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Spouses' conflict profiles and the role of affect

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The University of Arizona, 1991

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SPOUSES' CONFLICT PROFILES AND THE ROLE OF AFFECT

by

Julie Ann Phillips

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In the Graduate College

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

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As members of the Final Examination Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Julie Ann Phillips entitled Spouses' Conflict Profiles and the Role of Affect

and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

LIST OF TABLES

ABSTRACT

Marital research has demonstrated that one of the most important factors related to marital satisfaction is spouses' response to marital conflict. Three types of conflict behavior have been previously identified: problem solving, coercion, and avoidance. Problem solving has been linked to marital satisfaction, whereas coercion and avoidance have been linked to marital dissatisfaction. Previous marital researchers have studied couples' response to marital conflict as though spouses' typical response to conflict consists of only one of these types. In addition, marital researchers have only recently begun examining the role of emotion and cognitive processes in marital conflict. The present study is descriptive in nature and addresses three goals. First, subgroups of spouses and couples are identified based on the pattern of conflict behaviors they endorse. Second, relationships among perception of partner conflict behavior, specific emotions, and perception of self conflict behavior are explored. Third, sex differences found with regard to the first two goals are examined. Subjects consisted of two samples, a clinical sample and a research sample, resulting in a heterogeneous total sample of 117 couples. Cluster analysis identified four subgroups of husbands and five subgroups of wives. Differences in husband and wife clusters were consistent with previous marital conflict research. Although the valence of emotion was found to differentiate among the various subgroups of spouses, the type of emotion (e.g. sadness versus anger) was not found to differentiate these groups. However, regression analyses identified more complex relationships which varied with group identity and gender. In these relationships, the type of emotion was important. Limitations of the present study, clinical implications, and implications for future research are discussed.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Historical Perspective

Marital researchers of the sixties focused their attention on the influence of social and economic variables on marital satisfaction and stability (Hicks & Platt, 1970). With the advent of the women's movement, the structure of American marriages began to change. Marital stability became increasingly less important to couples than marital satisfaction. People began rejecting traditional sex roles that established clear rules and norms within the context of the marital relationship. Consequently, individual couples had to begin negotiating their own set of expectations. This shift in marital expectations is reflected in the marital literature of the seventies. Although there remained interest in social and economic variables, and there was an increasing interest in premarital variables, the largest number of studies in the seventies focused on dyadic or interpersonal factors (Lewis & Spanier, 1979). In addition, although Hicks and Platt state that marital happiness is only one of the many determinants of marital stability, Lewis and Spanier argue that "...the *quality* of most American marriages is the primary determinant of whether a marriage will remain intact" (p. 268). The link between marital satisfaction and marital stability is important because marital status has consistently been found to be the one social variable that is related in a number of ways to personal well-being (Bloom, Asher, & White; 1978).

Marital research has demonstrated that one of the most important factors related to marital satisfaction is spouses' response to marital conflict (Phillips, 1989). As traditional sex roles become less of a factor in establishing rules and norms in American

marriages, the potential for conflict and the need for negotiation becomes increasingly important if couples wish to maintain a satisfying relationship.

The Nature of Marital Conflict

Deutsch (1969) states that "A conflict exists whenever incompatible activities occur" (p.7). One activity is incompatible with another activity when the first activity "...prevents, obstructs, interferes with, injures, or in some way makes it [the second activity] less likely or less effective" (p. 8). Conflict is contrasted with competition, a narrower concept (Deutsch, 1969; Sprey,1979). Competition refers to a situation involving at least two parties in which gains for one party are necessarily associated with losses for the other party. Equating conflict with competition is a perception that limits how people respond to conflict. If one believes that in any conflict situation there will be only one winner and everyone else must lose, then efforts to negotiate a mutually satisfying solution will be minimal at best.

Consistent with the above description of conflict, marital conflict can be seen as any situation in which one spouse's behavior is interfering with the ability of the partner to achieve a desired goal. Any particular conflict episode can have either a constructive or destructive impact on the martial relationship. Deutsch (1969) lists several positive functions of conflict that can apply to the marital relationship: 1. conflict prevents stagnation, 2. it stimulates interest, 3. it permits discussion and solution of problems, 4. it is the root of personal and social change, and 5. it helps establish group and personal identities. Other theorists have also asserted that conflict can have a positive impact by increasing understanding, extending the range of interaction, and resolving marital issues (Hinde, 1979; Rands, Levinger, & Mellinger, 1981). However, Hinde warns "Destructive conflict becomes probable if commitment is

lacking, if the ability of the partner to reciprocate in the future is doubted and, of course, if important goals conflict" (p. 252). Likewise, Hinde warns that lack of trust increases the likelihood of perceived threat and therefore increases the likelihood that conflict will have a negative outcome. These authors seem to suggest that for conflict to result in positive outcomes for a couple, both spouses must willing to work at improving the quality of the relationship and must trust that their partner is willing to do likewise. In addition, they suggest that there are some fundamental issues that are very difficult for couples to negotiate when in conflict. For example, issues that are very difficult to negotiate may include role expectations, appropriate child rearing practices, and issues of fidelity.

In the empirical literature, two factors relating to marital conflict that distinguish dissatisfied couples from satisfied couples have been identified. The first factor is the frequency of conflict. Studies have consistently found that although distressed and satisfied couples argue over the same topics, distressed couples argue much more frequently than satisfied couples (Birchler, Weiss, & Vincent,1975; Hahlweg, Schindler, Revenstorf, & Brengelmann, 1984; Schaap, Buunk, & Kerkstra, 1988). The second factor differentiating satisfied from dissatisfied couples is how each group tends to respond to conflict situations. It is likely that these two factors are interrelated. Markman and Kraft (1989) argue that couples who are not skilled at coping with conflict are at risk for marital distress. Unresolved issues fester and become more emotionally charged over time. This argument suggests that as the number of unresolved issues increases and the volatility of issues increases, it is likely that the couple becomes less tolerant and more sensitive to any disagreement. Consequently, an inability to resolve marital issues can result in a progressive increase in the frequency

of conflicts. Therefore, it is vitally important to determine which behaviors are likely to result in the resolution of conflict, and which behaviors maintain or escalate conflict.

Three Categories of Conflict Behaviors

Three general types of behaviors displayed in conflict situations have typically been identified in the marital literature. Each type has been found to discriminate satisfied from dissatisfied couples. Although different names have been used to label these three categories of conflict behaviors, for the purposes of this paper, they shall be labeled "problem solving," "coercion," and " avoidance." These labels best represent the nature of each category.

Problem solving. Problem solving has also been called "constructive conflict" (Galvin & Brommel, 1986), "productive conflict" (Deutsch, 1969), "compromise" (Rands et al., 1981), "cooperation" (Fitzpatrick, 1988), and "cooperative problem solving" (Deutsch, 1969). Problem solving involves perceiving conflict as a common problem in which both sides have joint interest in reaching a mutually satisfying solution (Deutsch, 1969). Galvin and Brommel list several behaviors that characterize effective problem solving. Information is exchanged and all parties have equal time to express their points of view. Feelings are openly expressed. People listen to each other without frequent interruption. The discussion remains focused on the topic at hand and does not expand to include other conflict areas. Participants believe that solutions are possible and are an important part of growth. In addition, Deutsch states that the use of problem solving behaviors in conflictual situations encourages the recognition of the legitimacy of each side's interests and leads to a trusting, friendly attitude that increases sensitivity to similarities and tolerance of differences. The disadvantages of problem

solving behaviors is that they typically depend upon a certain amount of interpersonal skill and self control, and tend to be time consuming.

Coercion. Other common labels include "competition" and "contending" (Fitzpatrick, 1988), "attack" (Rands et al., 1981), "aggression" (Margolin, Fernandez, Gorin, & Ortiz, 1982), "destructive conflict" (Deutsch, 1969) and "overt destructive conflict" (Galvin & Brommel, 1986). Coercion involves attempts to impose one's preferred solution on the other party (Fitzpatrick, 1988). Deutsch describes identifying characteristics of the use of coercive behaviors. Conflict episodes tend to expand and escalate: the conflict often continues after initiating causes become irrelevant or forgotten. In addition, there is an increasing reliance on power techniques such as threats and deception. Such behaviors induce defensiveness and reduce tolerance of differences. However, when it does not become a dominant response pattern, coercive tactics can serve a constructive function by allowing intense emotions to be vented and by engaging an otherwise passive or apathetic partner.

Avoidance. Avoidance has also been called "covert destructive conflict" (Galvin & Brommel, 1986) and "withdrawal" (Margolin et al., 1982). A spouse who employs avoidance techniques is attempting to defend against direct confrontation with the partner. Avoidance involves any behaviors designed to move the discussion away from the matter at hand (Fitzpatrick, 1988). In addition, avoidance tactics typically convey little information to the partner (Raush, Barry, Hertel, & Swain, 1974). Two commonly mentioned tactics include denial and disqualification (Galvin & Brommel, 1986; Raush et al., 1974). Denial is a statement that there is not a problem accompanied with nonverbal signals that contradict the verbal message. Disqualification is similar to denial and refers to the expression of negative feelings that are then

discounted in some way, such as attributing the feelings to innocuous or external causes. The intent is to hide or minimize the emotion. Avoiding behaviors can serve a constructive function when specifically used to postpone discussion of a conflict to a time when resolution is more likely to occur, such as when the spouses are more calm, or when they have sufficient time and privacy. However, a habitual pattern of avoidance precludes resolution of relationship problems and may result in future marital problems due to a lack of tolerance for conflict.

