engaged Cohabiting Married
Other (please specify): _____
6. Duration of Relationship: _____
7. Do you have children? Yes No
8. How many children do you have? _____
9. Age of child(ren): _____

Crawford Huston Relationship Satisfaction Questionnaire

Please circle the number that best describes your level of satisfaction with each area of your marriage/partnership during the past year.

	Extremely Dissatisfied			Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied			Extremely Satisfied			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
10. Communication: How satisfied are you with how well the two of you talk over important and unimportant issues?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	N/A
11. Support for your work roles: How satisfied are you with how understanding your partner is about your work situation either inside or outside the home?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	N/A
12. Ideas about childrearing: How satisfied are you with your partner's fundamental principals about how to bring up children? (e.g., values, ideas about discipline, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	N/A
13. Support for you as a parent: How satisfied are you with the extent to which your partner makes you feel good about the kind of parent you are, supports your decisions about rules and discipline, etc?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	N/A
14. Decision-making: How satisfied are you with the way decisions in your partnership get made and the level of influence you have in those decisions?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	N/A
15. Social life and leisure: How satisfied are you with the way you and your partner spend free time together (e.g., the activities you do, the people you socialize with)?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	N/A
16. Relations with in-laws: How satisfied are you with how well you and your partner get along with one another's families and how much and how often do you see them?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	N/A
17. Family finances: How satisfied are you with your family's total financial situation?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	N/A
18. Division of housework: How satisfied are you with how the two of you divide housework such as cooking, cleaning, yard work and so on?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	N/A
19. Division of child care: How satisfied are you with how the two of you divide the tasks of taking care of the children including getting them ready for school, helping with homework, etc.?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	N/A

Weiss-Cerreto Marital Status Inventory

We would like to get an idea of how your marriage stands right now. Please answer the questions below by circling TRUE or FALSE for each item with regard to how things stand right now.

20. I have made specific plans to discuss break up with my partner.
(a) True
(b) False
21. I have set up an independent bank account in my name in order to protect my own interests.
(a) True
(b) False
22. Thoughts of breaking up occur to me very frequently, as often as once a week or more.
(a) True
(b) False
23. I have suggested to my partner that I wished to be broken up or rid of him/her.
(a) True
(b) False
24. I have thought specifically about breaking up. I have thought about who would get the kids, how things would be divided, pros and cons, etc.
(a) True
(b) False
25. My partner and I have broken up. This is a (check one) ___ Trial ___ Legal Separation.
(a) True
(b) False
26. I have discussed the question of breaking up with someone other than my partner (trusted friend, psychologist, minister, etc.).
(a) True
(b) False
27. I have occasionally thought of breaking up or wished that we were broken up, usually after an argument or other incident.
(a) True
(b) False
28. I have discussed the issue of divorce or separation seriously or at length with my partner.
(a) True
(b) False
Year: _____
29. We are separated.
(a) True
(b) False

30. I have considered divorce or separation a few times, other than during or after an argument, although only in vague terms.

- (c) True
- (d) False

Gottman The Four Horsemen

Read each statement and select the appropriate response.

When we discuss our marital issues:	Response
31. I feel attacked or criticized when we talk about our disagreements.	(a) True (b) False
32. I usually feel like my personality is being assaulted.	(a) True (b) False
33. In our disputes, at times, I don't even feel like my partner likes me very much.	(a) True (b) False
34. I have to defend my self because the charges against me are so unfair.	(a) True (b) False
35. I often feel unappreciated by my spouse.	(a) True (b) False
36. My feelings and intentions are often misunderstood.	(a) True (b) False
37. I don't feel appreciated for all the good I do in this relationship.	(a) True (b) False
38. I often just want to leave the scene of the argument.	(a) True (b) False
39. I get disgusted by all the negativity between us.	(a) True (b) False
40. I feel insulted by my partner at times.	(a) True (b) False
41. I sometimes just calm up and become quiet.	(a) True (b) False
42. I can get mean and insulting in our disputes.	(a) True (b) False
43. I feel basically disrespected.	(a) True (b) False
44. Many of our issues are just not my problem.	(a) True (b) False

