

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: ECONOMIC STRAIN, FRIENDS' SUPPORT,  
AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION IN  
ARGENTINEAN COUPLES: PATHS OF  
INFLUENCE AND GENDER DIFFERENCES.

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Since their worst economic crisis in December 2001, Argentines have lived in an atmosphere of great economic stress. However, the effects of this crisis on the Argentinean couples' relationships are still unknown. Based on Conger and his colleagues' family stress model, the present study examined the indirect link between economic strain and relationship satisfaction found in previous studies. It expanded on previous research in the field by (a) focusing on a culturally different population, (b) identifying each partner's level of economic strain and measuring it as a subjective experience of stress rather than an objective economic difficulty, (c) including both males' and females' variables in the same conceptual and statistical model, (d) proposing both psychological aggression and positive behaviors toward the partner as mediators between economic strain and relationship satisfaction, and (e) including perceived support from friends as a factor potentially buffering the effect of each partner's economic strain on their own relational behavior.

This study used self-report data provided by 144 heterosexual couples recruited from an outpatient mental health clinic in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 2003

and 2004. After controlling for partners' levels of education, relationship status, time living together, and presence of children, path analysis and post hoc analyses suggested different gender patterns. Males experienced higher economic strain than females, and only their economic strain was associated with the relational behaviors of both partners (greater psychological aggression by both partners and less positive behavior by females). However, females' relationship satisfaction seemed to be more affected by these relational behaviors than males' did.

No positive buffering effects of perceived friends' support were found for either gender. Males' perceived support from friends had a negative influence on the couple as it directly increased each partner's psychological aggression and directly and indirectly decreased each partner's relationship satisfaction. By contrast, females' support from friends directly increased the males' positive behaviors toward their partners.

This study demonstrates the importance of including both partners' economic strain, psychological aggression, positive behaviors, and relationship satisfaction in a model of couple response to economic strain. Limitations and implications of this study are discussed.

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AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION IN ARGENTINEAN COUPLES:  
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## Dedication

This work is dedicated to my husband Cesar, who provided me with insightful comments and supported me throughout the process, and to my two children Milena and Lucca, who fill my life with joy and have given me the strength to complete this dissertation.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

#### Statement of the Problem

In December 2001, after ten years of economic stability, Argentina witnessed the worst economic crisis since 1891 (U.S. Congress, 2003). Its currency was suddenly devalued, all bank deposits were unexpectedly frozen and forced to be converted to pesos, and the government declared default on its foreign debt. As a result of these measures, during 2002 the real gross domestic product fell 28% from its peak in 1998, inflation rose to 41%, wages fell 23.7% in real terms, the unemployment rate reached 23.6%, and 57.3% of the population was left living in poverty (U.S. Congress, 2003).

These national figures had their correlates at the family level, where the general economic crisis was profoundly felt. A nationally representative survey of 2,800 households conducted by the World Bank (Fiszbein, Giovagnoli, & Adúriz, 2002) indicated that in 2002 half of the families, particularly middle-class, witnessed a decline in their income, and 62% of men and 38% of women lost their jobs. Regardless of whether their income decreased or not, 98.2% of families chose to reduce their consumption of products and services and buy less expensive and second hand products to face the economic crisis, whereas 37.3% of households' family members have either had to look for jobs, worked longer hours, sold possessions, spent savings, asked for loans, or emigrated to other countries.

Even though there has been slight economic recovery in 2003 and in the beginning of 2004 as evidenced by slim increases in productivity, Argentina is still

facing high unemployment and poverty rates (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos [INDEC], 2004). Moreover, the majority of families have never recovered a sizeable proportion of their savings, have maintained the same emergency measures to cope with the crisis, and have been extremely concerned about their finances (INDEC, 2004).

More than a decade ago Conger and his colleagues (1990, 1994) suggested a family stress model to explain the impact of economic strain on couple and family functioning. They basically argued that economic pressure could cause emotional changes in each partner, which on the one hand might negatively affect their parenting and end up contributing to children's psychosocial problems, and on the other hand might create difficulties in the couple's own interactions, which in turn might negatively influence their perceptions of relationship quality.

Consistent with Conger and colleagues' family stress model, studies on populations in other countries that have also faced significant levels of economic pressure have consistently found that objective economic hardship affects individuals' psychological well-being as well as their family dynamics, particularly the couple's relationship, either through the individuals' stress over financial issues or their subjective perception of economic pressure (Conger, Elder, Lorenz, Conger, Simons, Whitbeck, Huck, & Melby, 1990; Conger, Ge, & Lorenz, 1994; Kessler, House, & Turner, 1987; Price, Choi, & Vinokur, 2002; Vinokur & Schul, 2002). At the individual level, economic stress or strain has been associated with loss of personal control, emotional distress in general, and depressed mood in particular (Conger, Foster, & Ardel, 1992; Conger et al., 1994; Conger, Rueter, & Elder, 1999;

Fox & Chancey, 1998; Kessler et al., 1987; Kinnunen & Pulkkinen, 1998; Kwon, Rueter, Lee, Koh, & Ok, 2003; Liker & Elder, 1983; Price et al., 2002; Vinokur, Price, & Caplan, 1996). At the family level, economic stress has been found to be indirectly related to children's depression and externalizing behavior through poor parenting in general and increases in parental hostility in particular (Conger et al., 1992; Elder, Conger, Foster, & Ardel, 1992; Hilton & Desrochers, 2000).

Concerning the couple relationship, empirical findings suggest that economic strain increases hostile interactions, which in turn increases relationship distress and instability (Conger et al., 1990; Conger et al., 1992; Conger et al., 1994; Conger et al., 1999; Cutrona, Russell, Abraham, Gardner, Melby, Bryant, & Conger, 2003; Hraba, Lorenz, & Pechacova, 2000; Kinnunen & Pulkkinen, 1998; Kwon, Rueter, Lee, Koh, & Ok, 2003; Liker & Elder, 1983; Rosenblat & Keller, 1983; Vinokur et al., 1996). Economic strain has also been found to affect relationship satisfaction by decreasing spousal warmth (Vinokur et al., 1996).

Regarding the Argentinean situation, it is already known that the economic crisis has affected people's lives beyond their finances. The World Bank's study (Fiszbein, Giovagnoli, & Adúriz, 2002) showed that 77.4% of the sample felt hopeless about the future and 72.5% felt depressed. It has also been reported that after December 2001 the rate of psychiatric emergencies in Argentina has doubled, and the severity of the cases has increased (Astete, 2002). However, considering that Conger's family stress model actually predicts the negative impact that economic strain can have on couples' relationships and that prior research in other countries has found economic strain to be a risk factor for intimate relationship conflict it is

surprising that no study has yet examined the impact of economic strain on Argentinean couples. This is even more surprising when relationship conflict has been found to be a strong predictor of children's emotional and behavioral adjustment problems (Cummings, Davies, & Campbell, 2000) and of partners' individual physical and psychological difficulties (Halford & Bouma, 1997; Robles & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2003). Unfortunately, the lack of research in this area is consistent with the overall absence of published empirical studies on couples in Argentina. Therefore, a study of this nature would not only inform the literature on the economic strain-relationship distress association; it also would inaugurate empirical literature on Argentinean couples' relationships.

Additionally, using the Argentinean case to reexamine the influence of economic strain on couples' relationships might provide an opportunity for applying Conger et al.'s (1990) family stress model and overcoming some of the limitations of previous studies on this topic. To begin with, studies have typically focused on the objective assessment of economic stressors or pressure rather than on the subjective strain experienced by individuals with respect to this pressure (Conger et al., 1990; Conger et al., 1994; Conger et al., 1999; Cutrona, Russell, Abraham, Gardner, Melby, Bruant, & Conger, 2003; Elder et al., 1992; Hraba et al., 2000; Kwon et al., 2003; Vinokur et al., 1996). For example, families have only been asked whether they were able to pay bills or purchase life's necessities instead of also being asked whether they worried or felt frustrated about financial matters. Moreover, in most cases the husband's and the wife's responses have been summed into a composite score, creating a single indicator of economic pressure (Conger et al., 1990; Conger et al.,

1994; Conger et al., 1999; Elder et al., 1992; Hraba et al., 2000; Kwon et al., 2003) or have been treated as two indicators of the same latent construct (Vinokur et al., 1996). However, as Hilton and Devall (1997) have argued, “two people may experience the same level of economic hardship but feel very different about it” (p. 266). Consequently, a model that is intended to capture the effect of economic strain on a couple’s functioning should include an assessment of each partner’s subjective experience of financial stress as opposed to assuming that economic pressure affects the two partners identically. Learning about each partner’s level of subjective economic strain might be even more necessary in a study on the Argentinean population, where women constitute 41.4% of the total labor force (Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social, 2004).

Consistent with Conger and his colleagues’ (1990) model in which economic strain promotes difficulties in a couple’s interactions, which in turn negatively influence the partners’ perceptions of relationship quality, spousal hostility/social undermining and warmth/support are the two relationship characteristics most often examined as mediators in the association between economic stress and level of relationship satisfaction (e.g., Conger et al., 1990; Conger et al., 1994; Cutrona et al., 2003; Hraba et al., 2000; Liker & Elder, 1983; Vinokur et al., 1996). Nonetheless, a focus on these two constructs limits the scope of assessment of spouses’ negative and positive behaviors that may be affected by economic strain. In the case of hostility or social undermining, these concepts have been defined and measured as including explosiveness, irritability, criticism, contempt, shouting, yelling, moralizing, verbal attack, getting angry in general, arguing, and hitting (Conger et al., 1990; Conger et

al., 1994; Cutrona et al., 2003; Elder et al., 1992; Vinokur et al., 1996). These definitions include coercive verbal behaviors and nonverbal behaviors directed to the partner's body but leave out nonverbal psychologically aggressive behaviors that are not directed to the partner's body but that are also coercive and intimidating, such as driving recklessly to frighten the spouse (Murphy & Hoover, 1999), destroying his or her property, or slamming doors (Hamby & Sugarman, 1999; Murphy & O'Leary, 1989). In addition, some of these studies have only measured partners' hostility through trained raters' observations of a couple's interactions during laboratory discussion tasks (e.g., Conger et al., 1990; Cutrona et al., 2003; Elder et al., 1992; Liker & Elder, 1983), which leaves untapped those psychologically and physically aggressive behaviors that take place outside the observer's influence, such as threatening to hit the partner. No study has as yet measured the wide range of psychologically aggressive behaviors that may be triggered by economic stressors, including but not limited to verbal hostility/social undermining, whose occurrence has been associated with job insecurity (Barling & Macewen, 1992) and negative life stressors (Margolin, Joh, & Foo, 1998). However, psychological aggression is a form of negative behavior that is worth examining not only because it may mediate the relation between economic strain and couples' relationship satisfaction, but also because it is a strong predictor of physical assault in couples (Dutton, 1995; Dutton, Starzomski, & Ryan, 1996; Hamby & Sugarman, 1999; Murphy & Hoover, 1999; Murphy & O'Leary, 1989; Russell & Hulson, 1992; Stets, 1990).

Likewise, warm/supportive behaviors have been largely measured by means of trained raters' observations of couples' conversations during conflict resolution



tasks, and therefore, they have been limited to compliments, praise, helpfulness, attending, smiling, physical affection, and listener responsiveness (Conger et al., 1990; Cutrona et al., 2003; Elder et al., 1992). When assessment of positive behaviors beyond the lab setting through self-reports has been attempted, it has been restricted to expressions of support such as listening, understanding, or helping sort things out (Vinokur et al., 1996). In any case, these warm/supportive behaviors do not adequately cover the breadth of an individual's positive behaviors toward the other spouse that may be reduced as a result of financial strain. Specifically, they leave out those pleasant behaviors that are unrelated to direct verbal communication between the spouses and have been characteristically associated with couples' relationship satisfaction (Broderick & O'Leary, 1986; Jacobson, Follette, & McDonald, 1978; Johnson & O'Leary, 1996; Margolin, 1978; Wills, Weiss, Patterson, 1974), such as doing a favor, arranging to spend extra time together, preparing a meal, running an errand, initiating sexual activity, etc. Besides, studies that examined a decrease of warmth/support as a mediating mechanism in the economic strain-relationship distress association have relied mostly on outside observers' measurement of positive interactions rather than on each partner's subjective assessment of those behaviors (Conger et al., 1990; Cutrona et al., 2003; Elder et al., 1992). However, empirical evidence suggests that a person's subjective judgments of the spouse's behavior are a better predictor of the person's relationship satisfaction than are an outside observer's measurement of the spouse's rewarding behaviors (Johnson & O'Leary, 1996; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Smutzler, & Vivian, 1994; Robinson & Price, 1980).

As noted earlier, an additional limitation of the existing literature is that findings come from studies in which researchers have analyzed the impact of shared economic strain (summing each male partner's and female partner's responses and creating one variable or treating their responses as two different indicators of the same latent construct) on each partner's relational behaviors in separate statistical models, one for men and one for women (Conger et al., 1990; Conger et al., 1994; Fox & Chancey, 1998; Hraba et al., 2000; Kinnunen & Pulkkinen, 1998; Liker & Elder, 1983; Vinokur et al., 1996). The separate model approach has prevented researchers from addressing the relations between the two partners' levels of economic strain or their behaviors toward each other. However, in the case of financial strain, empirical evidence suggests that whenever one partner is preoccupied about the economic situation or is insecure about or has lost his or her job, the other partner is likely to feel some financial strain as well (Aubry, Tefft, & Kingsbury, 1990; Mauno & Kinnunen, 2002). Accordingly, a more complete model of how financial stress affects couples should include the influence of each partner's economic strain.

Regarding the relation between the two partners' behaviors toward each other, only one study on the impact of economic strain has related the hostility levels of both partners, but it failed to include them as mediating mechanisms between economic strain and relationship distress (Elder et al., 1992). In most studies the association between the two partners' levels of hostility or between their levels of warmth and supportive behavior has not been tested (e.g., Conger et al., 1990; Hraba et al., 2000; Kinnunen & Pulkkinen, 1998). However, general studies of reciprocal

behaviors in couples show that partners' levels of psychological aggression are significantly associated with each other (Capaldi, Shortt, & Crosby, 2003; Straus & Sweet, 1992). Likewise, partners' degrees of positive exchanges have been found to be correlated with each other (e.g., Conger et al., 1990). Therefore, an individual's psychological aggression toward the other partner may result not only from his or her own level of financial stress but also from the effects of the partner's psychological aggression. Similarly, each partner's reduced positive behaviors towards the other person may be contributing to the other partner's lower likelihood of engaging in positive marital behaviors. Consequently, a more complete model should include the relation between the two partners' behaviors, because there is empirical evidence showing a link between partners' positive relational behaviors (Conger et al., 1990) and between partners' negative relational behaviors (Conger et al., 1990; Elder et al., 1992; Stets, 1991; Straus & Sweet, 1992).

Another limitation of the existing literature is that although it has been recommended that researchers examine the social context that may mitigate or exacerbate the within-family processes through which economic strain influences couples' relationship quality (Conger et al., 1994), studies have virtually ignored such social factors. Only one study has examined the influence of the financial status of the neighborhood within which families live (Cutrona et al., 2003) and as yet no studies have examined the influence of social support from friends on the family's responses to economic strain. The exploration of friends' support as a protective and moderating mechanism is important, as it usually has been identified as a resilience factor in research on family stress and coping (Alferi, Carver, Antoni, Weiss, &

Duran, 2001; Bega, Kolody, Valle, & Hough, 1986; Cotton, 1999; Klein, Forehand, Armistead, & Wierson, 1994; Procidano & Heller, 1983; Rodriguez, Mira, Myers, Morris, & Cardoza, 2003). However, much of the research has focused on the social support that spouses provide for each other, without regard to friends' support (Conger et al., 1999; Elder et al., 1992; Perrucci & Targ, 1988; Vinokur et al., 1996). When non-family social support was considered, it was included as a mediating mechanism between family economic pressure and depressive symptoms, and the couple's interactions were not considered (Lorenz, Conger, & Montague, 1994). It seems particularly pertinent to examine both the potential positive main and buffering effects of friends' support in a study of a Hispanic population, considering that support from friends has been found to surpass the positive effects of family support among Hispanics (Rodriguez et al., 2003).

Finally, the homogeneity of the samples used in previous studies has jeopardized the generalizability of the findings. Most studies have focused on married couples with children (Conger et al., 1990; Conger et al., 1994; Conger et al., 1999; Cutrona et al., 2003; Kwon et al., 2003; Liker & Elder, 1983). The association between economic strain and relationship distress has not been explored much in couples without children or in unmarried cohabitating couples. There are only two published studies (Kinnunen & Pulkkinen, 1998; Vinokur et al., 1996) that have included couples without children, and one of them has included unmarried cohabiting partners (Vinokur et al., 1996).

In addition, the majority of studies have focused on Caucasian American populations (e.g., Conger et al., 1990; Conger et al., 1994; Conger et al., 1999;

Cutrona et al., 2003; Elder et al., 1992; Fox & Chancey, 1998). When other populations have been examined, Hispanic samples were never included. In fact, there is one study that analyzed African American couples (Cutrona et al., 2003), one that examined Czech couples (Hraba et al., 2000), one that examined Korean marriages (Kwon et al., 2003), and one that examined Finnish couples (Kinnunen & Pulkkinen, 1998), but no study has yet analyzed a Hispanic or Spanish speaking population.

In sum, there is a need not only to examine Argentinean couples' processes through which each partner's economic strain might affect their own and each other's relationship satisfaction, but also to refine some of the concepts inspired by Conger's family stress model that have been proposed to understand the indirect association between economic strain and marital distress. Specifically, applying Conger's family stress model involves examining other mediating mechanisms as well as relating both partners' levels of economic strain and negative and positive behaviors toward each other within the same model. Otherwise, we may continue to artificially isolate male and female partners' behaviors from each other, thereby missing crucial links to understanding couple functioning.

#### Purpose

There is a great need to examine the impact that Argentines' economic stress is having on their couple relations, as well as a need for refinements in applications of Conger and his colleagues' (1990) family stress model for understanding the indirect link between economic strain and relationship satisfaction. Consequently the present study will apply Conger et al.'s model with a sample of

Argentinean couples, examining within the same model whether each partner's economic strain affects his or her negative and positive behaviors toward the other spouse and whether these changes in turn influence each partner's relationship satisfaction. In addition to analyzing a population that is culturally different from the ones that have been examined previously, this study will refine previous applications of Conger's family stress model by: (a) measuring economic strain as a subjective experience of stress rather than an objective economic difficulty, (b) discriminating between the two partners' levels of economic strain and relating both levels in the model, (c) proposing changes in psychological aggression and positive behaviors toward the other partner as the mechanisms that mediate between economic strain and the partners' levels of relationship satisfaction, (d) including and relating both partners' psychologically aggressive and positive behaviors within the same model, and (e) studying whether or not each partner's perceived social support from friends buffers the effect that economic strain has on each person's psychological aggression and positive behavior toward the other partner.

#### Theoretical Framework for the Study

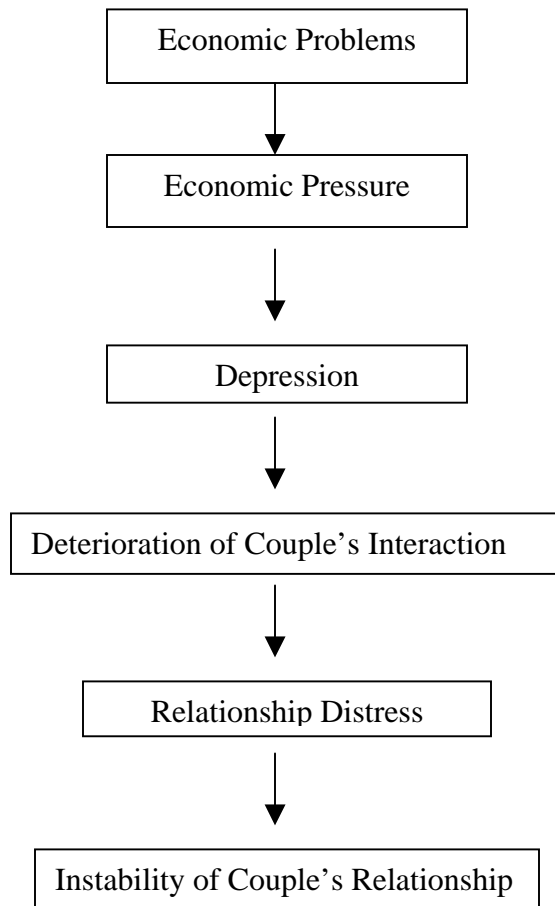
The theoretical framework that has guided the present investigation is the family stress model that has been advanced by Conger and his colleagues (1990, 1994). Drawing on previous research and theoretical conceptualizations from the literature on stress processes, these scholars proposed a model that could explain how the stress created by economic problems could negatively affect family and couple relationships.

Conger and Elder (1994) argued that “stressful events or conditions create strains or pressures in daily living” and that “these strains affect the moods and behaviors of individual family members and, in this fashion, the developmental trajectories of parents and children” (p.9). Regarding couples’ functioning specifically, it was proposed that economic hardship affected couples’ instability by creating some level of economic strain which in turn increased negative behavioral exchanges and decreased positive behavioral exchanges, both of which ended up affecting each partner’s perception of their relationship quality, which led to increased instability in the couple’s relationship (Conger et al., 1990). Specifically, it was argued that objective economic pressure created some family level of economic strain, which increased the male’s hostility and reduced his warmth, both of which predicted his female partner’s perception of lower relationship quality and eventually her increased perception of instability in the couple’s relationship. In the case of female partners, the family economic strain led women to be more hostile and less warm to their male partners. These responses led their male partners to have more negative perceptions of the quality of their marital relationships, which in turn, led to perceived higher instability in their marriages.

However, Conger and his colleagues (1994) later refined their model by adding each partner’s increased depressed mood as a mediator between economic pressure (what they used to call economic strain) and his or her negative behaviors toward the other spouse. The following graph illustrates Conger’s later model.

Figure 1

Conger et al.'s Family Stress Model



#### Application of Conger et al.'s Family Stress Model in the Present Study

The present study was guided by the family stress model's general idea that economic problems create strains and concerns in everyday life and that these strains and concerns affect the moods and relational behaviors of each member in the couple, which end up affecting their relationship satisfaction. However, given that this study's aim was to focus only on the indirect impact of each partner's *subjective experience of economic strain* on their relationship satisfaction, it did not consider all the relations that were included in Conger's later models as depicted in Figure 1.



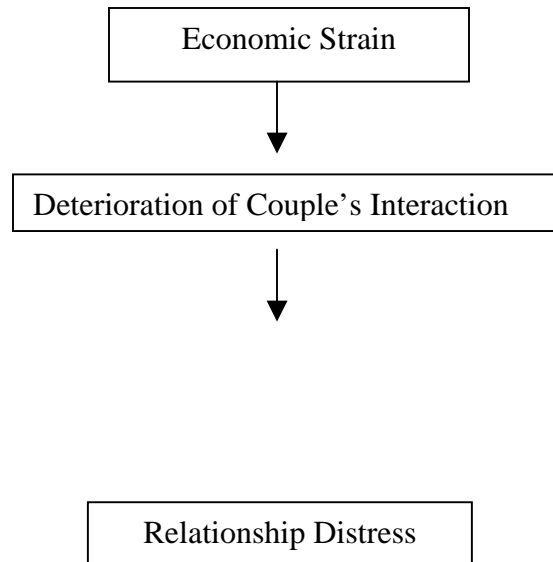
Instead of focusing on objective economic problems, economic pressure and depression, the model for this study only included the subjective experience of economic strain, because this investigator believed that this construct was more inclusive than depressive symptoms of the range of changes in emotional states that economic problems and pressure may elicit in a person. The empirical literature has shown that people sometimes react to economic problems not only with symptoms of depression but also of anxiety (e.g., Conger et al., 1999; Kwon et al., 2003), and this might be the reason why depression has not always been found to mediate the relation between economic strain and couple hostility (e.g., Kinnunen & Pulkkinen, 1998).

In addition, the present study did not focus on relational instability, because relational distress and satisfaction are not necessarily the best predictors of relational instability. Sometimes dissatisfied couples stay together despite thinking of getting a divorce (Clifford, 2002), indicating that relationship dissatisfaction does not necessarily lead to couple's dissolution. In addition, the quality of the couple's relationship is more closely associated with their children's psychological functioning than is whether the partners stay together or separate (Morrison & Coiro, 1999).

Figure 2 depicts the relations of interest in the present study.