Relationship of Conflict Behaviors to Marital Satisfaction

Self-report studies on marital conflict have consistently found that problem solving behaviors are related to marital satisfaction, whereas coercive and avoiding tactics are related to marital distress (Christensen, 1988; Margolin et al.,1982; Rands et al., 1981; Schaap et al., 1988). Interaction studies have demonstrated more complex, but similar relationships between the three types of conflict behaviors and concurrent marital satisfaction (Phillips, 1989). Based on a review of the marital interaction literature, Phillips describes how distressed and satisfied couples tend to behave in conflict situations. Couples who are experiencing marital distress have consistently been found to engage in coercive behaviors. Specifically, they seem to focus on attacking their partner by disagreeing, criticizing, telling their spouse what to do, and rejecting their spouse's feelings or suggested solutions. Distressed spouses also respond to their partner's complaints with their own complaints resulting in negative escalation that appears to be the hallmark of distressed couples' interaction. A less prominent finding is the tendency of distressed couples to engage in avoiding behaviors. They avoid discussing how their behavior has a negative impact on their spouse by ignoring their partner's feeling statements, by denying responsibility for problems, and

by making excuses for their behavior. In general, it appears that distressed couples attempt to impose their perspective and desired solutions on their spouse, and/or attempt to get out of the interaction altogether. On the other hand, nondistressed couples engage in much more amiable and constructive interactions. They tend to agree with each other, and are able to focus on discussing the problem at hand. In general, satisfied couples demonstrate problem solving behaviors while dealing with conflict. They validate each other's perceptions and feelings, accept responsibility for their behavior, and contract with each other in order to obtain a mutually satisfying compromise.

The results from a longitudinal study by Gottman and Krokoff (1989) suggest a slightly different picture. Gottman and Krokoff found that not all negative behavior erodes marital satisfaction, even though it tends to be linked to concurrent dissatisfaction. Perhaps the key is that couples openly confront conflict in a manner that prevents negative escalation. When couples avoid conflictual interactions, or attempt to minimize conflict by complying with their spouse, they appear to sacrifice satisfaction in the long run for peace in the short run. Couples who are able to improve their marital satisfaction appear to find the middle ground between avoidance and aggression by being assertive: they are able to openly express dissatisfaction with one another in a way that allows them to resolve relationship problems.

Impact of Gender on Marital Conflict

The literature on marital conflict reviewed thus far suggests that satisfied couples are able to openly and honestly discuss and resolve dissatisfactions without the conversation disintegrating into negative escalation. Another important conclusion occurring frequently in the marital conflict literature is that differences in the way men and women respond to conflict may actually undermine their ability to interact in a

constructive manner. A number of studies have found that men tend to be rational and avoiding, whereas women tend to be emotional and coercive (Christensen, 1987; Komarovsky, 1962; Margolin, Burman, & John, 1989; Margolin et al., 1982; Margolin & Wampold, 1981; Notarius & Johnson, 1982; Raush et al., 1974.) Although this pattern is more likely to be found among distressed couples (Notarius & Pellegrini, 1987), the fact that gender-linked reactions to conflict are found independent of marital satisfaction suggests that there may be gender differences that interfere with constructive conflict resolution.

The Role of Emotion In Marital Relationships

Researchers have examined in detail the behavioral differences in response to conflict between distressed and satisfied couples and between men and women. The next logical step in the study of marital conflict is discovering why people respond to conflict the way they do. Based on their review of the marital conflict literature, Schaap et al. (1988) conclude that "...the crucial underlying dimension is affect, the contribution of each interactant to the emotional climate of the interaction" (p. 228).[1] Krokoff, Gottman, and Hass (1989) agree and also state that the negative affect dimension is the most consistent discriminator of distressed versus nondistressed interactions. Likewise, Markman (1989) conceptualizes effective marital conflict management as the ability to deal with negative affect. Consistent with the above conclusions, two studies have demonstrated the importance of affective variables relative to other marital variables. Broderick and O'Leary (1986) found that, relative to behavioral variables, affective and attitudinal variables accounted for more unique variance in marital

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[1] For the purposes of this paper, the terms "affect" and "emotion" shall be treated as synonyms. The former term is favored in the marital literature, although the latter term is more common in the empirical and theoretical literature on emotion in general.

satisfaction. Fincham and O'Leary (1983) found that affective responses are more important than causal attributions in predicting spouses' behavior. Given these conclusions, it becomes clear that marital researchers need to examine the theoretical construct of emotion.

Interpersonal Theories of Emotion

There is no agreement in the emotion literature regarding exactly what emotion is. There are a large number of theories representing a number of different approaches including behavioral, arousal, cognitive, evolutionary, brain function, and psychoanalytic theories (Plutchik, 1980). For the purposes of this paper, no attempt will be made to pick one definition. Instead, focus will be placed on describing how emotions are produced and what functions they serve.

Several theorists argue that emotions result from the interpretation of environmental events. Lazarus (1975) theorizes that "in man emotional activity results from the person's evaluation or appraisal of his moment to moment transactions with the environment, transactions that can be viewed by him as benign, positive, challenging, or threatening" (p. 47). Likewise, Cornelius (1984) agrees that emotions are based on interpretation of the person's situation. In addition, Cornelius emphasizes the importance of the social environment in the production of emotion: he states that emotions are only meaningful as they are embedded within one's interpersonal context. Averill (1980) places even more emphasis on the importance of social interaction in producing emotion and defines emotions as transitory social roles that include the individual's appraisal of the situation. If emotions are produced as a result of interpreting the meaning of one's interaction with other people, then emotions are very likely to be produced during conflict interactions with one's spouse since conflict results

from interference with an important goal. Berscheid not only agrees with this conclusion, but takes it one step further and states that interference of on-going activity is a necessary condition for the production of emotion (Berscheid,1982; Berscheid,1985; Berscheid, Gangestad, & Kulakowski, 1984). Interruption signals that important changes have occurred in the environment. Berscheid's definition of emotion also includes perceived increase in autonomic nervous system arousal and the labeling of that arousal with some sort of emotional term. Berscheid's theory suggests that emotion results from interpersonal conflict. On the other hand, Greenberg and Johnson (1986 a; 1986 b) argue that affective experience is extremely salient and overrides other cues during marital interaction. In other words, emotional experience provides a framework that structures spouses' perceptions of each other. This position suggests that once emotion is produced, it influences the course of a particular conflict situation. Over time, if the same emotions are repeatedly produced during conflict interactions, couples may begin to react to each other based on their emotional state and independent of the actual behaviors displayed by each spouse.

Emotion and Marital Conflict Behaviors

Including the dimension of affect clarifies the behavioral differences demonstrated by distressed relative to nondistressed couples. Several studies have demonstrated that the interaction of dysfunctional couples typically becomes increasingly negative as their conversation progresses. Greenberg and Johnson (1986 b) state that dysfunctional relationships develop vicious cycles in which partner's underlying emotions are used as fodder for perpetuating the cycle rather than leading to diffusion or de-escalation of the cycle. The importance of emotion is also demonstrated by Gottman (1979) who found that content codes alone failed to discriminate distressed

from nondistressed couples. Only when an affect code was combined with the individual content codes did differences emerge. Based on a review of laboratory marital interaction studies, Gottman and Levenson (1986) conclude that relative to the interaction of nondistressed couples, the interaction of distressed couples is characterized by more negative affect and more negative affect reciprocity.

The dimension of affect also helps to clarify gender differences in response to conflict. Markman and Kraft (1989) hypothesize that"...gender differences in interaction are the result of differences in men's and women's abilities to cope with conflict, such that men are biologically primed and behaviorally socialized to withdraw from unstructured conflict, while women are much better able to withstand and manage conflict" (p. 52). Several studies have found that marital conflict is more stressful for men than women (Notarius & Johnson, 1982; Schaap, 1984.) Markman (1989) also hypothesizes that there are two tasks involved in every marriage--managing conflict and maintaining intimacy. Both avoidance and coercion represent dysfunctional conflict management: the former involves attempts to over control negative affect and the latter represents lack of control.

One study (Guthrie & Snyder,1988) suggests that part of the difference between the way husbands and wives deal with emotions elicited during marital conflict is that wives and husbands appraise the meaning of emotional behaviors differently. It was found that husbands and wives both appraised vulnerable expressions, such as admitting nervousness and telling personal problems, as indicative of powerlessness. However, wives also appraised these emotional behaviors as opportunities for affiliation whereas husbands did not. Shows of anger invoked images of independence for wives, but invoked images of powerlessness for husbands. Consequently, husbands reported being less

expressive of anger and other emotions that they regarded as indicative of powerlessness. Therefore, emotional expression of negative feelings may be seen by men as representing a loss of control, whereas women believe positive outcomes can occur when negative emotions are expressed.

In a similar vein, Rubin (1983) suggests that differences in the way men and women deal with conflict and intimacy result from differences in the way they deal with their inner emotional life. Rubin states that for men, proximity itself result in feelings of intimacy. It is reassuring just to be in a woman's presence, to know that she's there and available when she is needed. Women, on the other hand, feel that intimacy without words is not enough. It is important for her to know what he is feeling in order to feel close to him. She also wants him to care about what she is feeling. However, too much self disclosure is burdensome for the man. Especially when the woman asks for the expression of feelings that expose his vulnerability, such as fear, sadness, and hurt, he is likely to withdraw in an attempt to protect himself. This difference in dealing with emotions results in an interaction pattern that Rubin labels the "rational-man-hysterical-woman script" (p. 73). Consistent with Rubin's theory, Guerin, Fay, Burden, and Kautto (1987) describe the dynamics of what they label the "emotional pursuer-emotional distancer" relationship. The emotional pursuer, typically the female, provides the impetus for change whereas the distancer provides the stability to accomplish important relationship tasks. The emotionality of the pursuer fills a perceived lack in the distancer's life whereas the calmness and reasonableness of the distancer serves as a check to the pursuer's impulsivity. The pursuer is usually the first to notice too great a distance in the relationship and acts to narrow it. The distancer functions to maintain appropriate boundaries and to prevent negative

escalation. Unfortunately, Guerin et al. warn that under stress, these complementary patterns can result in escalating cycles of reaction. This warning is consistent with the previously mentioned finding that gender-linked differences in response to conflict are more commonly found among dissatisfied couples.

