ABSTRACT

Title of Document: PERSONAL RESOURCE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PARTNERS, CONFLICT-RESOLUTION COMMUNICATION BEHAVIORS, AND DYADIC SATISFACTION

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This study investigated the relationship between partners' relative resources, their communication behaviors, and dyadic satisfaction. The impact of gender on partner resource discrepancy and communication was examined as was communication as a mediator between partners' relative resources and dyadic satisfaction. Secondary analyses were conducted on data collected from 88 couples who sought therapy at a university-based clinic. No significant differences across relative income groups were identified for communication behaviors. Females with relatively equal educational attainment as their partners used more constructive communication than females whose partner had greater educational attainment. No other differences were identified across relative educational attainment groups. Correlations between communication behaviors and dyadic satisfaction were found. Communication behavior did not mediate partners' relative resources and relationship satisfaction. The study underscores the importance of communication behaviors in couple

relationships and contributes to knowledge on impacts of resource disparities between partners on relationship functioning.

PERSONAL RESOURCE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PARTNERS, CONFLICT-RESOLUTION COMMUNICATION BEHAVIORS, AND DYADIC SATISFACTION

By

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science
2006

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people:

My husband, Jon- You have supported me in every sense of the word while I worked on this thesis. As always, you have been kind and generous. I love you very much!

My family- Mom, Dad, Jess, Will, Grandma, Bubbie, Bob, and Sandi- Thanks for encouraging me and instilling in me a good work ethic. Both were needed to complete the thesis in a timely manner.

Class of 2004- Sarah, Mark, Rachel, Liz, Alexis, and Serena- You have been such wonderful friends over the past two years and I am glad that like everything else we have done in this program, we supported each other in this endeavor.

Dr. Norman Epstein- Norm! I am so grateful for all the time that you spent advising me on my thesis. Your knowledge, expertise, and kind demeanor were appreciated. I have learned a great deal and thank you for all the help. If I ever write a dissertation, can I call you?

Dr. Carol Werlinich- Thank you for encouraging me to accomplish as much as I could with my time at the clinic. I admire you a great deal.

Dr. Susan Walker- Thank you for serving on my committee. Your additional perspective was invaluable.

Rachel- You are the best thesis buddy imaginable. Completing the thesis would not have been nearly as enjoyable without someone to go to lunch with and constantly annoy.

Lindsey- You're advice was a great help to me. I am sure you will be a wonderful professor someday; you are already a wonderful teacher.

Lucy and Pretty- Thank you for never eating my homework and always keeping me company.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Both Conflict and Resource theories point to differences in the relative resources of partners in couple relationships as primary sources of conflict (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Ingoldsby, Smith, & Miller, 2004; White & Klein, 2002; Winton, 1995). There is a large body of research showing that power differences between partners, including those based on differences in resources, can influence a couple's relationship in adverse ways (Anderson, 1997; Babcock, Waltz, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1993; Sagrestano, Heavey, & Christensen, 1999). In fact, differences in personal resources such as discrepancies between marital partners' educational and occupational attainments have been identified as potential risk factors for psychological, physical, and even life-threatening abuse (Hornung, McCullough, & Sugimoto, 1981).

Additionally, it has been demonstrated that the gender of the partner with higher personal resources and associated higher status is of great significance when predicting negative consequences in the relationship. Non-traditional gender role combinations of personal resources have been found to be more highly correlated with relationship stress (Hornung et al., 1981). When status incompatibilities favor the female partner there is increased potential for abuse (Kaukinen, 2004.) Furthermore, status incompatibilities that favor the woman have also been linked to lower marital satisfaction of the couple (McCloskey, 1996; Techenor, 1999).

Examining how conflict is managed in romantic relationships is an important step in gaining an understanding of relationship stability and instability (Ingoldsby et al., 2004). In fact, conflict management in relationships has been identified as one of the

most important determinants of relationship well-being (Crohan, 1992). Numerous studies have linked constructive communication with higher levels of marital satisfaction (Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Greef & De Bruyne, 2000). When conflict is managed constructively, the result is often growth as a couple. However, when couples engage in conflict in a destructive manner (e.g., through aggressive behavior), they are at increased risk for relationship dissatisfaction and dissolution (Gottman, 1994; Greeff & De Bruyne). Given that resource discrepancies between partners have been demonstrated to be risk factors for negative couple interaction, it is important to determine whether the discrepancies are associated with negative communication when couples attempt to resolve issues in their relationships. This study addresses this question.

Purpose

Although there has been prior research that links differences in personal resources with conflict in couple relationships, as well as studies that have focused on the relationship between communication styles and dyadic satisfaction, there is a dearth of studies that examine the interactions among the various factors. The current study helps fill this gap in knowledge by examining how differences between the relative socio-economic resources of partners in dyadic relationships (i.e., income and educational attainment) are related to the amounts of constructive and destructive communication behavior partners engage in when in conflict, and how their communication behaviors are associated with relationship satisfaction. Additionally, because past research has shown that gender is a significant issue when examining the impact of differences in personal resources within a dyadic relationship, this study utilized feminist theory as a framework

for considering gender's impact on the relation between partners' resource discrepancies and their communication behaviors.

Review of the Literature

Conflict in Dyadic Relationships

Because it is highly unlikely that members of a couple will consistently have fully compatible needs, goals, beliefs, and preferences, it is inevitable that they will experience at least some degree of conflict from time to time (Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 2001; Raush, Barry, Hertel, & Swain, 1974). However, the existence of a conflict related to partners' preferences is not necessarily a source of distress or dissatisfaction (Markman et al., 2001). In fact, a possible advantage of conflict in relationships is that through discussions, arguments, negotiations, and management, partners gain a greater understanding of each other and a perception that they are a well-functioning team (Ingoldsby et al., 2004).

In his textbook, *The Functions of Social Conflict*, Coser (1956) explains many of the beneficial aspects of conflict in a family context. Conflict in a family can provide a safety valve for "letting off steam" and diffusing tension, without which pressures in the system may build and blow apart. It also has the ability to foster communication and interaction within a system. Conflict creates opportunities for couple members to learn about one another and exchange thoughts and feelings that might not have been possible to share without conflict.

Conflict-Resolution Communication and Dyadic Satisfaction

The impact of conflict lies in the manner in which the couple interacts in response to their differences (Markman et al., 2001). Epstein and Baucom (2002) cite positive

communication as one of the behaviors that elevates couples from the nondistressed range to the optimal range of functioning. Osgarby (1998) reviewed the role of positive communication in marital functioning and found that, while not all studies are consistent, there is clear evidence for the following differences between satisfied and distressed couples:

> Satisfied couples used more assent (Margolin & Wampold, 1981; Schaap, 1984), approval and caring (Birchler, Clopton, & Adams, 1984; Schaap, 1984), empathy (Birchler et al., 1984), humour, smiling and laughing (Margolin & Wampold, 1981; Revenstorf et al., 1984; Schaap, 1984), positive physical touch (Margolin & Wampold, 1981; Revenstorf et al., 1984) and problem description and solution (Birchler et al., 1984; Margolin & Wampold, 1981; Schaap, 1984). (p. 24)

Epstein and Baucom (2002, p. 39) report that the three most important empirically supported factors in couples' abilities to solve problems effectively include:

1. Specific communications, such as accepting responsibility or expressing contempt;
2. Patterns of interaction, or the ways that partners respond to each other, with constructive discussions by both partners indicating more satisfied relationships;
3. Incorporation of the preferences and desires of both individuals into solutions.

Christensen and his colleagues (Christensen, 1988; Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Christensen & Shenk, 1991) have consistently found a correlation between relationship satisfaction and the communication style used by a couple during conflict. Couples who are more satisfied with their relationships respond to problems and differences of opinion

by mutually engaging in discussion about the area of concern in a respectful manner. Christensen and Shenk compared a sample of 22 divorcing couples who had separated within the past 12 months, 15 clinical couples seeking marital therapy, and 25 happy couples who had not separated or sought marital therapy and who indicated satisfaction with their relationship. Findings suggest that mutual constructive communication was most present in the sample of nondistressed couples and least evident in the sample of divorcing couples. Additionally, the study found that destructive communication was more evident during problem discussions in distressed couples when compared with nondistressed couples. More specifically, clinical and divorcing couples were found to exhibit more mutual avoidance of problem discussions and more demand/withdraw communication during problem discussions than did nondistressed couples.

In a study of married couples, Marchand and Hock (2000) identified a number of significant correlations between conflict and problem-solving behaviors and partners' levels of marital satisfaction. More specifically, marital dissatisfaction was found to be a powerful predictor of avoidance and attacking conflict-resolution strategies. Couples participating in the study were recruited from a large metropolitan area through private physician offices, a women's health center, and other community resources. The sample included 40 White, nonclinical, community-residing married couples, who were parents of young children. Lower levels of marital satisfaction were related to higher rates of attacking conflict behaviors in both husbands and wives. Among husbands, marital satisfaction emerged as a significant predictor of husbands' avoidant conflict-resolution strategies. Additionally, compromising behaviors were positively correlated to both wives' and husbands' marital satisfaction.

Similarly, in a study of 57 couples who had been married for at least 10 years, Greef and De Bruyne (2000) found that a collaborative conflict management style yielded the highest level of marital satisfaction for both males and females. Other constructive conflict behaviors, such as compromising, also resulted in marital satisfaction. Couples who engaged in competitive conflict management styles reported the lowest levels of marital satisfaction, and destructive conflict behavior such as conflict-avoidance was also associated with lower marital satisfaction. However, a limitation of the study was the small sample comprised of Afrikaans-speaking members of a Protestant church living in the Stellenbosch area of South Africa. Due to the uniqueness of the sample, the findings, while significant, may only be generalizable to a similar population.

The link between conflict-related couple communication and relationship satisfaction has also been investigated longitudinally. In a study of marital interaction and satisfaction over a period of three years, Gottman and Krokoff (1989) found that some types of conflict engagement (e.g., confrontation of disagreement) may be functional for a marriage longitudinally, whereas conflict behaviors involving defensiveness, stubbornness, and withdrawal are more likely to be dysfunctional longitudinally. Furthermore, they suggested that couples who characteristically avoid conflict in daily life are at risk longitudinally for marital dissatisfaction.

Support for Gottman's and Krokoff's (1989) hypothesis was also found in a longitudinal study that focused on marital happiness and spousal consensus on beliefs about marital conflict (Crohan, 1992). The study examined the relationship between happiness and beliefs about conflict for 133 Black and 149 White couples in the first year of their marriage (Time 1) and then two years later (Time 2). Results suggest that

couples who believed that conflict should be avoided at Time 1 reported lower marital happiness throughout the first three years of their marriage when compared with couples in which both spouses believed that conflicts should not be avoided.

Thus, the impact of partners' conflicting goals, preferences, etc. on their relationship satisfaction and stability can be viewed as mediated by the type of conflict resolution behavior that the members of the couple employ. The current study will examine the consequences for the relationship of constructive and destructive communication behavior in terms of partners' marital satisfaction.

Impact of Partners' Relative Resources on Couple Behavior and Interaction

Fairly little is known about characteristics of couples and their individual members that influence the partners' use of destructive and constructive conflict-resolution behavior. Consequently, this study is also intended to examine differences in personal resources between partners as a risk factor for destructive conflict behavior. As described below, both conflict theory and resource theory (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Ingoldsby et al., 2004; White & Klein, 2002; Winton, 1995) suggest that when a member of a relationship has a deficit in personal resources in relation to his or her partner, that individual may resort to aggressive behavior in order to re-balance the power imbalance in the relationship that is associated with having personal resources. Although the current study's hypotheses are primarily based on this assertion, it is necessary to note other possibilities. For example, feminist theory points to the use of destructive communication, including violence, by the partner with greater power as a means of maintaining control (Yllö, 1993).