Figure 2

Relations of Interest from Conger et al.'s Family Stress Model

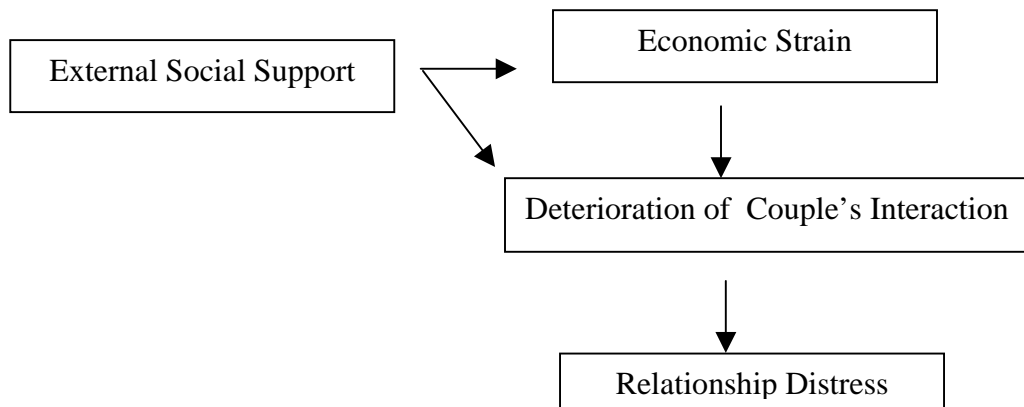


None of the versions of Conger et al.'s family stress model (Conger et al., 1990; Conger et al., 1994; Conger et al., 1999) included social support from outside the couple as a moderator variable. Moreover, when Conger and his colleagues included social support in their model they hypothesized it to play a mediating role in the relation between economic strain and depression. However, given the amount of theoretical and empirical literature that presents perceived social support as *buffering* the effect of stressors on mental and physical health (for a review see Thoits, 1995), or as simply having a main positive effect on mental health (e.g., Andrews et al., 1978; Cotten, 1999; Klein et al., 1994; Procidano & Heller, 1983), in the present study social support from outside the couple was examined as having a main effect and a buffering effect on the relation between economic strain and couple interactions. This inclusion is consistent with several family stress theories that have

contended that a family's response to predictable or unpredictable life changes depends, among other factors, on the type and severity of the stressor and external social support (e.g., Hill, 1949; McCubbin & McCubbin, 1989; McCubbin & Patterson, 1981). Figure 3 shows the incorporation of social support into Conger et al.'s family stress model.

Figure 3

Addition of External Social Support into the Family Stress Model



Although Conger and his colleagues never suggested that the impact of economic pressure on the males' and females' behaviors within their couple relationship should be thought as occurring separately without any influence on each other, most applications of Conger et al.'s family stress model have disregarded each partner's contributions to changes in the other's behavior (Conger et al., 1990; Conger et al., 1994; Fox & Chancey, 1998; Hraba et al., 2000; Kinnunen & Pulkkinen, 1998; Liker & Elder, 1983; Vinokur et al., 1996). Therefore, instead of examining the impact of economic strain on relational behaviors for male and female partners separately, the present study included both members of the couple within the same model. This approach allowed an examination of individuals' relational

behaviors as determinants of changes in their partners' behaviors. This model discriminated between the two partners' levels of economic strain and included each person's economic strain and relationship satisfaction as factors possibly contributing to the other's economic strain and relationship satisfaction. It also included both partners' levels of social support from people outside the couple. Figure 4 presents Conger et al.'s family stress model as it has been typically applied for males and females separately, and Figure 5 presents the model that includes the other partner's contributions to a person's economic strain, relational behaviors, relationship satisfaction, and outside social support.

Figure 4

Conger et al.'s Family Stress Model for Males and Females Separately

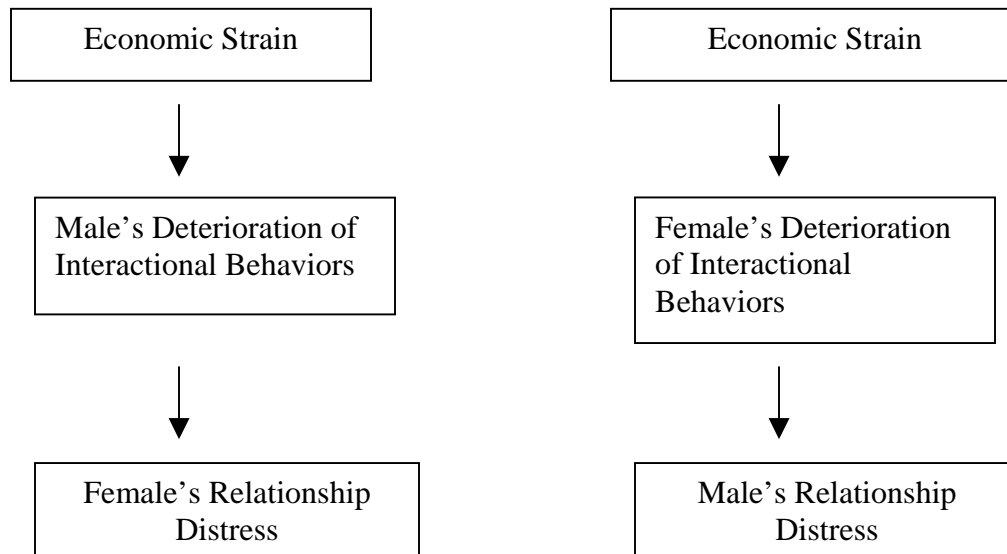
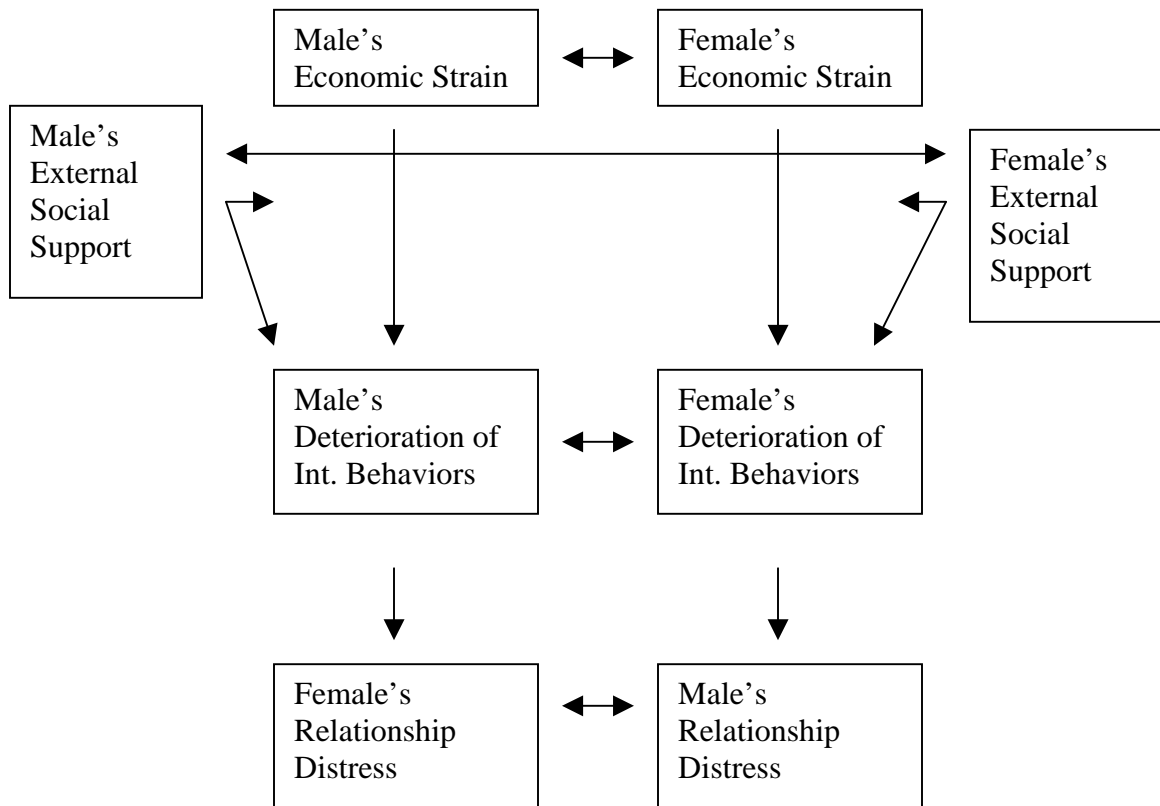


Figure 5

Conger et al.'s Family Stress Model Including Both Males and Females



## Literature Review

### *Defining Economic Strain*

One of the most cited definitions of economic strain has been provided by Voydanoff and Donnelly (1988), who identify economic strain as “a subjective evaluation of one’s financial situation” that “includes the perceived adequacy of financial resources, financial concerns and worries, and expectations regarding one’s future economic situation” (p.98). These authors believe that economic strain is one of the subjective components that characterize economic distress. They have

suggested that economic distress is a multidimensional construct that includes subjective (employment uncertainty and economic strain) and objective (economic deprivation and employment instability) aspects of employment and income.

It is important to understand the differences between economic strain and the closely related construct of economic pressure, because this latter concept has also been examined in relation to couple's functioning (Conger et al., 1994; Conger et al., 1999; Cutrona et al., 2003; Elder et al., 1992; Hraba et al., 2000; Kwon et al., 2003; Vinokur et al., 1996). Despite being defined as representing "the daily irritations and difficulties created by the inability to pay one's bills or to finance economic necessities, and the need to continually reduce expenditures" (Conger et al., 1999, p.63), economic pressure has been examined as including the subjective need for financial constraints and adjustments without including the strain or stress experienced by the individual as a result of experiencing this need. When measuring economic pressure, researchers have typically asked individuals about their inability to make ends meet, not having enough money for necessities, and economic adjustments or cutbacks (Conger et al., 1994; Conger et al., 1999; Cutrona et al., 2003; Elder et al., 1992; Hraba et al., 2000; Kwon et al., 2003; Vinokur et al., 1996). It has also been assessed more objectively by measuring change in a family's income over time (Conger et al., 1990; Liker & Elder, 1983).

Unlike economic pressure, and consistent with Voydanoff and Donnelly's definition, economic strain has been measured by asking individuals not only about their perceived inability to meet their financial responsibilities (perceived inadequacy of financial resources) but also about their *concern* for their economic problems and

how much interference in their lives that concern creates (financial concerns and worries) (Hilton & Desrochers, 2000; Hilton, Desrochers, & Devall, 2001; Hilton & Devall, 1997). In other words, economic strain includes the assessment of an individual's subjective appraisal of the adequacy of his or her financial resources, which has been typically taken as an indicator of economic pressure, plus his or her worries and concerns about financial issues. As the present study is intended to focus on each spouse's experience of stress related to financial issues, economic strain seems to be a more appropriate construct than economic pressure.

#### *Defining Psychological Aggression Toward a Partner*

“Psychological aggression refers to both coercive verbal behaviors (e.g., insulting or swearing at a partner) and coercive nonverbal behaviors that are not directed at a partner's body (e.g., slamming doors or smashing objects)” (Murphy & O'Leary, 1989, p. 579). Therefore, psychological aggression includes aggressive and intimidating behaviors that are “most often verbal” as well as “some physically aggressive acts that are not inflicted directly on a partner, but are still used toward a partner during arguments or as part of a pattern of coercion” (Hamby & Sugarman, 1999, p. 962) such as destroying a partner's property. Psychological aggression has been measured with a variety of instruments such as the Conflict Tactics Scales (Strauss, 1979), the Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996), and the Spouse Specific Aggression Scale (O'Leary & Curley, 1986).

Although psychological aggression is related to the constructs of emotional abuse and psychological abuse or maltreatment, it should not be confused with them.

Both emotional abuse and psychological abuse or maltreatment include psychologically aggressive acts (Schumacher, Slep, & Heyman, 2001; Semple, 2001), but they are more inclusive forms of negative control. Psychological abuse is usually part of an “ongoing pattern of behavior that produces a climate of fear in the recipient” (Semple, 2001, p.61). In addition, emotionally abusive partners seek to increase victims’ dependency on them and damage the abused person’s self-concept (Murphy & Cascardi, 1999). By contrast, psychological aggressive acts do not include attitudes or “structural or organizational elements of a relationship that may be used to control a partner” such as jealousy, possessiveness or physical isolation (Hamby & Sugarman, 1999, p. 962).

Given that psychological aggression may not be part of an ongoing pattern of behavior intended to produce fear and dependency, it might be a more appropriate construct than emotional abuse or psychological abuse or maltreatment to describe the type of negative behaviors that partners may engage in as a result of economic stress. In addition, psychological aggression presents other advantages in relation to other constructs that have been examined in the literature as mediators in the economic stress-relationship functioning association, such as hostility, social undermining, and marital tension or conflict. Hostility and social undermining have been defined as including explosiveness, irritability, criticism, contempt, shouting, yelling, moralizing, verbal attack, getting angry in general, arguing, and hitting (Conger et al., 1990; Conger et al., 1994; Cutrona et al., 2003; Elder et al., 1992; Vinokur et al., 1996). Compared to hostility and social undermining, psychological aggression includes not only verbal attacks but also nonverbal acts of aggression that



are not directed at a partner's body, such as driving recklessly to frighten the spouse (Murphy & Hoover, 1999), destroying his or her property, or slamming doors (Hamby & Sugarman, 1999; Murphy & O'Leary, 1989). In other words, there is some overlap between the concept of psychological aggression and those of hostility and social undermining. Psychological aggression includes verbal attacks that have been part of the definitions of hostility and social undermining, but it also includes nonverbal acts of aggression that are not directed at a partner's body and have not been typically included in definitions and measurement of hostility and social undermining. In addition, psychological aggression excludes physical aggression that is part of the construct of hostility.

Psychological aggression also is distinct from marital tension or conflict. Chronic marital tension or conflict has been defined as a volatile relationship in which partners are not happy, frank, or affectionate with each other and are in disagreement on many topics (Liker & Elder, 1983, p. 346). In contrast, psychological aggression refers to each partner's specific behaviors toward the other partner rather than to the overall quality of the couple's relationship. Psychological aggression is both a common expression of relationship conflict and a contributor to the maintenance or worsening of conflict.

#### *Defining Positive Behaviors Toward a Partner*

Positive behaviors toward a partner have been defined commonly as including positive or pleasing acts in four domains: (a) intimacy (affection and sexual activities), (b) interaction (communication process and consideration),

(c) instrumental (child care, household management, financial decision making, personal habits and appearance, employment-education, self-spouse independence), and (d) companionship (recreational activities and coupling activities) (Johnson & O'Leary, 1996). In order to measure levels of positive and negative behaviors between spouses in all those different behavioral domains, Weiss, Hops, and Patterson (1973) developed the Spousal Observation Checklist (SOC). This widely used 400-item instrument asks each partner to report the daily occurrences of specific pleasing and displeasing couple behaviors in 12 content areas: companionship, affection, sex, consideration, communication process, coupling activities, child care, household management, financial decision making, employment, personal habits, and self-spouse independence. This long measure was subsequently used and modified by other researchers, most often by reducing the number of items (e.g., Barnett & Nietzel, 1979; Christensen & Nies, 1980; Wills, Weiss, & Patterson, 1974). One of the latest short versions was developed by Broderick and O'Leary (1986) and it only includes 109 items, 54 of which assess positive behaviors. This version, the Daily Checklist of Marital Activities, has been widely used in more recent studies (Broderick & O'Leary, 1986, Fincham & Linfield, 1997; Johnson & O'Leary, 1996).

Studies using the SOC have consistently found a positive association between partners' positive or pleasing behaviors and the relationship satisfaction of both males and females (Broderick & O'Leary, 1986; Christensen & Nies, 1980; Johnson & O'Leary, 1996; Kasian & Painter, 1992; Langhinrichsen-Rohling & Smutzler, 1994; Margolin, 1981; Wills et al., 1974). This strong association indicates that it is

important to include positive couple behaviors as a predictor when investigating possible determinants of variability in relationship satisfaction.

### *Defining Relationship Satisfaction*

Relationship satisfaction refers to the partners' "global and overall evaluations or attitudes toward the partner and the relationship" (Sabatelli, 1988, p.895), which overlaps with the concept of relationship quality defined as the "person's global evaluation" of the quality of the couple's relationship (Sabatelli, 1988, p. 894). In addition, relationship satisfaction has been used as a synonym for relationship happiness (Crane, Allgood, Larson, & Griffin, 1990) and it has been said to be part of the more general concept of relationship adjustment (Crane et al., 1990; Sabatelli, 1988). All of these constructs (relationship satisfaction, relationship quality, relationship happiness, and relationship adjustment) are the most widely examined constructs in the research literature on couples. As Bradbury, Fincham, and Beach (2000) have stated, "the sheer magnitude of this work attests to the continued importance placed on understanding the quality of marriage, as an end in itself and as a means to understanding its effect on numerous processes inside and outside the family" (p.964).

Despite the overwhelming presence of relationship satisfaction in the couple research literature, controversy exists around whether it is a unidimensional or multidimensional construct. Researchers who view relationship satisfaction as a unidimensional construct have emphasized that a person's relationship satisfaction refers, as noted earlier, to the individual's "global and overall evaluations or attitudes toward the partner and the relationship" (Sabatelli, 1988, p. 895). Those who support

the global evaluation of relationship satisfaction (i.e., virtually asking individuals how satisfied they feel with their relationships) argue that “it facilitates research on the correlates of marital quality,” avoiding any overlap of item content between relationship satisfaction and its hypothesized predictors such as communication quality, level of intimacy, etc. (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987, p.800).

However, several other researchers have conceptualized relationship satisfaction as a multidimensional construct that includes satisfaction regarding various domains of the relationship: intimacy, childrearing issues, time together, communication, sexual life, finances, social life, religious matters, etc. (Spanier, 1976). The couple’s research literature reflects that both conceptualizations of relationship satisfaction, as unidimensional or as a multidimensional construct, have been examined as outcome variables in several studies in relation to partners’ cognitions, behavioral interaction patterns, affect, physiological responses, conflict resolution styles, violence, substance abuse, and various psychological and physical disorders (for a review see Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000).

In the present study relationship satisfaction is conceptualized and measured as a unidimensional construct that can be assessed through respondents’ global evaluations of their couple relationship, to avoid any overlap between relationship satisfaction and variables that are predictors of relationship satisfaction. As we are focusing on positive behaviors and psychological aggression between partners as determinants of relationship satisfaction, considering relationship satisfaction as a multidimensional construct might confound results.

### *Defining Perceived Social Support from Friends*

Social support has been defined by Cobb (1981) as “information belonging to one or more of the following three classes: (1) information leading the subject to believe that he is cared for and loved; (2) information leading the subject to believe that he is esteemed and valued; and (3) information leading the subject to believe that he belongs to a network of communication and mutual obligation” (p. 300). Cohen and Wills (1985) defined two types of social support: structural and functional. Structural social support refers to objective support (i.e., concrete instances of amounts of support received), whereas functional social support refers more to perceived availability or receipt of support.

Perceived social support has been said to be “the extent to which an individual believes that his/her needs for support, information, and feedback are fulfilled” (Procidano & Heller, 1983, p.2) or that “love and caring, sympathy and understanding, and/or esteem and value are available from significant others” (Thoits, 1995, p.64). Therefore, perceived support from friends can be defined as the “general perception of availability of supporting friends” (adapted from Laireiter & Bauman, 1992). In other words, perceived social support relates to the person’s perception of whether he or she has friends that provide emotional support (e.g., empathic listening), instrumental support (e.g., providing help), and companionship (sharing time together) and whether the person and his or her friends have open communication (e.g. honesty) and feel close to each other (Procidano & Heller, 1983).

Perceived support from friends has been measured with a variety of instruments such as the Perceived Social Support Scale (Procidano & Heller, 1983) or the Provisions of Social Relations (Turner, 1992) and with questionnaires designed for specific studies (e.g., Atkinson, Liem, & Liem, 1986; Schaefer, Coyne, & Lazarus, 1981; Walen & Lachman, 2000). These different instruments ask respondents whether he or she perceives that friends give them emotional support (e.g., “My friends give me the moral support I need”), instrumental support (e.g., “I’ve recently gotten a good idea about how to do something from a friend”), and companionship (e.g., “When I want to go out to do things I know that many of my friends would enjoy doing these things with me”) and whether communication is open with friends (e.g., “I have at least one friend I could tell anything”).

Several researchers have preferred to examine perceived social support rather than actual receipt of social support because the literature has consistently reported it to be a better positive predictor of mental health (for a review see Thoits, 1995). In addition, it is perceived social support that has been reported to moderate the negative effects of stress on people’s mental and physical wellbeing (Thoits, 1995). Reviewing the existing literature, different authors (e.g., Cohen & Wills, 1985; Thoits, 1995) have noted that unlike structural support (e.g., social integration or connectedness usually indicated by number of friends, frequency of interaction, etc.), which has been associated with having a direct positive effect on psychosocial well-being, it is functional or perceived support that has been found to buffer the physical and mental impacts of stressful live events or chronic difficulties. Therefore, the assessment of perceived support is highly relevant to the present investigation, because the study

focuses on social support as a variable that may buffer the degree to which partners' subjective economic strain has negative impacts on the couple's relationship

It is important to note that only a few studies have examined the impact of perceived support from friends and other external sources on couples' relationships. When investigating social support, most couple researchers have preferred to focus on the support (perceived or observed) that each person receives from his or her partner and its relation to the couple's functioning (Beach, Fincham, Katz, Bradbury, 1996; Cobb, Davila, & Bradbury, 2001; Cutrona, 1996a, 1996b; Cutrona, Hessling, & Suhr, 1997; Davila, Bradbury, Cohan, Tochluk, 1997; Dehle, Larsen, & Landers, 2001; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998; Pasch Bradbury, & Davila, 1997; Pasch, Bradbury, & Sullivan, 1997). Consequently, this study expands on previous research by examining social support that partners perceive themselves receiving from the external source of their friendships.

#### *Indirect Link Between Economic Strain and Relationship Satisfaction*

When researchers have tested for a direct link between economic strain and relationship satisfaction, no direct association was found (Conger et al., 1990; Kinnunen & Pulkkinen, 1998; Perrucci & Targ, 1988). For example, Perrucci and Targ (1988) failed to find a significant correlation between economic strain and marital happiness in a population of displaced workers and their spouses after a plant closing.

Conger and his colleagues (1990) then suggested that this lack of a relation between economic strain and relationship distress could be attributed to the fact that the link between the two variables actually was indirect. They argued that the

researchers were not examining indirect paths in which a couple's interactions served as mediating mechanisms between economic strain and relationship distress. This suggestion inspired numerous research studies that have tried to uncover aspects of couple's interaction that could mediate the relation between economic strain and relationship distress. In general these studies followed Conger and his colleagues' model (Conger et al., 1990; Conger et al., 1994) in which economic pressure would cause an increase in partners' negative interactions and a decrease in their positive exchanges, which in turn would lead to lower relationship satisfaction. As a result, many of these studies focused on hostility, marital conflict or tension, or social undermining to characterize the mediating negative behaviors, and/or on spousal warmth or support to define the positive behaviors (e.g., Conger et al., 1990; Conger et al., 1994; Cutrona et al., 2003; Hraba et al., 2000; Kwon et al., 2003; Liker & Elder, 1983; Vinokur et al., 1996). None of these studies found a direct relation between economic stress and relationship satisfaction or distress and most of them did find that the quality of couple interactions mediated the relation between these two characteristics, which will be described in the following sections.

*Increased Psychological Aggression Mediating the Relation Between Economic Strain and Relationship Satisfaction*

To date researchers have examined negative couple interactions that may increase as a result of economic stress more than they have investigated positive couple exchanges that may decrease. However, in regard to the negative couple interactions that may mediate between economic strain and relationship satisfaction, these studies have never focused on psychological aggression but rather on closely



related constructs such as marital tension or conflict, hostility, or social undermining (Conger et al., 1990; Conger et al., 1994; Conger et al., 1999; ; Cutrona et al., 2003; Elder et al., 1992; Hraba et al., 2000; Kinnunen & Pulkkinen, 1998; Kwon et al., 2003; Liker & Elder, 1983; Vinokur et al., 1996. Given the conceptual overlap between these constructs and psychological aggression as aspects of negativity between members of a couple, this section will review the studies that included hostility, social undermining, and marital tension or conflict as mediating mechanisms in the link between economic strain and relationship satisfaction.

Regarding marital tension, Liker and Elder (1983) studied longitudinally the effects of income loss during the Great Depression on marital functioning. They used data collected by the Berkeley Guidance Study at the University of California, which followed families from 1928 through 1940. Marital tension (a volatile relationship with chronic tension and extreme conflict) was assessed through interviews and home observations and, as hypothesized, was found to mediate the relation between chronic economic hardship (unemployment, receiving public assistance, and low income level) and marital instability.

In the case of hostility, several studies examined its mediating role in the association between economic strain and relationship quality. Most of the studies measured hostility through observation of the couple's interaction during a discussion task (Conger et al., 1990; Conger et al., 1994; Conger et al., 1999; Cutrona et al., 2003; Elder et al., 1992; Liker & Elder, 1983). Independent observers rated each partner's behavior, giving higher scores for hostility if an individual exhibited criticism, angry gestures, or contempt for the spouse. When self-reports of one's own

and the other partner's hostility also were assessed, respondents were asked about temper outbursts, argumentativeness, shouting or throwing things, and conflicts with family and co-workers (Conger et al., 1994). Except for one (Cutrona et al., 2003), these studies have consistently found hostility to mediate the relation between economic strain and relationship distress for men. Regarding women, the findings have been mixed. Three studies (Conger et al., 1994; Conger et al., 1999; Hraba et al., 2000) found hostility to mediate the economic strain-relationship distress association for women and one study did not (Liker & Elder, 1983).