The sex differences found in the marital conflict literature are consistent with the hypothesis that men and women manage their inner emotional life in different ways. Clearly, the finding that women tend to be emotional and negative suggests that women desire a mutual discussion of both negative and positive feelings. When their spouse is not responsive, they escalate their expression of dissatisfaction. The tendency of men to engage in rational problem solving behaviors may actually serve to distance men from confronting the emotions that are an inherent part of conflict between two people. The sex differences found by Gottman and Krokoff (1989) are also consistent with this proposed gender-linked difference in managing affect. The couples who were able to maintain the highest levels of marital satisfaction over time consisted of a wife who was able to engage her husband in venting anger and dissatisfaction without becoming defensive toward her husband, and a husband who was able to vent his feelings of anger and dissatisfaction without whining, withdrawing, or becoming stubborn and defensive.

Specific Emotions

Prior to the late 1980's, almost all of the studies on affect in the marital literature have conceptualized affect as positive or negative evaluations of spouse behavior. In their review of marital interaction studies, Gottman and Levenson (1986) argue that it is important to break down global affect categories into more specific emotion categories such as fear and anger. They give the example of one couple whose interaction was coded based on positive, negative, and neutral affect categories. The

results regarding negative affect reciprocity suggested that the wife and husband were expressing the same emotions. However, when specific negative affects were coded, this apparent symmetry derived from the analysis of global affects disappeared. Instead, it became clear that the wife responded with fear to the husband's anger, revealing a dominance structure.

Gottman and Levenson's argument is consistent with the claim by most emotion theorists that there is a set of "basic" emotions, supposedly resulting from different underlying biological foundations (Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Connor, 1987). Ekman, Levenson, & Friesen (1983) found empirical support for the claim that there are a set of basic emotions that can be distinguished based on specific autonomic activity. They examined a set of six target emotions: surprise, disgust, anger, fear, and sadness. In addition to finding a general distinction between the positive and the negative emotions, Ekman et al. also found important differences among the negative emotions. Specifically, disgust was characterized by low heart rate, whereas anger, fear, and sadness were characterized by high heart rate. Anger was characterized by high skin temperature, whereas fear and sadness were characterized by low skin temperature. The existence of a set of basic emotions is also supported by studies in which subjects' views of emotions are explored. Bretherton and Beeghly (1982) found that the emotion terms most frequently mentioned by 28-month-old children are love, like, mad, scared, happy, and sad. Fehr and Russell (1984) asked 200 subjects to list as many items of the category 'emotion' as came into mind. More than 40 percent of the subjects listed happiness, anger, sadness, love, fear, hate, and joy. Shaver et al. (1987) asked 100 college students to sort a large number of emotion terms in any way that seemed reasonable to them. Then they performed cluster analysis on the data and obtained six

separate clusters including love, joy, anger, sadness, fear, and surprise. Plutchik (1980) also discusses studies in which mood adjective checklists were factor analyzed. He points out that different studies using different word lists obtained different numbers of factors. Despite the fact that different categories are obtained across studies, there is clearly overlap. For example, almost all (if not all) studies obtain clusters of emotions representing anger, fear, and sadness. In addition, the fact that people are able to categorize large numbers of emotion terms at all suggests that the idea of the existence of a small number of basic emotions fits with their subjective reality.

Specific Emotions and Marital Interaction

Recently, researchers have begun to look at the relationship between the ways in which people act and the specific emotions that they are expressing. The four studies below all coded taped interactions between spouses with behavioral coding schedules that assessed specific communication and problem solving behaviors, and with affective coding schedules that assessed a set of basic, or specific emotions.

The verbal expression of anger, depression, and affection. Guthrie & Noller (1988) examined how spouses communicate different emotions by videotaping 41 couples while they role played six different situations. Each spouse took a turn acting as expresser and receiver in an anger situation, a depression situation, and an affection situation. The parts of the interaction that the expresser or receiver identified as conveying the target emotion were coded for six styles of communication. It was found that in the affection situation, the most common style used was the conversational style that involves joking, describing, story telling, and expressing preferences and opinions. In the anger situation, the most common verbal style employed by both spouses was the "heavy active controlling" style that involves behaviors such as blaming, demanding,

accusing, and threatening. In addition, wives were also very likely to use a "heavy passive controlling" style that includes behaviors such as complaining, nagging, criticizing, and whining. On the other hand, husbands were also very likely to use a "light active controlling" style that includes such behaviors as directing, advising, and persuading. When expressing depression, both spouses engaged in listening behaviors and both spouses displayed the exploratory style, which consists of explaining, analyzing, reasoning, and proposing solutions. Wives also displayed the heavy passive controlling style.

Quality of communication and specific emotions. Krokoff, Gottman, and Hass (1989) examined the relationship between speaking and listening behaviors and the expression of various specific emotions. The conflict interaction of 52 couples who varied in marital satisfaction were coded with the Specific Affect Coding System and the Rapid Couples Interaction Scoring System global speaker and listener codes. It was found that the quality of speaking and listening on the part of both husbands and wives was related to humor, anger, disgust/contempt, sadness, whining, and fear. Specifically, the quality of listening behaviors was directly related to the display of humor. The quality of wife listening behaviors was directly related to wife fear, but inversely related to wife sadness. The authors speculate that the former finding is due to increased vigilance on the part of fearful wives. In terms of speaking behaviors, quality of speaking was inversely related to the expression anger and contempt for both husbands and wives. Finally, the quality of husband speaking was directly related to both husband affection and wife whining. The latter finding seems counterintuitive. The whine code appears to be similar to defensiveness, and therefore, it may be that as husbands express their dissatisfaction more effectively, their wives are reacting defensively compared to wives

whose husbands do not communicate their feelings of dissatisfaction. It must be noted, however, that none of the correlations between specific affect and quality of speaking and listening were greater than 0.49.

Expression of specific emotions among couples with different conflict styles. Margolin and her colleagues (Margolin, Burman, & John, 1989; Margolin, John, & Gleberman, 1988) have also recently explored the relationship between conflict behaviors and specific emotions. Seventy-three couples were separated into four groups: physically aggressive couples, verbally aggressive couples, couples who withdraw, and nondistressed couples. The entire study involved a total of five testing sessions that included questionnaires as well as tapings of laboratory and home interactions.

In the first part of the study, Margolin et al. (1988) taped couples in the laboratory while they discussed two separate marital problems. Each interaction was coded for various affective states. After completing a discussion, each spouse rated his or her own emotional state and completed a questionnaire assessing stress symptoms. Three comparisons were made: physically aggressive couples were compared with the other two discordant groups, all three groups of discordant couples were compared to the nondistressed group, and withdrawing couples were compared with verbally aggressive couples. It was found that physically aggressive couples differed from the other discordant groups in that the husband displayed more negative behaviors, reported more sadness, fear, anger, and feeling attacked, and somewhat more physiological arousal than the other husbands. Nondistressed couples differed from all the others in that they reported more positive emotions and less arousal. They also displayed more positive behaviors and fewer negative behaviors. Verbally aggressive couples and withdrawing

couples reacted in a similar manner during conflict discussions. However, verbally aggressive wives were more defensive than withdrawing wives. In addition, compared to verbally aggressive husbands, withdrawing husbands reported higher physiological arousal during the first discussion that involved a topic that was the most problematic of the two discussions. However, by the second discussion, both groups of husbands reported the same level of stress symptoms.

In the latter part of the study (Margolin et al.,1989), two conflict interactions were taped in the couples' homes. The interactions were coded for seven scales, some of which were very affective in nature (e.g. despair), others were very behavioral in nature (e.g. problem solve), and still others appeared to be both affective and behavioral (e.g. overt hostility). The authors made the same three comparisons described above. Only main effects, and group-by-spouse interactions will be reported here. It was found that physically aggressive spouses were higher in overt hostility than the other two discordant groups. In addition, relative to the husbands in the other discordant groups, physically aggressive husbands were more defensive. However, the three groups of discordant wives did not differ from one another. The nondistressed couples showed more involvement, less despair, and more problem solving behaviors relative to all three discordant groups. Compared to the withdrawing couples, the verbally aggressive couples displayed less involvement. In addition, withdrawing wives displayed more despair than verbally aggressive wives whereas withdrawing husbands displayed less despair than verbally aggressive husbands. Withdrawing husbands also displayed somewhat more warmth than verbally aggressive husbands. In addition to these group differences, some gender differences were found across groups. Wives in general displayed more hostility, despair, and problem solving behaviors. Husbands, on

the other hand, displayed less involvement, more defensiveness, and more patronizing behaviors.

Conclusions

Based on the results of these studies that examine the relationship between specific emotions and marital interaction, three general conclusions can be made. The first is that such studies are consistent with previous research regarding sex differences in marital interaction and marital conflict. The second is that husbands' displays of emotions and conflict behaviors discriminate among different groups of couples better than wives' displays of emotions and conflict behaviors. The last conclusion is that specific emotions can be linked to specific conflict behaviors.

Gender differences. It was previously stated that a number of marital interaction and conflict studies have found that women tend to be emotional and coercive, while men tend to be rational and avoiding. The studies reviewed above are, for the most part, consistent with these findings. When Guthrie and Noller (1988) did find differences in the way husbands and wives express various emotions, they found that men tend to use communication styles that were rational, involving behaviors such as advising, persuading, explaining, analyzing, and reasoning. However, women tended to use a communication style that involved passive coercive behaviors such as complaining, nagging, criticizing, and whining. Likewise, Margolin et al. (1989) found that wives tend to express more hostility and despair than husbands, suggesting greater emotionality and negativity on the part of women. In addition, the finding that men tend to be less involved in the interaction is consistent with the previous finding that men tend to be avoiding. The tendency of husbands to behave defensively suggest that they are

feeling attacked by their spouse. However, the finding that wives display more problem solving behaviors is not consistent with previous research.