There is little doubt that the differences in personal resources resulting from disparities in educational and occupational status have potentially powerful implications for dyadic relationships. In a study conducted by Hornung et al. (1981), the relationships between the educational and occupational attainments of individuals in marital partnerships were examined as risk factors in abuse behavior within a sample of married women age 18 years or older. A modified version of the Conflict Tactics Scale was used to measure the incidence and one-year period prevalence of three levels of spouse abuse: psychological abuse, physical aggression, and life-threatening violence. Results showed that both status inconsistency (differential attainment of men and women in the various status hierarchies) and status incompatibility (combinations that are atypical) are associated with increased risks of psychological abuse, an even greater increased risk of physical aggression, and a still greater increased risk of life-threatening violence.

It is necessary to consider gender when identifying the impact of personal resource differences in a dyadic relationship that are based on education or income. Past studies (Hornung et al., 1981; Kaukinen, 2004; Tichenor, 1999) suggest that status disparities are not the only source of relationship stress; rather, *atypical* combinations of the distribution of status characteristics can lead to relationship problems. Whereas some patterns of status inconsistency are associated with higher risks of spouse abuse, other types of inconsistency seem to protect couples from abusive behavior. For example, Hornung et al. showed that when the man in a dyadic relationship obtained an occupational status that was high in comparison to what most other men with his level of education achieved, there appeared to be a protective effect against the risk of abuse in the relationship. However, when the woman in the relationship had the same type of

status inconsistency with an unusually high occupational attainment, the couple was at nearly twice the risk of life-threatening violence.

As further evidence of the importance of gender, Kaukinen (2004) found that status incompatibilities between partners that favor women increase the likelihood of emotional abuse. The study examined male and female partners' contributions to family economic well-being through employment, income, and education through the analysis of a large Canadian national database (n = 7,408). These measures tapped a continuum of status compatibility between intimate partners that included status parity (denoting egalitarian relationships in which neither partner is dominant; both are unemployed or employed, they make equal contributions to household income, and they have similar educational backgrounds), and two distinct forms of status incompatibility (a traditional status relationship in which the incompatibility favors the male and status reversal, a less common and non-normative relationship in which the status incompatibility favors the female). Although it was found that income and educational attainment reduced women's risk of emotional and physical abuse by their partners, status incompatibilities between partners that favor women increased the likelihood of abuse. Similarly, other studies have found that status incompatibilities that favor women are associated with lower marital satisfaction for partners of both genders and less relationship stability (McCloskey, 1996; Tichenor, 1999).

Tichenor (1999) conducted in-depth interviews with 30 predominantly White couples; 22 were status-reversal couples in which wives' income, occupational status, or both were higher than that of their husbands and eight were conventional couples in which husbands' income and occupational status were higher than their wives' or in

which the spouses are relatively equal on both variables. Reverse status couples were defined as those in which the wife earned 50% more per year than her husband and/or had a higher status occupation as defined by established occupational rankings, education required for the job, and position in the bureaucratic hierarchy. Tichenor found that wives in reverse status roles tended to place a greater value on their gender-appropriate contributions to the household and downplayed their paychecks as incidental. Spouses ignored or minimized the differences in income and status, having organized their lives in ways that diminished the differences. In contrast, no conventional husband downplayed his own economic contributions to the family. When examining how these couples managed the tensions created by income and status differences, Tichenor found that 64% of the reverse status couples were dissatisfied with their relationships in some way, whereas only 13% of couples in the conventional status group reported dissatisfaction. Thus, although the relatively small sample size of the study must be noted, there is evidence that non-traditional discrepancies between partners' socio-economic resources (i.e., education and personal income) can produce stress and destructive behavior in couple interactions. In the present study, discrepancies in socio-economic resources were examined as risk factors for more destructive and less constructive communication when couples are in the process of discussing conflictual issues in their relationship.

Theoretical Framework

Three theories will be used to guide the conceptual framework and interpretation of this research study: conflict theory, resource theory, and feminist theory. Conflict theory will be primarily used to conceptualize the presence of conflict in the relationships studied. According to conflict theory, conflict is used as an attempt to equalize resources

(Ingoldsby et al., 2004). The majority of this study's hypotheses were based on that assumption.

Resource theory, which overlaps considerably with conflict theory, was also included as a guiding theoretical framework for this study. Resource theory is primarily used in this study to explain the sources of power (as discussed in conflict theory) in terms of personal resources in dyadic relationships. Additionally, it is useful in that it was designed specifically in reference to marital power relationships (Blood & Wolfe, 1960), whereas conflict theory originated in sociology, where it is used to "explain differences between classes within society and the competition for scarce resources, including economic wealth, political power, and social status" (Ingoldsby et al., 2004, p.103).

A potential criticism of resource theory is the masculine bias, which assumes a "separate" rather than a "connected" self in that it is assumed that people are primarily concerned with their own self-interest as opposed to those of the couple, family, or larger group (Ingoldsby et al., 2004). Thus, a basic assumption of conflict theory is that humans are motivated principally by self-interest (White & Klein, 2002). Feminist theory was utilized in this study to potentially understand behaviors that support the group (i.e., the couple) over the individual. Additionally, it allows for a greater understanding of gender as a socially constructed concept in the context of a society that has a long history of unequal access to resources based on gender. This view is utilized when hypothesizing about variations that could potentially be found in the amount of conflict present in dyadic relationships when controlling for differences in personal resources.

Conflict Theory as an Explanation of the Source of Conflict in Dyadic Relationships

One of conflict theory's primary assumptions is that conflict is endemic in social groups (White & Klein, 2002). In social groups, such as families and romantic partnerships in which individuals spend the most time together, it can be expected that there will be considerable conflict. It is because of this assumption that conflict theorists suggest that the focus of study should include how the conflict is managed. The model suggests that, because all humans engage in conflict, an understanding of conflict management processes leads to an understanding of stability and instability in relationships (Ingoldsby et al., 2004).

Conflict theory explains the conditions under which stability and instability occur, and under what conditions harmonious interpersonal relationships are possible (Ingoldsby et al., 2004). In this theory, it is assumed that inequality exists in most relationships and conflict can be used as an attempt to equalize resources. Conflict theory examines each individual's access to scarce resources in order to determine who has the power in the family. This is done by analyzing unequal distribution of power and social status based on characteristics such as social class, gender, and education. Individuals are seen as focused on their own self-interest, and are thought to be in competition for scarce resources. Because individuals naturally desire power, prestige, and privilege, other individuals are viewed as competitors.

This study's hypotheses about the amount of conflict observed in couples in which individuals possess differing amounts of relative resources were based on the primary conflict theory assertion that those in a lower position of power will attempt to equalize the power in the relationship by engaging in more conflict. Additionally, it is

because conflict theorists recognize inequality and conflict as aspects of most relationships that the primary focus of the theory is the management of the conflict (Ingoldsby et al., 2004). Similarly, this study examined not only how differences in personal resources between partners influence the amount of conflict that they engage in, but it also included the relationships between the types of communication behaviors utilized (constructive or destructive) and their association with partners' relationship satisfaction.

Resource Theory as an Explanation of the Source of Power in Dyadic Relationships

Resource theory, unlike the closely related exchange and conflict theories, pertains specifically to power in marital relationships (Szinovacz & Harpster, 2001). According to resource theory, spouses' relative power in their relationship is contingent on their relative resources (Blood & Wolfe, 1960). Blood and Wolfe's original theory focused on spouses' relative economic contributions to the relationship. Economic resources such as income, education, and occupational status are deemed most influential for marital power. These variables are conceptualized as resources which one partner is able to use in the relationship to gain greater decision-making power. "Power accrues spontaneously to the partner who has the greater resources at his disposal" (Blood & Wolfe, p. 13), because that partner can provide or withhold future allocation of resources, putting him or her in a strategic position for influencing the other partner.

Worth noting is a variation of the original resource theory. Rodman (1972) developed a normative resource theory based on his findings that in patriarchal societies, such as Yugoslavia and Greece, testing failed to support the original theory. Rather than confirming a positive relationship between spouses' resources and their marital power

(commonly found in moderately egalitarian societies such as France and the United States), Rodman found that in less developed countries, the husband's occupational, educational, and income status is negatively correlated with the amount of power he exercises within the family. Thus, Rodman argues that the relationship between resources and marital power depends on societal gender role norms in less developed countries, where in traditional egalitarian societies, spouses' resources enhance their marital power and in patriarchal societies gender role norms predominate and resources are relatively unimportant.

Based on the importance of income and educational attainment in defining power in resource theory, the current study examined differences in personal resources as differences between the two partners' educational attainment and yearly gross income. The power differences, seen in conflict theory as the source of conflict, will be defined in this way and hereafter referred to as "resources."

Feminist Theory as a Framework for Examining Gender

One of the primary advantages to including feminist theory as a framework in the current study is its ability to overcome what are seen as common criticisms of both conflict and resource theories. Feminist theory acknowledges the important perspectives on relationship dynamics put forth by conflict and resource theories, but proposes that they do not adequately address the societal influence of gender (Yllö**,** 1993**)**. Without the additional use of a feminist lens, conflict and resource perspectives blur personal interests and gender interests. It is necessary to recognize that much of the conflict in heterosexual couple relationships does not stem wholly from a conflict between partners' personal interests but rather the individuals' "personal agendas" are socially constructed in a way

that entitles males and legitimizes their behavior. For example, as Yllö points out, if members of a couple have a conflict about what TV show they are going to watch, "the matter will likely be structured by expectations of gender and generational entitlement, not just personal preferences" (p. 52). As the importance of the issue increases, so likely will the salience of the gendered nature of the conflict. In short, conflict and personal interests are not gender neutral. Similarly, Szinovacz and Harpster (2001) point out that Blood and Wolfe (1960) negate the influence of authority and/or gender role attitudes on marital power relationships in resource theory.

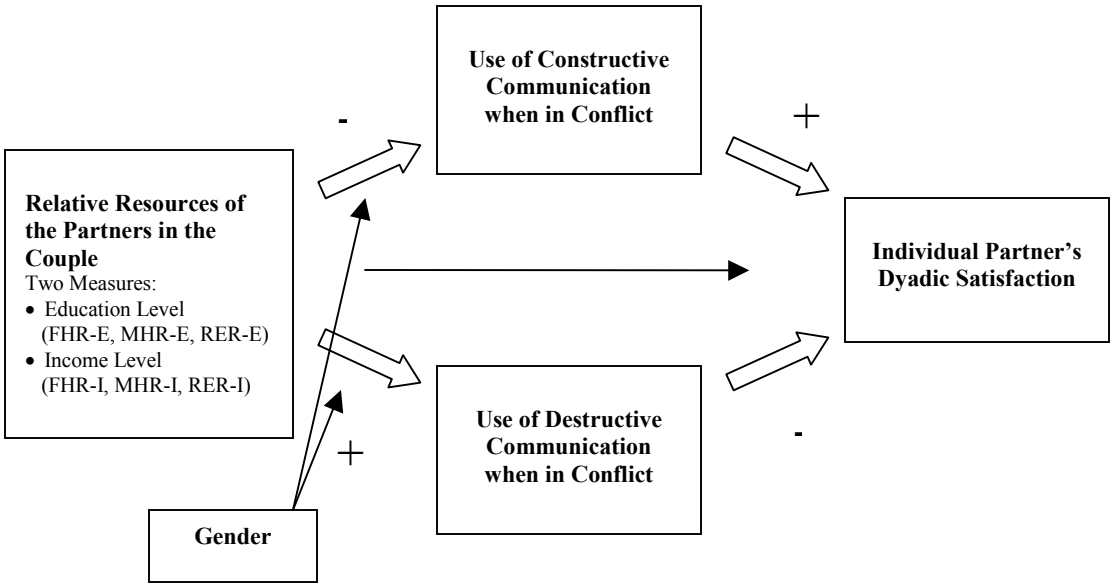
In contrast to other theories, feminists have argued that gender differences are not functional or inherent; rather, they are socially constructed to create and maintain male power within the family and society (Yllö, 1993). Feminist theory and research view social expectations regarding masculinity and femininity as shaping male-female relationships. More specific to the current study, a couple's motivation to communicate and the forms of communication used are influenced by the partners' genders. Some forms of destructive communication, including violence, may be used by the male partner in order to maintain dominance within a patriarchal relationship and can be analyzed as a means of social control of women in general.