One strong limitation of all of these studies is that economic strain or pressure was measured as a family-level variable that represented the family's inability to meet their financial responsibilities, instead of an individual-level characteristic involving each partner's experience of economic strain. Another major limitation is that all of these studies analyzed male and female partners in different models, without relating partners' relational behaviors to each other (Conger et al., 1994; Kinnunen & Pulkkinen, 1998). Thus, the studies did not consider causal paths in which one person's subjective economic strain affected his or her positive and negative behavior toward the partner, which in turn affected the partner's level of marital satisfaction.

In the first of these studies, Conger and his colleagues (1990) investigated 76 white rural couples and found that economic strain led husbands to be more hostile toward their wives, which in turn decreased their wives' relationship satisfaction and perceptions of marital stability. However, no significant path was found from family economic strain to the wife's hostility. Given that wives' and husbands' levels of hostility were highly correlated, the researchers speculated that perhaps wives'

hostility was increased by economic strain only indirectly through the husbands' hostility. However, they failed to test this hypothesis by including both husbands' and wives' hostile behaviors toward each other in the same model, due to the small sample size in the study. Their results might also reflect the failure to include separate measurements of women's and men's economic stress.

In a later series of studies, investigators tried to capture the different negative impacts that economic pressure had on each member of a couple by including each partner's depression or emotional distress as a factor mediating the relation between family economic pressure and each partner's hostility. However, these studies still assessed economic pressure as a shared family variable rather than measuring each partner's individually experienced economic pressure, and they yielded inconsistent results regarding gender differences in the mediating role of depression and emotional distress.

For example, two different studies that used each partner's depression as a mediating mechanism between economic pressure and each partner's hostility presented contradictory findings. Based on data from 400 married couples living in north central Iowa that participated in the Iowa Youth and Families Project (IYFP), Conger, Ge, and Lorenz (1994) found that family economic pressure was indirectly linked to husbands' hostility through their increased depressed mood; both their hostility and depression were negatively associated with their wives' marital satisfaction. Likewise, in the model tested for wives, family economic pressure increased wives' depression, which in turn increased their hostility, but only their hostility predicted their husbands' marital happiness. No significant direct paths were

found from economic pressure to hostility for either wives or husbands. An interesting gender difference in that study was that wives were more likely than husbands to be dissatisfied with their marriage when their partners were more hostile. However, a later study on Finnish couples (Kinnunen & Pulkkinen, 1998) contradicted some of these findings when depression was not found to mediate the relation between economic strain and marital hostility for either wives or husbands. Family economic strain was found to be indirectly related to wives' perception of marital quality through marital hostility, but no relations were found among economic strain, marital hostility, and husbands' perception of marital quality.

Regarding emotional distress (depression, anxiety, and negative psychological symptoms), two different studies have included this variable as mediating the relation between economic pressure and the couple's marital conflict (reciprocal hostility being part of marital conflict), and they have also yielded inconsistent results. The first of these studies was performed by Conger, Rueter, and Elder (1999), who used the same sample from IYFP but followed it through time. Indicators of emotional distress were depression, anxiety, and hostility. Marital conflict was defined as one variable common to the couple and was assessed by independent observers who rated the couple's interactions in terms of presence of increasing mutual hostility, tense silence, and a brittle relationship. Findings from this study lent support to the hypothesis that economic pressure increased emotional distress in each partner, both of which led to marital conflict, which in turn predicted marital distress. No relation was found between the two spouses' levels of emotional distress. The second study (Kwon et al., 2003) was conducted on Korean marriages, finding that economic

pressure increased husbands' and wives' levels of emotional distress. However, it was only wives' emotional distress that led to more marital conflict, which in turn predicted the couple's marital satisfaction. Unlike the previous study, a significant direct path was also found between economic pressure and marital conflict and between the two partners' levels of emotional distress. In this study negative psychological symptoms and difficulties in coping with life events were used as indicators of emotional distress, and marital conflict was measured through self-reports that asked about the frequency of marital disagreements and arguments. Both studies failed to distinguish and relate the two partners' degrees of hostility toward the other, as the studies included the broader general construct of marital conflict instead.

In another attempt to measure the impact of economic pressure on each spouse, Hraba, Lorenz, and Pechacova (2000) included irritability, depression, and social behavior problems as mediating variables between economic pressure and marital hostility. Using a sample of 2,546 married couples, this study found that economic pressure had an indirect effect on wives' and husbands' hostility toward their spouses only through increases in their own irritability. Each spouse's hostility toward the other partner in turn led the spouse to greater perceptions of marital instability. In the case of males, problem behaviors (e.g., drinking) were found to mediate the relation between economic pressure and hostility toward the wife.

There is only one published study that failed to find hostility to be a mediating factor between financial strain and relationship quality (Cutrona et al., 2003). In this study marital hostility was measured as a couple-level variable through observation of

partners' interaction. Unlike most studies that have used structural equation modeling (SEM) techniques to analyze these models (Conger et al., 1990; Conger et al., 1994; Conger et al., 1999; Elder et al., 1992; Hraba et al., 2000; Kinnunen & Pulkkinen, 1998; Kwon et al., 2003; Vinokur et al., 1996), Cutrona et al. (2003) used multilevel regression and did not find financial strain to be a predictor of hostility. Moreover, unlike previous studies, they found a direct link between family financial strain and marital quality. According to the investigators, these results could be attributed to the absence of an individual mediational variable of psychological distress, multicollinearity among predictors, or the relative affluence of their sample, which experienced relatively low levels of financial strain. Given that financial strain was measured as a shared family-level variable, the effects of economic pressure on each partner were not captured.

Social undermining has been another construct used to capture the negative couple interactions that may increase as a result of economic strain and that may mediate the relation between this stress and relationship satisfaction. In a study of 2,005 unemployed job seekers and their partners, Vinokur, Price, and Caplan (1996) found that family financial strain increased the partner's depression, which in turn increased his or her undermining behaviors toward the job seeker. The partner's undermining behaviors were measured by asking the job seeker whether the partner acted in an unpleasant or angry manner, made his or her life difficult, acted in ways that showed dislike for him or her, made him or her feel unwanted, got on his or her nerves, and criticized and/or insulted her. These undermining behaviors in the partner

were found to predict negatively the job seeker's relationship satisfaction, regardless of gender.

In sum, although no studies have as yet examined psychological aggression as a mediating mechanism between economic strain and relationship satisfaction, findings from studies that have included closely related constructs such as marital tension, hostility, or social undermining suggest that psychological aggression (coercive verbal and nonverbal behaviors that are not directed at a partner's body) could also play a mediating role in the economic strain-relationship satisfaction association. The review of these studies also indicates that when investigators have used increasingly sophisticated models that try to capture the different effects of economic pressure on each partner and that include mediating factors between economic pressure and each partner's negative behavior, the results have been inconsistent across studies, precluding any general conclusion. In addition, the greatest limitation of these studies in terms of couple research is that male and female partners have been analyzed in different models without examining each partner's negative behavior toward the other. Lastly, none of these studies have been based on Hispanic samples, so findings from predominantly middle class white samples cannot be generalized safely.

#### *Economic Strain and Psychological Aggression*

Findings from studies that established a positive relation between economic strain or life stressors in general and psychological aggression or closely related concepts lend additional support for psychological aggression as a mechanism mediating between economic strain and relationship satisfaction. For example,

economic stress has been related to verbal aggression between partners, which is one type of psychologically aggressive behavior (Hamby & Sugarman, 1999). Based on data from the 1975 National Family Violence Surveys, Straus (1990) found that out of all stressors examined it was economic and occupational stress that best predicted spouses' verbal aggression. In another study on 190 employed individuals, job insecurity, a concept closely related to economic stress, was found to be indirectly linked to marital psychological aggression through poor concentration and depression (Barling & Macewen, 1992).

Using a sample of 76 rural married couples living in the Midwest, Elder, Conger, Foster, and Ardel (1992) also found a direct link between economic pressure and wives' and husbands' hostility toward each other. In addition, they found a significant correlation between partners' hostility levels, as well as a greater association between economic pressure and hostility for men than for women. Although this is the only investigation that looked at whether husbands' and wives' hostility was correlated to each other in a study of economic pressure, spousal hostility was considered an outcome variable instead of a mediating factor between economic pressure and relationship distress. Consistent with this study's findings, Rosenblatt and Keller (1983) also found that couples that experienced higher levels of economic stress tended to blame each other more.

Despite the lack of studies testing the association between economic strain and couples' psychological aggression, some studies have linked other forms of life stressors with psychological aggression. For example, in a study of 175 volunteer non-clinical married couples, Margolin, Joh, and Foo (1998) found that those men



who were severely emotionally aggressive toward their partners had experienced more negative life events during the previous year compared to those men were not. A study by Mason and Blankenship (1987) found that for both men and women negative life stressors were good predictors of being psychologically abusive toward a partner or receiving this type of abuse.

Moreover, physical aggression, which consistently has been closely associated with psychological aggression (Follingstad, Rutledge, Berg, Hause, & Polek, 1990; Hamby & Sugarman, 1999; Murphy & O'Leary, 1989; Russell & Hulson, 1992; Stets, 1990) has also been related to life stressors for males (for a review see Cano and Vivian, 2001) as well as for females (MacEwen & Barling, 1988; Mason & Blakenship, 1987). This association has been found particularly with the life stressors of economic strain (Seltzer & Kalmuss, 1988), perception of poor financial well-being (Fox, Benson, DeMaris, & Van Wyk; 2002), and financial/work stress (Cano & Vivian, 2003). Seltzer and Kalmuss (1988) found that together with childhood exposure to abuse and recent stressful experiences, economic strain was an additive predictor of a composite index of both physical and psychological aggression. A later longitudinal study (Fox, Benson, DeMaris, & Van Wyk, 2002) conducted on 4,583 couples revealed that either the husband's or the wife's positive feelings about their financial situation decreased the odds of marital violence. The couple's number of debts and the husband's contribution to the couple's total income affected each partner's sense of financial well-being, which was in turn a predictor of spousal violence. In addition, Cano and Vivian's (2003) comparison of violent and non-violent clinic couples found that both violent men and women reported more frequent

and negative occupational stressors than non-violent men and women. This result was consistent with previous studies that found that financial/work stressors predicted men's violence (Barling & Rosenbaum, 1986; Barnett & Fagan, 1993; Barnett, Fagan, & Booker, 1991; Cascardi & Vivian, 1995).

In summary, economic stress and various other types of life stressors have been found to be associated with higher levels of partners' verbal attacks, hostility, and blaming each other. Economic stressors have also been found to be related to increased marital violence. These two lines of research findings lend support for the hypothesis that economic strain may be directly linked to individuals' greater psychological aggression toward their partners.

#### *Psychological Aggression and Relationship Satisfaction*

Consistently, every study that investigated the relation between psychological aggression and relationship satisfaction has found a negative association. For example, using a convenience sample of 42 couples, Sagrestano, Heavey, and Christensen (1999) found that male-to-female psychological aggression was related to lower marital adjustment. In another study of risk factors for husbands' emotional and physical abuse of their wives (Margolin et al., 1998), it was found that men with severe physical and emotional aggression experienced lower marital satisfaction when compared with men who did not engage in aggressive behavior. Similarly, in a study of 1,625 college age males and females, Kasian and Painter (1992) found that psychological abuse was negatively related to satisfaction with the relationship and positively related to termination of the relationship.

Although the cross sectional designs of all of these studies prevent one from drawing any conclusions regarding causal direction, longitudinal studies seem to indicate that it is psychological aggression that leads to marital deterioration. In a study of 56 newlywed couples Lawrence and Bradbury (1995) found that 63% of wives who were victims of spousal psychological aggression reported later deterioration of the marital relationship whereas 53% of husbands of psychologically aggressive wives reported marital deterioration. Similarly, in a longitudinal study Gottman and Levenson (1992) found that criticism and contempt in couple's communication, which can be seen as psychologically aggressive behaviors, were part of the cascade that precipitated the couple's dissolution. It is worth noting that all of these findings are consistent with the extensive body of studies showing that unhappy couples engage in negative interaction much more frequently than happy couples do (for reviews see Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Gottman & Notarius, 2000; Weiss & Heyman, 1997).

*Reduced Spousal Positive Behaviors Mediating the Relation Between Economic Strain and Relationship Satisfaction*

In addition to the *negative* processes of hostility, marital tension, and social undermining, a decrease in *positive* couple's interactions has also been proposed as a possible mechanism mediating between economic strain and relationship distress. Conger and his colleagues (1990) have emphasized the need to focus not only on the impact of aversive relational interactions within the couple, but also on aspects of the couple's warmth/supportiveness such as compliments, praise, helpfulness, attending, and smiling.

However, in the studies that have been conducted positive behaviors have not always been found to have a mediating role in the relation between economic strain and relationship satisfaction, although this might have been related to the way in which positive behaviors were conceptualized and measured. When positive behaviors were assessed in terms of warm/supportive exchanges between partners (e.g., physical affection, reciprocation of warmth, listener responsiveness, cooperation, helpfulness, attentive listening, expressions of approval) during lab observations as couples engaged in discussions of conflict topics, studies have failed to find these behaviors as playing a mediating role. For example, in the study of white rural couples by Conger et al. (1990) described above, the marriage's economic strain decreased husbands' warm and supportive communication toward their wives as much as it increased their hostile behavior. However, the warm/supportive behaviors were not related directly to wives' perceptions of marital instability. No significant path was found in the analysis from family economic strain to wives' warmth either. As with hostility, the authors suggested an indirect link between family economic strain and wives' warmth through husbands' warmth, which they were unable to test given the small size of their sample. However, as noted earlier with hostility, these results might also reflect the researchers' failure to assess women's and men's individual levels of financial stress separately. Likewise, another study (Conger et al., 1999) assessed marital support as a mediator variable between economic pressure and marital distress but failed to produce the expected result. Finally, as with hostility, Cutrona and her colleagues (1993) failed to find marital warmth as a mediator between family financial strain and marital quality.

However, a different picture emerged when partner's support was measured through self-reports and included a wider range of behaviors than the limited forms of supportive behavior assessed during observations of couples' actual communication. These included positive behaviors such as providing encouragement, caring about the partner as a person, raising the partner's self-confidence, and making the partner feel that he or she can rely on you. Vinokur et al. (1996) found that financial strain led to more depressive symptoms in the job seeking person's partner, which in turn reduced his or her support to the job seeker, ultimately reducing the job seeker's relationship satisfaction, regardless of the job seeker's gender. In addition, the partner's positive support and negative undermining had similar and independent effects on the job seeker's relationship satisfaction.

In brief, economic strain seems to lead to a decrease in an individual's positive behavior toward his or her partner, lowering in turn the partner's satisfaction with the relationship. However, these relations are not captured when the measurement of couples' positive behaviors is limited to those exchanged during lab observations as the couples discuss topics of conflict in their relationships.

#### *Economic Strain and Positive Behaviors*

In addition to the studies described in the previous section, findings from studies that established a positive relation between economic strain and positive behaviors might lend additional support for positive behaviors mediating the link between economic strain and relationship satisfaction. However, there is no published study in the English or Spanish empirical literature that has examined the relation between economic strain and positive behaviors beyond the interest of investigating

positive behaviors as a mediating mechanism in the economic strain-relationship distress association.

### *Positive Behaviors and Relationship Satisfaction*

According to behavioral exchange theory, the rate of negative or positive events between partners is a “major component of marital functioning leading to either satisfaction or distress” (Johnson & O’Leary, 1996, p. 417). Unlike the relation between positive behaviors and economic strain that has not received any attention by the research community, this theoretical framework has inspired numerous investigations on the relation between positive behaviors and relationship satisfaction. With the exception of one study (Barnett & Nietzel, 1979), these studies have consistently found a positive association between partners’ positive behaviors and their satisfaction with their couple relationship (Broderick & O’Leary, 1986; Christensen & Niel, 1980; Johnson & O’Leary, 1996; Kasian & Painter, 1992; Langhinrichsen-Rohling & Smutzler, 1994; Margolin, 1981; Wills et al., 1974).

Based on observations of lab interaction tasks and recorded home interactions, Birchler, Weiss, and Vincent (1975) reported that distressed couples engaged in more displeasing and less pleasing behaviors in both settings when compared to nondistressed couples. Christensen and Nies (1980) reported from their study on 50 couples using Wills et al.’s (1974) modification of the Spousal Observation Checklist (SOC) that spousal pleasing behaviors correlated positively with the partner’s global marital satisfaction, for both husbands and wives. The same result was obtained by Margolin (1981) using the original SOC, as unhappy couples exhibited lower rates of pleasing behaviors. Broderick and O’Leary (1986) also obtained similar results when

they studied 30 clinical couples and reported that positive behavior as measured by their own modified version of the SOC (which they called the Daily Checklist of Marital Activities) was positively correlated with marital satisfaction for husbands (.38) as well as for wives (.27). Kasian and Painter's (1992) previously mentioned study of college age men and women found that termination of a relationship was associated with the absence of positive behaviors between partners. Finally, based on data from structured interviews with 132 couples, Langhinrichsen-Rohling and Smutzler (1994) reported that marriage positivity (positive communication, caring gestures, and recollections of happiest times) was higher for nondistressed community marriages than for members of clinical couples.

The association between positive behaviors and relationship satisfaction for both males and females seems to be so strong that it was still found to be present regardless of whether positive behaviors are measured with an open-ended individualized method (positive behaviors identified by the spouse) or a standardized checklist (Johnson & O'Leary, 1996). In addition, there is evidence that the relation has some cross-cultural generality, as the association has been found to be valid for the Australian population. Halford and Sanders (1988) found that distressed Australian couples displayed lower rates of pleasing behaviors as measured by the SOC. However, no results have as yet been reported on Hispanic groups.

Companionship, which is one dimension of positive spousal behaviors (Johnson & O'Leary, 1996), has also been found to be related to relationship happiness. Companionship was associated with marital satisfaction for both husbands

and wives in a study using a convenience sample of 94 couples in the Midwest (Sprecher, Metts, Burleson, Hatfield, & Thompson, 1995).

Overall, positive behaviors between partners have consistently been found to be related to partners' relationship satisfaction, and this result is so robust that it seems to be present regardless of the measurement method. However, most of these studies have been performed on Caucasian populations in the U.S., and it is still unknown whether this relationship is also strong in other populations. In addition, as with findings regarding the relation between negative spousal behavior and relationship distress, findings from cross-section studies of the association between positive behavior and relationship satisfaction do not identify the causal direction.

#### *Evidence of Economic Strain in Both Partners*

Studies that have examined either negative or positive behaviors as mediating the relation between economic strain or pressure and relationship satisfaction have always measured economic strain as a couple-level variable, without discriminating the two partners' levels of economic strain. However, various studies suggest that the economic difficulties experienced by a couple are likely to cause financial stress for both partners regardless of whether the difficulties were triggered by only one partner's unemployment or job uncertainty. For example, it was found that in cases where one of the spouses lost his or her job, the unemployment situation constituted a significant financial strain on both spouses (Aubry et al., 1990) and that family economic pressure caused emotional distress in both partners (Kwon et al., 2003). In a study of 387 dual earner couples conducted in Finland, Mauno and Kinnunen (2002) also discovered that each partner's level of perceived job insecurity was



associated not only with their own economic stress level but also with that of their partner. The researchers considered these results to be expectable “since it is reasonable to assume that economic stress is shared in families” (p. 310).

Closely related studies that have examined the relation between family-work conflict and emotional distress have also found that one person’s conflict increased not only their own psychological distress but also their partner’s distress (Matthews, Conger & Wickrama; 1996). Moreover, there is some evidence that women view their husbands’ job instability as even more threatening than their own (Fox & Chancey, 1998) and that their husbands’ adverse job events can be as distressing for them as their own negative job experiences (Rook, Dooley, & Catalano, 1991)

Given that both partners feel to a certain extent the effects of family economic hardships or family-work conflicts, it is no wonder that their levels of stress have been found to be correlated with each other (Kwon et al., 2003; Matthews et al., 1996). This is consistent with the general stress literature that has consistently discovered a crossover effect between the partners’ levels of stress (Westman & Vinokur, 1998). The positive relation between the two partners’ stress levels has received various explanations, each of which has had some empirical validation. Some researchers have found evidence that the crossover effect is the result of a common stressor in a shared social environment (Westman & Vinokur, 1998). Others have uncovered a direct transmission of stress from one partner to another that is above and beyond the effects of a common stressor, whereas others have found that the effect is indirect as it is mediated by the interactions between the partners (e.g.,

stress increasing hostility in one partner which increases stress in the other) (Westman & Vinokur, 1998).

In conclusion, the empirical evidence clearly suggests that both members of a couple experience some level of economic strain. However, there is no theoretical framework or empirical evidence that suggests that this level is the same for both partners.

#### *Reciprocity of Psychological Aggression*

Unlike physical violence, psychological aggression seems to be similarly prevalent among men and women and is reciprocal. Research has shown that in intimate relationships both males and females are likely to be psychologically aggressive toward their partners (e.g., Stets, 1991; Straus & Sweet, 1992). Regarding verbal abuse in particular, which is part of psychological aggression, several studies have shown that males are also the victims of verbal attacks by their female partners and that females can be as verbally aggressive as their male partners (Jacobson & Gottman, Waltz, Rushe, & Babcock, 2000; Kasian & Painter, 1992; Simonelli & Ingram, 1998). Analyzing data from 5,232 American couples from the 1975 National Family Violence Survey, Straus and Sweet (1992) found that “men and women engage in about equal amounts of verbal/symbolic aggression against their partners” (p. 346) even when physical aggression is controlled for statistically in the analysis. In addition, findings indicated that there was no significant difference between man-to-woman and woman-to-man verbal/symbolic aggression.

Similar findings have been reported for some Hispanic populations, as Sughibara and Warner (2002) found in their sample of 316 Mexican Americans that

86% of men and 85% of women reported being psychologically aggressive toward their partners.

Consistent with these results, a later longitudinal study of physical and psychological aggression in young couples at risk for delinquency (Capaldi, Shortt & Crosby, 2003) found that those young men and women who remained with the same partner tended to maintain high levels of psychological aggression toward each other, revealing that the aggression was reciprocal. In addition, several studies have indicated that members of distressed couples tend to reciprocate their negative verbal and non-verbal behaviors much more than do nondistressed couples (Gottman, 1979; Margolin & Wampold; Robison & Price, 1980).

Although the empirical evidence suggests that many times psychological aggression is reciprocal between partners, studies that have examined negative behaviors as mediating the economic strain-relationship satisfaction relation have failed to examine the link between the two partners' behaviors. As noted earlier, most studies have analyzed men's and women's behaviors in different models (Conger et al., 1990; Conger et al., 1994; Fox & Chancey, 1998; Hraba et al., 2000; Kinnunen & Pulkkinen, 1998; Liker & Elder, 1983; Vinokur et al., 1996), failing to include how negative behaviors by one partner contribute to variance in the negative behaviors of the other above and beyond the variance in the other's negative behavior that is accounted for by economic strain.

#### *Reciprocity of Positive Behaviors*

Like negative behaviors, each partner's positive behavior tends to encourage reciprocity from the other person. For example Conger and his colleagues (1990)

found a significant positive correlation between partners' positive behaviors. However, studies that focused on positive behaviors as a mediating factor between economic strain and relationship distress have not included the relation between the two partners' positive behaviors due to the fact that males' and females' data were analyzed in separate models (Conger et al., 1990; Conger et al., 1994; Fox & Chancey, 1998; Hraba et al., 2000; Kinnunen & Pulkkinen, 1998; Liker & Elder, 1983; Vinokur et al., 1996). In other words, the empirical literature has left unexamined how the positive behaviors by one spouse can contribute to the occurrence of positive behaviors of the other above and beyond the dampening influence that economic strain has on the other's positive behavior.

#### *Relationship Between Partners' Levels of Relationship Satisfaction*

Although men have typically reported higher relationship satisfaction than women have (e.g., Fowers, 1991), studies have consistently revealed that partners' levels of relationship satisfaction are usually correlated with each other (Levinger & Breedlove, 1966; Spotts, Neiderheiser, Towers, Hansson, Lichtenstein, Cederblad, Pedersen, & Reiss, 2004; Terman, 1938). Correspondence between partners' satisfaction with their relationship derives from sharing not only interpersonal processes but also similar backgrounds and characteristics and facing similar life conditions, such as number of children, family life cycle, and children's problems (for a review of studies that show how these predictors affect relationship satisfaction see Bradbury et al., 2000). Moreover, lately the correlation between partners' relationship satisfaction also has been related to genetic factors (Spotts et al., 2004), which

indicates that relationship satisfaction can be due to factors beyond the influence of the partners' interactions.