The group differences found by Margolin and her colleagues (Margolin, Burman, & John, 1989; Margolin, John, & Gleberman, 1988) are also consistent with the hypothesis by Markman and Kraft (1989) stating that men are less able to deal with the negative emotions associated with marital conflict. Compared to verbally aggressive husbands, withdrawing husbands reported more arousal during discussion of a marital problem that was rated as most problematic by the couple. Perhaps withdrawing behaviors are an attempt by these over-aroused husbands to decrease their level of arousal and to prevent negative escalation of the interaction that would result in even greater levels of arousal. If withdrawing husbands are attempting to over control their level of negative affect, then physically aggressive husbands represent the opposite side of the coin. Physically aggressive husbands' tendency to report a larger variety of negative affect, to display more negative behaviors, and to report being more aroused than the husbands in the other discordant groups suggest that physically aggressive husbands are out of control of their negative affect.

Importance of husband behavior. Margolin and her colleagues failed to find differences among wives from each of the three discordant groups of couples. In addition, differences between physically aggressive couples and the other discordant couples were due to differences in the behavior of physically discordant husbands. These findings are consistent with previous research on marital conflict. Barry (1970) found that couples whose marriages are distressed are characterized by the husband being more coercive, punitive, and less conciliatory than the rest of the husbands in the sample. Raush, Barry, Hertel, and Swain (1974) found little difference between the conflict behavior

of discordant and harmonious wives. In addition, Notarius and Pellegrini (1987) cite studies that find that differences between distressed and nondistressed couples' decoding skill are due to deficits in distressed husbands' decoding ability. In all, these studies suggest that husband behavior is more important in differentiating groups of married couples than wife behavior.

Links among specific emotions and specific conflict behaviors. All of the above studies demonstrate that relationships between specific emotional states and specific conflict behaviors can be identified. Guthrie and Noller (1988) found that behaviors such as blaming, demanding, accusing, and threatening are most typically used by both spouses to express anger. Likewise, Krokoff et al. (1989) find that the degree of anger expressed is inversely related to the quality of speaking behaviors. Both of these findings suggest a link between coercion and anger.

Links between other specific emotions and conflict behaviors interact with gender and group identity. Krokoff et al. (1989) found the relationship between sadness and listening behaviors to be the opposite of the relationship between fear and listening behaviors, but only for wives. In comparing verbally aggressive couples to withdrawing couples, Margolin et al. (1989) found that the link between despair and conflict style varied by sex: wives with a withdrawing conflict style expressed the most despair whereas husbands with a verbally aggressive conflict style expressed the most despair.

Inconsistencies among the links between emotion and conflict behavior do occur across these studies. Margolin et al. (1989) found less despair expressed by nondistressed couples relative to the discordant couples. Krokoff et al. (1989) found an inverse relationship between the expression of sadness in wives and the quality of their listening behavior. These two findings suggest an inverse relationship between sadness

and the quality of a spouse's conflict management. However, Guthrie and Noller (1988) found that a typical communication style of depressed spouses consisted of listening behaviors as well as problem solving behaviors such as explaining, analyzing, and proposing solutions. The manner in which all three codes are operationalized suggest they all tap a similar emotional state: "despair" included the items sad/depressed, sulk, hurt, hopeless; "depression" was described as feeling down in the dumps, unhappy, taken for granted; and no definition was given for "sadness". Why, then, do these inconsistencies appear? It may be because in the study by Guthrie and Noller, couples were given conflict situations to improvise, whereas in the other studies, couples discussed an actual problem they were experiencing in their relationship. Perhaps couples have a hard time "pretending" to be sad. Nevertheless, these discrepancies suggest that further research is necessary to determine the relationship between sadness and conflict behaviors.

Perceptual Biases in Marital Conflict Interaction

It is clear that emotion plays an important role in marital conflict. Other marital researchers have argued that the relationship between emotion and conflict behavior can not be fully understood without also considering perceptual and evaluative processes that occur during conflict interactions. The interpersonal theories of emotion previously mentioned all state that the production of specific emotion depends upon the person's evaluation or appraisal of his or her situation. Within an intimate relationship, a person's affective reaction to the partner's behavior depends upon the meaning the person attributes to that behavior. Based on a review of the perception literature, Sillars (1984) concludes that emotionality is a pervasive factor in interpersonal perception. In addition, strong negative emotions lead to less accurate,

more one-sided, and more negative perception of one's partner. Sillars (1981) states that people rely on the attributions they make about other people's behavior to decide how to handle conflict. Since attributions are affected by negative feelings, and negative feelings are often a part of marital conflict, attributions contribute to spouses' ineffectiveness in handling conflict.

Weiss (1980, 1984) states that distortions occur in couples' perceptions of their interactions resulting in an insensitivity to the actual quality of communication displayed by one's spouse, an hypothesis he calls "sentiment override." Weiss (1980) states that "The evaluation of interaction patterns is a joint function of sentiment and the outcome of events themselves" (p. 244). Weiss' sentiment override hypothesis is consistent with the argument by Greenberg and Johnson (1986a, 1986b) that emotion serves as a framework that overrides other cues during marital interaction and structures spouses' perceptions of each other. Weiss hypothesizes that as long as a spouse's sentiment remains positive toward the partner, then the spouse will continue to attribute good intentions to the partner regardless of the partner's behavior. However, if after a period of time the partner's behavior continues to conflict with the spouse's needs and goals, then the spouse's sentiment will shift and become more negative, and the spouse will begin to question the partner's intentions. After time and with continued conflict, the spouse will attribute relationship difficulties to malevolence on the part of the partner. Couples get "stuck" in a dysfunctional relationship because of the hypotheses they make about one another's behavior. Weiss argues that the negative sentiment override of distressed couples must be addressed for any change to occur. They need to see how their view of their relationship is preventing them from making positive behavior change. If negative sentiment is not addressed, each spouse's

perception of the partner's behavior will continue to be biased so that either positive changes in the partner's behavior are not perceived, or negative motives are attributed to any behavior change that is intended by the partner to be positive.

There are several sources of empirical evidence supporting the premise that couples' subjective experience of their conflict interactions is biased, and this bias affects the responses elicited by each spouse. The first source comes from insider-outsider studies in which marital interaction is coded by the couple and strangers. These studies find that relative to trained observers, couple's rate their own interactions much differently. A second source of support comes from research on the interpersonal agreement of husbands and their wives which consistently finds a discrepancy in how they perceive and evaluate their own interactions. Another source comes from the marital attribution literature. Last of all, a few interaction studies have directly assessed the relative contributions of perceptual factors in predicting various interaction processes and various outcomes to conflict interactions.

Insider-Outsider Agreement

Studies that have compared observer's ratings of couples' interactions with couples' ratings of their own interactions have discovered that spouses rate their own and their partner's behavior differently than outsiders. Floyd and Markman (1983) found that although observers rate the husbands' behaviors more positively than the wives' behaviors, couples rate the wives' behaviors more positively than the husbands' behaviors. In addition, Margolin, Hattem, John, and Yost (1985) found that when rating the positivity or negativity of their own behavior during a conflict interaction, spouses agree with each other more than they agree with outside observers.

Several studies have found that disagreement with outside observers interacts with gender and/or level of marital distress. Floyd (1988) found that husbands but not wives disagree with outside observers. Both Notarius and Pellegrini (1987) and Floyd and Markman (1983) found that distressed husbands rate their wives' behavior more positively than do observers. However, Birchler, Clopton, and Adams (1984) found that nondistressed couples disagree with outside observers. In addition, they found better agreement between distressed spouses and observers when rating negative codes.

Two studies have found that couple's disagreement with outside observers is specific to rating their own behaviors as compared to rating the behavior of other couples. Gottman and Porterfield (1981) located a decoding deficit in distressed husbands that was relationship specific: the distressed husbands were able to accurately decode strangers' communication. Margolin et al. (1985) found that agreement with observers was greater when coding strangers' interactions than when coding their own interactions.

Although results from insider-outsider studies conflict in terms of where disagreement is found, several conclusions can be drawn. For the most part, spouses perceive their own behaviors and their partners' behaviors differently than outside observers, and this difference in perception is specific to their marital interactions. This conclusion is consistent with the hypothesis that spouses' global evaluation of their marriage and their partner biases their perception of the actual behaviors displayed by themselves and their partner. In addition, the fact that more disagreement is found with distressed couples than nondistressed couples suggests that distortions in perception are greater when couples typically employ ineffective or destructive problem solving tactics.

Agreement Between Spouses

Both interaction and self-report studies find that spouses disagree as to what is actually happening in their marriage. Gottman and his colleagues have compared the communication patterns of distressed and nondistressed couples (Gottman, 1979; Gottman, Notarius, Gonso, & Markman, 1976.) Few differences in the intent of the messages sent to one's partner were found between distressed and nondistressed couples. However, distressed couples were much more likely to perceive their partner's message as negative than nondistressed couples. Either distressed couples lie about the intent of their message or do not realize how negative they are acting, or distressed couples have a negative bias toward their partner's behavior.

Self-report studies find that spouses also disagree about which specific communication and problem solving behaviors they see as characteristic of themselves and their partner. Hahlweg, Schindler, Revenstorf, and Brengelmann (1984) found that the correlations between husbands' and wives' responses to questionnaires assessing communication and problem solving behaviors were low, indicating that spouses view their interaction quite differently. Consistent with the insider-outsider studies, other self report studies have found that differences in perception between spouses interact with gender and level of marital distress. Yelsma (1984) found smaller differences between "happy" spouses' self and spouse perceptions of marital communication practices than between "counseling" spouses' perceptions. Likewise, Margolin, Fernandez, Gorin, and Ortiz (1982) found greater discrepancies between distressed couples' perceptions of their conflict behaviors than between nondistressed couples' perceptions. In addition, there was a sex difference in the discrepancy between spouse ratings of own behaviors and partner's ratings of spouse behaviors: there was more

disagreement over husband than wife withdrawal behaviors. Although Christensen, Sullaway, and King (1983) did not find any sex differences, they too found better agreement between spouses who were satisfied with their marriage than spouses who were distressed. Agreement was also found to vary with the nature of the item being rated: it was better on objective, specific items and on socially desirable items. However, these items were rated as relatively unimportant by couples. It would appear that husbands and wives "see" different behaviors happening in their relationship, especially distressed spouses.