Feminist theory points to the need for research that treats economic variables (e.g., income, education level) as symbolic resources. Inherent in the model, is a "deep distrust of the kind of thinking that has systematically excluded the experiences and claims of women" (White & Klein, 2002, p.177) and the view of the family as a "conceptual fabrication used to justify and maintain certain patterns of privilege" (White & Klein, 2002, p. 180). It is an ideology that, from the feminist perspective, demands the

analysis of gender-based distinctions and inequalities. It is for these reasons that gender is such a significant factor in this study and that feminist theory was selected as a guiding framework.

Hypotheses

Based on conflict, resource, and feminist theories, it was expected that in couples in which the two individuals' personal socio-economic resources are relatively similar, the use of constructive communication behaviors during conflict will be more frequent, whereas in couples in which one individual's personal resources varies significantly from that of his/her partner, the couple will engage in more destructive communication behavior. Additionally, the use of constructive and destructive communication behavior used by each partner will vary based on gender. These relationships are represented in Figure 1.



Note. FHR-E = Female Higher Resources- Education, MHR-E = Male Higher Resources- Education, RER-E =Relatively Equal Resources- Education, FHR-I = Female Higher Resources- Income, MHR-I = Male Higher Resources- Income, and RER-I = Relatively Equal Resources- Income.

Figure 1. Model of partners' relative resources impacting couple use of constructive and destructive behaviors and their marital satisfaction

This study had 12 hypotheses. The first four hypotheses address how discrepancies in the relative socio-economic resources of members of a couple impact their use of constructive and destructive communication behaviors. The next four hypotheses predict that gender moderates the relationship between partners' relative resources and their use of constructive and destructive communication behaviors. Hypotheses nine and ten pertain to the correlation between communication behaviors and marital satisfaction. Hypotheses 11 and 12 predict that communication behavior mediates the relationship between partners' relative resources and their levels of relationship satisfaction. The hypotheses are as follows:

1. Degree of difference in income between partners will be negatively associated with the use of constructive communication behavior during conflict. In couples where either the male or female partner has a significantly higher income than his/her partner, there will be less constructive communication than in couples in which partners have relatively equal incomes.
2. Degree of difference in income between partners will be positively associated with the use of destructive communication behaviors during conflict. In couples where either the male or female partner has a significantly higher income than his/her partner there will be more destructive communication than in couples in which partners have relatively equal incomes.
3. Degree of difference in partners' education levels will be negatively associated with the use of constructive communication behaviors during conflict. In couples where either the male or female partner has a significantly higher level of education than his/her partner, there will be less constructive communication than

in couples in which partners have relatively equal levels of educational attainment.

4. Degree of difference in partners' education levels will be positively associated with the use of destructive communication behaviors during conflict. In couples where either the male or female partner has a significantly higher level of education than his/her partner, there will be more destructive communication than in couples in which partners have relatively equal levels of educational attainment.
5. Gender moderates the relation between partners' relative resources and their destructive couple communication, in that couples in which the female has a higher level of income will have more destructive communication than couples in which the male has a higher level of income (see Table 1).
6. Gender moderates the relation between partners' relative resources and their destructive couple communication, in that couples in which the female has a higher level of education will have more destructive communication than couples in which the male has a higher level of education (see Table 1).
7. Gender moderates the relation between partners' relative resources and their constructive couple communication, in that couples in which the male has a higher level of income will have more constructive communication than couples in which the female has a higher level of income (see Table 1).
8. Gender moderates the relation between partners' relative resources and their constructive couple communication, in that couples in which the male has a

higher level of education will have more constructive communication than couples in which the female has a higher level of education (see Table 1).

9. Constructive communication behavior is positively correlated with partners' marital satisfaction.
10. Destructive communication behavior is negatively correlated with partners' marital satisfaction.
11. The relationship between differences in partners' income levels and dyadic satisfaction is mediated by the couple's use of constructive and destructive communication.
12. The relationship between differences in partners' educational attainment and dyadic satisfaction is mediated by the couple's use of constructive and destructive communication.

Table 1

Hypotheses for Communication Behavior as a Function of the Partners' Relative Personal Resources

	Relative Personal Resources of the Two Partners		
Communication Behavior	Female Higher (FHR)	Relatively Equal (RER)	Male Higher (MHR)
Constructive	Low	High	Moderate
Destructive	High	Low	Moderate

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

Participants

This study used pre-existing data collected from 88 heterosexual couples who voluntarily sought treatment at the Family Service Center (FSC), a clinical training facility for graduate students enrolled in the Marriage and Family Therapy master's degree program at the University of Maryland, College Park. Data used for the current study were collected from 2000-2005. A summary of the sample's demographic characteristics is presented in Table 2. Demographic information specific to relative resource groups is presented in Tables 3 and 4. The average age in years of males was 33 and the average age of females was 31. Of these couples, 54.5% were currently married and living together, 5.7% were currently married and separated, 20.5% were living together and unmarried, 1.1% were separated and unmarried, and 18.2% were dating while living separately. The average length of their relationship in years was seven. Regarding the participants' reported race, 2.3% were Asian/Pacific Islander, 36.2% were Black, 8.1% were Hispanic, 9.8% were Native American, 46.6% were White, and 3.4% classified themselves as "other". In terms of educational attainment, 4.6% had completed some high school, 16.0% completed high school, 4.0% had attended trade school, 30.3% had completed some college, 9.1% had received an associate degree, 9.7% had received a bachelor's degree, 10.3% had some graduate education, 13.7% had a master's degree, and 2.3% had a doctoral degree. On average, the participants had one child living in the home with them. The mean yearly gross income of individuals in the sample was $31,047.

Table 2

Demographics by Gender (N = 176)

	Males (*n* = 88)	Females (*n* = 88)
	mean (SD)	mean (SD)
Age	32.77 (9.48)	30.92 (9.11)
Length of Relationship (in years)	7.01 (7.27)	7.23 (7.41)
Number of Children who Live in Home	1.06 (1.19)	1.14 (1.19)
Yearly Gross Income	38,606 (32,424)	23,487 (19,647)
	n (%)	*n* (%)
Relationship Status		
Married, living together	46 (52.9)	48 (54.5)
Married, separated	5 (5.7)	5 (5.7)
Living together, not married	20 (23.0)	18 (20.5)
Separated, not living together	2 (2.3)	1 (1.1)
Dating, not living together	14 (16.1)	16 (18.2)
Race		
Asian/Pacific Islander	2 (2.3)	2 (2.3)
Black	28 (32.2)	35 (40.2)
Hispanic	8 (9.2)	9 (10.3)
Native American	3 (3.4)	0 (0.0)
White	43 (49.4)	38 (43.7)
Other	3 (3.4)	3 (3.4)

Table 2 (Continued)

Demographics by Gender (N = 176)

	n (%)	*n* (%)
Highest Level of Education		
Some High School	4 (4.6)	4 (4.5)
High School Diploma	20 (23.0)	8 (9.1)
Trade School	2 (2.3)	5 (5.7)
Some College	24 (27.6)	29 (33.0)
Associate's Degree	7 (8.0)	9 (10.2)
Bachelor's Degree	8 (9.2)	9 (10.2)
Some Graduate Education	7 (8.0)	11 (12.5)
Master's Degree	12 (13.8)	12 (13.6)
Doctoral Degree	3 (3.4)	1 (1.1)

Table 3

Female Demographics by Resource Group

	Income Resources of Partners		
	FHR-I	RER-I	MHR-I
	mean (SD)	mean (SD)	mean (SD)
Age	32.71 (8.24) (*n* = 17)	31.67 (10.17) (*n* = 24)	30.51 (9.34) (*n* = 35)
Length of Relationship	7.48 (6.23) (*n* = 11)	7.95 (7.90) (*n* = 20)	7.30 (8.68) (*n* = 28)
Yearly Gross Income	34,694 (18,763) (*n* = 17)	34,536 (16,320) (*n* = 24)	10,063 (14,724) (*n* = 35)
	Education Resources of Partners		
	FHR-E	RER-E	MHR-E
	mean (SD)	mean (SD)	mean (SD)
Age	31.56 (7.92) (*n* = 27)	29.40 (8.29) (*n* = 24)	34.32 (12.13) (*n* = 19)
Length of Relationship	6.55 (4.20) (*n* = 20)	5.06 (4.30) (*n* = 30)	14.14 (12.50) (*n* = 14)
Yearly Gross Income	26,081(18,633) (*n* =26)	22,735 (21,064) (*n* = 33)	21,639 (20,284) (*n* = 18)

Note. FHR-E = Female Higher Resources- Education, MHR-E = Male Higher Resources- Education, RER-E =Relatively Equal Resources- Education, FHR-I = Female Higher Resources- Income, MHR-I = Male Higher Resources- Income, and RER-I = Relatively Equal Resources- Income.

Table 4

Male Demographics by Relative Resource Group

	Income Resources of Partners		
	FHR-I	RER-I	MHR-I
	mean (SD)	mean (SD)	mean (SD)
Age	34.35 (9.64) (*n* = 17)	33.71 (10.66) (*n* = 24)	32.31 (9.22) (*n* = 35)
Length of Relationship	7.41 (6.48) (*n* = 11)	7.80 (7.99) (*n* = 20)	6.75 (8.15) (*n* = 28)
Yearly Gross Income	11,412 (13,181) (*n* = 17)	37,500 (20,033) (*n* = 24)	52,694 (39,044) (*n* = 35)
	Education Resources of Partners		
	FHR-E	RER-E	MHR-E
	mean (SD)	mean (SD)	mean (SD)
Age	32.41 (8.79) (*n* = 27)	31.77 (8.21) (*n* = 35)	37.05 (12.21) (*n* = 19)
Length of Relationship	6.45 (4.27) (*n* = 20)	4.88 (3.95) (*n* = 30)	13.36 (12.54) (*n* = 14)
Yearly Gross Income	27,173 (18,961) (*n* = 26)	45,009 (36,907) (*n* = 33)	46,417 (38,981) (*n* = 18)

Note. FHR-E = Female Higher Resources- Education, MHR-E = Male Higher Resources- Education, RER-E =Relatively Equal Resources- Education, FHR-I = Female Higher Resources- Income, MHR-I = Male Higher Resources- Income, and RER-I = Relatively Equal Resources- Income.

The data used in the current study were originally collected as a part of an ongoing study evaluating the effectiveness of the Couples Abuse Prevention Program (CAPP), a treatment program for couples who have experienced problems with anger control and psychological and/or mild to moderate physical violence in their relationship. The data used in this study were taken from self-report questionnaires and behavioral assessment information collected during the clinical assessment used in the original study of domestic abuse treatment, which began in 2000 and continues to the present. The criteria for inclusion in the current study were consistent with those used in the original study. In order to be eligible for inclusion, the couple must meet the following criteria: (1) both partners are 18 years of age or older; (2) the couple has been in a heterosexual intimate couple relationship for at least 6 months; (3) one or both partners have experienced problems with anger control and the potential for violence in their relationship in the last four months; (4) no abuse resulting in the need for a doctor or hospital visit has occurred in the relationship during the past four months: (5) both partners want to work to improve the relationship; (6) the partners see each other at least once a week; and (7) neither partner has an untreated alcohol or drug problem.

Measures

The following are descriptions of the measures used in this study. Table 3 summarizes the variables and how they were measured.