### *Perceived Social Support from Friends*

As described earlier, it has been suggested that while *actual receipt* of social support usually produces only main effects on outcome variables regarding the recipient's functioning and that it is *perceived* social support that seems to buffer the effects of life stress on individuals' physical and mental health (for reviews see Cassel, 1976; Cobb, 1976; Cohen, 1992; Cohen & Wills 1985; Thoits, 1995; Turner, 1983). However, the empirical evidence has shown that perceived social support can produce both main and moderating effects (Turner & Marino, 1994). For example, a study on an Australian sample found that expecting friends, relatives, or neighbors to help during a crisis was negatively correlated with psychological impairment (Andrews, Tennant, Hewson, & Schonell, 1978). However, in other studies perceived social support was identified as having a buffering effect on the impact of stresses on individuals' functioning. In another earlier study (Gore, 1978) perceived social support (family, spouse, and friends) was found to moderate the effects of being laid off on negative physical symptoms. In another study, Pearlin (1981) found that perceived social support buffered the effects of chronic strains and life events on loss of self esteem and sense of mastery. Similarly, Atkinson, Liem and Liem (1986) found that men with more perceived family support had better mental health after four months of being unemployed when compared to men with less family support.

Regarding perceived support from friends specifically, research on stress has consistently indicated that social support beyond the immediate family is associated

with better health outcomes. On examining different marital status groups, Cotten (1999) found that perceived support from friends was negatively associated with depression for both married and unmarried individuals, regardless of their gender. Perceived social support from friends also had a main positive effect on better mental and physical health among hemophilic men and their partners, regardless of the husband's HIV status (Klein, Forehand, Armistead, & Wierson, 1994). In three different studies with undergraduate students, Procidano and Heller (1983) reported that symptoms of distress and psychopathology were negatively related to perceived support from friends. It is important to note that the correlational nature of these studies does not allow conclusions about causal direction and therefore, lower perceived support from friends might be a predictor as well as a consequence of negative health status.

Reliance on friends seems to be a very important source of social support for Latinos also. According to a study (Bega, Kolody, Valle, & Hough, 1986) based on data from 1,825 women, Mexican immigrant women rely heavily not only on family but also on friends when they are depressed. Both Latinos and Latinas have also been found to be more likely to disclose their HIV-positive sero-status to friends rather than to family members (Simoni, Mason, Marks, Ruiz, et al., 1995; Zea, Reisen, Poppen, Echeverry, & Bianchi, 2004). It has also been reported that Latinas with breast cancer who receive emotional support before surgery show lower levels of distress post-surgery (Alferi, Carver, Antoni, Weiss, & Duran, 2001). Among Latino college students, friends' support has also been found to be a stronger protective

factor against psychological distress than family support (Rodriguez, Mira, Myers, Morris, & Cardoza, 2003).

On explaining the reasons why support from friends has a positive influence on mental health, authors have consistently pointed out that this type of support is voluntary and “subject to fewer structural and normative constraints” and therefore, it is less judgmental (Cotton, 1999, p. 231). “Emotional distress can be relieved by talking to a sympathetic friend” (Argyle, 1992, p. 18). Friends can provide information, domestic or financial help, and companionship which can reduce feelings of loneliness and enhance psychological well-being (Argyle, 1992). Besides, unlike family members, friends are usually considered partisan supporters (Klein & Milardo, 2000). According to Klein and Milardo (2000), “friends are chosen as friends because they are seen as sympathetic and supportive, and they may risk ceasing to be friends if they become too critical” (p. 622). Moreover, Oliner (1989) has found that when wives are in marital crises they are supported and validated by their best friends.

In addition to the above discussed positive effects, perceived social support from friends has also been found to buffer the effects of negative stressors. For example, Walen and Lachman (2000) studied 2,348 adults and found that perceived support from friends not only had a main effect on psychological well-being and physical health, but also buffered the negative effect of social strain on mental and physical well-being. Another study (Gielen, O’Campo, Faden, & Kass, 1994) found that perceived support from a friend was a protective factor for women from partners’ verbal and physical abuse during the childbearing years. However, in one study using

a sample from the Iowa Youth and Families Project, Lorenz, Conger, and Montague (1994) found that perceived extrafamilial social support mediated (showed an additive main effect) but did not moderate the relation between economic pressure and depressive symptoms for both husbands or wives.

In an attempt to circumscribe even more the circumstances under which we may find social support to have a buffering effect, House, Umberson, and Landis (1988) have suggested that “buffering effects are most often found when there is a strong stressor to which people with varying degrees of involvement in social relationships are exposed, or when the measure of social relationships is phrased in terms of buffering” (p. 295). Even though economic problems are considered a strong stressor (Margolin et al., 1998), except for Lorenz, Conger, and Montague (1994), no other study has examined the possibility that perceived support from friends may not only affect marital interactions directly but also buffer for both husbands and wives the negative effects of economic strain on each partner’s marital behaviors.

Given the positive effects of perceived friends’ support and perceived social support in general on mental health, it could be expected that this type of support will be found to have a direct effect on decreasing psychological aggression toward the other partner. In other words, those individuals who perceive more support from their friends would be expected to be less psychologically aggressive toward their partners. This line of reasoning seems to be consistent with studies that have found hostility and family violence to be negatively associated with the perpetrator’s social support (Davidson et al., 1996; Lackey & Williams, 1995; Rodriguez, Lasch, Chandra, & Lee, 2001) and positively associated with social isolation (Stets, 1991a). As Stets has



argued, “isolation may lift restraints on being aggressive” (1991a, p. 669). Social networks provide social controls on social relations and may be a deterrent for violence toward an intimate partner.

Likewise, perceived support from friends should be associated with individuals exhibiting more positive behavior toward their partners. In fact, non-spousal social support has been theoretically and empirically associated with marital (Kurdek, 1989) and family satisfaction (e.g., Greef, 2000) and better marital quality (Camp, 1996). Part of this positive effect might be related to the fact that partners in a couple tend to share many of their friends (Julien, Tremblay, Belanger, Dube, Begin, & Bouthillier, 2000; Klein & Milardo, 2000) and therefore benefit from many of the same positive influences.

In short, putting together the research on social support in general and on social support from friends specifically, it seems that perceived social support from friends may have both main and buffering effects on couple interactions. Regarding the main effects in particular, related empirical evidence suggests that perceived support from friends should have a positive influence on couple interactions.

#### *Some Gender Differences*

Despite the previous cited findings that both males and females seem to be affected by economic problems, empirical evidence also seems to suggest that this effect is greater for men. In their study of the effects of income loss on family functioning, Liker and Elder (1983) found that economic pressures during the Great Depression increased marital tension through husbands but not through wives. Economic pressures made males more worried, unstable, and explosive, which in turn

damaged couple's relationships. This finding is consistent with the general literature on stress that has repeatedly found that whereas women may become more upset by interpersonal issues with family and friends, men are more reactive to financial and work stressors than women are (Almeida & Kessler, 1998; Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Schilling, 1989; Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Wethington, 1989; Conger, Lorenz, Elder, Simons, & Ge, 1993; Wheaton, 1990). Liker and Elder's (1983) explanation for this finding has been that economic difficulties are going to have a more negative impact on men's relational behaviors within the couple "given their continuing stake in the breadwinner role as a primary source of identification" (p. 645).

Regarding gender differences in perceived social support, findings have been mixed. Several studies have found that women report more perceived support from their social networks than men do (for a review of studies see Thoits, 1995). Although men's social networks seem to be larger, "women exhibit greater investment and intimacy in their relationships" (Thoits, 1995, p. 65), which would explain why support from social networks has been found to have a greater positive effect on women's well-being than on men's (e.g., Antonucci & Akiyam, 1987; Walen & Lachman, 2000). However, these findings have been contradicted by studies that have reported no differences in the social networks of men and women and no gender difference in terms of its positive influence on mental and physical health (Pearlin, Morton, Lieberman, Menaghan, & Mullan, 1981; Turner, 1994; Turner & Marino, 1994; Vinokur et al., 1996).

## Hypotheses

The following sixteen hypotheses are based on Conger and colleagues' family stress model (1990, 1994) modified with the additions and changes that were explained earlier in the section introducing the theoretical framework as well as based on the empirical literature previously discussed.

*Hypothesis 1:* Each partner's level of economic strain will have a positive and direct influence on his or her psychologically aggressive behaviors toward the other partner.

*Hypothesis 2:* Each partner's level of economic strain will have a negative and direct influence on his or her positive behaviors toward the other partner.

*Hypothesis 3:* Each partner's psychologically aggressive behaviors toward the other partner will have a negative and direct influence on the other partner's relationship satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 4:* Each partner's positive behaviors toward the other partner will have a positive and direct influence on the other partner's relationship satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 5:* Each partner's perceived friends' support will have a negative and direct influence on his or her psychologically aggressive behaviors toward the other partner.

*Hypothesis 6:* Each partner's perceived friends' support will have a positive and direct influence on his or her positive behaviors toward the other partner.

*Hypothesis 7:* Partners' levels of perceived friends' support will be positively correlated with each other.

*Hypothesis 8:* The relation between each partner's level of economic strain and his or her psychologically aggressive behaviors toward the other partner will be moderated by his or her perceived support from friends, after controlling for any potential main effect of perceived support from friends on psychologically aggressive behaviors toward the other partner. Specifically, perceived support from friends will reduce the strength of the relation between economic strain and individuals' psychologically aggressive behaviors toward their partners.

*Hypothesis 9:* The relation between each partner's level of economic strain and his or her positive behaviors toward the other partner will be moderated by his or her perceived support from friends, after controlling for any potential main effect of perceived support from friends on positive behavior toward the other partner. Specifically, perceived support from friends will reduce the strength of the relation between economic strain and positive behaviors toward the other partner.

*Hypothesis 10:* Partners' levels of economic strain will be positively correlated with each other.

*Hypothesis 11:* Individuals' levels of psychologically aggressive behavior toward their partners will be positively correlated with each other above and beyond the correlation that may result from the relationships established in all the previous hypotheses.

*Hypothesis 12:* Individuals' levels of positive behavior toward their partners will be positively correlated with each other above and beyond the correlation that may result from the relationships established in all the previous hypotheses.

*Hypothesis 13:* Partners' levels of relationship satisfaction will be positively correlated with each other above and beyond the correlation that may result from the relationships established in all the previous hypotheses.

*Hypothesis 14:* The two partners' interactions between their own economic strain and their own perceived support from friends will be positively correlated with each other. In other words, the degree to which one partner's perceived support from friends moderates the relation between his or her economic strain and his or her own psychologically aggressive behaviors and positive behaviors respectively, will be positively correlated with the degree to which the other partner's perceived support has such a moderating effect.

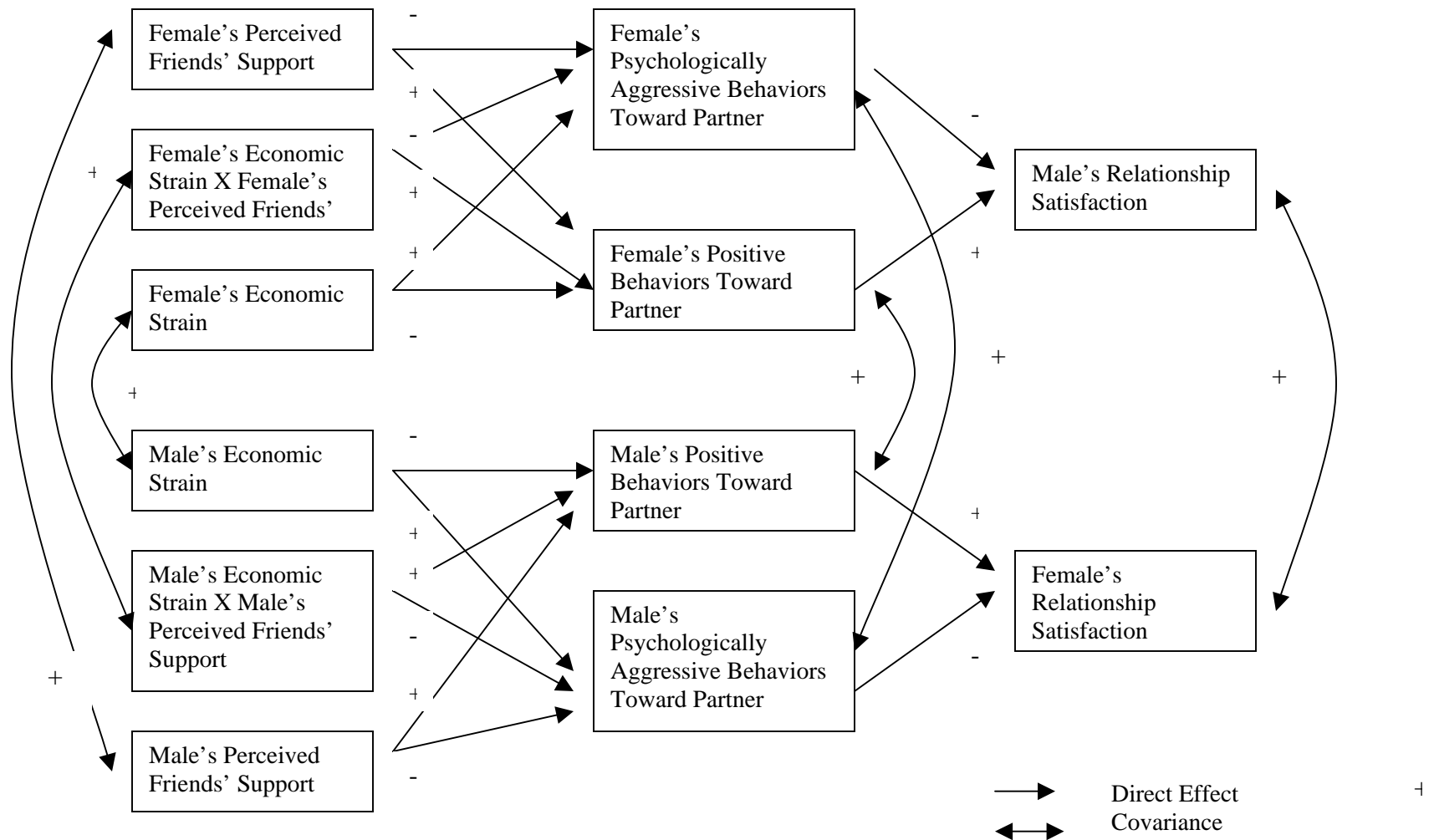
*Hypothesis 15:* The direct positive effect of economic strain on individuals' psychological aggression toward their partners will be larger for male partners than for female partners.

*Hypothesis 16:* The direct negative effect of economic strain on individuals' positive behaviors toward their partners will be larger for male partners than for female partners.

The sixteen hypotheses are depicted and integrated in the following model diagram.

Figure 6

Conceptual Model



## Chapter II

### Method

#### Sample

The sample for the present study consisted of 144 Argentinean heterosexual couples. These were couples in which at least one member had sought psychotherapeutic treatment (individual, couple, and/or family) at Centro Privado de Psicoterapias, an outpatient mental health clinic in Buenos Aires, Argentina and in which both members had completed the clinic's self-report assessment instruments following the first therapy session between July 2003 and June 2004. Members of these couples were 18 years of age or older, had been together for at least one year, and were either married or cohabiting, because the focus of this study is on committed couple relationships that have experienced significant economic stress, experiences that would not be typical in couples who are involved in casual dating relationships. None of these couples included members with psychotic disorders and/or untreated substance abuse, because such severe psychopathology was likely to have a major impact on individual functioning, couple functioning, and the validity of the participant's responses to the self-report measures.

The mean ages of women and men in this sample were 35.88 (SD = 8.60) years and 38.03 (SD = 9.04) years, respectively. As Table 1 shows, women in this sample were relatively well educated, as 85% had at least completed high school and 62.1% had some post high school education. Table 1 also indicates that men were slightly less educated than women in this sample as 77.1 % had completed high school and only 37.9% had some post high school education.

Table 1

## Women's and Men's Level of Education

Level of Education	Women ( <i>n</i> = 144)		Men ( <i>n</i> = 144)	
	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)
Primary Incomplete	1	7	1	.7
Primary Complete (6-12 years-old) <sup>1</sup>	8	5.6	3	2.1
Secondary Incomplete	12	8.3	28	19.4
Secondary Complete (12-17 years-old) <sup>2</sup>	32	22.2	44	30.6
Tertiary Incomplete	16	11.1	11	7.6
Tertiary, Non-University Degree <sup>3</sup>	24	16.7	12	8.3
University Incomplete	26	18.1	26	18.1
University Complete <sup>4</sup>	18	12.5	13	9.0
University Graduate Program	2	1.4	1	.7
Master's Degree	0	0	0	0
Doctoral Degree	1	.7	1	.7

All men and women in this sample were Hispanic and white, and the majority of women (81.3%) and of men (75.5%) were Roman Catholic. Thirty-seven percent of the women in this sample were homemakers, whereas 25% worked part-time and 29% worked full-time. Only one woman was a student, only one woman was retired, and three women were unemployed. The majority of the men in this sample worked

<sup>1</sup> Equivalent in the American system of education to 1<sup>st</sup> grade through 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

<sup>2</sup> Equivalent in the American system of education to 8<sup>th</sup> grade through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

<sup>3</sup> Equivalent in the American system of education to a community college or technical school degree.

<sup>4</sup> Equivalent in the American system of education to a master's level degree.



full-time (74.3%) whereas only 13.9% of men were working part-time. Three men were retired and five men were unemployed. As Table 2 indicates, half of the women (50.7%) and the majority of men (72.2%) reported having a monthly gross income between \$500 (= US \$167) and \$ 1,999 (= US \$333) and men's monthly gross income was higher than women's. When men's and women's incomes are taken together, it seems that the majority of the couples in this sample were middle-class according to Argentine standards. However, the figures presented in Table 2 are not completely reliable as unclear wording in the demographic forms may have led participants to include both partners' incomes in their reports.

Table 2

Females' and Males' Monthly Gross Income

Monthly Gross Income (in Argentine pesos)	Females ( <i>n</i> =144)		Males ( <i>n</i> =144)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Below \$500 (= US \$ 167)	24	16.7	2	1.4
\$500 - \$999 (=US\$167 – US\$333)	39	27.1	29	20.1
\$1,000 - \$1,999 (=US\$333 – US\$666)	34	23.6	75	52.1
Above \$2,000 (=US\$666)	10	7.3	32	21.5

Almost 20% of the cohabiting couples in this sample were unmarried (*n*=28), whereas 80.4% were married (*n* =114). On average couples in this sample had been living together for ten years and four months (mean= 124.33 months, SD = 90.61 months) and had 1.5 children living in the household (SD =.99). The majority of the

sample ( $n = 112$  couples; 81%) had children living in the household, and only 27 couples (19%) did not.

It is worth noting that this clinical sample is not representative either of the total population of Argentina or the population of the city of Buenos Aires, from which couples were recruited. Table 3 compares the level of education and employment status of men and women among the total population of Argentina, the population of the city of Buenos Aires, and the sample of the present study. This table indicates that the sample of the present study was better educated and had a larger percentage of employed individuals when compared with the total population of Argentina and the population of the city of Buenos Aires.

Table 3

Education and Employment Status: Argentina, Buenos Aires, and Present Sample

		Argentina	Buenos Aires	Present Sample
Education (High School Completed)	Females	17.47%	24.88%	85.00%
	Males	16.79%	23.71%	77.10%
Employment Status (Employed)	Females	29.53%	40.75%	54.00%
	Males	40.90%	49.70%	88.20%

Source: Censo Nacional de Poblacion, Hogares y Viviendas 2001 (INDEC, 2004)

#### Variables and Measures

##### *Economic Strain*

Economic strain refers to the personal “perception of inadequacy in one’s financial position, with attendant financial concerns and worries” (Hilton & Devall,

1997, p. 248). Economic strain was measured with the *Family Economic Strain Scale* (FESS) created by Hilton and Devall (1997). This is a 13-item questionnaire. The first twelve items ask the respondent to rate the frequency with which he or she experiences that particular strain on a five-point scale that includes *never* (1), *seldom* (2), *sometimes* (3), *usually* (4), and *almost always* (5). Out of these first 12 items, only ten were considered for the present study. Two items were not considered because they refer to financial obligations in relation to children, and 19% of couples in the present sample do not have children living in the household. Five of the ten items included for this study ask about financial inadequacy (e.g., “In general, it is hard for me and my family to live on our present income”), whereas the other five specifically ask about worries and concerns about the financial situation (e.g., “I worry about financial matters”) and about how often the financial problems interfere with the respondent’s life (e.g., “Financial problems interfere with my work and daily routine). The last item in the FESS asks the participants to evaluate their income relative to other families in Argentina on a five-point scale that ranges from *far below average* (1) to *far above average* (5).

Given the particular economic situation of Argentina, an extra item was added to the scale to assess the respondent’s fear regarding his or her future financial situation (“I am afraid that my income will decrease”). Compared to other items of FESS, this item presented similar inter-item correlation coefficients and increased the internal consistency of the scale (females’ alpha = .86; males’ alpha = .85). After reversing the response value for the last item, this measure was scored by adding the

response values for the set of items. Higher total scores represent higher levels of economic strain.

Although the creators of the FESS have reported that the instrument has good construct validity and reliability (Hilton & Desrochers, 2000; Hilton, Desrochers, & Devall, 2001), they failed to report specific psychometric properties of their questionnaire. Two different studies have reported the instrument to have high internal consistency, with alphas of .92 and .95 (Touliatos, Perlmutter, & Straus, 1990). In this present study the FESS, including the extra item added in this investigation, also showed high internal consistency for females (alpha = .86) as well as for males (alpha = .85).

*Psychologically Aggressive Behaviors Toward the Other Partner*: refers to both coercive verbal and non-verbal behaviors targeted at the partner but that are not inflicted directly on the partner's body (Hamby & Sugarman, 1999; Murphy & O'Leary, 1989). In the present study psychologically aggressive behaviors toward the other partner were measured through the Denigration, Hostile Withdrawal, and Intimidation subscales of the *Multidimensional Emotional Abuse Scale* (MEAS) (Murphy & Hoover, 1999). This is a self-report multiple-choice type questionnaire. Respondents are asked to indicate among seven options on a scale how many times they engaged in each of the specific behaviors during the past four months, and how many times their partner engaged in them during the same period. The response options are *once* (1), *twice* (2), *3-5 times* (3), *6-10 times* (4), *11-20 times* (5), *more than 20 times* (6), *not in the past four months, but it did happen before* (7), and *this has never happened* (0). The Denigration scale includes seven items that ask the

respondent about acts such as calling the other person worthless or ugly or belittling the other person in front of other people. The Hostile Withdrawal scale also includes seven items that ask about behaviors such as reluctance to talk or discuss a problem with the partner, acting cold and distant, and avoiding the partner. The Intimidation scale includes seven items each of which focus on behaviors such as threatening to hit the other person, smashing something in front of the other person, or driving recklessly to frighten the other person. The fourth subscale of the MEAS is Restrictive Engulfment and has not been included in the present study as it does not measure behaviors that constitute directly (verbal or non-verbal) aggressive acts but rather involves restraining the other person's freedom and is more related to controlling behaviors.

For calculating each partner's level of psychologically aggressive behavior, the respondent's response value that yielded the higher incidence of aggressive behavior either by himself (or herself) or by the partner was the one considered as the value for a particular item. This strategy has been used in other studies of physical and psychological aggression (National Institute of Justice, 1998) and it counteracts the tendency to underreport socially undesirable acts such as psychological aggressive behaviors toward a partner. After reconverting scores (0=0, 7=1, 1=2, 2=3, 3=4, 4=5, 5=6, 6=7) and adding all the response values, one total psychological aggression score was obtained for each partner, without calculating the score for each subscale. Scores were reconverted so that higher scores would represent higher levels of psychological aggression towards the other partner.