Marital Attributions

Conclusions drawn from the marital attribution literature are consistent with the hypothesis that couples who experience negative sentiment attribute different meaning to their partner's behaviors than couples who experience positive sentiment. Based on a review of the literature, Bradbury and Fincham (1987) conclude that distressed couples maximize the meaning of negative marital events and minimize the meaning of positive marital events, whereas satisfied couples maximize the meaning of positive events and minimize the meaning of negative events. Specifically, marital attribution studies have consistently found that negative marital events are seen by distressed couples as having an impact on many aspects of the marriage. Less consistently, it has been found that distressed couples see negative events as reflecting some stable characteristic of the partner. However, with regard to positive marital events, distressed couples see them as specific in impact, and attribute them to external, unstable causes. An opposite pattern was found for satisfied couples: negative events are seen as specific in impact and due to external, unstable events, whereas

positive events are seen as global in impact and are attributed to stable partner characteristics.

Effect of Perceptual Biases on Behavior

Three interaction studies have directly assessed the relative contribution of cognitive/affective evaluation of partner behavior to the behavioral response of the perceiver. Results have varied across gender and level of distress. In the first study, Weiss (1984) compared correlations among three sets of variables: "context," which included measures of overall relationship sentiment (satisfaction) and measures assessing expectations regarding outcomes of conflict interactions, "process," which included positive-to-negative ratings by both the couple and outsider observers of actual conflict-resolution interactions, and "outcome," which included global ratings of satisfaction and degree of progress and were completed after each conflict-resolution interaction by both the couple and outside observers. The sample consisted of 25 couples not in immediate need of therapy. Each couple participated in two conflict-resolution interactions which were videotaped. Weiss found that couples agree to some degree with outside observers about what partner behaviors are positive. In predicting couples ratings of their own positive behavior, observer's ratings of positive behavior predicted best (r = 0.57). However, couples disagree with outside observers on what behaviors are perceived as negative. The best predictor of couple's perception of their own negative behaviors was the sentiment context ratings (r = 0.54). In other words, couple's global evaluations of their relationship predicted how they evaluate particular partner behavior better than the objective quality of that particular behavior as measured by outside observers. In addition, couples' own process ratings were better predictors of their outcome ratings of overall satisfaction with the interaction (r =

0.59) than process ratings by outside observers. These results suggest sentiment override plays a major role in the perception of negative partner behaviors. In addition, sentiment override determines indirectly the couples' overall satisfaction with their conflict interactions: it affects how they perceive their on-going interaction, and their perceptions of their on-going interaction affect how satisfied they are with the interaction once it is over. It is also likely that couples' level of satisfaction with particular conflict interactions contributes to their overall sentiments toward their partner. Thus, the process of sentiment override is cyclical: sentiments affect perceptions, which affect later sentiments.

In a second, similar study, Floyd and Markman (1983) had ten nondistressed couples and six distressed couples discuss and attempt to resolve the primary problem area in their relationship while rating the ongoing discussion. In addition, the interactions were videotaped and later rated by ten undergraduate observers. The authors found that although observers rated the husbands in both groups the same, distressed wives rated their husbands much more negatively. In addition, observers rated the behavior of distressed wives the most negatively. These two findings suggest that distressed wives' behavioral reactions to their husband's behavior is consistent with their negative bias of that behavior, but is inconsistent with the actual quality of that behavior as rated by outside observers. Floyd and Markman also found that distressed husbands rated their wives' behavior much more positively than outside observers. Together with the finding that husbands in both groups are rated similarly by outsiders, this finding suggests that distressed husbands are acting positively in accord with their positive bias of their wives' behaviors even though their wives' behavior is perceived as very negative by outsiders.

The third and last interaction study also found evidence for the influence of negative sentiment override on distressed wives' behavior, and the influence of positive sentiment override on distressed husbands' behavior. Notarius, Benson, Sloane, Vanzetti, and Hornyak (1989) had nine distressed and nine nondistressed couples rate the impact of their partner's messages while discussing both a low conflict issue and a high conflict issue. Their interactions were also coded by undergraduate observers. Based on the results of the study, the authors conclude that "...the behavioral response of a husband or wife is a function of both the antecedent behavior from the partner and the husband's or wife's affective evaluation of the antecedent" (p. 59). Although spouses' affective evaluation of partner behavior was a partial determinant of spouses' behavioral response across all spouses, the authors also conclude that sentiment override was characteristic of distressed couples' interactions, but not of the interactions of nondistressed couples. Husband behavior that was coded as neutral by outside observers was more likely to be perceived as negative by distressed wives relative to nondistressed wives. Once perceiving negative partner behavior, distressed wives were more likely to respond with negative behavior relative to nondistressed wives. It would appear that the negative evaluations distressed wives make regarding their husband's behavior is an important determinant of their own negative behavioral response. In addition, although outsiders rated the behavior of distressed wives much more negatively than the behavior of nondistressed wives, the two groups of husbands did not differ in their subjective reactions to their wives' behavior. In addition, both groups of husbands received similar ratings by outside observers. In other words, the behavior response of distressed husbands was consistent with their positive evaluation of their wives' behaviors but was inconsistent with the actual quality of their wives' behavior as rated by outside

observers. The authors suggest that the positive bias displayed by distressed husbands is actually an attempt to control the emotional tone of the conversation.

Present Study

The present study evolves from the marital conflict literature focusing on the role of emotion, as well as perception and attributions. Three basic conclusions drawn from the review of the marital conflict literature serve as a foundation for the present study. First, studies on the perceptual biases and attributions inherent in marital conflict interactions demonstrate the importance of assessing the subjective experience of spouses in order to understand processes that underlie marital conflict. Specifically, it is found that spouses disagree with each other and outside observers when asked to identify negative conflict behaviors. In addition, how a spouse perceives his or her partner's behavior is related to the types of behaviors he or she displays during conflict interactions. The second basic conclusion is that emotion plays an important role in the process of a conflict interaction. Emotions have been conceptualized both as reactions to perception of partner behavior and as motivators of self behavior. Recent research has found that links can be established between specific emotions and different types of conflict behaviors. The last basic conclusion stems from limitations in the manner in which different types of conflict behaviors have been studied in previous research. Many of the marital conflict studies reviewed above treat the three types of conflict behaviors as exclusive. Most studies assess the presence of each type of conflict behavior separately, and then relate each type to other process or outcome variables. A few studies divide couples a priori into groups based on which of the three types of conflict behaviors they most frequently display. Both methods assume that couples' typical conflict style consists of only one of the three types of conflict behaviors. Such

methods prevent the discovery of conflict styles consisting of complex patterns of behaviors. Consequently, the last conclusion is that spouses can be functional and dysfunctional in different ways and that couples can be classified based on the individual conflict profile characterizing each spouse.

In addition to these three conclusions, one assumption also underlies the present study. It is assumed that spouses develop a relatively stable profile of conflict behaviors which becomes characteristic of their conflict interactions. These profiles result from several different types of factors. Before entering a marriage, each partner has already developed a typical way of dealing with interpersonal conflict based on past experiences and personality characteristics such as the person's level of emotionality, self-control, and skill. Once in a marriage, both spouse's coping styles interact, and over time, the couple develops a typical conflict interaction pattern.

Because of the recency of empirically testing the role of affect in marital conflict interactions, the present study is descriptive in nature. The present study attempts to accomplish three different goals. The first involves identifying subgroups of spouses and couples based on the pattern of conflict behaviors they endorse. The second is to identify the relationships among perception of partner conflict behavior, specific emotions, and spouse's perceived behavioral response to marital conflict interactions. Lastly, any sex differences found with regard to the first two goals will be explored. The intent is to further knowledge of how different types of couples develop patterns of conflict interaction which become characteristic of their relationship, so that a comprehensive model of marital conflict processes can be developed.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Subjects

There are two samples of subjects, a research sample and a clinical sample. The research sample (see table 1a) consists of 117 couples from families who were recruited to participate in a family assessment research project. Families who participated in this separate study were paid 25 dollars. The clinical sample (see table 1b) consists of 65 couples who volunteered for an intervention research project in which couples were taught communication and problem solving skills over an eight week period. At the time of the study, all couples in both samples were married and living together. In addition, couples in the second sample obtained MMPI scores below 80 on all scales. These two samples were both included in this study because they represent different levels of marital dysfunction, with the clinical sample being more dysfunctional. Although the clinical sample was found to be more educated and had a greater income than the research sample, the clinical sample also had a greater number of remarriages, reported more anxiety, sadness, and anger in their marriages, and reported more spouse coercion, spouse avoidance, self coercion, and self avoidance. Relative to the clinical sample, the research sample had longer marriages and reported more satisfaction in their marriages and spouse problem solving. There were no differences with regard to age, race, and self problem solving. Because of this difference in the quality of marital interaction across the two samples, a wider range of conflict styles can be identified by combining these two samples than if either of these two samples were studies alone.