Gender, Income, and Educational Level

Demographic information such as gender, race, length and status of relationship, gross yearly income, and highest level of educational attainment were taken from a self-report form completed by each individual during their pre-therapy assessment. (Please

see Appendix A.) The Couple Information and Instructions questionnaire is the first form clients are asked to complete during the Day One assessment in the original study of domestic violence. Each partner in the couple is asked to complete the form individually. Information collected from this form that pertains to the current study includes: gender, personal yearly gross income, and highest level of education completed. On item five the partner identifies his or her gender. Item 13 asks for personal yearly gross income (i.e., before taxes or any deduction) and provides a blank space in which the individual can enter a figure. Item 18 asks for the highest level of education completed by the individual, and subjects choose from the following categories: 1) Some high school (less than 12 years); 2) High school diploma (12 years); 3) Some college; 4) Trade School (mechanic, carpentry, beauty school, etc.); 5) Associate's degree; 6) Bachelor's degree (BA, BS); 7) Some graduate education; 8) Master's degree (MA, MS, etc.); and 9) Doctoral degree (PhD, MD, EdD, etc.).

Construction of Couple Relative Resources Index

Prior studies have utilized many approaches in operationalizing the relative resources of partners in a couple relationship, but a standard has yet to emerge. For example, Kaukinen (2004) constructed status compatibility measures that reflected men's and women's relative economic contributions. Anderson (1997), in an effort to compare degrees of difference in resources, constructed five categories of income status compatibility/ incompatibility based on a ratio (woman's earnings/ couple's earnings). In contrast, Tichenor (1999) defined a wife as having a higher income when she earned 50% more income per year than her husband, in order to clearly capture differences related to relative incomes.

In the current study, couples were categorized into one of three groups based on the two partners' relative resources for the variables of personal income and education. Couples in which there was less than a 30% difference in the incomes of the members were categorized as having Relatively Equal Resources (RER-I) for the income variable; couples in which the male partner's income surpassed that of the female by at least 30% were categorized as Male Higher Resources (MHR-I); and those in which the female partner's income surpassed that of the male by at least 30% were categorized as Female Higher Resources (FHR-I). A 30% difference was chosen for the current study in order to reflect psychologically meaningful differences in the incomes of the partners and because that percentage allowed for reasonable equality in the sizes of the groups.

In order to categorize the couples based on the partners' relative incomes, a ratio was calculated by dividing each female partner's income by their male partner's income, and criteria were set regarding the percentage of difference between partners' incomes that would be considered substantial or likely to be psychologically meaningful to the partners. If this ratio was between .00 and .69, the male's income surpassed that of the female by at least 30% and the couple was categorized as "male higher resources on income" (MHR-I). If the ratio was between .70 and 1.30, the couple was categorized as having "relatively equal resources on income" (RER-I) as there was not the minimum 30% difference present. A ratio of 1.30 or greater was categorized as "female higher resources for income" (FHR-I) as the female's income exceeded that of their partner's by a minimum of 30%. Because a number cannot be divided by zero, in the case that a participant had recorded their annual income as $0, the $0 was recoded as $1 in order to calculate a ratio that was representative of the couple's difference in income.

Categories of education completed were constructed based on their relative similarity. Subjects' responses were coded based on what they reported as their highest level of education. Some high school, high school diploma, and trade school were coded as 1; some college and an associate's degree were coded as 2; a bachelor's degree and some graduate education were coded as a 3; and a master's degree or doctoral degree were coded as a 4. Couples in which the two partners completed a level of education that received the same code were categorized as having Relatively Equal Resources (RER-E) for the education level variable. Couples in which the male partner's education was coded higher than that of the female were categorized as Male Higher Resources (MHR-E), whereas couples in which the female partner's coded educational level surpassed that of the male partner were categorized as Female Higher Resources (FHR-E).

Couple Communication Behavior During Conflict

The global version of the Marital Interaction Coding System (MICS-G; Weiss & Tolman, 1990) was used to assess each partner's use of constructive and destructive behaviors during a videotaped 10-minute discussion of a conflictual topic in their relationship, recorded during the assessment phase preceding therapy. The MICS-G is a global behavioral coding system that examines both content and affective components of each partner's behavior in order to categorize the behaviors as constructive or destructive. (Please see the sample scoring sheet in Appendix B.)

Coding systems such as the MICS-G have been used extensively in research on couple communication (Epstein & Baucom, 2002). Although the amount of communication that is sampled in studies such as the present investigation is relatively short in comparison to the amount of communication that occurs within a couple's

relationship, prior research has demonstrated that the information taken from the sample is significant and representative of how the couple communicates in general. Communication behaviors and patterns that have been identified with coding systems have been found to be associated with both short-term and long-term relationship satisfaction. One example is Gottman's (1994) finding that four variables, criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling (withdrawal), which he referred to as the "four horsemen of the Apocalypse," have the ability to predict couples' future distress and relationship dissolution. Additionally, subjects who have participated in communication samples generally report that the sample is representative of how they communicate with their partners.

In order to determine if the communication sample used in the current study was reflective of couples' typical communication behaviors, participants were asked to rate on a self-report questionnaire (Hooley & Teasdale, 1989) the similarity of their own behavior and that of their partner during the communication sample and the way they typically behave when discussing an issue at home, on a scale in which 1 = not at all similar to 10 = very similar. Of the 176 participants in the study, responded to this scale. Male participants' mean rating of the representativeness of their own communication sample was 6.83 (SD = 2.24). When asked how similar their partner's behavior was to the way she typically behaves when discussing an issue at home, the males' mean representativeness rating was 6.78 (SD = 2.50). Females' responded with ratings of the representativeness of their own communication sample, with a mean of 7.35 (SD = 2.20), as well as a mean rating of 6.97 (SD = 2.70) for their partner's behavior. Additionally,

there were no cases in which both partners in the couple rated the sample as atypical of their communication behaviors at home.

Verbal cues, voice tone, body posture, word emphasis, and eye contact are all aspects of behavior used to categorize the individual's behavior into six categories of constructive and destructive behavior on the MICS-G. Coders rate each partner's behavior on each of the six categories within five 2-minute segments of the 10-minute discussion, and composite scores are produced for each of the six types of behavior across the five 2-minute segments. Constructive and destructive communication behaviors are not opposite ends of one spectrum, but rather distinct variables. The constructive behavior categories are problem solving, validation, and facilitation:

- Problem solving: This category measures the spouse's willingness to discuss or commit to making a change in the relationship.
    - Content cues: problem description, proposing a positive and/or negative solution, and compromising with one's partner.
    - Affect cues: a relaxed and open body posture, a willingness to listen to one's partner, and attentiveness to one's partner.
- Validation: This category measures how the spouse who is in the listening role reacts to the speaker with behaviors and affects that are validating.
    - Content cues: expressing agreement with the partner's opinion or behavior, expressing approval of something the partner has said or done, and accepting responsibility for a past or present problem or behavior in the relationship.

- Affect cues: expressions indicating agreement with one's partner (e.g., head nod, back-channeling responses, e.g., "Mm-hmm"), receptivity to one's partner (e.g., good eye contact), and encouragement of one's partner (e.g., warm voice tone, a display of patience that allows the partner to complete his/her statements).

- Facilitation: This category measures a spouse's use of behaviors that ease the progress of interaction.
  - Content cues: positive mind-reading (i.e., statements that make positive inferences or assumptions about one's partner), paraphrasing (i.e., statements that mirror or reflect back what the partner said), and using humor (i.e., humorous and light-hearted statements that often evoke laughter from the partner).
  - Affect cues: positive physical contact (e.g., hugging, kissing, holding hands), friendly smiles and laughter, open body posture (e.g., a relaxed body, orienting one's head toward the other partner, not using arms and feet to block one's body from the partner's body), and warm/affectionate tone of voice.

The three destructive behavior categories of the MICS-G are conflict, invalidation, and withdrawal:

- Conflict: This category measures the degree to which spouses express dissatisfactions (verbally or nonverbally) with their partner, their relationship, or life.

- Content cues: complaining (e.g., expressions of feeling deprived, wronged, or inconvenienced as a result of the partner's actions), criticizing (e.g., expressions of dislike or disapproval of a partner's behavior), negative mind-reading (e.g., statements inferring or assuming a negative attitude or emotion on the part of one's partner), put-downs and insults (e.g., statements intended to hurt, demean, or embarrass one's partner), and negative commands (e.g., angry or hostile demands made toward other partner).
- Affect cues: hostility (e.g., obscene or threatening gestures; shouting), voice intonation that is sarcastic, whining, angry, and/or bitter.

- Invalidation: This category measures how the spouse who is listening reacts to the speaker with behaviors indicative of rejecting the speaker's responses.
  - Content cues: disagreement (e.g., statements of disagreement with the partner's opinion(s) or behavior), denial of personal responsibility (e.g., refuting any responsibility for a problem addressed by the other partner), changing the subject of the discussion (e.g., purposely steering the conversation away from the original problem), and excuses (e.g., illegitimate statements that attempt to avoid responding to the other partner or taking responsibility for one's behavior).
  - Affect cues: interrupting one's partner (e.g., deliberate attempts to dominate the conversation), turn-off behaviors (e.g., expressions indicating displeasure, disgust, disapproval, or disagreement with the partner), inconsiderate or rude behaviors (e.g., gestures indicating that

the listener is not interested in what their partner is saying), and domineering behaviors (e.g., behavior that attempts to control the other partner or discussion, refusing to allow the partner to speak, etc.).

- Withdrawal: This category measures the degree that a spouse disengages from their partner.
    - Content cues: negation (e.g., statements indicating that the speaker does not want to take part in the conversation) and involuntarily contributing to the discussion (e.g., responding only when an answer is forced or demanded).
    - Affect cues: no response (e.g., silence after the other partner speaks), turning away (e.g., moving head and/or body away from other partner while still in the same spatial position), increasing physical distance from one's partner (e.g., physically moving one's chair away from the partner), and erecting physical barriers (e.g., raising arms or hands between one's self and their partner as a means of forming a barrier or blockade).

The topics discussed by couples in the original study were selected from a list of relationships issues that both partners had previously rated as a source of slight to moderate source of conflict on the Relationship Issues Survey (RIS; Epstein, 1999). The RIS is a 28 item self-report measure designed to identify current sources of disagreement and conflict in a dyadic relationship (see Appendix C). Items include career and job issues, sexual relationship, and personal habits. Partners rate each item from 0 = Not at all a source of disagreement, to 3 = Very much a source of disagreement or conflict. An

issue rated by both members of the couple as being slightly to moderately a source of disagreement and conflict in the relationship (i.e., scored as either 1 or 2 on the RIS) is chosen by the therapist as the topic for the couple's communication sample. The ten minute communication sample is videotaped with the couple's permission and coded later using the MICS-G.

Coding

For coding, the videotaped communication sample was divided into five, two-minute segments. Each segment was rated for each of the six behavior categories separately by two trained undergraduate research assistants, using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 0 = None; the spouse did not display any of that type of behavior in the interaction, to 5 = Very High; the spouse's behavior for the category was very intense and characterized most or all of the interaction. When the two coders' ratings of a behavioral category for a 2-minute segment were within one point, they averaged their two scores. When the coders' ratings for a type of behavior during a segment varied by more than one point, they viewed the tape again and came to a consensus within one point. Each member of a couple was rated separately, and a partner's score for each behavioral category was the sum of the ratings for that behavior for the five 2-minute segments. Scores from the three constructive behavior categories were combined to create a constructive behavior composite score for each member of the couple. Similarly, a composite score representing destructive behavior for each partner was created by summing the scores from the three destructive behavior categories.