Murphy and Hoover (1999), who developed the MEAS, have reported that the instrument has good discriminant and convergent validity when correlations were computed with the circumplex scales of the Inventory of Personal Problems (Alden, Wiggins, & Pincus, 1990) and indices of self-report attachment variables. However, no specific figures have been reported. In the present study, the internal consistency of the MEAS total psychological aggression index was quite strong for males ( $\alpha = .87$ ) as well as for females ( $\alpha = .90$ )

*Positive Behaviors Toward the Other Partner:* refers to positive acts toward the other spouse regarding intimacy, interaction, instrumental behavior, and companionship (Johnson & O’Leary, 1996). In the present study positive behaviors toward the other partner were assessed through the positive behavior subscale of the *Daily Checklist of Marital Activities* (DCMA) developed by Broderick and O’Leary (1986). In this self-report questionnaire each participant is asked to indicate which of 54 positive behaviors his or her partner exhibited during the past week (*Happened = 1; Did Not Happen = 0*) and to rate each behavior that occurred in terms of how pleasant or unpleasant it was for him or her (*Extremely Pleasant = 1, Very Pleasant = 2, Rather Pleasant = 3, Slightly Pleasant = 4, Neutral = 5, Slightly Unpleasant = 6, Rather Unpleasant = 7, Very Unpleasant = 8, Extremely Unpleasant = 9*). The items ask about expressions of affection (e.g., “Partner cuddled close to me in bed”), instrumental behaviors (e.g., “Partner cleaned up after making a mess”), positive interactions (e.g., “Partner expressed understanding or support of my feelings or mood”), and attempts to spend time together with the partner or plan recreational activities (e.g., “Partner made arrangements for us to go out together or have

company”). Only 42 items were used in the current study, because there are 12 items that do not differentiate who initiated the positive behaviors (e.g., “We cooked or worked together on a project, hobby, etc”), information that is important for the purposes of the present investigation. Each partner’s level of positive behaviors toward the other was calculated by adding the response values of whether the behavior happened or did not. Higher total scores represent more positive couple relationship behaviors displayed by the partner. Unlike other studies in which the total score was computed by adding the partner’s pleasing ratings across checked items (e.g., Broderick & O’Leary, 1986; Johnson & O’Leary, 1996), the present investigator preferred not to use such a strategy in order to avoid confounding the relation between partners’ positive behaviors and their personal relationship satisfaction. An individual’s satisfaction with the relationship with the other partner might influence the rating of his or her pleasing marital behaviors. In addition, this study focused on the occurrence of positive marital behaviors rather than on how much pleasure those behaviors caused to the partner.

As noted in the previous section, the DCMA is a shorter version of the widely used Spouse Observation Checklist developed by Weiss, Hops, and Patterson (1973) and has been used in several previous studies (Broderick & O’Leary, 1986, Fincham & Linfield, 1997; Johnson & O’Leary, 1996), all of which found that this shorter measure also had good psychometric properties. However, specific indices of reliability and validity have not been reported for this shorter version of the DCMA. In the present study the internal consistency of the instrument was strong for females ( $\alpha = .84$ ) as well as for males ( $\alpha = .88$ )

*Relationship Satisfaction*: refers to the person's level of satisfaction with the couple's relationship. In this study relationship satisfaction was measured with the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976). This is a self-report questionnaire that consists of four subscales: Dyadic Consensus, Dyadic Satisfaction, Dyadic Cohesion, and Affectional Expression. In this study only the Dyadic Satisfaction scale was used to measure relationship satisfaction. The Dyadic Satisfaction scale consists of ten items. The first seven items ask the respondent to rate the frequency (*All the Time* = 0, *Most of the Time* = 1, *More Often Than Not* = 2, *Occasionally* = 3, *Rarely* = 4, *Never* = 5) with which they have thought about divorcing the partner, left the house after a fight, thought that things in the couples were going well, confided in the partner, regretted that they married, quarreled with partner, and got on each other's nerves. The eighth item asks about how often the respondent kisses the partner, on a five-point scale that ranges from *Every day* (=0) to *Never* (=5). The ninth item asks how happy the respondent is in the relationship, on a seven-point scale that ranges from *Extremely Unhappy* (0) to *Perfect* (6). The last item of this subscale asks the respondent about the future of the relationship, with response options ranging from "I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and would go to almost any length to see that it does" (5) to "My relationship can never succeed, and there is no more that I can do to keep the relationship going" (0). After reversing the scores for the third and fourth items, the total score for the Dyadic Satisfaction scale was calculated by adding the value responses to the ten items. Higher scores represent higher levels of relationship satisfaction.



Although several studies have used the total score of the DAS as an indicator of relationship satisfaction (for a review see Fincham & Bradbury, 1987), some complaints have been raised against this practice. Kurdek (1992) has argued that except for the Dyadic Satisfaction subscale, the other three scales of the “DAS confound the assessment of relationship satisfaction with the determinants of relationship satisfaction” (p. 34). Kurdek (1992) himself tested this hypothesis with two types of samples, one of heterosexual and another of homosexual couples, and found support for his contention. Moreover, he concluded that the DAS was not multidimensional and added that “the Satisfaction score alone is the most psychometrically solid of all DAS scores and could be used alone with little loss of information” (p. 34). Based on Kurdek’s findings, some other investigators have used only the Dyadic Satisfaction subscale as an indicator of total relationship satisfaction (Brennan, Hammen, Katz, & Le Brocque, 2002; Hammen & Brennan, 2002). The internal consistency of this scale in the present study was strong for females ( $\alpha = .78$ ) as well as for males ( $\alpha = .83$ )

*Perceived Support from Friends:* refers to “the extent to which an individual believes that his/her needs for support, information, and feedback are fulfilled” by friends (Procidano & Heller, 1983, p. 2). In the present study, perceived support from friends was measured through the Perceived Social Support [PSS] Scale (Procidano & Heller, 1983). This is a self-report questionnaire that includes two subscales: (a) friends and (b) family. This study used only the friends subscale, which consists of twenty items. Each item asks the respondent to rate the extent to which the statement describes his relations with his or her friends on a five-point scale that ranges from

*Yes* (1) to *No* (5). Items ask about emotional support (e.g., “My friends give me the moral support I need”), instrumental support (e.g., “My friends are good at helping me solve problems”), openness in communication (e.g., “My friends and I are very open about what we think about things”), and companionship (e.g., “My friends seek me out for companionship”). It is important to note that some of the items of this scale also measure the support that the respondent provides to his or her friends (e.g., “My friends get good ideas about how to do things or make things from me”). As the scale was originally designed to measure a person’s perceived support from friends, the assumption is that relationships with friends involve mutual support. However, this measure has been typically and widely used to assess a person’s perceived support rather than to measure mutual support (e.g., Boies, Cooper, Osborne, 2004; Gloria & Ho, 2003; Procidano & Heller, 1983; Rodriguez et al., 2003; Solomon, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2004).

The total score for this scale was calculated by adding the response values for every item, after reversing the scores for items 7, 18, and 20. Higher scores represent higher levels of perceived support from friends. This questionnaire, which has been used in other research studies of family functioning, has been reported to have good validity and reliability but no specific indices have been provided (Procidano & Heller, 1983). Consistent with these reports, the internal consistency of the PSS scale in this study was strong for females ( $\alpha = .82$ ) as well as for males ( $\alpha = .87$ ).

All of the above five measures had been translated into Spanish by a native speaker and revised by a professional translator. To insure the accuracy of the

translation, all measures were back-translated into English, and this version and the original one were compared, with modifications in wording made if necessary.

### *Control Variables*

There were four variables that were controlled for in this study: each partner's education level, the number of years that the couple has lived together, whether there are children living in the household or not, and relationship status (married or unmarried). These variables were controlled for because there is empirical evidence that each of them is correlated with some of the main variables included in the present study. Education has been found to be negatively correlated with negative behaviors such as hostility (Cutrona et al., 2003). Regarding length of the relationship, after reviewing over 100 longitudinal studies on marriage, Karney and Bradbury (1995) have recommended controlling for this variable as it confounds results on couple functioning. The presence of children has also been reported to affect the quality of the couple's relationship (e.g., Belsky, 1990; Waite & Lillard, 1991). In connection with relationship status, cohabiting unmarried couples have been found to have lower incomes and poorer employment situations (Jamieson, Anderson, McCrone, Bechhofer, Stewart, & Li, 2002; Manning & Lichter, 1996), to be less happy (Nock, 1995), and to show higher rates of inter-partner aggression (Stets, 1991a) when compared to cohabiting married couples.

Information about each partner's level of education, the length of their relationship, presence of children in the household, and relationship status was

obtained through a general demographic information form that clients completed at the Centro Privado de Psicoterapias. This demographic form (see copy in Appendix C) also asks for information about type of therapy treatment being sought, marital status, current employment status, occupation, annual income, religion, and substance abuse

#### Procedure

Individuals, couples, and families who presented themselves for therapy at Centro Privado de Psicoterapias in Buenos Aires, Argentina were introduced to the clinic's assessment procedures at the end of their first therapy session. If both members of the couple were present, the therapist explained to them that as part of the assessment procedure each of them would have to complete 13 different questionnaires. The therapist explained to them that the completion of the forms was totally voluntary but he or she clarified that it would enhance the assessment as well as the treatment process and that the information they provided might be eventually used for research purposes. The therapist handed a letter to each partner with this explanation (see copy in Appendix A). Afterward, the therapist gave each partner a packet with all the questionnaires and the instructions about how to fill them out. He or she emphasized that partners must complete these instruments separately and without consulting each other. In addition to providing brief explanations about each questionnaire, the therapist discussed with the clients issues about confidentiality and reminded clients of his or her availability in the case that either member of the couple might become upset as a result of completing these forms. Clients were instructed to turn in their packets by the following therapy session. If only one member of the

couple attended the session, the therapist explained the same procedure to the person and asked the person to give the packet with the questionnaires to the other partner.

In order to keep the clients' identities confidential, none of the forms contained the clients' names. Instead, forms were identified through the clients' case number and an F or an M was marked depending on whether they had been completed by the female or the male partner.

## Chapter III

### Results

#### Data Entry

The data collected through these assessment questionnaires were routinely entered into a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) data file by undergraduate students who were completing an externship through the Universidad de Belgrano at the Centro Privado de Psicoterapias. They entered information about each member of the couple under the same case number but as different variables so that the information could eventually be analyzed as couple data.

#### Statistical Analyses

##### *Mean Comparisons*

First, *t*-tests for paired samples were conducted to assess differences between males' and females' means for each of the path model variables.

##### *Control Variables*

Before proceeding to the multivariate analysis, the influence of level of education, length of the relationship, presence of children, and relationship status were partialled out from the data. Each of the path model variables (Economic Strain, Psychologically Aggressive Behaviors Toward the Partner, Positive Behaviors Toward the Partner, Perceived Social Support from Friends, and Relationship Satisfaction) was regressed on each of these four control variables, and unstandardized residuals were obtained. In the case of level of education, females' path variables were regressed on the females' level of education but not on the males' and the males' path variables were regressed on the males' level of education but not

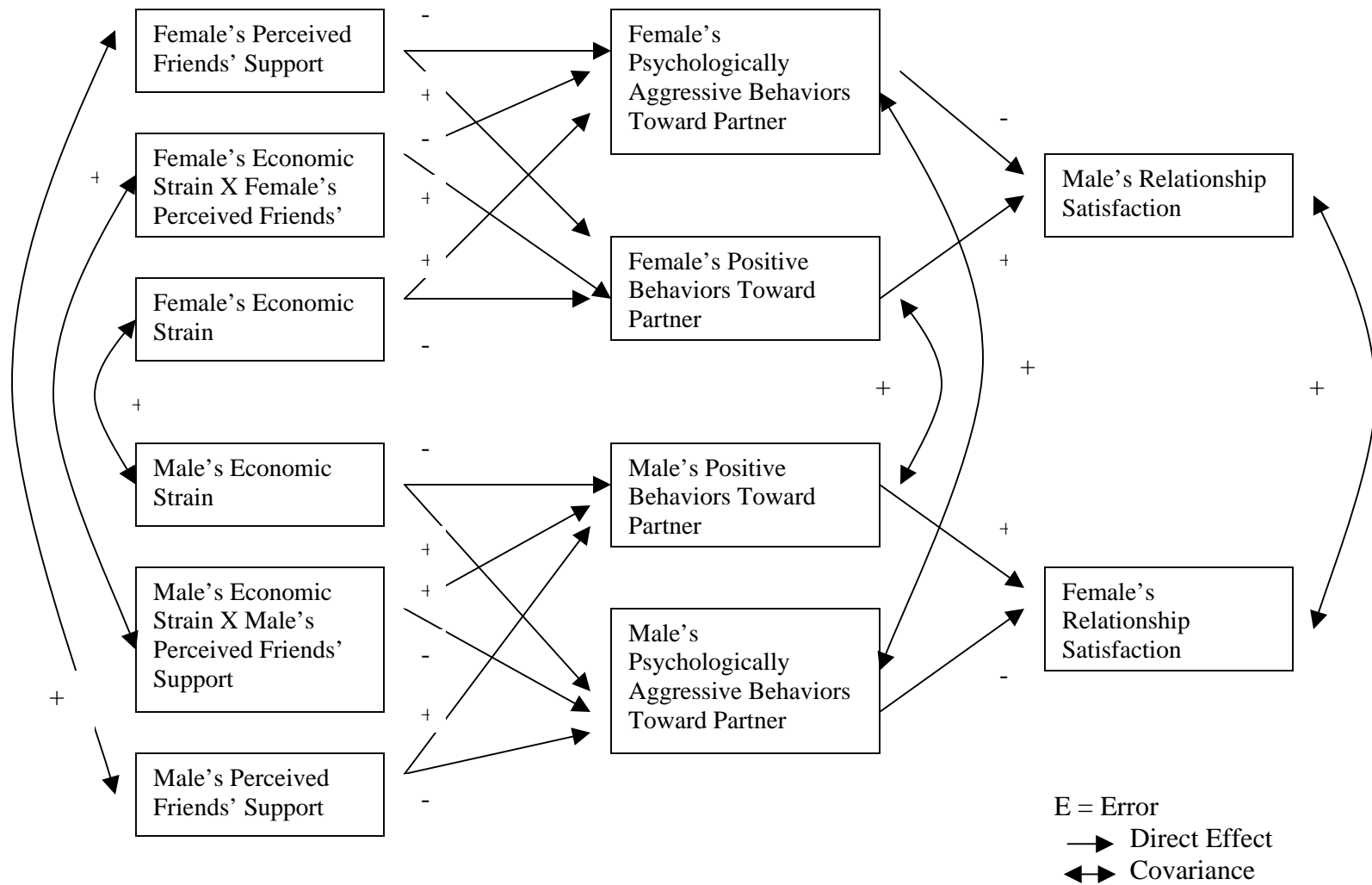
on the females'. These unstandardized residuals became the data for the observed variables in the path model analysis. By partialing out the effects of level of education, length of the relationship, presence of children, and relationship status from the data, the findings from the multivariate analysis would not be biased because of the linear effects of any of these variables. This strategy of initially partialing out the effects of control variables has already been used in other studies (e.g., Newcomb & Bentler, 1988) and is particularly useful for limited sample sizes. Otherwise, these control variables would have to be included in the model tested, which would exponentially increase the number of paths and make it impossible to test the model with the present sample size.

#### *Multivariate Analysis*

Modern path analysis was conducted using the EQS program (Version 6.1). Given that skewness and kurtosis of the data were minimal as shown in the section on results, the maximum likelihood estimation method was used to test the fit of the conceptual model (Figure 7) with the data. As suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999), the fit of the model was assessed using three criteria: the Standardized Root Mean-Square Residual (SRMR), Bentler's Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). Exploratory analyses were conducted using the Lagrange Multiplier to assess which paths could be added to improve the model fit.

Figure 7

Path Analysis Model





The model indicates that the female's economic strain influences her level of psychologically aggressive behaviors and positive behaviors toward her male partner, both of which in turn directly influence her male partner's relationship satisfaction. Likewise, the male's economic strain has a direct influence on his level of psychologically aggressive behaviors and his positive behaviors toward his partner, both of which have a direct effect on his female partner's relationship satisfaction. Therefore, the link between the female's economic strain and her male partner's relationship satisfaction is indirect, as is the relation between the male's economic strain and his female partner's relationship satisfaction.

In addition, this model presents correlations between (a) the male's economic strain and the female's economic strain, (b) the error terms of the female's psychologically aggressive behaviors and the male's psychologically aggressive behaviors, and (c) the female's positive behaviors and the male's positive behaviors. The model also includes main direct effects from each person's perceived friends' support on his or her psychologically aggressive behaviors and on his or her positive behaviors toward the other partner. In addition, two interaction terms have been included: (a) female's economic strain by female's perceived support from friends and (b) male's economic strain by male's perceived support from friends. These interaction terms are used to analyze, for both males and females, the moderating effect that perceived support from friends may have on the relation between each partner's economic strain and their own psychologically aggressive behaviors and positive behaviors toward their partner. The model also includes a correlation between each of these interaction variables.

## Missing Data

As Table 4 shows, missing data on each of the demographic variables never exceeded 6.25%. The corresponding variable mean was substituted for instances of missing data before each of the 12 variables of the model was regressed on each of the five control variables (men's and women's level of education, length of time living together, presence of children, relationship status). However, in the case of length of time living together, presence of children, and relationship status, which are control variables about which each partner had to report, if one member of the couple failed to provide the information, the data presented by the other partner were considered. Regarding the length of time living together, some discrepancies were found between the two partners' reports, in which case values from both reports were averaged. No discrepancies between partners' reports were found concerning presence of children in the household and relationship status.

Table 4

Missing Data on Demographic Variables

Demographic Variable	<i>n</i>	Percentage (%)
Women's Age	5	3.47
Men's Age	2	1.39
Women's Occupational Status	7	4.86
Men's Occupation Status	9	6.25
Women's Level of Education	4	2.78
Men's Level of Education	4	2.78
Women's Annual Income	7	4.86
Men's Annual Income	4	2.78
Women's Religion	2	1.39
Men's Religion	1	.69
Relationship Status	0 <sup>5</sup>	0
Length of Time Living Together	3 <sup>6</sup>	2.08
Presence of Children in the Household	5 <sup>7</sup>	3.47

N=144 couples

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<sup>5</sup> Number of cases for which neither member of the couple provided information.

<sup>6</sup> Number of cases for which neither member of the couple provided information.

<sup>7</sup> Number of cases for which neither member of the couple provided information.

With the exception of the MEAS, when a subject had missing items on a particular scale, the mean score of all the other items that the subject had completed on that particular scale was substituted for each missing item, as long as the subject did not exceed 25% of missing items on that particular scale. However, when a subject had more than 25% of the items missing for a particular scale, no substitution was made for each item missing and the subject was considered to have a missing total score for that scale. In those cases of missing total values for the scales, participants were assigned the mean total score for that particular scale. In the case of the MEAS, in which both members of the couple had to report about their own behavior and their partner's behavior, when one of the partners failed to provide the information, data from the other partner were considered for that particular item. However, if neither partner provided information on an item, the general substitution procedure described for the other scales was applied. As Table 5 indicates, the number of missing items never exceeded 3.51% of the data on each scale, and the number of missing total scores never exceeded 4.2% of the number of possible total scores on a particular variable.

Table 5

Missing Data: Missing Items and Missing Total Scores for Females and Males

Scale	Females ( <i>n</i> =144)				Males ( <i>n</i> =144)			
	Missing Items		Missing Total Scores		Missing Items		Missing Total Scores	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
DAS	16	1.11	2	1.4	15	1.04	0	0
DCMA	85	1.41	2	1.4	54	0.89	1	0.7
FESS	47	2.72	6	4.2	34	1.97	3	2.1
MEAS	23	.76	4	2.8	24	.73	4	2.8
PSS	87	3.02	3	2.1	101	3.51	4	2.8
Total	258	1.80	17	2.36	228	1.63	12	1.67

Note. DAS = Dyadic Adjustment Scale; DCMA = Daily Checklist of Marital

Activities; FESS = Family Economic Strain Scale; MEAS = Multidimensional

Emotional Abuse Scale; PSS = Perceived Social Support.

#### Results of Analyses

##### *Path Model Variable Characteristics*

*Economic Strain.* Females tended to report slightly higher levels of economic strain than males did, and this difference was found to be significant at the .05 level (Table 7). The skewness of the distributions, means, standard deviations, and range of scores all indicated that both men and women tended to report low rather than high levels of economic strain (Table 6).

*Psychologically Aggressive Behaviors Toward the Partner.* Males were reported to display higher levels of psychological aggression towards their partner than females were, and this difference was found to be significant at the .001 level (Table 6). As with economic strain, the skewness of the distributions, means, standard deviations, and range of scores all indicated that both males and females tended to report relatively low levels of psychological aggression enacted by themselves and by their partners. None of the males' and females' scores on psychological aggression toward their partner exceeded 96 on the scale where the maximum score could be 147, and the mean was 22.05 for females and 27.44 for males.

*Positive Behaviors Toward the Other Partner:* The *t*-test indicated no significant difference between females' and males' positive behaviors toward their partner (Table 7). The skewness of the distributions, means, standard deviations, and range of scores all indicate that both males and females were slightly more inclined to report high rather than low levels of positive behaviors from their partners toward them (Table 6).

*Perceived Social Support from Friends.* Compared to males, females tended to report slightly lower levels of perceived social support from friends, and this difference was found to be significant at the .001 level (Table 7). Nevertheless, the skewness of the distributions, means, standard deviations, and ranges of scores for men and women indicate that neither females' nor males' scores tended to be concentrated in the lower or higher levels of the possible score range (Table 6).

*Relationship Satisfaction.* In this sample females tended to report slightly lower levels of relationship satisfaction than males did, and this difference was found

to be significant at the .013 level (Table 7). In addition, the skewness of the distributions, means, standard deviations, and ranges of scores for men and women indicate that both males and females tended to report high levels rather than low levels of relationship satisfaction.

Table 6

Path Model Variable Characteristics for Females and Males

Variable		Mean	SD	Range	Scale Range	Skew	Kurtosis
Economic Strain	Females	28.75	7.74	15-56	0-60	.827	1.25
	Males	27.44	7.70	12-49	0-60	.520	-.30
Psychological Aggression Toward Partner	Females	22.05	16.75	0-84	0-147	.910	.44
	Males	24.51	19.12	0-96	0-147	1.02	.64
Positive Behaviors Toward Partner	Females	24.94	6.96	7-42	0-42	.07	-.24
	Males	26.15	7.44	10-42	0-42	-.09	-.56
Perceived Social Support from Friends	Females	46.65	12.01	20-81	0-100	.60	.34
	Males	55.16	15.35	21-98	0-100	.60	.46
Relationship Satisfaction	Females	35.96	5.95	20-48	0-51	-.54	-.07
	Males	37.02	6.08	14-48	0-51	-.85	1.02

*n* = 144 females and 144 males

Table 7

## Gender Differences on Path Model Variables

Variable	Mean Difference	SD	<i>T</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. Level (2-tailed)	Effect Size (Cohen's <i>d</i> )
Economic Strain	1.35	7.48	2.10	135	.038	.17
Psychological Aggression Toward the Partner	-2.46	8.50	-3.43	139	.001	-.14
Positive Behaviors Toward the Partner	-1.14	7.42	-1.83	140	.070	-.17
Perceived Social Support from Friends	-8.57	17.79	-5.7	139	.000	-.62
Relationship Satisfaction	-1.03	4.87	-2.51	141	.013	-.18

*Partialing Out the Effects of Control Variables*

As Table 8 indicates there were some significant correlation coefficients between control variables and path model variables, which confirmed the need to remove the effect of these control variables from the path model variables before proceeding to the multivariate analysis. Changes in the correlations among path model variables can clearly be observed when comparing correlation coefficients before and after partialing out the effect of control variables from the path model variables (Tables 9 and 10).



Table 8

## Correlations Among Control Variables and Path Model Variables

Variables	Female's Education	Male's Education	Time Living Together	Relationship Status	Children in the Household
Female's Economic Strain	-.17	-.15	-.04	-.05	.13
Female's Economic Strain	-.10	-.09	.12	.03	.20*
Female's Psychological Aggression Toward Partner	.28**	.32**	-.21*	-1.0	-.08
Male's Psychologically Aggression Toward Partner	-.28**	.23**	-.15	-.06	-.08
Female's Positive Behaviors Toward Partner	-.20*	-.21*	-.04	-.18*	-.08
Male's Positive Behaviors Toward Partner	-.05	-.19*	.00	-.16	.09
Female's Perceived Social Support from Friends	-.06	-.04	-.01	-.11	.03
Male's Perceived Social Support from Friends	.00	.11	.11	.05	.11
Female's Relationship Satisfaction	-.19*	-.18*	.12	.00	.05
Male's Relationship Satisfaction	-.09	-.18*	.10	.08	.04

\* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

\*\* Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 9

## Correlations Among Path Model Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Female's Economic Strain	-									
2. Female's Economic Strain	.54**	-								
3. Female's Psychological Aggression Toward Partner	.19*	.18*	-							
4. Male's Psychological Aggression Toward Partner	.17	.23**	.90**	-						
5. Female's Positive Behaviors Toward Partner	.04	-.11	-.18*	-.16	-					
6. Male's Positive Behaviors Toward Partner	.03	.14	-.11	-.05	.47**	-				
7. Female's Social Support from Friends	.16	.09	-.06	-.06	-.06	.20*	-			
8. Male's Social Support from Friends	.20*	.15	.23**	.25**	-.13	-.16	.17*	-		
9. Female's Relationship Satisfaction	-.22*	-.23**	-.69**	-.69**	.30**	.24**	.01	-.34**	-	
10. Male's Relationship Satisfaction	-.23**	-.23**	-.60**	-.62**	.21*	.16	.09	-.25**	.67**	-

\* Correlation significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

\*\* Correlation significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 10

## Partial Correlations Among Path Model Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Female's Economic Strain	-									
2. Male's Economic Strain	.53**	-								
3. Female's Psychological Aggression Toward Partner	.24**	.25**	-							
4. Male's Psychological Aggression Toward Partner	.22**	.29**	.84**	-						
5. Female's Positive Behaviors Toward Partner	.01	-.13	-.16	-.10	-					
6. Male's Positive Behaviors Toward Partner	-.02	.11	-.08	-.01	.44**	-				
7. Female's Social Support from Friends	.10	.08	-.06	-.05	-.08	.17*	-			
8. Male's Social Support from Friends	.21*	.13	.24**	-.24**	-.11	-.10	.18*	-		
9. Female's Relationship Satisfaction	-.25**	-.28**	-.69**	-.63**	.28**	.22**	-.01	-.35**	-	
10. Male's Relationship Satisfaction	-.26**	-.27**	-.56**	-.59**	.19*	.15	.10	-.30**	.66**	-

\* Correlation significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

\*\* Correlation significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

### *Multivariate Analysis*

Modern path analysis was conducted using the EQS (Version 6.1) maximum likelihood estimation method to test the fit of the conceptual model (Figure 6) with the data. The chi-square for this initial model (Model 1) was 119.75 with 44 degrees of freedom. However, as Table 11 indicates the CFI, SRMR, and RMSEA, which are the fit indices suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999), show a poor fit of the model with the data. The Lagrange Multiplier (LM) Test suggested which paths could be added to improve the fit of the model with the data. As recommended by Byrne (1994), the statistical information provided by the LM Test was closely examined, considering the theoretical grounds for adding particular paths. No more than one statistically significant path was added at a time when the model was re-specified. After eight different paths that made theoretical sense had been added, the model fit the data according to the criteria suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999). In other words, as Table 10 indicates, for this second model (Model 2) the CFI was higher than .96, the SRMR was lower than .10, and the RMSEA was lower than .06. After the addition of these eight different paths, only one more path could be added that would improve the fit of the model with the data. The fit indices for this third model (Model 3) are also presented in Table 11.