45. The way we talk makes me want to just withdraw from the whole relationship.
(a) True
(b) False
46. I think to myself, “who needs all this conflict?”
(a) True
(b) False
47. My partner never really changes.
(a) True
(b) False
48. Our problems have made me feel desperate at times.
(a) True
(b) False
49. My partner doesn’t face issues responsibly and maturely.
(a) True
(b) False
50. I try to point out flaws in my partner’s personality that need improvement.
(a) True
(b) False
51. I feel explosive and out of control about our issues at times.
(a) True
(b) False
52. My partner uses phrases like “you always” or “you never” when complaining.
(a) True
(b) False
53. I often get the blame for what are really our problems.
(a) True
(b) False
54. I don’t have a lot of respect for my partner’s position on our basic issues.
(a) True
(b) False
55. My spouse can be quite selfish and self-centered.
(a) True
(b) False
56. I feel disgusted by some of my spouse’s attitudes.
(a) True
(b) False
57. My partner gets far too emotional.
(a) True
(b) False
58. I am just not guilty of many of the things I get accused of.
(a) True
(b) False
59. Small issues often escalate out of proportion.
(a) True
(b) False
60. Arguments seem to come out of nowhere.
(a) True
(b) False

61. My partner's feelings get hurt too easily. (a) True
(b) False
62. I often will become silent to cool things down a bit. (a) True
(b) False
63. My partner has a lot of trouble being rational and logical. (a) True
(b) False

Gottman Areas of Disagreement Scale

This form contains a list of topics that many couples disagree about. We would like to get some idea of how much you and your spouse disagree about each area.

In the first column, please indicate how much you and your partner disagree by placing a number from 0 to 10 next each item. A zero indicates that you don't disagree at all, and a 10 indicates that you disagree very much.

We disagree about	How much?
64. Money and finances.....	
65. Communication.....	
66. In-laws and kin.....	
67. Sex.....	
68. Religion.....	
69. Recreation and having fun.....	
70. Friends.....	
71. Alcohol and drugs.....	
72. Children.....	
73. Jealousy.....	
74. Lifestyle.....	
75. Philosophy of life.....	
76. Basic values.....	
77. Our goals.....	
78. Emotional expression.....	
79. Issues of power.....	
80. Independence and dependence.....	
81. Household chores and childcare.....	
82. Politics Balancing career and family.....	
83. Handling stresses.....	

Please feel free to write down any other areas of disagreement:

The Distance and Isolation Questionnaires
D. Self-Test: Do You Lead Parallel Lives?

Answer “yes” or “no” to each of the following statements, depending on whether or not you mostly agree or disagree.

84. We don't eat together as much as we used to. (a) Yes
(b) No
85. Sometimes, it seems we are roommates rather than a married couple. (a) Yes
(b) No
86. We have fewer friends in common than we used to. (a) Yes
(b) No
87. We seem to do a lot more things separately. (a) Yes
(b) No
88. It seems that we have fewer and fewer interests in common. (a) Yes
(b) No
89. Sometimes we can go for quite a while without ever talking about our lives. (a) Yes
(b) No
90. Our lives are more parallel than connected. (a) Yes
(c) No
91. We often don't talk about how our separate days went. (a) Yes
(b) No
92. We don't spend very much time together anymore. (a) Yes
(b) No
93. We spend a lot of our free time apart. (a) Yes
(b) No
94. We don't set aside much time together anymore. (a) Yes
(b) No
95. I don't think we know each other very well anymore. (a) Yes
(b) No
96. We don't have dinner together very much anymore. (a) Yes
(b) no
97. We rarely go out on dates together. (a) Yes
(b) No

98. A lot of good times these days are with people other than each other.
- (a) Yes
 - (b) No
99. We seem to be avoiding each other.
- (a) Yes
 - (b) No
100. We are like two passing ships, going our separate ways.
- (a) Yes
 - (b) No

**Shared Meanings Questionnaire:
Honoring Each other's Dreams**

We want you to think about how well you and your partner have been able to create a sense of shared meaning in your lives together. When people become a couple, they create a new culture, and some partnerships also involve the union of two very different cultures. But even if two people are coming from the same regional, cultural, ethnic, and religious background, they will have been raised in two very different families, and their merging involves the creation of new culture.