Relationship Satisfaction

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976) was used to assess each partner's relationship satisfaction. The DAS is a 32-item, self-report measure (Please see Appendix D) originally developed by Spanier in an attempt to create an instrument that would demonstrate a higher degree of validity and reliability when compared with previous measures of overall relationship functioning. Items on the DAS were worded such that they apply to any committed relationship, not only marriages. Since its development, the DAS has become one of the most widely used measures of marital satisfaction. It yields a total score indicating overall relationship adjustment as well as a separate score for each of four subscales: (1) dyadic satisfaction; (2) dyadic cohesion; (3) dyadic consensus; and (4) affectional expression. Researchers are able to use one of the subscales alone without losing confidence in the reliability or validity of the measure, but usually the total DAS score is used, as it was in this study. DAS scores can range from 0 to 151, with scores below 100 typically used to identify relationship distress. Internal consistency for the total DAS was found to be .96 (Spanier, 1976). Content validity for the measure originally was assessed by the evaluation of three independent judges. Included items were considered by the judges to be "(1) relevant measures of dyadic adjustment for contemporary relationships; (2) consistent with the nominal definitions…for adjustment and its components (satisfaction, cohesion, and consensus); and (3) carefully worded with appropriate fixed choice responses" (Spanier, 1976, pp. 22-23).

Table 5

Summary of Variables, Conceptual and Operational Definitions, and Tools of Measurement

Variable	Conceptual Definition	Operational Definition	Measure of Variable
Relative Income Resource	The income of each partner relative to that of their partner	FHR-I = female partner's income surpassed that of the male by 30% or more. RER-I = less than a 30% difference in the incomes of the partners. MHR-I = male partner's income surpasses that of the female by 30% or more.	Couple Information and Instructions Questionnaire
Relative Education Resource	The educational attainment of each partner in comparison to that of their partner	Individual's highest reported level of education was coded based on their similarity to other levels of educational attainment. FHR-E = female partner's coded educational level surpassed that of the male's. RER-E = Partners with the same educational Code. MHR-E = male partner's education was coded higher than that of the female's.	Couple Information and Instructions Questionnaire

Table 5 (Continued)

Summary of Variables, Conceptual and Operational Definitions, and Tools of Measurement

Variable	Conceptual Definition	Operational Definition	Measure of Variable
Constructive Communication	Individual's use of constructive communication behaviors when in conflict	Each partner's composite score representing his/her constructive behaviors (problem-solving, validation, facilitation) used during the 10-minute communication sample.	Marital Interaction Coding System-Global (MICS-G)
Destructive Communication	Individual's use of destructive communication behaviors when in conflict	Each partner's composite score representing his/her destructive behaviors (conflict, invalidation, withdrawal) used during the 10-minute communication sample.	Marital Interaction Coding System-Global (MICS-G)
Dyadic Satisfaction	Individual's satisfaction with their relationship	The scores received by each partner on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale at the time of their pre-therapy assessment in the original study	Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS)

Note. FHR-E = Female Higher Resources- Education, MHR-E = Male Higher Resources- Education, RER-E =Relatively Equal Resources- Education, FHR-I = Female Higher Resources- Income, MHR-I = Male Higher Resources- Income, and RER-I = Relatively Equal Resources- Income.

Procedure

This study was a secondary analysis of data collected for use in the aforementioned CAPP study on domestic violence. Data were originally collected during two standard assessment sessions at the Family Service Center. The first assessment session lasted approximately two hours. After clients were informed of the clinic's policies, fees, confidentiality, and limits thereof, clients had the opportunity to have any questions addressed. Clients were then required to sign an authorization and release form prior to the commencement of therapy or the completion of any paperwork.

Partners were taken to separate therapy rooms to complete their assessment paperwork in order to maintain confidentiality. Clients were informed that the information they provide on the questionnaires would remain confidential and were asked to complete the forms as thoroughly as possible. The therapists left the clients alone for increments of about 20 minutes at a time, returning to check on progress and informing the clients of any missed questions. Assessments completed during the first day of assessment that are relevant to the current study include the Couple Information and Instructions Questionnaire, the Relationship Inventory Survey (RIS), and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS).

Following the first assessment session, all couples who met the criteria for the original study (as previously described in Participants section) were invited to participate in the CAPP study and to complete a second assessment. After agreeing to participate in the study and prior to completing the second assessment they reviewed and signed a formal human subjects consent form. The document informed clients about the details of the larger study which included the potential risks and benefits for the study as well as

details about voluntary withdrawal. Inclusion criteria for the current study are the same as those described for the original study.

During the second day of assessment in the original study, clients were asked to complete a 10-minute communication sample (as previously described), as well as several other self-report questionnaires. The videotaped communication sample was subsequently coded using the Marital Interaction Coding System - Global (MICS-G).

All individuals, couples, or families who contact the Family Service Center in order to obtain services are assigned a five-digit numerical code. All data used in the database from which the information used in this study were drawn are identified only by that five-digit code. For the purposes of this study, no identifying information about the participants was used.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Before the study's hypotheses were tested, exploratory analyses were conducted to identify whether subjects' ages and lengths of relationship were significantly related to the variables used to test the study's hypotheses (income and education discrepancies; constructive and destructive communication behavior) in order to determine if it was necessary to control for those demographic variables in the data analyses. Three analyses of variances (ANOVAs) were conducted in order to determine if there were differences among the three income discrepancy groups (FHR-I, RER-I, and MHR-I) for the females' ages, males' ages, or length of relationships. Analyses showed that the groups did not differ in the age of the male or female subjects; nor did they differ in terms of length of relationship. Because no differences were found among the groups, it was unnecessary to control for subjects' age or length of relationship in analyses involving couples' income discrepancies.

Similarly, three ANOVAs were conducted in order to determine if there were differences among the three education discrepancy groups (FHR-E, RER-E, and MHR-E) for the females' ages, males' ages, or length of relationships. These analyses indicated that neither males' nor females' ages differed across groups. However, length of relationship was different across the three groups of relative resources in terms of educational attainment; F (2, 61) = 8.56, p = .001. Post hoc paired comparisons (Student-Newman-Keuls) were computed to determine which of the three relative resource groups differed from each other. It was found that participants in the MHR-E reported their length of relationship (mean = 14.14) to be significantly longer than either the FHR-E

(mean = 6.55) or the RER-E (mean = 5.06) group. The FHR-E and RER-E groups did not differ significantly from each other. Consequently, it was decided that length of relationship would be controlled for in tests involving resource discrepancies based on education.

Pearson correlations indicated that subjects' ages were unrelated to communication behavior, further evidence that there was no need to control for age in tests of the hypotheses. Length of relationship also was not significantly related to females' use of constructive communication behaviors or males' use of constructive or destructive communication behaviors. However, length of relationship was significantly related to females' use of destructive communication ($r = 0.31$, $p = .008$, 2-tailed). Therefore, years together was used as a control variable in tests of hypotheses involving females' use of destructive communication behaviors.

Finally, Pearson correlations indicated that length of relationship was significantly inversely correlated with both females' dyadic satisfaction ($r = -0.44$, $p < .001$, 2-tailed) and males' dyadic satisfaction ($r = -0.30$, $p = .01$, 2-tailed). Therefore, length of relationship was used as a control variable when testing hypotheses involving dyadic satisfaction.

It was decided that for the purposes of this study, possible differences based on race would not be examined, due to the limited sample size ($n = 88$); the study could not afford a further division of the sample (with several categories of race) without sacrificing statistical power of the tests.

Overview of Data Analyses

The first eight hypotheses were analyzed using one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs). The next two hypotheses were analyzed using Pearson's correlations. The final two hypotheses were analyzed using analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs). The analyses used to test each hypothesis are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Difference in income between partners will be negatively associated with the use of constructive communication behavior during conflict. In couples where either the male or female partner has a significantly higher income than his/her partner, there will be less constructive communication than in couples in which partners have relatively equal incomes.

The relationship between the independent variable, partners' relative income, and dependent variable, constructive communication behavior was analyzed using one-way analysis of variance, with three levels of the partners' income discrepancy status (female greater, equal, and male greater) as the independent variable and constructive communication as the dependent variable.

Hypothesis 2: Difference in income between partners will be positively associated with the use of destructive communication behaviors during conflict. In couples where either the male or female partner has a significantly higher income than his/her partner, there will be more destructive communication than in couples in which partners have relatively equal incomes.

The relationship between the independent variable, partners' relative income, and dependent variable, destructive communication behavior was analyzed using one-way analysis of variance, with three levels of the partners' income discrepancy status (female

greater, equal, and male greater) as the independent variable and destructive communication as the dependent variable.

Hypothesis 3: Difference in partners' education levels will be negatively associated with the use of constructive communication behaviors during conflict. In couples where either the male or female partner has a significantly higher level of education than his/her partner, there will be less constructive communication than in couples in which partners have relatively equal levels of educational attainment.

The relationship between the independent variable, partners' relative education level and dependent variable, constructive communication behavior was analyzed using a one–way analysis of variance, with three levels of the partners' education discrepancy status (female greater, equal, and male greater) as the independent variable and constructive communication as the dependent variable.

Hypothesis 4: *Differences in partners' education levels will be positively associated with the use of destructive communication behaviors during conflict. In couples where either the male or female partner has a significantly higher level of education than his/her partner, there will be more destructive communication than in couples in which partners have relatively equal levels of educational attainment.*

The relationship between the independent variable, partners' relative education level and dependent variable, destructive communication behavior was analyzed using a one-way analysis of variance, with three levels of the partners' education discrepancy

status (female greater, equal, and male greater) as the independent variable and destructive communication as the dependent variable.

Hypothesis 5: Gender will moderate the relation between partners' relative income resources and their destructive couple communication in that couples in which the female has a higher level of income will have more destructive communication than couples in which the male has a higher level of income.

The statistical test used to test this hypothesis was a one-way analysis of variance, with three levels of the partners' income discrepancy status (female greater, equal, and male greater) as the independent variable and destructive communication as the dependent variable. The test of the contrast between the female-greater and the male-greater groups was the specific test of the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 6: Gender will moderate the relation between partners' relative education resources and their destructive couple communication in that couples in which the female has a higher level of education will have more destructive communication than couples in which the male has a higher level of education.

The statistical test used to test this hypothesis was a one-way analysis of variance, with three levels of the partners' education discrepancy status (female greater, equal, and male greater) as the independent variable and destructive communication as the dependent variable. The test of the contrast between the female-greater and the male-greater groups was the specific test of the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 7: Gender will moderate the relation between partners' relative income resources and their constructive couple communication. Couples in

which the male has a higher level of income will have more constructive communication than couples in which the female has a higher level of income.

The statistical test used to test this hypothesis was a one-way analysis of variance, with three levels of the partners' income discrepancy status (female greater, equal, and male greater) as the independent variable and constructive communication as the dependent variable. The test of the contrast between the female-greater and the male-greater groups was the specific test of the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 8: Gender will moderate the relation between partners' relative education resources and their constructive couple communication. Couples in which the male has a higher level of education will have more constructive communication than couples in which the female has a higher level of education.

The statistical test used to test this hypothesis was a one-way analysis of variance, with three levels of the partners' education discrepancy status (female greater, equal, and male greater) as the independent variable and constructive communication as the dependent variable. The test of the contrast between the female-greater and the male-greater groups was the specific test of the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 9: Constructive communication behavior will be positively correlated with partners' relationship satisfaction.

The relationship between constructive communication behavior and partner relationship satisfaction, was analyzed using a Pearson's correlation.

Hypothesis 10: Destructive communication behavior will be negatively correlated with partners' relationship satisfaction.

The relationship between destructive communication behavior and partner relationship satisfaction was analyzed using a Pearson's correlation.

Hypothesis 11: *The relationship between differences in partners' income levels and their relationship satisfaction will be mediated by couples' use of constructive and destructive communication.*

The hypothesis was tested with two analyses of covariance, with three levels of partners' relative income (female greater, equal, and male greater) as the independent variable, couples' constructive and destructive communication as covariates, and relationship satisfaction of each partner as the two dependent variables in the two ANCOVAs.