Table 11

Summary of the Fit Statistics for Each Model

Fit Indices		Model 1 (Original model)	Model 2 (8 paths added)	Model 3 (9 paths added)
Chi-Square	$\chi^2=$	119.751	52.161	47.535
	$df=$	44	36	35
	$p=$	< .001	.040	.077
CFI		.849	.968	.975
SRMR		.132	.087	.083
RMSEA		.110	.056	.050
90% Confidence Interval		(.086, .133)	(.013, .087)	(.000, .083)

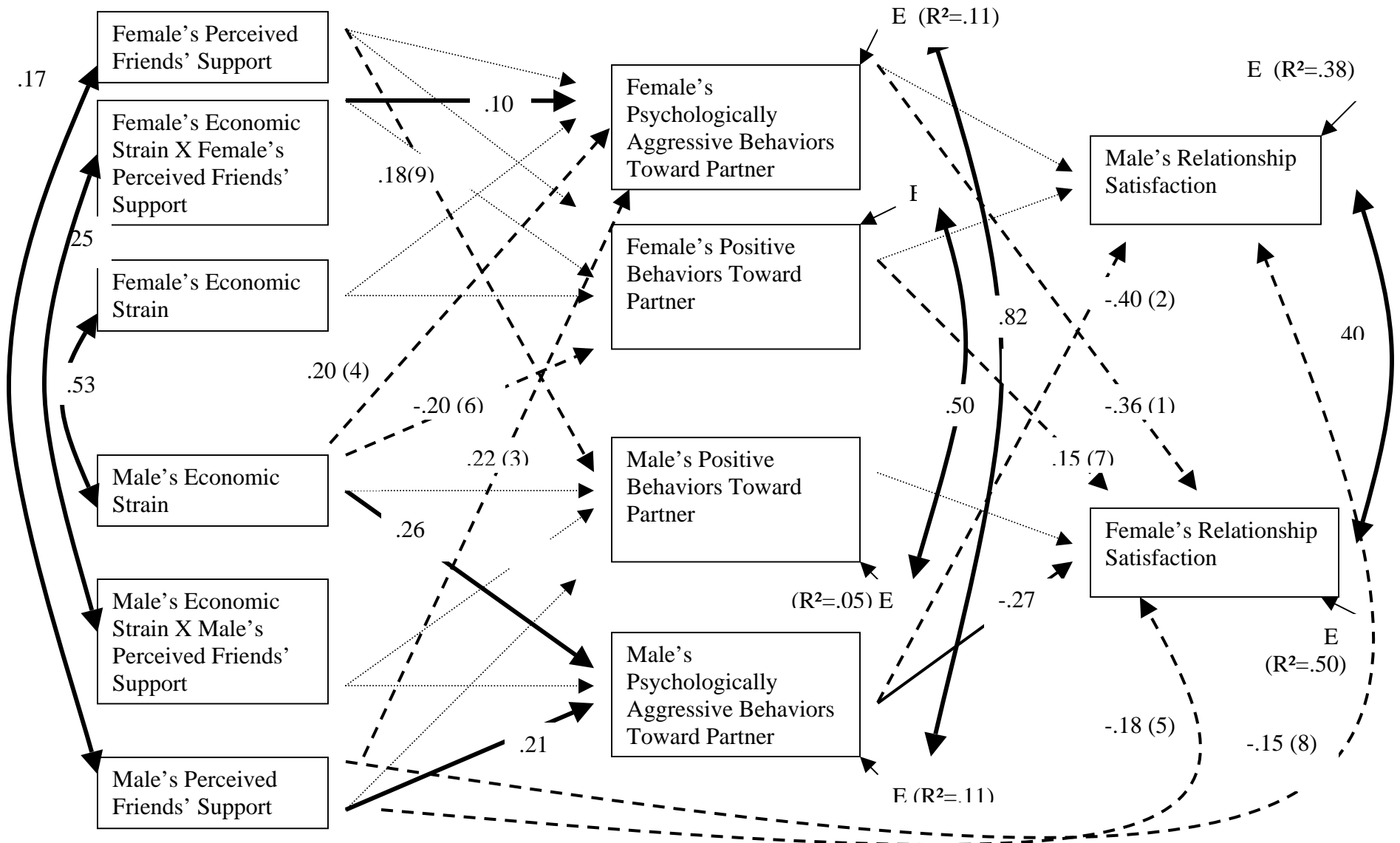
The difference between the chi-square values of Model 2 and Model 3 was computed to assess whether Model 3 was significantly better than Model 2. This difference was 4.626 with 1  $df$  ( $p < .05$ ), indicating that Model 3 was significantly better than Model 2.

Figure 8 shows Model 3, which is the final model in this study. Small dotted lines indicate the paths from the original Model 1 that did not reach statistical significance. The broken lines indicate which paths have been added to the original model (Model 1), and the number between parentheses reflects the order in which the paths were added. Standardized path coefficients and correlation coefficients are presented whenever statistical significance was reached at least at the .05 level, and

$R^2$  values have been added next to the error terms of endogenous variables (variables that are caused by one or more variables in the model).

Figure 8

Path Analysis Model: Standardized Results



Only partial empirical support was found for Hypothesis 1 that predicted that each partner's level of economic strain would have a positive and direct influence on his or her psychologically aggressive behaviors toward the other partner. A significant, moderate, positive path coefficient was only found for males from their economic strain level to their psychologically aggressive behaviors toward their female partners (.26). No direct main influence was found for females' economic strain on their psychologically aggressive behaviors toward their male partners. However, the LM Test indicated that a path from the male's economic strain to the female's psychological aggression could be added to improve the fit of the model. This path was added because it made conceptual sense, as discussed in the next chapter, to think that the male's economic strain could increase the female's psychological aggression toward the male. In fact, Figure 8 shows that in the final model the male partner's economic strain has a positive main influence (.20) on the female's psychological aggression toward the male.

Hypothesis 3 also only received partial empirical support, as a significant direct negative influence was only found from the male's psychological aggression toward his partner on the female partner's relationship satisfaction, but no significant direct path was found from the female's psychologically aggressive behaviors toward her partner on her male partner's relationship satisfaction. In addition, the LM Test suggested adding a path from each partner's psychological aggression toward the other partner to their *own* relationship satisfaction. As it made conceptual sense to think that each partner's psychological aggression toward the other could decrease



their own relationship satisfaction, both paths were added. Results in Figure 8 indicate a moderate, direct, negative path between each partner's psychological aggression toward the partner and their own relationship satisfaction. The conceptual reasons for adding these paths will be further discussed in the next chapter.

No empirical evidence was found for Hypotheses 2 and 4, for either males or females. In other words, no direct negative influence was found for each partner's economic strain on his or her own positive behaviors toward the other partner, and no positive direct influence was found for each partner's positive behaviors toward the other partner on the other partner's relationship satisfaction. However, the LM Test suggested that the path from the male's economic strain to the female's positive behaviors toward her partner could improve the fit of the model. As it made conceptual sense to think that the male's economic strain could decrease the female's positive acts toward him, this path was added. In fact, the final model in Figure 8 indicates a significant, direct, negative influence from the male's economic strain on her female partner's positive behaviors toward him. However, the conceptual reasons for adding this path will be further discuss in the next chapter.

Additionally, the LM Test also suggested the addition of a path from the female's positive behaviors to her own relationship satisfaction. Based on conceptual consistencies that will be explained in the next chapter, this path was added and the final model showed that the female's positive behaviors toward her partner did have a small positive direct influence (.15) on her own relationship satisfaction.

When all these results are taken together, they indicate that the female's psychological aggression and positive behaviors toward her partner and the male's

psychologically aggressive behaviors toward his partner mediate the relation between the male's economic strain and the female's relationship satisfaction in the final model but that it is only the male's psychologically aggressive behaviors that mediate the relation between the male's economic strain and his relationship satisfaction. As hypothesized, the LM Test did not indicate that the addition of a direct path from females' economic strain to their partner's relationship satisfaction or from males' economic strain to their partner's relationship satisfaction would improve the fit of the model with the data.

Contrary to Hypothesis 5, a direct, negative influence was found for the male's perceived support from his friends on his psychologically aggressive behaviors toward his female partner, and no direct influence was found from the female's perceived friends' support on her own psychological aggression toward her partner. Contrary to Hypothesis 6, no direct paths were found from each partner's perceived support from friends on their own positive behaviors toward the other partner. However, in relation to the perceived support from friends, the LM Test suggested that the addition of four paths would increase the fit of the model with the data: (a) from the female's perceived support from friends to the male's positive behaviors toward the partner, and from the male's perceived support from friends to (b) his own psychological aggressive behaviors, and to (c) the female's psychological aggressive behaviors. All of these paths were incorporated, because it made theoretical sense to hypothesize relations about each of them as it will be further discussed in the next chapter. In fact, in the final model results indicated that the female's perceived support from friends had a significant, small, direct, positive

influence (.18) on her partner's positive behaviors toward her and that the male's perceived friends' support had a significant, direct, positive influence on his female partner's (.22) as well as his own (.21) psychological aggression and a significant negative influence on his own relationship satisfaction (-.15) as well as on his female partner's relationship satisfaction (-.18).

Hypothesis 8 did not receive empirical support. For males no significant direct paths were found from the interaction between male's level of economic strain and his perceived support from friends on his level of psychological aggression toward her female partner. Regarding females, instead of a negative effect, a small positive interaction effect (.10) was found between her level of economic strain and her perceived support from friends on her psychologically aggressive behaviors toward her male partner, as indicated by the significant but small direct path coefficient in Figure 8.

Contrary to Hypothesis 9, no significant direct paths were found from the interaction between each partner's level of economic strain and his or her perceived support from friends on his or her positive behaviors toward the other partner.

Consistent with Hypothesis 10, a significant strong positive correlation was found between the two partners' levels of economic strain. Also consistent with Hypothesis 11, each partner's level of psychologically aggressive behaviors was found to be significantly, strongly, and positively correlated with each other above and beyond the influences of each partner's economic strain, perceived support, and the interaction between economic strain and perceived support. Consistent with Hypothesis 12, the two partners' levels of positive behavior toward the other person

were found to be significantly strongly and positively correlated with each other, above and beyond the influences of each partner's economic strain, perceived support, and interaction between economic strain and perceived support.

Consistent with Hypothesis 13, a significant, strong, positive correlation was found between the two partners' levels of relationship satisfaction, above and beyond the influences of each partner's psychologically aggressive positive behaviors, perceived support from friends, economic strain, and interactions between economic strain and perceived support from friends. Also consistent with Hypothesis 7 and Hypothesis 14, respectively, a significant, small, direct positive correlation was found (a) between partners' perceived support from friends and (b) between the interaction between each partner's economic strain and their own perceived support from friends.

Regarding Hypothesis 15, a significant direct positive influence was found for males but not for females from economic strain on psychological aggression toward the other partner. No empirical support was found for Hypothesis 16, which predicted a larger negative effect of a partner's economic strain on his or her own positive behaviors for males when compared to females, as no such significant, negative, direct influences were found for either partner.

Regarding the extent to which the final model explained variation in the endogenous variables, it seems that the relationships established in the model were able to explain a substantial part of the variation in each partner's relationship satisfaction ( $R^2$  for females = .50;  $R^2$  for males = .38) but little of the variation in each partner's psychologically aggressive behaviors ( $R^2$  for females = .11;  $R^2$  for males =

.11), extremely little of the variation in the male's positive behaviors ( $R^2 = .05$ ) and none of the variation in the female's positive behaviors toward the other partner.

Regarding indirect effects, as seen in Table 12, female's economic strain, female's perceived support from friends, and the interactions between each partner's economic strain and perceived support from friends had an almost null indirect effect on either the female's or the male's relationship satisfaction. However, male's economic strain and male's perceived support from friends had small negative indirect effects on both the female's and the male's relationship satisfaction (Table 12)

Table 12

Indirect Effects for the Female's and the Male's Relationship Satisfaction

Variable	Indirect Effects on Relationship Satisfaction	
	Female	Male
Female's Economic Strain	.008	.010
Male's Economic strain	-.165	-.160
Female's Perceived Support from Friends	.014	-.004
Male's Perceived Support from Friends	-.147	-.122
Female's Economic Strain X Female's Perceived Support from Friends	-.026	-.008
Male's Economic Strain X Male's Perceived Support from Friends	.002	-.009

## CHAPTER IV

### Discussion

#### Interpretation of Results

##### *Evidence of Economic Strain in Both Partners*

Results from the present study indicate that there is a strong positive association between partners' levels of economic strain. This result, which is consistent with findings from previous studies (Kwon et al., 2003; Matthews et al., 1996), can be interpreted in at least three different ways. The association could result from (a) a direct transmission of stress from one partner to the other (Riley & Eckenrode, 1986; Westman & Vinokur, 1998), (b) both partners experiencing a common stressor (Westman & Vinokur, 1998), or (c) both partners experiencing a common stressor *and* a direct transmission of stress from one partner to the other.

Regarding the common stressor, it could be argued that regardless of whether the economic problems are associated with only one partner's source of income, economic difficulties are going to have consequences for both partners. However, given the particular economic crisis of Argentina, the common stressor could also be the loss of savings resulting from the various economic measures that the government took (e.g., frozen bank deposits, devaluing the currency and forcing savings to be converted to the Argentine peso). Further studies should examine all of these possible interpretations to understand why partners' levels of economic strain are strongly correlated with one another in the Argentinean case.

It is worth noting that despite having to face one of the worst economic crises in Argentine history and living in a country that has not yet recovered financially

(INDEC, 2004), this clinical sample of couples did not tend to report high levels of economic strain. This result could reflect limitations of the particular instrument used to measure economic strain, individuals' unwillingness to reveal how concerned and stressed they are over financial issues, or the fact that Argentina has always been a country subject to financial uncertainty and turmoil (U.S. Congress, 2003) and its inhabitants have simply become accustomed to living in such an environment and are relatively habituated and less stressed over economic problems.

In addition, women in this sample seemed to experience slightly higher levels of economic strain in comparison to their male partners. Although this gender difference is small it seems to be consistent with a previous study that found that women viewed their husbands' job instability as even more threatening than their own (Fox & Chancey, 1998). These findings clearly indicate that when a couple face economic problems, both members are likely to experience economic strain, and therefore both partners' levels of economic strain should be considered when assessing the impact of economic strain on relationship satisfaction.

#### *The Indirect Link Between Economic Strain and Relationship Satisfaction*

Consistent with the strong body of empirical literature on the economic strain-relationship satisfaction association (Conger et al., 1990; Kinnunen & Pulkkinen, 1998; Perrucci & Targ, 1998) and with Conger and his colleagues' family stress model (Conger et al., 1994), this study found an indirect relationship between economic strain and relationship satisfaction that was mediated by changes in the couple's interactions. However, the results indicate different gender patterns in terms of how economic strain affects each member of the couple.

It was hypothesized in the present study and has been found in several previous studies that negative marital interactions (e.g., hostility) mediate the relation between economic stress and relationship satisfaction (Conger et al., 1990; Conger et al., 1994; Conger et al., 1999, Elder et al., 1992; Liker & Elder, 1983). Consistent with the hypothesis and prior findings, results from the present study suggest that the male's economic strain increases his psychologically aggressive behaviors toward his female partner, and that this increase in his psychological aggression in turn decreases his female partner's relationship satisfaction.

However, results from the present study did not support the hypothesis that females' economic strain would have a main effect in increasing their level of psychologically aggressive behavior toward their male partners. Neither was a direct effect found from the female's psychological aggression toward her partner on the male's relationship satisfaction. These findings seem to be consistent with other studies that also failed to find that the female's increased hostility mediated the relation between her economic stress and her partner's relationship satisfaction (Conger et al., 1990) or that found the impact of economic stress on partners' hostility was smaller for women than for men (Elder et al., 1992).

One possible reason why the female's level of economic strain did not produce any main effect on her own or her male partner's psychologically aggressive behavior might be female gender role expectations in which it is considered important for women to strive to keep the family stable and cohesive when the family is experiencing financial stresses. Nonetheless, the data from the present study do suggest that it is not the female's own level of economic strain but rather her male



partner's strain that directly increases her psychological aggression toward her partner. This path from the male's economic strain to the female's psychologically aggressive behaviors was suggested by the post hoc analyses, and the decision to introduce this path was based on conceptual grounds. Women tend to be more concerned than men are over family problems, which might make them more reactive than men are to their partners' stress regarding financial issues. In fact, several studies indicate that men tend to experience more stress concerning financial issues than over interpersonal problems and that females tend to experience more stress concerning interpersonal issues and family problems (Almeida & Kessler, 1998; Bolger et al., 1989; Conger et al., 1993; Kessler & McLeod, 1984).

In addition, women may react negatively (with more psychological aggression) if they see that their male partner is not successfully performing his breadwinning role. This might be particularly true for Argentinean couples living in a culture still embedded in values associated with *machismo* (Torrado, 2003), in which both men and women still expect men to be responsible for "bringing home the bacon" (Falicov, 1998). Consequently, it makes theoretical sense that women might be affected by respond to their partner's level of stress as the post hoc analysis suggested, whereas males are not similarly affected by their female partner's economic strain.

It must be highlighted that this effect of the male's economic strain on his female partner's negative relational behaviors did not appear in previous studies, probably because data on males' and females' economic stress levels and couple behaviors were analyzed in separate models. The innovation of combining both

partners' data on variables within the same model allows us to see that despite the fact that both members of the couple experience economic strain, it is the male's strain alone that directly makes partners behave more aggressively toward each other.

In an attempt to overcome limitations from past studies (Conger et al., 1990, Cutrona et al., 2003; Elder et al., 1992; Vinokur et al., 1996), the present study included partners' positive behaviors that were not limited to direct verbal communication between the partners and did not rely on outside observers' assessments, and discriminated between the male's and the female's level of economic strain. By including positive behaviors of each partner, the study created the possibility of finding what previous studies had failed to uncover; that is, a decrease in positive behavior toward the other partner serving to mediate the relation between economic stress and relationship satisfaction. However, neither males nor females in this sample were less affectionate and helpful or engaged in fewer positive interactions with their partner as a function of experiencing economic strain.

Although this finding was contrary to what was hypothesized in the present study, it is consistent with previous studies that failed to find a decrease in positive behaviors such as partner's warmth or supportiveness to be moderating the relation between each partner's economic stress and the other partner's relationship satisfaction (Conger et al., 1990; Cutrona et al., 2003; Elder et al., 1992). This result is also consistent with several researchers' decision to only include negative relational behaviors and to exclude positive ones as a link between economic strain and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Conger et al., 1994; Conger et al., 1999; Kinnunen & Pulkkinen, 1998; Kwon et al., 2003).

One possible interpretation for this finding is that men and women can still engage in positive marital interactions regardless of how economically strained they feel. However, this finding also may be an artifact of the relatively low levels of economic strain reported by members of couples in this study. It might be the case that the economic strain experienced by partners may have to reach a certain threshold before it actually decreases their positive behaviors toward each other. This “threshold” hypothesis needs to be explored in future studies. Nonetheless, this result may be also due to the relatively high levels of positive behaviors reported in this sample. Perhaps males and females in this sample inflated the number of positive behaviors displayed by their partners in an attempt to present a more favorable portrait of their couple’s relationship.

Contrary to the hypothesis, the male’s relationship satisfaction was not directly influenced by the female partner’s psychological aggression and positive behaviors toward him. This finding was surprising because (a) behavioral exchange theory suggests that if a partner displays more negative relational behaviors and fewer relational positive behaviors the other partner is likely to be less satisfied with their relationship (Johnson & O’Leary, 1996) and (b) there is substantial empirical evidence from previous studies that supports these associations (Broderick & O’Leary, 1986; Christensen & Niel, 1980; Johnson & O’Leary, 1996; Kasian & Painter, 1992; Langhinrichsen-Rohling & Smutzler, 1994; Lawrence & Bradbury, 1995; Margolin, 1981; Sagrestano et al., 1999; Wills et al., 1974).

However, this finding becomes intelligible when it is analyzed in the context of the gender differences and other relationships found in this study that emerged as a

result of examining both males' and females' relational behaviors within the same model. Whereas the male's relationship satisfaction was unrelated to his female partner's relational behaviors, the results suggested that the woman's relationship satisfaction depends on her partner's psychologically aggressive behaviors toward her. In addition, post hoc analyses suggested adding paths from the women's psychological aggression and positive behaviors toward their partner to their *own* relationship satisfaction and from the male's psychological aggression to his *own* relationship satisfaction. Influenced by previous research that had examined the female's and the male's relationship satisfaction in separate models, only the influences from one partner's relational behaviors to the other partner's relationship satisfaction were originally hypothesized in the present study. However, it is reasonable to think that each individual's relationship satisfaction might be influenced not only by the other's relational behavior but also by his or her own behavior. Being psychologically aggressive with one's partner might contribute to decreasing one's own satisfaction with the relationship, whereas doing positive things for the partner might have the opposite effect. This is the reason why the paths suggested through the post hoc analyses were added.

After the addition of these paths, the results from the multivariate analysis indicated that women's relationship satisfaction was directly influenced by their own psychologically aggressive behaviors, as well as by those of their partners, in a negative way, as well as by their own positive behaviors in a positive way. However, only the males' own psychologically aggressive behavior directly influenced the males' relationship satisfaction, in a negative direction. Taken together, these

findings suggest that females' relationship satisfaction is influenced more by what happens within the relationship (their positive and negative relational behaviors and their partner's negative behaviors) than men's are, for the only intra-couple factor that influences their relationship satisfaction is the male's own psychologically aggressive behavior toward the partner.

Again, these gender differences might be explained by females' more interpersonal orientation, which might make them more sensitive than men are to their own as well as their partner's behaviors within the couple relationship. Therefore, it is logical to think that females' relationship satisfaction will be influenced more by relational exchanges within the couple than are males'. In addition, this is consistent with findings that show that women become more upset than men by interpersonal issues (Almeida & Kessler, 1998; Bolger et al., 1989; Kessler & McLeod, 1984) and that their relationship satisfaction is more strongly associated with the couple's interactions (Acitelli & Antonucci, 1994; Julien & Markman, 1991) than is males'.

Nonetheless, it was interesting to find that the male's positive behaviors did not influence either the female's or the male's relationship satisfaction, when the level of the males' positive behaviors was even significantly higher than that of the females'. This finding together with the small significant path found from women's positive behaviors to their relationship satisfaction contrast sharply with the stronger influences found from psychological aggression to relationship satisfaction. However, these results are consistent with findings from several previous studies that have found that relationship satisfaction is more influenced by the negative rather than the

positive interactions within the couple (for a review see Bradbury et al., 2000 or Gottman & Notarius, 2000).

In short, by including both males' and females' variables within the same model, this study was able to uncover relationships that had not been reported in the literature before. The study was able to find empirical evidence that suggests that it is mostly the male's economic strain that affects the interactions within the couple by increasing each partner's psychological aggression toward the other and by decreasing the female's positive behaviors and that all of these changes in relational behaviors, particularly psychologically aggressive behaviors, in turn decrease the female's relational satisfaction. In other words, it is only the male's economic strain that brings changes in the relational behaviors of both partners, but it seems that it is the female's relationship satisfaction that is more affected by these changes, as the male's relationship satisfaction is only sensitive to changes in his own psychologically aggressive behavior toward his partner.