Table 1a. Research Subject Demographics. N=117 Couples

		Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
Age of Subjects:	Husbands	42.2	6.6	29-60
	Wives	40.2	6.2	20-59
Years Married:		17.5	7.4	1-38

		First Marriage	Remarriage
Marital Status:	Husbands	80.0%	20.0%
	Wives	76.5%	23.5%

Race

	Cacausian	Black	Native American	Hispanic	Asian	Other
Husbands	93.2%	1.7%	0.9%	4.3%	0%	0%
Wives	87.9%	0%	3.4%	6.9%	0%	0.9%

Religion

	Protestant	Catholic	Jewish	None	Other
Husbands	15.4%	22.2%	5.1%	6.8%	50.4%
Wives	15.5%	27.6%	3.4%	6.0%	47.4%

Maximum Education

	some highschool	highschool graduate	some college or vocational training	college graduate	advanced degree
Husbands	7.7%	26.5%	35.9%	17.1%	12.8%
Wives	6.0%	35.0%	40.2%	15.4%	3.4%

	0-19	20-29	30-49	50-59	60-69	70 up
Family Annual Income*	21.4%	26.5%	36.8%	6.8%	3.4%	5.1%

* in thousands of dollars

Table 1b. Clinical Subject Demographics. N=65 Couples

		Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
Age of Subjects:	Husbands	41.9	10.7	26-74
	Wives	39.4	10.1	25-68
Years Married:		9.5	10.4	0.25-47

		First Marriage	Remarriage
Marital Status:	Husbands	47.7%	52.3%
	Wives	63.1%	36.9%

Race

	Cacausian	Black	Native American	Hispanic	Asian	Other
Husbands	90.8%	0%	0%	6.2%	1.5%	1.5%
Wives	92.3%	0%	0%	7.7%	0.0%	0.0%

Religion

	Protestant	Catholic	Jewish	None	Other
Husbands	24.6%	13.8%	9.2%	36.9%	15.4%
Wives	30.8%	20.0%	7.7%	20.0%	21.5%

Maximum Education

	some highschool	highschool graduate	some college or vocational training	college graduate	advanced degree
Husbands	0%	1.5%	43.1%	21.5%	23.1%
Wives	0%	12.3%	30.8%	24.6%	26.2%

	0-19	20-29	30-49	50-59	60-69	70 up
Family Annual Income*	1.5%	10.8%	32.3%	12.3%	12.3%	30.8%

* in thousands of dollars

Measures

Conflict Inventory (CI)

The Conflict Inventory (Margolin et al., 1982) is a questionnaire that consists of three scales: "aggression," which includes coercive behaviors, "withdrawal," which includes avoiding behaviors, and "problem solve" (see Appendices A and B). Items consist of specific types of conflict behaviors. Subjects are asked to rate each item on a scale from 0 (never) to 6 (almost always). There are two forms of the CI in the present study. The first asks subjects to rate how often the subject has exhibited each behavior during the last two months. The second asks subjects to rate the frequency of partner behavior. Only those scale items that have been found to differentiate distressed from nondistressed couples will be used in the analyses. These items include initiate discussion, listen, state position, admit faults, and give helpful ideas (items 1, 3, 10, 15, 17, 18) from the problem solve scale; insult, threaten, blame, get revenge, hit (items 4, 7, 12, 24, 25) from the aggression scale; and hide tension, sulk, distant, leave, think of leaving, stop discussion, give in (items 2, 5, 6, 11, 19, 20, 21) from the withdrawal scale. Consequently, problem solve scale scores range from 0 to 36, aggression scale scores range from 0 to 30, and withdrawal scale scores range from 0 to 42. Margolin reports that all three scales significantly correlate with Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS, see below) scores for both self and partner ratings (r ranges from -0.32 to 0.69, with a mean of 0.50.) These scales have also been found to be significantly related to scales from another conflict questionnaire that focuses on verbal and physical attacking behaviors, the Conflicts Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979.) Margolin reports alpha coefficients, based on spouses' ratings of one another, of 0.82 for problem solve, 0.85 for aggression, and 0.82 for withdrawal. To be consistent with the

terminology used in the discussion of conflict behaviors above, the three Conflict Inventory scales will henceforth be referred to as problem solving, coercion, and avoidance.

Spouse Elicited Emotions (SEE)

The SEE (appendix C) was developed by the author and consists of four scales assessing four different affective states: anger, anxiety, sadness, and happiness. Previous research has consistently identified the first three affective states as basic emotions (Plutchik, 1980; Shaver et al., 1987.) There is no agreement across previous empirically and theoretically derived lists of basic emotions with regard to positive affect. Consequently, the scale "happiness" represents global positive affect in the context of the marriage. Each scale consists of six emotion terms. All but one of the terms from each scale were derived from previous affect checklists (Plutchik, 1980; Shaver et al., 1987.) There is a total of 42 items; however, only the bottom 8 items in each of the three columns are used to assess the four scales. The upper six items in each column represent fillers. Each subject is asked to indicate on a scale from 0 (never) to 6 (almost always) how often during the last two months he or she has experienced each emotion when talking with his or her spouse. Each of the four scale scores range from 0 to 36.

Procedure

Couples who participated in the family assessment project were mailed two packets of questionnaires, one week apart, to be completed in their homes. They were told to complete the questionnaires independently and to not to discuss their responses until after they had completed both packets. Only data from the CI, the SEE, and a demographic questionnaire will be included in the present study.

Clinical couples were those who volunteered for a research project involving a communication and problem solving skills class. They participated in a testing session before beginning the class. During this testing session, each spouse independently completed a packet of questionnaires. Only data from the CI, the SEE, and a demographic questionnaire collected during this pretest session will be included in this study.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

The internal consistency of each of the scales from the SEE and CI questionnaires was assessed. Based on data from the first 35 couples from both of the samples[2], the four SEE scales were found to be very reliable. Alphas of 0.92, 0.89, 0.93, and 0.92 were obtained for the anger, anxiety, satisfaction, and sadness scale respectively. However, scales from the self and partner forms of the CI were found to be less consistent. Based on data from the first 20 couples from both samples[3], alphas of 0.73, 0.72, and 0.63 were obtained for spouse problem solving, spouse avoidance, and spouse coercion respectively; and alphas of 0.58, 0.78, and 0.66 were obtained for self problem solving, self avoidance, and self coercion respectively.

When independent variables are correlated among themselves, this multicollinearity can cause problems in different statistical procedures, especially with multiple regression (Neter, Wasserman, & Kutner, 1985). However, Neter et al. state "In polynomial regression models...expressing the independent variable(s) in the form of deviations from the mean serves to reduce substantially the multicollinearity among the first-order, second-order, and higher-order terms for any given independent variable" (p. 394). Correlations among the four emotions assessed by the SEE questionnaire were found to range from an absolute value of 0.50 to 0.82 (mean r =

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[2] CI data from the first 35 couples in both samples were compared to CI data from the rest of the sample. Of the 24 comparisons (six CI scores x gender x sample), only one of the t-tests were found to be significant at the .05 level.

[3] SEE data from the first 20 couples in both samples were compared to SEE data from the rest of the sample. Of the 16 comparisons (four SEE scores x gender x sample), none of the t-tests were found to be significant.

0.69) across the entire sample of husbands and wives. Correlations among the three CI scales from the self form ranged from an absolute value of 0.15 to .56 (mean $\underline{r}$ = 0.32), and from the spouse form ranged from an absolute value of 0.43 to 0.61 (mean $\underline{r}$ = 0.50). Consequently, to ameliorate the effects of multicollinearity, especially among the different specific emotions, all raw data from the SEE and the two forms of the CI were converted into standard scores for husbands and wives separately.

Preliminary analyses support the presumption that the research sample and the clinical sample differ in quality of marital interaction. Comparison of the two samples revealed as expected that the couples in the clinical sample tended to have less functional marriages than couples in the research sample. The clinical sample was significantly more educated and had a greater annual income; but also had a higher proportion of remarried couples, reported more anxiety, sadness, and anger in the context of their marriage, and reported that their spouse engaged in more withdrawing and aggressive behaviors. On the other hand, the research sample had significantly longer marriages, reported more satisfaction in the context of their marriage, and reported that their spouse engaged in more problem solving behaviors. In addition, there was significant difference in the distribution of different religions across the two samples. However, there was no difference in age, race and self report of own problem solving behaviors across the two samples. Because clustering procedures require a large N size and a large amount of variability in order to identify meaningful clusters, both the samples were combined for all further analyses.

Identifying and Comparing Subgroups of Spouses

Data from the three scales from the self form of the CI were cluster analyzed separately for husbands and wives using the quick cluster program from the SPSS-X

(1988) statistical package. Several criteria were used to determine the number of clusters. The goal was to identify the minimum number of clusters representing conflict profiles that were clinically different from each other, and that went beyond a dichotomous functional and dysfunctional classification. Conflict profiles are described by identifying which cluster centers of the three types of conflict behaviors are at least one standard deviation above or below the mean of the sample. Consequently, since all scores had been converted to $\underline{Z}$ scores so that 68% of all scores fall within one standard deviation of the mean, the largest cluster ever obtained would necessarily consist of all three scale scores falling within one standard deviation of 0, regardless of the number of clusters. Therefore, the minimum cluster size was set at four since a size of three only identified an average conflict profile, a dysfunctional profile, and a functional profile. For husbands, a cluster size of four generated profiles whose pattern of mean scores were different from each other. However, for wives, a cluster size of four generated two profiles in which all three mean scale scores fell within one standard deviation of 0. Consequently, and cluster size of five was selected for wives. Even though a different number of clusters was identified for husbands and wives, it can be seen in table 2 that the means and standard deviations of each CI scale from the self form are very similar across gender. Therefore, even though all raw data has been converted to standard scores separately for husbands and wives, conflict profiles identified with this clustering procedure can be compared across gender.

Graphs of cluster centers for husbands and wives are plotted in figures 1a and 1b. Clusters are ranked based on the number of subjects belonging to a cluster, with cluster one representing the most common conflict profile. The first two clusters identified the same conflict profile for both husbands and wives. As stated previously,

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Non-Standardized Data From the Self Form of the Conflict Inventory. N=182 Couples.