Hypothesis 12: *The relationship between differences in partners' educational attainment and dyadic satisfaction will be stronger when accounting for the couples' use of constructive and destructive communication.*

The hypothesis was tested with two analyses of covariance, with three levels of partners' relative education (female greater, equal, and male greater) as the independent variable, couples' constructive and destructive communication as covariates, and relationship satisfaction of each partner as the two dependent variables in the two ANCOVAs.

Findings Regarding Tests of Hypotheses

Partners' Relative Resources and Communication Behaviors

For tests of hypotheses one and two, analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were used to compare partners' use of destructive and constructive communication behaviors across the three groups based on partners' relative income (Female Higher Resources - Income,

Relatively Equal Resources - Income, and Male Higher Resources - Income). No significant differences were found across the three groups; for males' use of constructive communication, F (2, 73) = .43, *ns*; for females' use of constructive communication, F (2, 73) = 1.09, *ns*; for males' use of destructive communication, F (2, 73) = .93, *ns*; for females' use of destructive communication, F (2, 73) = 1.34, *ns*. These results did not support the hypotheses.

For hypotheses three and four, ANOVAs were used to compare partners' use of destructive and constructive communication behaviors across the three groups (Female Higher Resources - Education, Relatively Equal Resources - Education, and Male Higher Resources - Education) based on partners' relative educational attainment. There was a significant difference among the groups for females' use of constructive communication behaviors, F (2, 78) = 3.52, $p < .05$. There were no significant differences among groups for males' use of constructive communication behaviors, F (2, 78) = 1.46, *ns* and for females' use of destructive communication behaviors, F (2, 78) = 2.51, *ns*.

Post hoc paired comparisons indicated that for females' constructive communication behaviors, the relatively equal education (RER-E; mean = 3.45) and the male higher education (MHR-E; mean = 2.65) groups differed significantly. This difference was consistent with hypothesis three, although the lack of a difference between RER-E and the female higher education (FHR-E; mean = 3.08) did not support the hypothesis. Concerning females' use of destructive communication behaviors, as described above, there was a trend toward group differences when length of relationship was not controlled F (2, 78) = 2.51, $p = .09$, and the mean for the RER-E group (1.14) was lower than the mean for the FHR-E (1.49) and MHR-E (1.74) groups, which was

consistent with hypothesis four. However, after controlling for the covariate of length of relationship, there was no significant difference among groups, F (2, 64) = 1.67, p = .20. It is important to note that the ANCOVA controlling for length of relationship had a significantly lower sample size due to missing data on length of relationship; therefore, the lack of a trend toward a resource discrepancy group difference may be due to the smaller sample size and lower statistical power of the test compared to the ANOVA that did not control for the covariate.

Gender as a Moderator for the Relation between Relative Resources and Communication Behaviors

Concerning hypotheses five through eight, the one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) testing for differences among the three resource discrepancy groups (female higher, relatively equal, male higher) were used to examine whether gender moderates the relationship between partners' use of destructive and constructive communication, through the comparison of the female higher and the male higher groups. The group means for females' and males' constructive and destructive communication are presented in Table 6. No significant differences were found between these two groups in any comparison of composite constructive or destructive communication scores. For hypothesis five, as reported previously for hypothesis one, the ANOVA comparing the three relative resource groups based on income indicated no group differences on males' or females' use of destructive communication behaviors. Therefore, hypothesis five was not supported.

For hypothesis six, as described above regarding hypothesis four, the ANOVA comparing the three groups based on relative educational resources of the partners on

males' use of destructive communication behaviors showed no differences across groups. The ANCOVA comparing the three groups based on relative educational resources of the partners with females' use of destructive communication behaviors, controlling for length of relationship, also showed no group differences. Therefore, hypothesis six was not supported.

Concerning hypothesis seven, as previously reported for hypothesis one, the ANOVA comparing the three relative resource groups based on income indicated no group differences on males' or females' use of destructive communication behaviors. Therefore, hypothesis seven was not supported.

In regard to hypothesis eight, as previously noted, the ANOVA comparing the three relative resource groups based on education indicated no group differences in males' use of constructive communication behaviors. However, the ANOVA comparing the relative education groups on females' use of constructive communication did show a significant group difference, but post hoc paired comparisons indicated no significant difference between the FHR-E (mean = 2.65) and MHR-E (mean = 3.08) groups. On the other hand, the group in which male partners had obtained a higher level of education (MHR-E) used a significantly lower amount of constructive communication behaviors than the (RER-E) group where the partners had relatively equal educational attainment (mean = 3.45). Therefore, hypothesis eight was not supported.

Table 6

Mean Communication Composite Scores as a Function of Relative Resources

Communication Behavior	Income (n = 152)			
	FHR-I	RER-I	MHR-I	F (2, 73)
Males' Constructive	3.42 (0.89)	3.15 (1.05)	3.21 (0.92)	0.43
Females' Constructive	3.33 (0.96)	2.88 (1.10)	3.13 (0.93)	1.09
Males' Destructive	1.24 (0.91)	1.45 (0.94)	1.13 (0.88)	0.93
Females' Destructive	1.39 (0.91)	1.73 (1.01)	1.28 (1.11)	1.34
Communication Behavior	Education (n = 162)			
	FHR-E	RER-E	MHR-E	F (2, 78)
Males' Constructive	3.04 (0.91)	3.42 (0.90)	3.08 (1.11)	1.46
Females' Constructive	3.08 (1.15)	3.45 (1.06)[a]	2.65 (0.97)[b]	3.52*
Males' Destructive	1.29 (0.80)	1.21 (0.95)	1.30 (0.82)	0.09
Females' Destructive	1.49 (0.97)	1.14 (0.79)	1.74 (1.25)	2.51

Note. FHR-E = Female Higher Resources- Education, MHR-E = Male Higher Resources- Education, RER-E =Relatively Equal Resources- Education, FHR-I = Female Higher Resources- Income, MHR-I = Male Higher Resources- Income, and RER-I = Relatively Equal Resources- Income. Standard deviations are in parentheses. Means with superscripts differ significantly. * = $p < .05$.

Communication Behaviors and Dyadic Satisfaction

In regard to hypotheses nine and ten, Pearson correlation analyses (see Table 7) revealed that individual dyadic satisfaction was significantly related to communication behaviors employed by the self as well as by the partner. Specifically, there were positive associations between males' dyadic satisfaction and females' use of constructive communication behaviors ($r = .28$, $p < .01$) and between males' dyadic satisfaction and males' use of constructive communication behaviors ($r = .34$, $p < .01$).

Additionally, males' dyadic satisfaction was negatively associated with males' use of destructive communication behaviors ($r = -.35$, $p < .001$). Males' dyadic adjustment was not significantly related to females' use of destructive communication behaviors ($r = -.14$, *ns*). Given that length of relationship was related to both males' and females' DAS scores and to females' use of destructive communication behaviors, the partial correlation between males' DAS scores and females' destructive communication behavior was computed, and it was also not significant ($r = -.04$, *ns*). Positive associations were found between females' dyadic satisfaction and males' use of constructive communication behaviors ($r = .29$, $p < .01$) and between females' dyadic satisfaction and their own use of constructive communication ($r = .36$, $p < .001$).

Furthermore, females' dyadic satisfaction was negatively associated with males' use of destructive communication behaviors ($r = -.41$, $p < .001$) and between females' dyadic satisfaction and their own use of destructive communication ($r = -.33$, $p < .01$). Again, given that length of relationship was related to both males' and females' dyadic satisfaction and to females' use of destructive communication behaviors, the partial correlation between females' dyadic satisfaction and their own destructive

communication behaviors was computed. This relationship was still found to be significant when controlling for length of relationship (r = - .23, p = .03). Again, it is notable that the sample size was reduced to 68 couples for the partial correlation analysis, whereas the original simple correlations were based on a larger sample of 88 couples.

Table 7

Correlations of Dyadic Satisfaction with Use of Constructive and Destructive Communication

Communication Behavior	Males' Dyadic Satisfaction (n = 88)	Females' Dyadic Satisfaction (n = 88)
Males' Constructive	.34**	.29**
Females' Constructive	.28**	.36***
Males' Destructive	.35***	-.41***
Females' Destructive	-.14	-.33**

Note. The partial correlation between females' dyadic satisfaction and females' use of destructive communication was -.23, $p < .05$ when controlling for length of relationship. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .00$.

Communication Behaviors as Mediators between Relative Resources and Dyadic Satisfaction

Two steps were involved in determining whether communication behavior mediated between discrepancies in partners' resources and the partners' levels of dyadic satisfaction. First, the relationship between partners' relative resources based on income and education and males' and females' dyadic satisfaction were tested with one-way analyses of variance. The ANOVAs testing differences in groups based on the relative incomes of the partners indicated no significant group differences for male dyadic

satisfaction, F (2, 73) = 0.14, and for females' dyadic satisfaction, F (2, 73) = 0.60. Similarly, the ANOVAs testing differences in groups based on the relative educational attainment of the partners indicated no significant group differences for males' dyadic satisfaction, F (2, 78) = 0.16, and for females' dyadic satisfaction, F (2, 78) = 1.00. Table 8 presents the group means for dyadic satisfaction. Thus, there was no relation between resource discrepancies and couples' satisfaction with their relationships in the first place that might be mediated by the partners' constructive and destructive communication.

Nevertheless, analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) were then used to determine the presence of significant differences in individual dyadic satisfaction across the three groups based on relative resources (FHR-I, RER-I, MHR-I, FHR-E, FHR-E, and MHR-E) with females' and males' constructive and destructive communication behaviors used as covariates. According to hypothesis 11, it was expected that the relationship between differences in partners' income levels and their relationship satisfaction would be mediated by couples' use of constructive and destructive communication behaviors. The results indicated that after controlling for the covariates male dyadic satisfaction was not significantly different across the three groups, F (1, 69) = 0.02, p = 0.98. The same test also revealed that female dyadic satisfaction was not different across the three groups, F (1, 69) = 0.12, p = 0.89, which was not consistent with the hypothesis. In neither analysis were females' or males' communication behaviors significant covariates.

According to hypothesis 12, it was expected that the relationship between differences in partners' relative educational attainment and their relationship satisfaction would be mediated by partners' use of constructive and destructive communication.

Inconsistent with expectations, results indicated that male dyadic satisfaction was not significantly different across the three groups, F (2, 74) = 0.38, *ns*. The same test also revealed that female dyadic satisfaction was not significantly different across the three groups F (2, 74) = 0.36.

Table 8

Means and Standard Deviations for Dyadic Satisfaction by Relative Resource Group

	Income			
	FHR-I	RER-I	MHR-I	
DAS Score	(n = 34)	(n = 48)	(n = 70)	F (1, 69)
Male	92.88 (18.84)	90.04 (18.25)	92.40 (21.27)	0.02
Female	84.12 (24.12)	80.32 (22.34)	86.91 (21.70)	0.12
	Education			
	FHR-I	RER-I	MHR-I	
DAS Score	(n = 54)	(n = 70)	(n = 38)	F (2, 74)
Male	92.22 (20.56)	89.17 (23.61)	89.68 (19.45)	0.38
Female	81.96 (23.84)	89.14 (23.88)	80.95 (24.91)	0.36

Note. FHR-E = Female Higher Resources- Education, MHR-E = Male Higher Resources- Education, RER-E =Relatively Equal Resources- Education, FHR-I = Female Higher Resources- Income, MHR-I = Male Higher Resources- Income, and RER-I = Relatively Equal Resources- Income. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

This study was undertaken in an attempt to better understand how resource discrepancies between partners in dyadic relationships impact their use of constructive and destructive communication behaviors and how that is related to their relationship satisfaction. It was expected that individuals in relationships with greater discrepancies between partners in personal resources (income and educational attainment) would engage in fewer constructive and more destructive communication behaviors when compared with individuals in relationships in which partners' resource attainment was relatively equal. Furthermore, it was expected that communication behaviors would be influenced by the gender of the partner with the greater resources. More specifically, when the female partner has the greater resources of the couple (FHR), the most destructive and least constructive communication behaviors were expected from both partners. Couples with relatively equal resources (RER) were expected to use the most constructive and least destructive communication behaviors. When male partners had greater resources in comparison to their female partners (MHR), it was expected that partners would exhibit less destructive and more constructive communication behaviors than those in the female higher resource groups and more destructive and less constructive communication behaviors than those in the relatively equal resource groups. It was further hypothesized that constructive communication behaviors would be positively correlated with partners' relationship satisfaction, and destructive communication behavior would be negatively correlated with partners' relationship satisfaction. Finally, it was also hypothesized that the relationship between differences in

partners' resources and their relationship satisfaction would be mediated by the couples' use of communication behaviors.