#### *Perceived Social Support from Friends*

Different gender patterns were also observed in this study regarding partners' perceived support from friends. Women in this sample perceived less support from friends than men did, and only a small positive relation was found between the two partners' perceptions of support from their friends. This finding is not consistent with studies that have reported women to have more kin and non-kin support than men (e.g., Veiel, Crisand, Stroszeck-Somschor, & Herrle, 1991). However, because the present study focused on perceived support rather than on structural support or size of the social network, it might be that even though women have more available support

than men do, they actually perceive that they can count less on that support than men do. Further, this finding could explain why there is a small positive association between males' and females' perceptions of support from friends. This result might also reflect that compared to women, men overestimate the available support they have from friends.

In general, each partner's perceived support from friends seemed to influence the couple's relationship in ways that were different from what was initially hypothesized in this study. It had been hypothesized that each partner's perception of support from friends would have a direct influence on his or her own relational behaviors and an indirect influence on the other partner's relationship satisfaction through these changes in relational behaviors. However, the LM Tests suggested paths leading from a partner's perception of friends' support to the other partner's relational behaviors, as well as direct influences of perception of friends' support on relationship satisfaction. These paths were added because some of the theoretical and empirical literature indicates that each partner's social network may affect not only his or her own relational behaviors but also his or her partner's behavior, and that direct influences between partners' social networks and their relationship satisfaction may exist (Julien, Chartrand, & Begin, 1999; Julien, Tremblay, Belanger, Dube, Begin, & Bouthillier, 2000; Milardo, 1982)

Various authors have advanced the idea that friends and social networks in general can have both a positive and negative influence on both members of the couple (Julien et al., 1999; Julien et al., 2000; Milardo, 1982). Friends can be supporters of the two partners as a couple or they may be a source of interference as

they “may provide individual emotional gratification outside the couple, favor the partner’s independence from the spouse, and develop alliances that compete with the marital bond” (Julien et al., 2000, p. 286). These arguments have received some empirical support as social network support or approval for the couple’s relationship has been found to be positively and directly associated with relationship quality and stability (Sprecher & Feilmlee, 1992). Furthermore, some authors have posited that the type of influence that friends have on the couple’s relationship depends on the degree of overlap between the two partners’ social networks (Julien, Chartrand, & Begin, 1999; Milardo, 1982). It has been argued that separate groups of friends may promote individuation and personal identities rather than a couple identity (Julien, Chartrand, & Begin, 1999; Milardo, 1982). People who are friends of both partners pose fewer threats to the couple’s relationship as they prevent the development of alliances and the couple is treated as a unit in their joint social life. Consistent with these arguments, past studies have reported that for both male and female partners network interdependence has a direct positive influence on marital quality, relationship satisfaction and stability (Cotton, Cunningham, & Antill, 1993; Julien, Chartrand, & Begin, 1999; Milardo, 1982; Milardo & Helms-Erikson, 2000). In short, both the empirical and conceptual literature indicate that the perceived support from friends may have a direct influence on the level of satisfaction that partners have with their couple’s relationship.

In addition, it has been found that partners’ social networks may affect the couple’s conflict management and that people tend to perceive their own friends as supporters of their position in couple relationship issues and the partners’ friends as



criticizers of that position (Klein & Milardo, 2000). This finding indicates that individuals do not have neutral opinions regarding the support that their partners receive from their friends, and therefore, it is logical to anticipate that their partner's perceived support from friends may also influence their own behavior and not only their partner's.

Returning to the present study, women's perceived support from friends did not have a main effect on either their own psychologically aggressive or their positive behavior toward their partners. Likewise, males' perceived support from friends did not have a main positive effect on their positive behavior toward their partners, but it did have a main positive effect on their level of psychological aggression toward the partner. However, the post hoc analyses suggested a path from the male's perceived support from friends to his female partner's psychological aggression and a path from the female's perceived support from friends to her male partner's positive behaviors. These paths were added to the model because, as explained earlier, it seems reasonable that a person's perceived support from friends could also influence the other partner's relational behaviors. The addition of these paths showed a positive direct effect from male's perceived support from friends on his partner's psychological aggression and a positive direct effect from the female's perceived support from friends on her partner's positive behaviors. Post hoc analyses also suggested a direct path from the male's perceived support from friends to his own relationship satisfaction and his partner's. As noted earlier, these paths were added because the empirical and theoretical literature has established a direct link between friends' support and relationship satisfaction. When these paths were added to the

model in this study, a negative influence was found in both paths from the male's perceived support from friends to the relationship satisfaction of each member of the couple; i.e., males' higher perceived support from friends' was associated with lower relationship satisfaction of both partners.

Taken together, these results suggest that (a) the female's perception of friends' support is a positive influence for the couple's relationship as it increases the males' positive behaviors toward her and that (b) the male's perception of friends' support is a negative influence for the couple's relationship as it increases both partners' psychological aggression to each other and decreases both partners' relationship satisfaction directly and indirectly through this increase in their psychological aggression toward each other.

As noted earlier, positive and negative effects of social networks on couples' relationships has already been reported and theorized in the literature (Julien et al., 2000). As friends' network interdependence has been found to be positively related to relationship quality and satisfaction (Cotton et al., 1993; Julien et al., 1999; Milardo, 1982; Milardo & Helms-Erikson, 2000), it could be speculated that the support that women perceive comes from friends who are also part of the male's support network, and therefore these individuals may be supportive of the couple as a unit and are not perceived as threatening by the male partner. Such joint support for both partners may enhance the male's positive behaviors toward his female partner. In contrast, men's friends may not be part of the female partner's social network, and therefore they may provide more support for the male's individual identity rather than the couple's identity. These individuals' unbalanced support for the male may pose more

of a threat for the female partner, creating a source of interference and conflict for the couple. This gender difference in social networks might result from different attitudes among women and men toward sharing friends. Perhaps women are more interested in making their friends part of their partner's social network, and they create opportunities for this sharing such as inviting their friends and partners to participate in joint activities. In contrast, men are perhaps less interested in promoting this type of overlap in social networks and may be less motivated to introduce their female partners into their network of friends, encouraging more autonomous activities.

This gender difference in promoting or discouraging network overlap might be particularly true in the case of Argentinean couples, who are embedded in a culture still dominated by values associated with *machismo* (Torrado, 2003). *Machismo* tends to encourage separation between the males' and females' worlds while at the same time assigning to men a position of control over women's activities (Falicov, 1998). This principle implies that men should know who their female partner's friends are, but women should be excluded from friendships among males. However, information on the degree of overlap of partners' social networks is not available in the present study, and consequently these hypotheses should be explored in further studies.

However, regardless of whether there is social network overlap or not, another interpretation is still possible for the negative influence of males' friends' support and the positive influence of female's friends' support on the couple's relationship. It has been argued that men's and women's friendships develop in different ways. Women tend to develop intimacy in their friendships by talking, whereas men have a preference for connecting with each other through joint activities (Swain, 1989). As

talking with friends can be done over the phone, by inviting a friend home, or when sharing everyday duties (e.g., taking children to school), it may not significantly reduce the time that members of the couple have available to share with each other. To the extent that women's social support for each other can be accomplished through such means that interfere minimally with the couple's time together, this could be a reason why women's friends and their support may not be perceived as a source of interference by either male or female partners. In contrast, for men's friendships, "the closeness is in the doing" (Swain, 1989, p. 77), and this requires sharing time together, often outside the home (e.g., playing sports or cards, attending sports events). This time that the male spends with his friends is time that he is not sharing with his female partner and any children the couple has. If his female partner perceives his friends and their support as a threat to the couple's relationship as she perceives him as spending too much time with them or believes that his friends simply hold different values and habits from hers, this might create conflict in the couple's relationship. If males' friends are more likely than females' friends to interfere with the couple's intimacy, this could explain why the findings of this study indicated that the male's support from friends directly increases each partner's psychological aggression and both directly and indirectly decreases each partner's satisfaction with their couple relationship.

Of course, the results might simply indicate that females' friends are in general more supportive of the couple's relationship and males' friends are less supportive (e.g., more critical of the couple's relationship) and more of a source of interference for the couple. If this is the case, support that females receive from their

friends encourage their partners' positive behaviors toward them, whereas the support that males receive from friends increases conflict in the couple.

It is important to note again that the data from the present study are cross sectional, and therefore no conclusions can be reached regarding the direction of causality between variables. In the path model, perceived support from friends was hypothesized to affect the couple's relationship. However, it could also be true that it is the couple's relationship that affects perceived support from friends. In fact, there are some studies that have shown that when partners are dissatisfied with their relationship they tend to disclose their problems to their friends (Crane, Newfield, & Armstrong, 1984; Julien & Markman, 1991). It could also be hypothesized that there is a mutual influence between perceived friends' support and couple relationship functioning.

In regard to the possible moderating effects of perceived support from friends on the relation between economic strain and partner's relational behaviors, the hypotheses of the present study did not receive empirical support. Perceived support from friends did not have a buffering effect on the relationship between economic strain and partners' negative relational behaviors either for males or females.

The female's perceived support from friends was found to play a moderating role but in the opposite direction of what was hypothesized. In other words, instead of having a buffering effect, the perceived support from friends seemed to increase the tendency for the female's economic strain to be associated with her psychologically aggressive behavior toward her partner. This phenomenon, which has been termed *negative buffering* (Argyle, 1992), has been found in other studies in which social

support from friends intensified women's depression (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987; Ross & Mirowsky, 1989). These studies showed that talking to friends when having a problem made things worse. If the social support from friends that women reported in the present study is actually a reflection of their true available support, it might be that talking to their friends about their economic problems and concerns might make women feel more stressed and thereby become more psychologically aggressive with their male partners. Moreover, results from the present study showed that all of the variance in females' psychologically aggressive behavior that was accounted for by their economic strain was moderated by their perceived support from friends.

The absence of a positive buffering effect of the perceived support from friends on the relationship between each partner's economic strain and his or her own positive and negative relational behaviors is consistent with evidence from other studies that failed to find the hypothesized buffering effect of perceived social support on various types of stressors, such as a HIV diagnosis (Klein et al., 1994; Pakenham, Dadds, & Terry, 1994), academic studies (Craddock, 1996), life events (Schaefer et al., 1981), and economic stressors in particular (Dressler, 1985; Lorenz et al., 1994; Pittman & Lloyd, 1988; Robertson et al., 1991).

The present findings are also consistent with the "matching hypothesis" (Cohen & McKay, 1984; Cohen & Wills, 1985) in which perceived social support may not provide stress buffering effects if the perceived support does not match the demands and needs that are elicited by a particular stressor, or if the instrument used to assess support does not measure the specific type of support relevant for the stressors that the subjects have experienced. As a matter of fact, the measure used in

the present study asked about general aspects of perceived support from friends and not about support that was specific to economic problems. Nevertheless, it is also possible that the absence of a buffering effect in the present study was due to the fact that the participants did not report high levels of economic strain. It has been argued that the buffering effect of social support may appear during times of high stress (Hobfoll & Vaux, 1991). For example, Hobfoll, Shoham, and Ritter (1991) found that females received more instrumental support under high stress conditions but were more likely to rely on their own resources under low stress conditions. Thus, even though this investigator assumed that many couples in the sample were likely to have experienced a high level of economic strain due to the pervasive severity of the economic crisis in Argentina that may not have been the case.

In brief, although each partner's perceived support from friends was introduced into the model for its potential to moderate the impact of each person's economic strain on his or her relational behaviors, no empirical support was found for such a moderating role. Instead, interesting different gender patterns emerged regarding the influence of friends' support on the couple's relational behaviors and relationship satisfaction. Males' perceived support from friends was found to have a negative influence on the couple as it directly increases psychologically aggressive behaviors in both partners and directly and indirectly decreases both partners' relationship satisfaction. In contrast, females' perceived support from friends seems to have a more mixed effect on the couple's relationship as it directly increases the male's positive behaviors toward her, even though it increases the association

between her own economic strain and her psychological aggression toward her partner.

*Associations Between Partners' Relational Behaviors*

In the present study although males were reported to show significantly higher levels of psychological aggression, both males' and females' psychological aggression levels in the present sample were relatively low. Given that this study was based on a clinical population in which at least some couples had suffered some level of economic strain, the sample's reports of low psychological aggression might reflect both partners' reluctance to reveal socially undesirable behaviors. However, males' and females' psychological aggression toward each other in this sample were strongly, positively associated with each other ( $R^2 = .67$ ), and a great deal of this reciprocal aggression could not be accounted for by variance that the two partners' aggressiveness had in common with the indices of economic strain and perceived support from friends. The positive association found between the two partners' psychological aggression in this study is similar to findings from previous studies (Capaldi et al., 2003; Strauss & Sweet, 1992; Sughibara & Warner, 2002) and may indicate that each partner's psychological aggression toward the other is largely influenced by the other's similar behavior. It might also reflect the influences of other variables that have not been included in this study and that are causing both partners to be psychologically aggressive with each other, such as one or both partners' substance abuse problems.

Similarly, females' and males' positive behaviors toward each other in the present study were found to be positively associated. This association between the



two partners' positive behaviors toward each other was unrelated to each partner's economic strain, perceived social support from friends, or psychologically aggressive behaviors toward the other partner; i.e., it was not an artifact of relations that positive behavior had with other variables in the model. As with psychological aggression, this positive association might reflect a process in which each partner's positive behavior contributes to the other partner's positive behaviors. It is reasonable to think that an individual's positive relational behaviors may motivate the other partner to reciprocate those behaviors. In fact, Conger and his colleagues (1990) also found a positive association between partners' positive behaviors. However, this positive association might also be due to another factor that was not assessed in the study and that is related to both partners' positive behavior toward the other person; for example, the couple's shared involvement in religious activities, a factor that has been demonstrated to be associated with satisfaction in couples' relationships (Cooper, 2003).

#### *Relation Between Partners' Levels of Relational Satisfaction*

Males' relationship satisfaction was found to be significantly higher than females' satisfaction. This result is consistent with previous findings (e.g., Fowers, 1991) that have typically reported women to have lower relationship satisfaction than men. This difference might be the result of women's greater interpersonal orientation, which makes their relationship satisfaction depend more on what transpires within the relationship.

As hypothesized, a moderate, positive significant association was found between the two partners' relationship satisfaction beyond the association that could

be explained by the fact that both are influenced directly by the male's perceived friends' support and by the male's psychologically aggressive behaviors toward his partner that result from his economic strain level and his perception of support from friends. In other words, the results from the present study indicate that even after controlling for the above mentioned variables, there appear to be other sources of influence that cause the two partners' levels of relationship satisfaction to be positively related to each other. It might be that when one partner perceives that the other is satisfied with their relationship, it increases his or her satisfaction with the relation as well. It might also be the case that there are other sources of influence that were not included in the model of the present study that cause the partners' levels of relationship satisfaction to be associated with each other. In any case, the results from the present study lend empirical support to the idea that the positive association between partners' relationship satisfaction might not only derive from the fact that partners share interpersonal processes but that it also may be due to factors such as sharing similar backgrounds and even the individuals' genetic makeup (Bradbury et al., 2000; Spotts et al., 2004). In addition the strong correlation between partners' levels of relationship satisfaction found in this study is consistent with findings from previous studies (Levinger & Breedlove, 1966; Spotts, Neiderheiser, Towers, Hansson, Lichtenstein, Cederblad, Pedersen, & Reiss, 2004; Terman, 1938).

*Theoretical Contributions to Conger et al.'s Family Stress Model*

Findings from the present study lend support to Conger et al's (1990, 1994) general idea that the strain created by economic problems affects partners' relationship satisfaction through deterioration in their interactions. However, this

study has clearly indicated that when Conger et al.'s model is applied, both the male's and the female's economic strain levels, relational behaviors, and relationship satisfaction need to be examined within the same model. In other words, both partners' contributions to changes in their own relational behaviors and relationship satisfaction need to be considered. This is the only way to see that the indirect way in which economic strain affects relationship satisfaction is not the same for both members of the couple.

This study also tested whether perceived support from friends could be incorporated into Conger et al.'s family stress model as buffering the impact of economic strain on couple interaction. No empirical support was found in the present study for such a buffering effect of friends' support.

#### *General Conclusion*

Overall, the final model suggested in the present study accounted for an important proportion of the variation in relationship satisfaction of both members of the couple. However, clearly different gender patterns emerged regarding the indirect influence of economic strain and the direct and indirect influence of friends' support on relationship satisfaction. Compared to females' influences, male's economic strain and support from friends seemed to have a greater effect on the relational behaviors of both partners. However, the females' relationship satisfaction seemed to depend more on these relational behaviors than did males'.

## Limitations

The findings and conclusions from the present study should be considered with caution, given that this study is limited in a number of ways. First of all, despite the suggested direction of influences included in the path model, results of the present study are based on cross sectional data and therefore, one cannot rule out other competing models that might establish different relations among the variables and that might also fit the data.

Second, all the data for the present study are based on self-report measures. Self-report data are sometimes less reliable and valid due to the tendency to provide socially desirable answers, particularly on sensitive topics such as psychological aggression. In addition, most of the data for the present study were based on only one partner's reports. This situation might create some common method variance problems when relations between variables for whom the source of information was the same person are found to be related (e.g., male's perceived support and male's relationship satisfaction). Even in the case of psychological aggression, where both members of the couple reported about their own and their partner's behavior, the significant negative relation found between the female's psychological aggression and her own relationship satisfaction and between the male's psychological aggression and the female's relationship satisfaction might be the result of common method variance. In this study, in order to calculate the level of psychological aggression for each partner the higher report of that person's aggression on each item by the two members of the couple was the one that was used. As in general females in this sample tended to report higher levels of aggression about themselves and about

their partners, most of the assessment of the male's as well as of the female's psychological aggression was based on the female's report.

Third, results from the present study are based on data that were obtained through questionnaires that participants completed in their homes. Although members of the couple were asked to complete these questionnaires separately and without consulting with each other, these conditions could not actually be monitored. Partners may have consulted each other for some answers, potentially inflating the relations among some variables.

Fourth, some of the self-report questionnaires used in the present study instructed participants to base their answers on different time frames. For example, the scales on economic strain, friends' support, and relationship satisfaction did not provide any time frames, whereas the one on psychological aggression asked the respondent to report on the last four months and beyond, whereas the questionnaire assessing positive behaviors was limited to events occurring during the last week. These discrepancies in time frame may affect the degrees of association found among scores on the instruments.

Fifth, in the present study perceived support from friends was measured with an instrument that assessed general support. The matching hypothesis (Cohen & McKay, 1984; Cohen & Wills, 1985) leaves unanswered the question of whether perceived support from friends could have buffered the negative impact of economic strain on partners' relational behaviors had a more specific measure of support that targets the needs caused by economic strain been used.

Sixth, only half of the initial hypotheses of this study received empirical support, and half of the final model that was derived and discussed was based on results obtained during post-hoc analysis. Caution should always be exercised when results from post-hoc analysis are considered, as they were not originally hypothesized.

Finally, data for the present study were obtained from a clinical population, which poses a serious threat to the external validity of the findings. It might be the case that the male's economic strain does not have a negative effect on the couple's functioning in non-clinical populations. The external validity of this study is also limited by the fact that data come from an Argentinean urban sample and therefore, conclusions may not apply to other culturally different populations or even to rural Argentinean or non-Argentinean groups.

#### Implications

##### *For Further Research*

Further research that overcomes the limitations of the present study should again test the final model presented in this investigation. In other words, this final model should be tested with data derived from non-Argentinean populations as well as from rural groups and non-clinical couples. Ideally, further studies should seek to examine each of the constructs of interest with a combination of self-report and observational measures that consider more than one source of information (e.g., independent observers and both partners' reports) to increase the validity and reliability of the results.

In addition, further studies should use longitudinal data so that more conclusions can be drawn regarding the directions of influence among variables and so that the possibility of mutual influences can be explored. Last, further studies should include other sources of extramarital social support, such as the extended family, or measures of extramarital social support specifically related to the demands and needs caused by economic strain so that the possible buffering effect of perceived social support can be reexamined.

Besides overcoming the limitations of the present investigation, further studies should also maintain some of the improvements made in this study relative to prior investigations. In particular, any study that is intended to increase understanding of the influence of economic stress or any other stressor on the intimate couple relationships should include both partners' levels of economic strain and behaviors (or cognitions, or emotions) within the same model so that influences between the two partners' variables can be considered and controlled for. Further studies on the economic strain-relationship satisfaction association should also include psychological aggression as one of the negative relational behaviors to be assessed, as this construct seems to be related to economic stress and relationship satisfaction. Additionally, given the clearly different gender patterns that have emerged from this study, further research should always consider gender differences when studying economic strain and friends' support with respect to relationship satisfaction. Needless to say, further studies should be conducted on Argentinean couples on whom there are almost non-existent published empirical data.

*For Clinical Practice*

Results from the present study suggest although females may suffer slightly more from economic strain than males, the male's economic strain increases both partners' psychological aggression toward each other, which in turn influences each partner's relationship satisfaction. Therapists who treat individuals, couples, and families that are facing economic stressors should be aware of these dynamics so that they do not target interventions to the male who suffers from economic strain but rather to both members of the couple. In addition, clinicians should know that the male's economic strain affects both partners' relationship satisfaction through its impact on their relational behaviors, so that clinicians will routinely assess how each member of the couple is responding to economic stressors and to the male's economic strain in particular. Clinicians should also be aware of the fact that once economic strain increases one partner's psychological aggression toward the other, a mutual cycle of psychological aggression may emerge.

These findings on the influences that males' and females' perceived support from friends may have on the couple's behaviors and relationship satisfaction are also important information for any clinician who works with couples, as a reminder that outside factors may also affect the couple's functioning. When working with Argentinean couples, and probably with many other Hispanic groups, therapists also should be aware of the fact that males' and females' friends' support play different roles in the couple's relationship. Moreover, practitioners should remember that even though the male's perceived support from friends might be expected to have a



positive influence at the individual level, its impact at the couple level may be quite the opposite.

#### *For Programming*

The results from the present study should be an inspiration for prevention and intervention programs in a country like Argentina that has been subject to so many economic crises. These programs should prepare couples to deal with economic stressors so that the negative impact on their relationships is minimized. Among other components, these programs could include some education on how the economic strain of one partner may end up affecting the relational behaviors of both partners and bring about feelings of dissatisfaction with the relationship. In addition, the programs could teach coping mechanisms to deal with economic strain and to prevent cycles of mutual psychological aggression. Programs could draw on models of couple and family therapy, such as the Enhanced Cognitive Behavioral Couples' Therapy (Epstein & Baucom, 2002), that help couples establish appropriate boundaries with friends and other people outside their relationship, using forms of supportive input from others that benefit both the individuals and the couple as a unit.

#### Conclusion

Similar to studies conducted on American, Korean, and Finnish populations, data from the present study suggest that when Argentinean men are stressed and concerned over financial issues, this stress has a negative impact on their couple relationship by increasing their psychological aggression toward their partners, which affects their own as well as their partner's relationship satisfaction. Despite its limitations, by including both males' and females' levels of economic strain and

relational behaviors within the same model, this study was able to uncover different gender patterns. Women's negative behaviors also seemed to increase because of their partners' economic strain and, compared to their male partners, their relationship satisfaction seemed to depend more on what happened within the couple's relationship. Finally, no buffering effect was found for the support that partners may perceive from their friends, and data from the present study even suggested that males' perceptions of this support may actually have a negative influence on the couple's relationship.

Given the scant published empirical literature on Argentinean couples, this investigation can serve as inspiration for other studies on this population. In the meantime, the present findings have implications for therapists and other professionals involved in the design of prevention and intervention programs for couples experiencing major life stressors. The negative influences of males' economic strain and perceived support from their friends on the couples' relationships clearly warrant further research.

## Appendix A

### Letter to Clients of Centro Privado de Psicoterapias

Dear patient:

Please complete individually the following set of questionnaires in this packet. The information that you provide is very important so that your therapist can have all the information that will enable him/her to help you better. This information also makes possible to put together statistics and conduct research work that will enable us to improve our treatment services. However, completing these questionnaires is absolutely voluntary.

Please read each item carefully and do not leave any item uncompleted. Note that almost every page is double-sided. In case an item is not clear enough, please ask your therapist about it.

We thank you in advance for your cooperation and dedication for this task.

Centro Privado de Psicoterapias

## Appendix B

### Letter to Clients of Centro Privado de Psicoterapias (Spanish Version)

Estimado paciente:

Por favor le pedimos que complete en forma individual la serie de cuestionarios que se encuentran en este paquete.. La información que Ud. provea es muy importante para que su terapeuta tenga toda la información que le permita ayudarlo, y también hace posibles estadísticas y trabajos de investigación que nos permite mejorar cada vez más nuestro sistema de atención. Sin embargo, completar estos cuestionarios es absolutamente voluntario.