	Problem Solving		Coercion		Avoidance	
	mean score	standard deviation	mean score	standard deviation	mean score	standard deviation
Husband	21.2	5.0	3.7	3.2	13.0	7.5
Wife	21.6	5.0	3.9	3.4	12.8	6.7

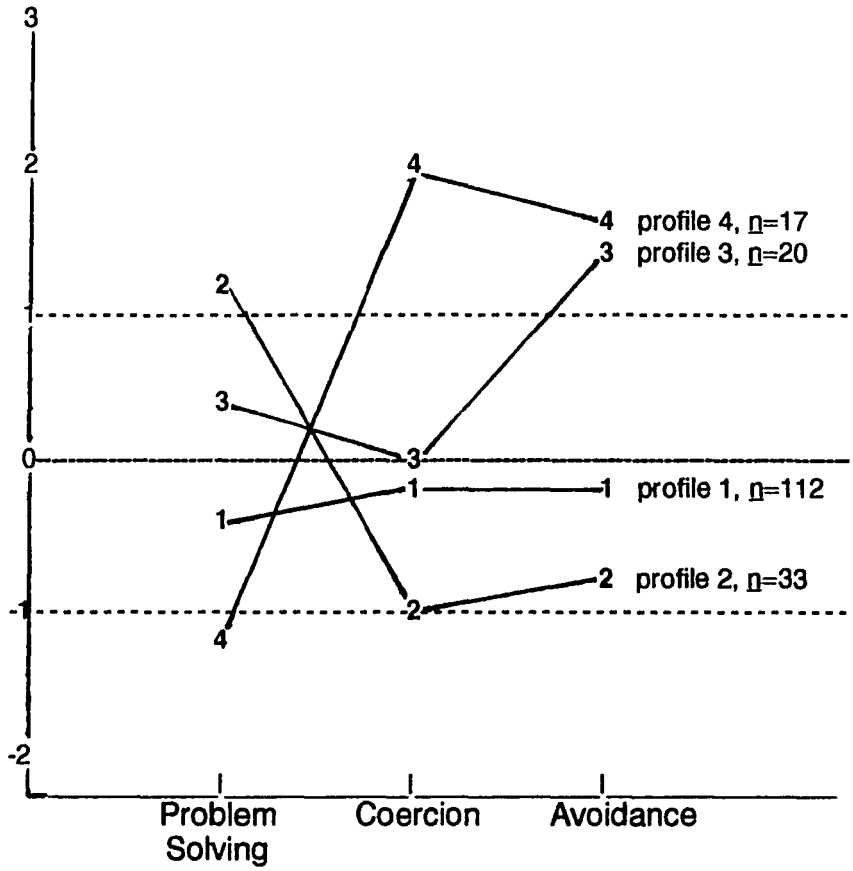


Figure 1a. Cluster Centers* for Husbands' Conflict Profiles. N=182

*Profile 1 = -0.4 PS, -0.2 CO, -0.2 AV
Profile 2 = 1.3 PS, -0.7 CO, -0.9 AV
Profile 3 = 0.4 PS, 0.1 CO, 1.5 AV
Profile 4 = -1.0 PS, 2.0 CO, 1.7 AV

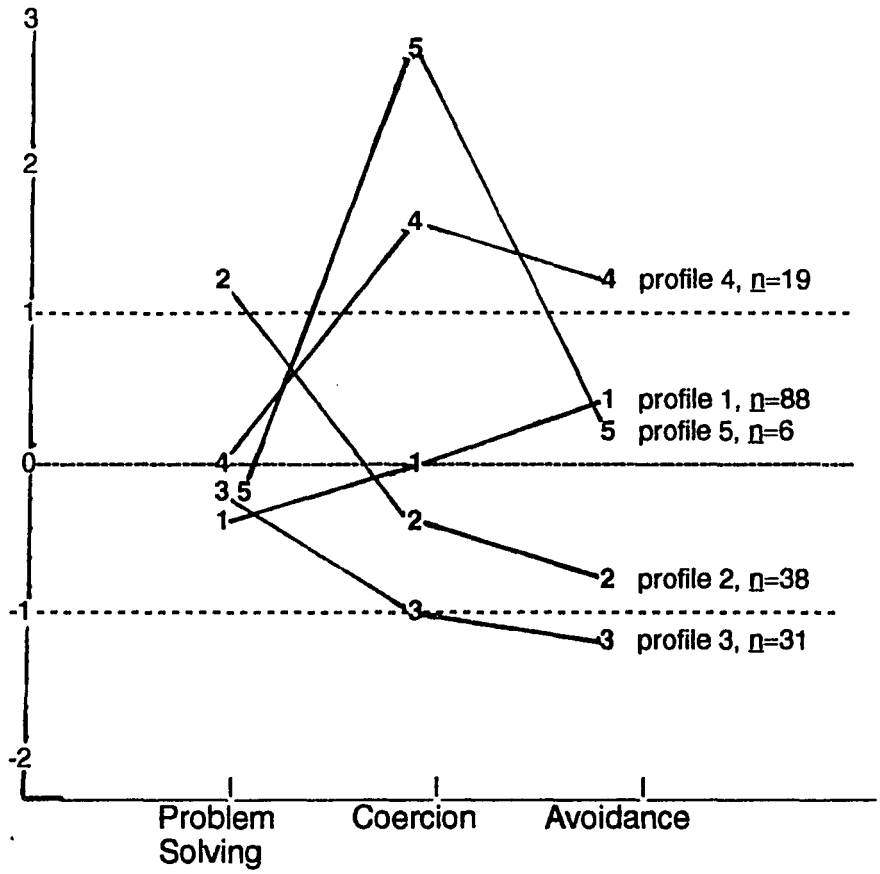


Figure 1b. Cluster Centers* for Wives' Conflict Profiles. N=182

*Profile 1 = -0.4 PS, -0.0 CO, 0.4 AV
Profile 2 = 1.3 PS, -0.4 CO, -0.7 AV
Profile 3 = -0.2 PS, -0.9 CO, -1.1 AV
Profile 4 = 0.0 PS, 1.7 CO, 1.3 AV
Profile 5 = -0.1 PS, 2.8 CO, 0.2 AV

the first profile consists of all three cluster centers falling within one standard deviation of each sample's mean, and thus shall be called the "average" profile. The second profile, which shall be called "high problem solving," consists of average coercion and avoidance cluster centers, but the problem solving cluster center falls outside one standard deviation above each sample's mean. The third cluster represents opposite profiles for husbands and wives. Both the husband and wife profiles have average problem solving and coercion cluster centers. However, the avoidance cluster center of the wife profile falls outside one standard deviation below the mean, whereas the avoidance cluster center of the husband profile falls outside one standard deviation above the mean. Consequently, the husbands' third profile shall be called "high avoidance" and the wives' third profile shall be called "low avoidance." The fourth cluster represents equivalent profiles for husbands and wives. Both have avoidance and coercion cluster centers which fall outside one standard deviation above the sample mean. However, the wives' fourth profile has an average problem solving cluster center while the husbands' fourth profile has a problem solving cluster center that falls outside one standard deviation below the mean. For the purposes of simplicity, the fourth profile for both husbands and wives shall be labeled "high coercion/avoidance." A fifth, albeit small, cluster was found for wives and consists of average problem solving and avoidance cluster centers, but a very high coercion cluster center (almost three standard deviations above the mean.) However, because of the small n size, data from this group of highly coercive wives will not be included in any further analyses.

By translating the cluster centers of each conflict profile into raw scores and comparing that number with the rating scale from the questionnaire, the conflict profiles identified in this study can be described in terms of the percentage of time

during marital disputes that certain types of conflict behaviors are displayed. Both husbands and wives endorsing an average profile report engaging in problem solving between 30% to 50% of the time, in coercion less than 10%, and in avoidance 10% to 30%. All other profiles are defined relative to this average profile. Consequently, the high problem solving profile represents an enormous amount of problem solving behaviors for both husbands and wives: a frequency of 70% to 90%. The high coercion/avoidance groups of spouses report they engage in coercive behaviors 10 to 30% of the time, and in avoiding behaviors 30-50% of the time. The group of avoiding husbands believe they avoid about 30-50% of the time, and the group of non-avoiding wives believe they avoid less than 10% of the time. The small group of coercive wives report engaging in coercive behaviors around 30% of the time.

Although the clustering procedure identified a small number of conflict profiles which are endorsed by both husbands and wives, the matching of husband and wife profiles results in a large number of different types of couples (see table 3.) The degree to which the profiles of two spouses fit together to form a couple will be discussed at the end of this chapter, after the second goal of the present study is addressed.

When the distributions of subjects from the clinical and research samples were compared across the different clusters, it was found that the distribution of these two samples is significantly different (Chi-Square = 21.78, $p<0.01$ for husbands, Chi-Square = 16.18, $p<.01$ for wives.) The results are consistent with the preliminary findings that the clinical subjects tend to endorse more dysfunctional interaction styles (see table 4a.) Among the wives, a much greater percentage of clinical wives relative to research wives fall within the high coercion/avoidance and high coercion clusters, whereas a much lower percentage fall within the low avoidance cluster. Likewise, among

Table 3. Matching of Wife and Husband Conflict Profile.

Count	Wife Profile	Husband Profile
62	Average	Average
22	Low Avoidance	Average
15	High Problem Solving	Average
15	High Problem Solving	High Problem Solving
11	High Coercion/Avoidance	Average
10	Average	High Avoidance
10	Average	High Problem Solving
8	Low Avoidance	High Problem Solving
6	Average	High Coercion/Avoidance
5	High Problem Solving	High Coercion/Avoidance
4	High Coercion/Avoidance	High Coercion/Avoidance
4	High Coercion/Avoidance	High Avoidance
3	High Problem Solving	High Avoidance
2	High Coercion	High Coercion/Avoidance
2	High Coercion	Average
2	High Coercion	High Avoidance
1	Low Avoidance	High Avoidance
0	High Coercion	High Problem Solving
0	Low Avoidance	High Coercion/Avoidance
0	Low Avoidance	High Avoidance

Table 4a. Distribution of Clusters Within Each Sample. N=182 Couples.

	Wife Clusters		Husband Clusters		
	Research Sample	Clinical Sample		Research Sample	Clinical Sample
Average	52.1%	41.5%	Average	68.4%	49.2%
High Problem Solving	19.7%	23.1%	High Problem Solving	21.4%	12.3%
Low Avoidance	21.4%	9.2%	High Avoidance	4.3%	23.1%
High Coercion/Avoidance	5.1%	20.0%	High Coercion/Avoidance	6.0%	15.4%
High Coercion	1.7%	6.2%			

Table 4b. Distribution of Research and Clinical Subjects Within Each Cluster. N=182 Couples.