Partners' Relative Resources and Communication Behaviors

Contrary to expectations, no significant differences in the communication behaviors used by either partner when engaged in conflict were found among the groups based on the partners' relative income resources. However, it is interesting to note that while not significant, the direction of mean communication scores as a function of relative income tended to be in the opposite direction of what was hypothesized. The greatest use of destructive communication was observed from both males and females in the Relatively Equal Resources-Income group, followed by the Female Higher Resources-Income group, with the lowest levels of destructive communication in the Male Higher Resources-Income group (Please see Table 6). Similarly, constructive communication behaviors for both males and females were most frequently observed in the Female Higher Resources-Income group, followed by the Male Higher Resources - Income group, with the least constructive communication observed in the Relatively Equal Resources-Income group.

One possible explanation for this trend may be that rather than engaging in conflict as a means of gaining power, the partner with fewer personal resources may be avoiding conflict because they have more to lose in terms of joint couple resources by engaging in the conflict. In fact, conflict theory recognizes that group dynamics are different in families than in other groups (Ingoldsby, Smith, & Miller, 2004). More specifically, it is more difficult to leave a family than it is to leave a group, and dissolution of a family is more threatening than the breakup of a group. Because it only

takes one person to dissolve a couple relationship, it stands to reason that the person with lesser interest has more power. An individual's inferior earning power may force him or her to rely on his or her partner to maintain his or her standard of living. Additionally, women's dependence on marriage may be further increased due to their typically inferior earning power and disproportionate responsibility for children (Kalmuss & Strauss, 1990). Therefore, when members of a couple have relatively equal resources, destructive communication may be perceived as less of a risk to the relationship than if one partner clearly has more resources.

Another possible explanation is that couples function with more constructive communication behaviors and less destructive behaviors when there is a clear hierarchical relationship. Conversely, hierarchical ambiguity may be present in the RER-I groups and may elicit more destructive communication behaviors because the partners in the couple are vying for power.

Consistent with expectations, females exhibited more constructive communication behaviors when their education level was relatively equal to that of their partner (RER-E) than when the male partner had greater educational attainment (MHR-E). However, while not a significant finding, the apparent trend that females whose education surpassed that of their partners (FHR-E) used more positive communication behaviors than the females whose partner had obtained a higher level of education (MHR-E) was unexpected.

Although relative education was not consistently associated with couples' communication behavior, it is possible that the individual partners' absolute levels of education might be more strongly related to their communication behaviors.

Consequently, a post-hoc exploratory one-way ANOVA was computed for each sex, with level of education as the independent variable and the constructive and destructive communication behaviors as the dependent variables. As previously explained, categories of education completed were constructed based on their relative similarity. Subjects' responses were coded based on what they reported as their highest level of education. Some high school, high school diploma, and trade school were coded as 1; some college and an associate's degree were coded as 2; a bachelor's degree and some graduate education were coded as a 3; and a master's degree or doctoral degree were coded as a 4.

When comparing females' use of constructive communication behaviors across the four groups of education levels, there was a significant difference among the groups, F (3, 80) = 2.96, $p < .05$. Females with higher education levels used more constructive communication. While no significant differences between the groups were found for females' use of destructive communication based on education level, F (3, 80) = 1.94, p = .13, *ns*, the direction of means did generally indicate that females with lower levels of education tended to use more destructive communication behaviors (Please see Table 9).

Similarly, when examining males' use of constructive communication behaviors across the four groups of education levels, there was a significant difference between the groups, F (3, 79) = 3.03, $p < .05$. Males with higher education levels were found to have used more constructive communication. Again, no significant differences across education level groups were found for males' use of destructive communication, F (3, 79) = 1.39, *ns*. However, once again, the direction of means generally indicated that lower levels of education were associated with higher levels of destructive communication.

Table 9

Mean Communication Composite Scores as a Function of Education Level

Communication Behavior	Coded Education Level			
	1	2	3	4
Female:	(*n* = 17)	(*n* = 38)	(*n* = 23)	(*n* = 6)
Constructive	2.5 (0.91)	3.21(1.05)	3.28 (1.00)	3.73 (1.55)
Destructive	1.88 (1.27)	1.32 (0.81)	1.38 (1.02)	0.92 (0.95)
Male:	(*n* = 27)	(*n* = 32)	(*n* = 19)	(*n* = 15)
Constructive	2.86 (0.59)	3.36 (0.97)	3.32 (1.21)	4.04 (0.65)
Destructive	1.51 (0.93)	1.13 (0.65)	1.07 (1.09)	1.08 (0.51)

Note. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

Notably, females' mean level of education in the Female Higher Resources-Education group was higher than that of the mean level of education of females in the Male Higher Resources-Education group, which may explain the unexpected but apparent trend found in the primary study that females whose education surpassed that of their partners used more positive communication behaviors than the females whose partner had obtained a higher level of education. Based on these findings it appears that absolute educational attainment may be a stronger predictor of communication behaviors used and may have overshadowed any differences that would have been found based on partners' educational attainment discrepancies. Furthermore, it is reasonable to hypothesize that with larger sample sizes and more statistical power, significant differences across education level groups would also be found for use of destructive

communication behaviors. A further examination of the relationship is a possible and important direction for future research.

Communication Behaviors and Dyadic Satisfaction

As expected, communication behaviors were generally correlated with dyadic satisfaction. The more that individuals used constructive communication behavior, the higher their partner's dyadic satisfaction was. Additionally, an individual's own dyadic satisfaction was found to be higher when he/she used more constructive communication. These findings were consistent with previous research and current conceptualization (Christensen, 1988; Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Osgarby, 1998), and further support the important role of communication in dyadic relationships.

Interestingly, while female partners' dyadic satisfaction was found to be lower when their male partners engaged in more destructive communication, males' dyadic satisfaction was not found to be significantly related to females' use of destructive communication. This result is also consistent with previous research. As Epstein and Baucom (2002) summarize, research suggests that a "relationship benefits longitudinally if the female is more negative, less positive, or both" (p. 61). This may be because females tend to assume the role of initiating conversations about problematic aspects of the relationship and when the female is not pushing the couple to address relationship concerns, the problematic issues are less likely to be addressed.

Worth noting is that a paired *t*-test comparing females' and males' dyadic adjustment scores (DAS) within the sample showed that males' DAS scores (mean = 90.22) were significantly higher than those of the females' (mean = 83.92), t (87) = 3.16,

p = .002. It is possible that this difference may be a result of males being less relationally oriented than women and therefore less sensitive to the communication behaviors being utilized by their partners. Alternatively, DAS scores may be higher for males because being in a couple relationship is somehow more beneficial for them than it is for their female partners. While research has not been consistent with regard to the interaction between gender and marital status and whether the mental health advantage of marriage is greater for men (Simon, 2002), both research and theory have made that suggestion. For example, feminist gender theory argues that the emotional benefits of marriage are fewer for women due to the pervasive structural inequality and female subordination in contemporary American society (England, 200; Thompson & Walker, 1989). Therefore, it is possible that the male partners were less impacted by their partners' destructive communication because that negative experience is buffered by greater benefits in the relationship as well. Furthermore, higher average male DAS scores could make it statistically more difficult to identify significant differences in relationship satisfaction as related to destructive communication behaviors.

Communication Behaviors as Mediators between Relative Resources and Dyadic Satisfaction

Inconsistent with expectations, there were no significant differences in dyadic satisfaction between the various groups of couples based on relative resources. When communication behaviors were used as a covariate to test whether they mediated the relationship between partners' relative resources and dyadic satisfaction, no significant group differences were found. The finding that communication behaviors did not mediate the relationship was reasonable given that no significant relationship was found

initially between relative resources and dyadic satisfaction. Because communication behaviors are such a strong predictor of dyadic satisfaction, the impact of resource discrepancies in couples may have been overshadowed.

Study Limitations

One limitation of this study and possible explanation for the lack of significant differences between the groups may be the limited sample sizes of the groups. Because self-report and behavioral data were available for only 88 couples, the sizes of the three relative resource groups necessarily were fairly small, making it statistically difficult to show significant group differences. Furthermore, group sizes for some analyses were smaller yet due to incomplete or missing information. In addition, because of already small group sizes, it was necessary to use composite scores for constructive and destructive communication behaviors rather than examining the six categories of communication behaviors separately. While creating representative variables for communication behaviors increased the statistical power of the analyses, it may have obscured significant differences between the behaviors. Possible future studies could make efforts to recruit more participants in order to more accurately detect differences both between and among groups.

Another limitation of the current study is that it only examined couples who qualified for the original study of domestic violence. The clinical nature of the couple sample places limitations on how generalizable the study is to couples not entering therapy. Participants in the study were heterosexual couples conjointly seeking therapy, and exhibited a specific range of abuse in their relationship. Because all of the participants in the study were seeking therapy, there is reason to believe that their

communication behaviors and scores on dyadic satisfaction were more homogenous than in a general population. Further, it is likely that communication behaviors in this sample would be characterized by more negative and less positive exchanges, while dyadic satisfaction would be, on average, lower than what might be observed in a more general population sample. Additionally, some participants were excluded because they failed to meet previously discussed inclusion criteria for the original study. Couples who did not engage in any level of abuse, as well as couples in which there were high levels of abuse, were excluded from the study. Couples were also excluded as participants if they reported via the telephone intake questionnaire that there was a current threat of abuse, suicide, or homicide, or if they reported that there was a current, untreated issue with drugs or alcohol. Future studies could benefit from including a larger range of participants. In particular, it would be interesting to include nondistressed couples who report being currently satisfied in their relationship and examine whether there are differences among groups based on relative personal resources.

Additionally, because the current study was a secondary analysis of data collected in a previous study, participants could not be directed to discuss issues during the 10-minute communication sample that may have elicited emotional and behavioral responses more typical of those that they may experience when thinking about and discussing income and education resource discrepancies in their relationships. As previously noted, participants completed a Relationship Issues Survey (RIS) in which they were asked to indicate the degree to which each of 28 areas tends to be a source of disagreement in their relationship. The couple was then asked to discuss an issue that both partners had rated as being slightly to moderately a source of disagreement during the communication

sample. Because this procedure resulted in a wide range of topics that couples discussed during the taped communication sample, interactions specifically associated with conflicts over resources may not have been sampled adequately. Future research studies may benefit from directing couples to discuss topics more directly relevant to partners' relative resources in order to determine if such discussions elicit constructive and destructive forms of communication more strongly related to degrees of discrepancies in partners' educational and income resources.

Finally, the study's definition and assessment of partners' relative financial and educational resources did not take into account potentially important variations in circumstances of the participants, such that important distinctions between individuals who are categorized into the same relative resource group were not captured. For example, in this study a woman who had a high-paying job but decided to stay at home for a couple of years to care for a new baby while sharing her husband's income would be categorized as MHR-I and not distinguishable from a woman who was working for minimum wage and has a partner who, while earning substantially more, is unwilling to contribute significantly to the household expenses. While categorically these women would be viewed as identical in the current study, clearly there is an important qualitative difference. Future studies would do well to take into consideration factors such as potential income, the significance that the individuals in the couple place on income and education, and the circumstances, financial arrangements, and choices of the couple.