Your Rituals	Response
101. We see eye-to-eye about the rituals that involve family dinnertimes in our home.	(a) True (b) False
102. Holiday meals (like Thanksgiving) are very special and happy times for us.	(a) True (b) False
103. We agree about the role of TV in our home.	(a) True (b) False
104. Bedtimes are generally good times for being close.	(a) True (b) False
105. During weekends, we do a lot of things together that we enjoy and value.	(a) True (b) False
106. We have the same values about entertaining in our home (having friends over, parties, etc.)	(a) True (b) False
107. We both value special celebrations (like birthdays)	(a) True (b) False
108. When I become sick, I feel taken care of and loved by my spouse.	(a) True (b) False
109. I really look forward to and enjoy our vacations and the travel we do together.	(a) True (b) False
110. The mornings together are special times for me.	(a) True (b) False
111. When we do errands together, we generally have a good time.	(a) True (b) False
112. We have ways of becoming renewed and refreshed when we are burned out or fatigued.	(a) True (b) False

Other Scales Created by the Author

Relationship Satisfaction

113. How satisfied are you with your relationship? Please circle the appropriate bullet.

Very Dissatisfied		Somewhat Dissatisfied			Somewhat Satisfied			Very Satisfied	
•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Conflict Level

114. What is your conflict level? Please circle the appropriate bullet.

Very Low		Somewhat Low			Somewhat High			Very High	
•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Relationship Rituals

115. What sort of relationship rituals (like kissing goodbye) do you and your partner partake in?

116. How many relationship rituals do you and your partner partake in per week?

Joint Leisure Activities

117. What sort of joint leisure activities (like going to the movies) do you and your partner partake in?

118. How many joint leisure activities do you and your partner partake in per week?

Appendix D
DEBRIEFING FORM

Thank you for participating in this study about non-violent couple conflict, interventions, relationship rituals, joint leisure activities and relationship satisfaction.

The purpose of this study was to learn about relationship rituals and joint leisure activities. The findings were compared to marital satisfaction and conflict levels. Conflict is a part of marital satisfaction. Researchers say that rituals and time spent together are important factors of a working marriage.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at (phone: 207-356-5646, email: Lori.Michaud@umit.maine.edu, address: P.O. Box 173, Stillwater, ME 04489, Campus Mail: Lori Michaud c/o Karen Kidder, 348 Boardman Hall). You may also reach the faculty advisor on this study, Robert Milardo, at (phone: 207-581-3128, address: 17 Merrill Hall, email: Robert.Milardo@umit.maine.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Gayle Anderson, Assistant to the University of Maine's Protection of Human Subjects Review Board, at 581-1498 (or email: Gayle.Anderson@umit.maine.edu).

Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

Here is a list of relationship references for your benefit:

Gottman, J. (1995). *Why marriages succeed or fail. . . and how you can make yours last.*

New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Gottman, J. (1999). *The marriage clinic: a scientifically based marital therapy.* New

York, NY: Norton & Company, Inc.

Gottman, J. M. & DeClaire, J. (2001). *The relationship cure.* New York: Three Rivers Press.

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Lori Ann Michaud was born in Caribou, Maine on October 11, 1984. She was raised in Madawaska, Maine and graduated from Madawaska High School in 2002. On May 7, 2005, she graduated from the University of Maine in Orono with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology with an additional major in Child Development and Family Relations. She is a member of Psi Chi, The National Honor Society in Psychology and Kappa Omicron Nu, The National Honor Society in Human Development and Family Studies. She earned an Advanced Certificate from the College Reading and Learning Association. During her college career, she received such honors as the University's and National Dean's List, Academic Achievement Pin, the Presidential Academic Award and the Chancellor's List. Lori Michaud is a candidate for the Master of Science degree in Human Development from The University of Maine in August of 2006.