Por favor lea con atención cada ítem y no deje ningún ítem sin completar. Advierta que casi todas las hojas están impresas de ambos lados. En caso de que algún ítem no le resulte claro, por favor consúltelo con su terapeuta.

Desde ya le agradecemos su cooperación y dedicación para esta tarea.

Centro Privado de Psicoterapias

## Appendix C

### Demographic Information

Identification Number: .....

Gender: F / M

Date: .....

Please provide requested information and/or check the appropriate answer. Please do not leave any item unanswered.

1) Age: \_\_\_\_\_

2) You're coming for:

a.) Family therapy \_\_\_\_\_ b.) Couple therapy \_\_\_\_\_

c.) Individual therapy \_\_\_\_\_

3) Marital Status:

1. Single

2. Married

3. Separated

4. Divorced

5. Widow/er

4) Relationship Status:

1. Dating, living separately

2. Currently living together, not married

3. Currently married, living together

4. Currently married, living separately

5. Separate but not divorced

6. Divorced

5) a. Years living together as a couple: \_\_\_\_\_ b. Years living together: \_\_\_\_\_

c. Length of marriage: \_\_\_\_\_

6) What's your occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

1. Clerical sales, bookkeeper, secretary
2. Executive, large business owner
3. Homemaker
4. Owner, manager of small business
5. Professional- tertiary or university degree
6. Skilled worker, craftsman
7. Service worker – barber, cook
8. Retired
9. Semi-skilled worker –e.g., machine operator
10. Unskilled worker

7) What's your current employment status? \_\_\_\_\_

1. Full-time employee
2. Part-time employee
3. Homemaker, not employed outside the home
4. Student
5. Disabled, unemployed
6. Unemployed

8) Highest level of education completed: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Primary incomplete
2. Primary complete

3. Secondary incomplete
4. Secondary complete
5. Tertiary incomplete
6. Tertiary, non-university degree
7. University incomplete
8. University complete
9. University graduate program
10. Master's degree
11. Doctoral degree
11. Technical school

9) Number of people living in the household: \_\_\_\_\_

10) Number of children living in the household: \_\_\_\_

11.) Number of children not living in the household: \_\_\_\_

12) Personal gross monthly income: \$\_\_\_\_\_

1. Below \$500
2. Between \$500 and \$999
3. Between \$1,000 and \$1,999
4. Between \$2,000 and \$2,999
5. Between \$3,000 and 5,000
6. Above \$5,000

13) What is your religious preference?

1. Roman Catholic
2. Jewish

3. Protestant
4. Muslim
5. Mormon
6. Jehovah's Witness
7. Other (e.g., Buddhist, Hindu)
8. No formal religious affiliation

14) How often do you participate in activities organized by the church or by a religious group?

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

15) 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 at all important



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
16				
17				
18				

19. Do you think that you have used alcohol beverages in excess or have you used any drug (e.g., marijuana, cocaine) in the last four months? Yes No

20. Do you think your partner has used alcohol beverages in excess or has he/she used any drug (e.g., marijuana, cocaine) in the last four months? Yes No

## Appendix D

### Demographic Information (Spanish Version)

Número de Identificación: .....

Sexo: F / M

Fecha: .....

Por favor complete este formulario y/o marque la respuesta que corresponde. Por favor no deje ningún ítem sin responder

4) Edad: \_\_\_\_\_

5) Viene por terapia:

a.) Familiar \_\_\_\_\_ b.) De pareja \_\_\_\_\_ c.) Individual \_\_\_\_\_

6) Estado Civil:

1. Soltero/a

2. Casado/a

3. Separado/a

4. Divorciado/a

5. Viudo/a

4) Status de la relación de pareja:

1. Novios viviendo separados

2. Actualmente viviendo juntos, no casados

3. Actualmente casado/a, viviendo juntos

4. Actualmente casado/a, viviendo separados

5. Separados pero no divorciados

6. Divorciados

5) a. Años juntos como pareja: \_\_\_\_\_ b. Años de convivencia: \_\_\_\_\_

c. Años de matrimonio: \_\_\_\_\_

6) Cuál es su ocupación? \_\_\_\_\_

1. Vendedor/a, administrativo/a, contador/a, secretaria/o
2. Ejecutivo, propietario de gran comercio
3. Ama/o de casa
4. Mediano o pequeño empresario
5. Profesional con título terciario o universitario
6. Trabajador calificado/ artesano
7. Trabajador en servicios – peluquero/a, cocinero/a
8. Jubilado
9. Trabajador semi-calificado – ej. maquinista
10. Trabajador no calificado

7) Cuál es su situación laboral actualmente? \_\_\_\_\_

1. Empleado a tiempo completo
2. Empleado part -time
3. Ama/o de casa, no empleado/a fuera de la casa
4. Estudiante
5. Discapacitado, no empleado
6. Desempleado

8) Nivel máximo de educación completado?: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Primario incompleto
2. Primario completo

3. Secundario incompleto
4. Secundario completo
5. Terciario incompleto
6. Título terciario no universitario
7. Universidad incompleta
8. Título universitario
9. Posgrado universitario
10. Título de master
11. Título doctoral
12. Escuela de oficios

9) Número de personas que viven en la casa: \_\_\_\_\_

10) Número de hijos que viven en la casa: \_\_\_\_

11.) Número de hijos que no viven en la casa: \_\_\_\_

12) Ingreso personal mensual bruto :\$ \_\_\_\_\_

1. Menos de \$500
2. Entre \$500 y \$999
3. Entre \$1,000 y \$1,999
4. Entre \$2,000 y \$2,999
5. Entre \$3,000 y 5,000
6. Más de \$5,000

13.) Cuál es su preferencia religiosa?

1. Católico/a Romana
2. Judío/a

3. Protestante
4. Musulman/a
5. Mormon/a
6. Testigo de Jehova
7. Otra (Ej. Budista, Hindu)
8. Ninguna afiliación a una religión formal

14) Con cuánta frecuencia participa en actividades organizadas por la iglesia o en un grupo religioso?

1. varias veces por semana
2. una vez por semana
3. varias veces al mes
4. una vez al mes
5. varias veces por año
6. una o dos veces al año
7. raramente o nunca

15) Cuán importante es la religión o espiritualidad en su vida diaria? \_\_\_\_\_

1. Muy importante
2. Importante
3. Más o menos importante
4. No muy importante
5. Para nada importante



## Appendix E

### Family Economic Strain Scale

*Instructions:* The following statements describe some of the ways that families experience economic strain. For each statement, please circle the response that indicates HOW OFTEN the situation that is described applied to you.

Statement	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Almost	Always
1. In general, it is hard for me and my family to live on our present income.	1	2	3	4	5	5
2. I experience money problems.	1	2	3	4	5	5
3. Financial problems interfere with my work and daily routine.	1	2	3	4	5	5
4. I worry about financial matters.	1	2	3	4	5	5
5. Financial problems interfere with my relationships with other people.	1	2	3	4	5	5
6. I worry about having money to celebrate holidays and other special occasions.	1	2	3	4	5	5
7. I put off family activities (such as vacations, movies, or special events) because of the expense.	1	2	3	4	5	5
8. I feel frustrated because I can't afford the education or training I need to get ahead.	1	2	3	4	5	5

9. I have to put off getting medical care for family members because of the expense.      1      2      3      4      5

10. I have to put off getting dental care for family members because of the expense.      1      2      3      4      5

11. I am afraid that my income will decrease.      1      2      3      4      5

12. Compared to other families in Argentina, would you say your income is

- \_\_\_ 1. far below average.
- \_\_\_ 2. below average.
- \_\_\_ 3. average.
- \_\_\_ 4. above average.
- \_\_\_ 5. far above average.



## Appendix F

### Family Economic Strain Scale (Spanish Version)

Los siguientes enunciados describen algunas de las formas en que las familias experimentan estrés económico. Por favor haga un círculo alrededor del número que mejor indica con qué frecuencia la situación descripta se aplica a Ud. en particular.

Enunciado	Nunca	Casi Nunca	A veces	Usualmente	Casi Siempre
1. En general es difícil para mí y mi familia mantenernos con nuestro ingreso actual.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Tengo problemas de dinero.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Los problemas económicos interfieren con mi trabajo y rutina diaria.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Me preocupan los asuntos económicos.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Los problemas económicos interfieren en mis relaciones con otra gente.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Me preocupa si voy a tener dinero para celebrar las fiestas y otras ocasiones especiales.	1	2	3	4	5

7. Pospongo actividades familiares (tales como las vacaciones, ir al cine, o eventos especiales) debido al gasto que generan.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Me siento frustrado por no poder pagar la educación o entrenamiento que necesito para progresar.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Tengo que posponer obtener atención médica para miembros de la familia debido al gasto que esto significa.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Tengo que posponer obtener atención odontológica para miembros de la familia debido al gasto que esto significa.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Siento temor a que mis ingresos disminuyan.	1	2	3	4	5

12. En comparación con otras familias en la Argentina, diría Ud. que su ingreso es

\_\_\_ 1. muy por debajo del promedio.

\_\_\_ 2. debajo del promedio.

\_\_\_ 3. promedio.

\_\_\_ 4. por arriba del promedio.

\_\_\_ 5. muy por arriba del promedio.

## Appendix G

### The Multidimensional Emotional Abuse Scale

No matter how well a couple gets along, there are times when they disagree, get annoyed with the other person, want different things from each other, or just have spats or fights because they are in a bad mood, are tired, or for some other reason.

Couples also have many different ways of trying to settle their differences. This is a list of things that might happen when you have differences. Please circle how many times you did each of these things **IN THE PAST 4 MONTHS**, and how many times your partner did them in the **IN THE PAST 4 MONTHS**. If you or your partner did not do one of these things in the past 4 months, but it happened before that, circle 7.

- |                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| <i>(1) Once</i>       | <i>(5) 11-20 times</i>   |
| <i>(2) Twice</i>      | <i>(6) More than 20 times</i>                                    |
| <i>(3) 3-5 times</i>  | <i>(7) Not in the past four months, but it did happen before</i> |
| <i>(4) 6-10 times</i> | <i>(0) This has never happened</i>                               |

How often in the last four months?

1. Said or implied that the other person was stupid.	You:            1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
2. Called the other person worthless.	You:            1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
3. Called the other person ugly.	You:            1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0

4. Criticized the other person's appearance.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
5. Called the other person a loser, failure, or similar term.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
6. Belittled the other person in front of other people.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
7. Said that someone else would be a better girlfriend or boyfriend.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
8. Became angry enough to frighten the other person.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
9. Put her/his face right in front of the other person's face to make a point more forcefully.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
10. Threatened to hit the other person.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
11. Threaten to throw something at the other person.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
12. Threw, smashed, hit, or kicked something in front of the other person.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
13. Drove recklessly to frighten the other person.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
14. Stood or hovered over the other person during a conflict or disagreement.	You: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0

## Appendix H

### The Multidimensional Emotional Abuse Scale (Spanish Version)

Más allá de cuán bien se lleve una pareja, hay momentos en los que desacuerdan, se enojan con el otro, quieren cosas diferentes del otro, o sólo tienen pequeñas rencillas o peleas porque están de mal humor, cansados, o por alguna otra razón. Las parejas también tienen diferentes formas de tratar de resolver sus diferencias. Esta es una lista de cosas que tal vez ocurren cuando ustedes tienen diferencias. Por favor haga un círculo alrededor del número que indica cuántas veces usted hizo alguna de estas cosas en los últimos cuatro meses y cuántas veces su pareja hizo alguna de ellas en los últimos cuatro meses. Si usted o su pareja no hicieron ninguna de estas cosas en los últimos cuatro meses, pero si anteriormente, haga un círculo alrededor del número 7.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1 = Una vez en los últimos cuatro meses    | 5 = 11-20 veces en los últimos cuatro meses                       |
| 2 = Dos veces en los últimos cuatro meses  | 6 = Más de 20 veces en últimos cuatro meses                       |
| 3 = 3-5 veces en los últimos cuatro meses  | 7 = No en los últimos cuatro meses, pero si ocurrió anteriormente |
| 4 = 6-10 veces en los últimos cuatro meses | 0 = Esto nunca ha ocurrido  |

Con qué frecuencia ocurrió esto?

1. Le dije a mi pareja que era un estúpido.	Usted: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
	Su pareja: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
2. Le dije a mi pareja que no valía nada.	Usted: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
	Su pareja: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
3. Le dije a mi pareja que era feo/a.	Usted: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
	Su pareja: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
4. Critiqué la apariencia de mi pareja.	Usted: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
	Su pareja: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
5. Le dije a mi pareja que era un perdedor/a, un fracaso, o un término similar.	Usted: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
	Su pareja: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
6. Menosprecié a mi pareja delante de otra Gente.	Usted: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
	Su pareja: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
7. Le dije a mi pareja que otro/a sería un/a Major esposo/a o novio/a.	Usted: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
	Su pareja: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
8. Me enojé lo suficiente como para asustar a mi pareja	Usted: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
	Su pareja: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
9. Puse mi care delante de mi pareja para recalcar un punto con más fuerza.	Usted: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
	Su pareja: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
10. La/o amenacé a mi pareja con pegarle.	Usted: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
	Su pareja: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
11. La/o amenacé a mi pareja con arrojarle Algo.	Usted: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
	Su pareja: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0

12. Arrojé, rompí, le pegué o pateé algo delante de mi pareja	Usted: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Su pareja: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
13. Manejé peligrosamente el auto para asustar a mi pareja.	Usted: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Su pareja: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
14. Me pare delante de mi pareja y la perseguí insistentemente durante un conflicto o desacuerdo.	Usted: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0 Su pareja: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0





9. Partner made arrangements for us to go out together or have company				
10. Partner went out of his/her way to do something special for me				
11. Partner was on time coming home, going out, or meeting me				
12. Partner arranged to spend extra time with me				
13. Partner took care of me or my chores when I wasn't feeling well or wasn't able to do them				
14. Partner expressed understanding or support of my feelings or mood				
15. Partner remembered and did a favor I had asked for				
16. Partner complimented me on my looks, actions, or ideas				
17. Partner thanked me for something that I did				
18. Partner asked me about how my day was				
19. Partner called to tell me he/she would be late				
20. Partner prepared a between-meal drink, snack, etc. for me				
21. Partner apologized to me				
22. Partner was tolerant when I made a mistake				
23. Partner comforted me when I was upset				
24. Partner called just to say hello				
25. Partner went to bed at the same time I did				
26. Partner initiated sexual activity				
27. Partner accepted my sexual advances				
28. Partner tried to please me sexually				
29. Partner listened to me talk about my problems or things that were troubling me				

30. Partner talked to me about his/her problems, or important decisions				
31. Partner talked about something humorous				
32. Partner worked on laundry, cleaning, straightening up, or other routine household project				
33. Partner worked on repairs or other non-routine project for the home				
34. Partner ran an errand or went shopping				
35. Partner prepared a meal				
36. Partner cleaned up after a meal or snack				
37. Partner worked on the garden, lawn, or yard				
38. Partner took care of the car maintenance				
39. Partner took care of the pet				
40. Partner disciplined the children appropriately				
41. Partner took care of the children				
42. Partner got involved in what the children were doing				

## Appendix J

### Daily Checklist of Marital Activities – Positive Behaviors Subscale (Spanish Version)

Instrucciones: piense en las actividades que tuvieron lugar entre Ud. y su pareja durante la última semana. Primero, indique con una cruz (X) si la actividad ocurrió, no ocurrió, o no se aplica. Segundo, evalúe cuán placentera o displacentera fue la actividad, desde 1, extremadamente displacentera a 9, extremadamente placentera.

Evaluación :

1	2	3	4		
Extremadamente	Muy	Bastante	Levemente		
<b>DISPLACENTERA</b>					
5	6	7	8	9	
NEUTRAL	Levemente	Bastante	Muy	Extremadamente	
<b>PLACENTERA</b>					

	Ocurrió	No ocurrió	No se aplica	Evaluación
1. Mi pareja me saludó cariñosamente.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Mi pareja me abrazó o besó.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Mi pareja se acurrucó junto a mí en la cama.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Mi pareja tomó mi mano.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Mi pareja me tocó o palmeó con cariño.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Mi pareja me dijo que me ama.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. Mi pareja limpió todo después de ensuciar.				
8. Mi pareja cuidó su apariencia personal (ej., se bañó, se vistió bien).				
9. Mi pareja hizo los arreglos para que saliéramos juntos o tuviéramos compañía.				
10. Mi pareja salió de su forma para hacer algo especial para mí.				
11. Mi pareja fue puntual en llegar a casa, salir, o encontrarse conmigo.				
12. Mi pareja acomodó todo para pasar tiempo extra conmigo.				
13. Mi pareja se ocupó de mí o de mis tareas cuando no me sentía bien o no podía hacerlas.				
14. Mi pareja expresó comprensión o apoyo para con mis sentimientos o estado de ánimo.				
15. Mi pareja se acordó y realizó un favor que yo le había pedido.				
16. Mi pareja me dijo un cumplido sobre mi aspecto, mis acciones, o ideas.				
17. Mi pareja me agradeció por algo que hice.				
18. Mi pareja me preguntó cómo había sido mi día.				
19. Mi pareja me llamó para decirme que llegaría tarde.				

20. Mi pareja me preparó una comida entremedio, snack, etc.				
21. Mi pareja se disculpó ante mí.				
22. Mi pareja fue tolerante cuando cometí un error,				
23. Mi pareja me consoló cuando me sentí molesto.				
24. Mi pareja me llamó solo para saludarme.				
25. Mi pareja se fue a la cama al mismo tiempo que yo.				
26. Mi pareja inició la actividad sexual.				
27. Mi pareja aceptó mi acercamiento sexual.				
28. Mi pareja trató de complacerme sexualmente.				
29. Mi pareja me escuchó hablar de mis problemas o cosas que me preocupaban.				
30. Mi pareja me habló de sus problemas, o decisions importantes.				
31. Mi pareja me habló sobre algo gracioso.				
32. Mi pareja lavó la ropa, hizo la limpieza, ordenó, u otro tarea de rutina del hogar.				
33. Mi pareja trabajó en reparaciones u otros tareas no rutinarias para la casa.				
34. Mi pareja hizo un mandado o las compras.				
35. Mi pareja preparó la comida.				
36. Mi pareja limpió todo después de la comida o				

de un snack.				
37. Mi pareja trabajó en el jardín, césped, o patio.				
38. Mi pareja se ocupó del mantenimiento del auto.				
39. Mi pareja se ocupó de la mascota.				
40. Mi pareja disciplinó a los chicos apropiadamente.				
41. Mi pareja cuidó a los chicos.				
42. Mi pareja se involucró en lo que los chicos estaban haciendo.				

## Appendix K

### Dyadic Adjustment Scale – Dyadic Satisfaction Scale

Place a checkmark (✓) to indicate your answer

	All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
1. How often do you discuss or have your considered divorce, separation or terminating your relationship?						
2. How often do you or your partner leave the house after a fight?						
3. In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?						
4. Do you confide in your partner?						
5. Do you ever regret that you married (or lived together)?						
6. How often do you or your partner quarrel?						
7. How often do you and your partner “get on each other’s nerves”?						





\_\_\_\_ 6. My relationship can never succeed, and there is nor more than I can do to keep the relationship going.

Appendix L

Dyadic Adjustment Scale – Dyadic Satisfaction Scale (Spanish Version)

Por favor marque con una cruz (X) su respuesta.

	Todo el Tiempo	La Mayor Parte del Tiempo	Frecuentemente	Ocasionalmente	Rara Vez	Nunca
1. Con qué frecuencia han hablado ó considerado la separación, el divorcio ó la terminación de su relación?						
2. Con qué frecuencia Ud. ó su pareja se va de la casa después de una pelea?						
3. =En general, con qué frecuencia piensa que las cosas entre Ud. y su pareja van bien?						
4. Le hace confidencias a su pareja?						
5. Alguna vez se ha arrepentido de haberse casado (o vivir juntos)?						
6. Con qué frecuencia pelea con su pareja?						
7. Con qué frecuencia Ud. y su pareja “se sacan de las casillas el uno al otro?”						

Marque con un círculo su respuesta

8. Besa Ud. a su pareja?

Todos los días    Casi todos los días    Ocasionalmente    Raramente    Nunca

9. Los puntos en la siguiente línea representan diferentes grados de felicidad en su relación. El punto medio “feliz” representa el grado de felicidad en la mayor parte de las relaciones. Por favor indique con un círculo el punto que mejor describa el grado de felicidad que Ud. experimenta en su relación tomando en cuenta todos sus aspectos.

·                      ·                      ·                      ·                      ·                      ·                      ·

Extremadamente    Más o Menos    Un poco    Feliz    Muy    Extremadamente    Perfecta

INFELIZ

FELIZ

10. Cuál de los siguientes enunciados describe mejor la manera en que Ud. se siente acerca del futuro de su relación?

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. Deseo desesperadamente que mi relación funcione y haría cualquier cosa para lograrlo.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. Deseo muchísimo que mi relación funcione y haré todo lo que pueda para lograrlo.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. Deseo muchísimo que mi relación funcione y haré la parte que a mi me corresponda para lograrlo.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. Sería muy bueno que mi relación funcionara, pero no puedo hacer mucho más de lo que estoy haciendo actualmente para ayudar a que así sea.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. Sería muy bueno que mi relación funcionara, pero me rehusó a hacer algo más de lo que estoy haciendo actualmente para que la relación continúe.

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. Mi relación no va a poder nunca salir adelante, y no hay nada que pueda hacer para que la relación continúe.

## Appendix M

### Social Support Scale – Friends Subscale

The statements which follow refer to feelings and experiences which occur to most people at one time or another in their relationships with friends. When thinking about friends, please do not include family members. For each statement there are five possible answers (1 through 5) ranging from “Yes” to “no”. Please check the answer you choose for each item.

	Yes			No	
	1	2	3	4	5
1. My friends give me the moral support I need.					
2. Most other people are closer to their friends than I am.					
3. My friends enjoy hearing about what I think.					
4. Certain friends come to me when they have problems or need advice.					
5. I rely on my friends for emotional support.					
6. If I felt that one or more of my friends were upset with me, I'd just keep it to myself.					
7. I feel that I'm on the fringe in my circle of friends.					
8. There is a friend I could go to if I were just feeling down, without feeling funny about it later.					
9. My friends and I are very open about what we think about things.					
10. My friends are sensitive to my personal needs.					

11. My friends come to me for emotional support.					
12. My friends are good at helping me solve problems.					
13. I have a deep sharing relationship with a number of friends.					
14. My friends get good ideas about how to do things or make things from me.					
15. When I confide in friends, it makes me feel uncomfortable.					
16. My friends seek me out for companionship.					
17. I think that my friends feel that I'm good at helping them solve problems.					
18. I don't have a relationship with a friend that is as intimate as other people's relationships with friends.					
19. I've recently gotten a good idea about how to do something from a friend.					
20. I wish my friends were much different.					

## Appendix N

### Social Support Scale – Friends Subscale (Spanish Version)

Los siguientes enunciados hacen referencia a sentimientos y experiencias que le ocurren a la mayoría de las personas en algún punto de sus relaciones con sus amigos.

Cuando piense en sus amigos(as), por favor no incluya familiares. Para cada enunciado hay 5 posibles respuestas (del 1 hasta el 5) que van de “Sí” hasta “No”. Por favor marque la respuesta que mejor describe su situación.

	Sí			No	
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Mis amigos(as) me dan el apoyo moral que necesito.					
2. La mayoría de las personas están más cerca de sus amigos(as) de lo que estoy yo.					
3. A mis amigos(as) les gusta escuchar lo que pienso.					
4. Algunos de mis amigos(as) recurren a mí cuando tienen problemas o necesitan que les den consejos.					
5. Cuento con el apoyo emocional de mis amigos(as).					
6. Si sintiera que alguno/a de mis amigos(as) está disgustado/a conmigo, no se lo diría a nadie.					
7. Siento que estoy en el borde mi círculo de amigos(as).					
8. Tengo un amigo(a) a quien podría recurrir si me sintiera triste, sin sentirme incómodo más tarde.					
9. Mis amigos(as) y yo somos muy abiertos cuando expresamos opiniones entre nosotros.					



10. Mis amigos(as) son muy receptivos con respecto a mis necesidades personales.					
11. Mis amigos(as) vienen a mí en busca de apoyo emocional.					
12. Mis amigos(as) son buenos para ayudarme a solucionar mis problemas.					
13. Yo tengo una relación personal de compartir mucho con cierto número de amigos(as).					
14. Mis amigos(as) obtienen de mí buenas ideas de cómo hacer las cosas.					
15. Cuando les cuento cosas personales a mis amigos(as) me siento incómodo(a).					
16. Mis amigos(as) buscan mi compañía.					
17. Creo que mis amigos sienten que soy bueno para ayudarles a resolver problemas.					
18. No tengo una relación tan cercana con mis amigos(as) como otras personas sí la tienen.					
19. Recientemente un amigo(a) me dio una buena idea sobre cómo hacer algo.					
20. Querría que mis amigos(as) fueran muy diferentes.					

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