Clinical Implications

The current study underscores once again the importance of communication behaviors in couple relationships. Because communication behaviors are clearly

associated with relationship satisfaction, it is necessary for clinicians to pay ample attention to their clients' use of constructive and destructive communication behaviors. Additionally, clinicians can use skills training to teach constructive communication behaviors that could ultimately serve to increase overall dyadic satisfaction. An additional implication of the study is the necessity to ensure that clients are not avoiding expression of their relationship concerns as an attempt to "be nice" but, rather, are expressing the concerns in a positive way.

Additionally, this study supports the notion that coders, using the MICS-G coding system, are able to identify constructive and destructive communication behaviors during a ten minute sample that are reflective of their broader communication patterns outside of a clinical setting and are highly correlated with their relationship satisfaction. Clinicians can use these behavioral samples as an assessment tool to inform the design of treatment plans that meet the specific needs of their clients. Furthermore, because self-report instruments can be influenced by factors such as social desirability bias, coupling a behavioral assessment such as the MICS-G with self-report instruments may give the clinician a more accurate picture of the communication dynamics between clients.

Despite its limitations, this study has contributed to knowledge on income disparities between partners in couple relationships, communication behaviors, and dyadic satisfaction. Beyond that, it has identified factors that are potentially more significant in predicting communication behaviors utilized by partners that could be studied further, and it offers suggestions for improving future research.

Appendix A
Couple Information and Instructions Questionnaire

This is a first in a series of questionnaires you are being asked to complete that will contribute to the knowledge about couple therapy. In order for our research to measure progress over time we will periodically re-administer questionnaires. Please answer the questions at a relatively fast pace, usually the first that comes to mind is the best one. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. Case #: _____ **2. Therapist's Code:** _____ **3. Co-therapist's Code:** _____ **4. Date:** _____

The following information is gathered from each partner separately.

Name: (Print) _____

Address: _____

E-mail address: _____

Phone Numbers: (h) _____ (w) _____

(cell) _____ (fax) _____

5. Gender: M F **6. SS#** _____ **7. Age (in years)** _____

8. You are coming for: a.) Family _____ b.) Couple _____ c) Individual Therapy _____

9. **Relationship status** to person in couple's therapy with you:
   1. Currently married, living together
   2. Currently married, separated, but not legally divorced
   3. Divorced, legal action completed
   4. Engaged, living together
   5. Engaged, not living together
   6. Dating, living together
   7. Dating, not living together
   8. Domestic partnership

10. Total Number of **Years** Together: _____
    a. **If married**, number of years married:_____

11. What is your **occupation**?_____
    1. Clerical sales, bookkeeper, secretary
    2. Executive, large business owner
    3. Homemaker
    4. None – child not able to be employed
    5. Owner, manager of small business
    6. Professional - Associates or Bachelors degree
    7. Professional – master or doctoral degree
    8. Skilled worker/craftsman
    9. Service worker – barber, cook, beautician
    10. Semi-skilled worker – machine operator
    11. Unskilled Worker
    12. Student

12. What is your **current employment status?**__
    1. Employed full time
    2. Employed part time
    3. Homemaker, not employed outside
    4. Student
    5. Disabled, not employed
    6. Unemployed
    7. Retired

13. Personal **yearly gross income**: $_____
    (i.e., before taxes or any deductions)

14. **Race**: _____
    1. Native American
    2. African American
    3. Asian/Pacific Islander
    4. Hispanic
    5. White
    6. Other (specify)_____

15. What is **your country of origin**? _____
What was **your parent's country of origin**? 16. _____(father's) _____(mother's)

18. Highest Level of **Education** Completed: ___
    1. Some high school (less than 12 years)
    2. High school diploma (12 years)
    3. Some college
    4. Trade School (mechanic, carpentry, beauty school, etc)
    5. Associate's degree
    6. Bachelor's degree (BA, BS)
    7. Some graduate education
    8. Master's degree (MA, MS, etc.)
    9. Doctoral degree (PhD, MD, EDD, etc)

--OVER PLEASE--

19. Number of people in household:_____ 20. Number of **children** who **live in home** with you: _____
21. Number of children who **do not live** with you: _____

Names and phone number of **contact people** (minimum 2):

_____

_____

22. What is your **religious** preference? _____

1. Mainline Protestant (e.g., Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Unitarian)
2. Conservative Protestant (e.g., Adventist, Baptist, Pentecostal)
3. Roman Catholic
4. Jewish
5. Other (e.g., Buddhist, Mormon, Hindu)
6. No affiliation with any formal religion

23. How often do you **participate in organized activities of a church or religious group?** _____

1. several times per week
2. once a week
3. several times a month
4. once a month
5. several times a year
6. once or twice a year
7. rarely or never

24. How **important is religion or spirituality** to you in your daily life?_____
1. Very important 2. Important 3. Somewhat important 4. Not very important 5. Not important at all

25. **Medications**: _ Yes _____ No If yes, please list the names, purpose, and quality of **medication**(s) you are currently taking. Also list the name and phone number of the medicating physician(s) and primary care physician:

Medications:

Primary Care Physician: **Phone:**

Psychiatrist? Yes/No Name & Phone, if yes.

Phone:

Legal Involvement:

26. A. Have you ever been involved with the police? Yes/No (circle)
If yes, what happened? Explain: _____

27. B. Have formal, legal procedures (i.e., ex-parte orders, protection orders, criminal charges, juvenile offenses) been brought against you? Yes/No (circle) If yes, what happened? Explain: _____

28. If formal procedures were brought, what were the results (e.g., eviction, restraining orders?) _____

Many of the questions refer to your "family". It will be important for us to know what individuals you consider to be your family. Please list below the names and relationships of the people you will include in your responses about your family. Circle yourself in this list.

29. (Number listed in family) _____.

Name Relationship

List the concerns and problems for which you are seeking help. Indicate which is the most important by circling it. For each problem listed, note the degree of severity by checking (√) the appropriate column.

	4-Severe	3-Somewhat Severe	2 – Moderate	1- Mild
30.	31.			
32.	33.			
34.	35.			
36.	37			

38. The most important concern (circled item) is # _____

Appendix B
Marital Interaction Coding System – Global (MICS-G)

SPOUSE SCORING SHEET

Rater _____ Couple # _____ H/W _____

Low Moderate High
0 1 2 3 4 5

	Cue Impression	Category Rating
CONFLICT		_____
1. Complain	_____	
2. Criticize	_____	
3. Negative mindreading	_____	
4. Put downs/insults	_____	
5. Negative commands	_____	
6. Hostility	_____	
7. Sarcasm	_____	
8. Angry/bitter voice	_____	
PROBLEM SOLVING		_____
1. Problem description	_____	
2. Proposing solution (+/-)	_____	
3. Compromise	_____	
4. Reasonableness	_____	
VALIDATION		_____
1. Agreement	_____	
2. Approval	_____	
3. Accept responsibility	_____	
4. Assent	_____	
5. Receptivity	_____	
6. Encouragement	_____	
INVALIDATION		_____
1. Disagreement	_____	
2. Denial of responsibility	_____	
3. Changing the subject	_____	
4. Consistent interruption	_____	
5. Turn-off behaviors	_____	
6. Domineering behaviors	_____	
FACILITATION		_____
1. Positive mindreading	_____	
2. Paraphrasing	_____	
3. Humor	_____	
4. Positive physical contact	_____	
5. Smile/laugh	_____	
6. Open posture	_____	
WITHDRAWAL		_____
1. Negation	_____	
2. No response	_____	
3. Turn away from the partner	_____	
4. Increasing distance	_____	
5. Erects barriers	_____	
6. Noncontributive	_____	

Appendix C
Relationship Issues Survey (RIS)

There are a variety of areas in a couple's relationship that can become sources of disagreement and conflict. Please indicate how much each of the areas is **presently** a source of disagreement and conflict in your relationship with your partner. Select the number on the scale which indicates how much the area is an issue in your relationship.

0 = Not at all a source of disagreement or conflict
1 = Slightly a source of disagreement or conflict
2 = Moderately a source of disagreement or conflict
3 = Very much a source of disagreement or conflict

_____ 1. Relationships with friends

_____ 2. Career and job issues

_____ 3. Religion or personal philosophy of life

_____ 4. Finances (income, how money is spent, etc.)

_____ 5. Goals and things believed important in life

_____ 6. Relationship with family of origin (parents, siblings)

_____ 7. Sexual relationship

_____ 8. Child rearing/parenting approaches

_____ 9. Personal habits

_____ 10. Amount of commitment to the relationship

_____ 11. Understanding of each other's stresses or problems

_____ 12. Daily life schedules and routines

_____ 13. Personal manners

_____14. How negative thoughts and emotions are communicated

_____15. How positive thoughts and emotions are communicated

_____ 16. Leisure activities and interests

_____ 17. Household tasks and management

_____ 18. Amount of time spent together

_____ 19. Affairs

_____20. Privacy

_____ 21. Honesty

_____ 22. Expressions of caring and affection

_____ 23. Trustworthiness

_____ 24. Alcohol and drugs

_____ 25. Taking care of possessions

_____ 26. Personal standard for neatness

_____ 27. How decisions are made

_____ 28. Personal grooming

Appendix D
Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS)

Most persons have disagreements in their relationship. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list. Place a checkmark (√) to indicate your answer.

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

	All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
16. How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation or terminating your relationship?						
17. How often do you or your partner leave the house after a fight?						
18. In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?						
19. Do you confide in your partner?						

20. Do you ever regret that you married (or lived together?)						
21. How often do you or your partner quarrel?						
22. How often do you and your partner "get on each others' nerves"?						

How often would you say the following events occur between you and your mate? Circle your answer.

23. Do you kiss your partner?
EVERYDAY ALMOST EVERYDAY OCCASIONALLY RARELY NEVER

24. Do you and your partner engage in outside interests together?
EVERYDAY ALMOST EVERYDAY OCCASIONALLY RARELY NEVER

25. Have a stimulating exchange of ideas?
EVERYDAY ALMOST EVERYDAY OCCASIONALLY RARELY NEVER

26. Laugh together?
EVERYDAY ALMOST EVERYDAY OCCASIONALLY RARELY NEVER

27. Calmly discuss something?
EVERYDAY ALMOST EVERYDAY OCCASIONALLY RARELY NEVER

28. Work together on a project?
EVERYDAY ALMOST EVERYDAY OCCASIONALLY RARELY NEVER

These are some things about which couples sometimes agree and sometimes disagree. Indicate if either item below causes differences of opinion of have been problems in your relationship during the past few weeks. Check "Yes" or "No."

29. Being too tired for sex. Yes ____ No ____
30. Not showing love. Yes ____ No ____

31. The dots on the following line represent different degrees of happiness in your relationship. The middle point, "happy," represents the degree of happiness of most relationships. Please circle the dot which best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, in your relationship.

• • • • • • •

Extremely Unhappy | Fairly Unhappy | A Little Happy | Happy | Very Happy | Extremely Happy | Perfect

32. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about the future of your relationship? Check the statement that best applies to you.

____ 1. I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and would go to almost any length to see that it does.
____ 2. I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and will do all I can to see that it does.
____ 3. I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and will do my fair share to see that it does.
____ 4. It would be nice if my relationship succeeded, but I can't do much more than I am doing now to help it succeed.
____ 5. It would be nice if my relationship succeeded, but I refuse to do any more than I am doing now to keep the relationship going.
____ 6. My relationship can never succeed, and there is no more that I can do to keep the relationship going

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