	Wife Clusters		Husband Clusters		
	Research Sample	Clinical Sample		Research Sample	Clinical Sample
Average	69.3%	30.7%	Average	71.4%	28.6%
High Problem Solving	60.5%	39.5%	High Problem Solving	75.8%	24.2%
Low Avoidance	80.7%	19.4%	High Avoidance	25.0%	75.0%
High Coercion/Avoidance	31.6%	68.4%	High Coercion/Avoidance	41.2%	58.8%
High Coercion	33.3%	66.7%			

the husbands, a much greater percentage of clinical husbands relative to research husbands fall within the high avoidance and high coercion/avoidance clusters, whereas a much lower percentage fall within the high problem solving cluster. However, table 4b shows that both samples make an important contribution to each husband and wife cluster. Consequently, although sample membership played a role in the formation of clusters, the two samples do not represent completely separate populations.

Differences in Affect Across Subgroups of Spouses

Analyses of variance were performed on SEE data across clusters for husbands and wives separately. For both genders, differences in specific affect across the four subgroups were found to be significant for all four emotions (see tables 5a and 5b.) Posthoc pairwise comparisons revealed that all of the four groups of husbands experienced differing levels of each emotion, except for the high avoidance group and the high coercion/avoidance group. In addition, the high problem solving group and the average group of husbands reported the same level of anxiety. Likewise, posthoc pairwise comparisons also revealed that all of the four groups of wives experienced differing levels of each emotion, except for the low avoidance group and the high problem solving group. In addition, the average group and the high coercion/avoidance group reported the same level of anxiety. It would appear that the two groups of husbands endorsing the most dysfunctional conflict behaviors report the same emotional tone in their marital relationships, whereas the two most functional groups of wives report the same emotional tone. It would also appear that of all the specific emotions, anxiety differentiates the subgroups of spouses the least well. Despite these differing levels of specific emotions, comparison of the rankings of each emotion across groups reveals that the specific emotions are not differentiated. Instead, it would appear that the degree of

Table 5a. Differences in Husbands' Affective Reaction to Spouse Across Subgroups*. N=182, df=181.

Subgroup	Mean Anxiety	Mean Sadness	Mean Anger	Mean Satisfaction
F=	17.46	25.86	29.22	28.35
p<	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
High Avoidance	1.01	0.87	0.97	-0.81
High Coercion/Avoidance	0.49	0.76	0.95	-0.83
Average	-0.20	-0.25	-0.19	-0.06
High Problem Solving	-0.51	-0.74	-0.76	0.93

*All pairwise comparisons are significantly different except for the high avoidance group and the high coercion/avoidance group for all emotions, and except for the high problem solving group and the average group for anxiety.

Table 5b. Differences in Wives' Affective Reaction to Spouse Across Subgroups*. N=182, df=181.

Subgroup	Mean Anxiety	Mean Sadness	Mean Anger	Mean Satisfaction
F=	5.91	11.08	15.76	11.43
p<	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
High Coercion/Avoidance	0.48	1.07	1.25	-0.77
Average	0.29	0.25	0.18	-0.20
Low Avoidance	-0.30	-0.34	-0.57	0.76
High Problem Solving	-0.47	-0.42	-0.38	0.43

*All pairwise comparisons are significantly different except for the low avoidance group and the high problem solving group for all emotions, and except for the average group and the high coercion/avoidance group for anxiety.

negative and positive affect experienced in the context of the marital relationship, not the specific type of emotion, varies with the level of dysfunction in conflict management.

Relationships Among Perception of Spouse Behavior, Specific Affect, and Perception of Self Behavior across Subgroups of Spouses

The role of specific emotion as a reaction to the perception of spouse behavior, and as a motivator for self behavior was assessed in a series of stepwise regression analyses. F to enter and F to remove were set at the SPSS-X (1988) default parameters of 3.84 and 2.71 respectively. Each set of regression analyses were performed within each cluster of wives and husbands. Preliminary analyses indicated a large amount of multicollinearity among the various variables, especially among the SEE scales. Because multicollinearity strongly effects beta weights in regression equations and because of the limited n size of each husband and wife cluster, only those predictor variables which accounted for the most variance in the Y variable are reported. To assess the role of specific emotion as a reaction, a set of stepwise regression analyses were performed in which the Y variable consisted of each specific emotion, and the X variables were each of the three CI scale scores from the spouse form (see tables 6a and 6b.) Overall, perception of spouse conflict behaviors was found to predict specific emotions, although to a lesser degree among husbands than wives. The amount of variance in specific emotion explained by ratings of spouse conflict behavior ranged from 14 % to 44% with a mean of 0.25 for wives, and ranged from 0.09 to 0.32 with a mean of 0.19 for husbands. It was found that the relationship between perception of spouse conflict behavior and specific emotion varies depending upon the conflict style endorsed by the subject. In addition, these relationships vary with the gender of the subject.

Table 6a. Predicting Wives' Specific Emotions with Perception of Spouse Conflict Behavior.

Subgroup	Y	X	Adjusted R Squared	Standard Error	Beta
Average:	anxiety	coercion	0.14	1.07	0.39
n=88	sadness*	avoidance	0.26	0.89	0.51
	anger*	coercion	0.21	0.87	0.47
	satisfaction*	problem solve	0.20	0.91	0.46
High Problem Solve:	anxiety	avoidance	0.21	0.62	0.49
n=38	sadness	problem solve	0.27	0.57	-0.54
	anger	problem solve	0.38	0.59	-0.63
	satisfaction*	avoidance	0.44	0.73	-0.67
Low Avoidance:	anxiety	avoidance	0.24	0.57	0.52
n=31	sadness	problem solve	0.28	0.70	-0.55
	anger	avoidance	0.22	0.63	0.49
	satisfaction*	avoidance	0.29	0.64	-0.56
High Coercion/Avoidance:	anxiety	coercion	0.19	0.98	0.48
n=19	sadness	coercion	0.22	0.93	0.51
	anger	coercion	0.18	0.89	0.47
	satisfaction	-			

*Other predictor variables were found to account for variance in the Y variable to a lesser degree, but are not reported.

Table 6b. Predicting Husbands' Specific Emotions with Perception of Spouse Conflict Behavior.

Subgroup	Y	X	Adjusted R Squared	Standard Error	Beta
Average:	anxiety	avoidance	0.11	0.79	0.34
n=112	sadness*	avoidance	0.09	0.74	0.26
	anger*	avoidance	0.20	0.71	0.33
	satisfaction*	problem solve	0.18	0.76	0.44
High Problem Solve:	anxiety	coercion	0.23	0.58	0.50
n=33	sadness	coercion	0.32	0.47	0.59
	anger	coercion	0.27	0.55	0.54
	satisfaction	coercion	0.18	0.54	-0.46
High Avoidance:	anxiety	–			
n=20	sadness	–			
	anger	coercion	0.20	1.01	0.49
	satisfaction	problem solve	0.23	0.73	0.52
High Coercion/Avoidance:	anxiety	–			
n=17	sadness	–			
	anger	problem solve	0.15	0.69	0.46
	satisfaction	avoidance	0.15	0.70	0.45

*Other predictor variables were found to account for variance in the Y variable to a lesser degree, but are not reported.

Among the wives endorsing an average conflict style, it was found that spouse coercion predicts both anxiety and anger, spouse avoidance predicts sadness, and spouse problem solving predicts satisfaction. In contrast, among the wives endorsing a problem solving conflict style, spouse avoidance predicts both anxiety and satisfaction, whereas spouse problem solving predicts both sadness and anger. Among the group of non-avoiding wives, spouse avoidance predicts anxiety, anger, and satisfaction. And lastly, spouse coercion predicts anxiety, sadness, and anger for the group of coercive/avoiding wives.

Results from the wives' data are contrasted to findings from the husbands' data. It was found that spouse avoidance predicts anxiety, sadness, and anger, while spouse problem solving predicts satisfaction for the average husbands. In contrast, spouse coercion predicts all four specific emotions for the problem solving group of husbands. Among the group of avoiding husbands, it was only found that spouse coercion predicts anger, and spouse problem solving predicts satisfaction. Lastly and surprisingly, it was found that spouse problem solving predicts anger and spouse avoidance predicts satisfaction for the group of coercive/ avoiding husbands.

To assess the role of specific emotion as motivation of self behavior, a set of stepwise regression analyses were performed in which the Y variable consisted of self conflict behaviors, and the X variables consisted of the four specific emotions (see tables 7a and 7b.) Overall, the relationships among specific emotions and self behavior were less than the relationships among perception of spouse behavior and specific emotions. The amount of variance in self behavior accounted for by specific emotion ranged from 0.06 to 0.47 with a mean of 0.24 for wives, and ranged from 0.12 to 0.24 with a mean of 0.17 for husbands.

Table 7a. Predicting Wives' Reported Conflict Behavior with Specific Emotions.

Subgroup	Y	X	Adjusted R Squared	Standard Error	Beta
Average:	problem solving	–			
n=88	coercion	anger	0.08	0.53	0.31
	avoidance	sadness	0.06	0.57	0.27
High Problem Solving:	problem solving	–			
n=38	coercion*	satisfaction	0.47	0.52	-0.70
	avoidance	anger	0.25	0.56	0.52
Low Avoidance:	problem solving	–			
n=31	coercion	–			
	avoidance	anxiety	0.30	0.31	0.57
High Coercion/Avoidance:	problem solving	–			
n=19	coercion	anger	0.25	0.55	0.54
	avoidance	–			

*Other predictor variables were found to account for variance in the Y variable to a lesser degree, but are not reported.

Table 7b. Predicting Husband's Reported Conflict Behavior with Specific Emotions.

Subgroup	Y	X	Adjusted R Squared	Standard Error	Beta
Average:	problem solving	satisfaction	0.13	0.68	0.36
n=112	coercion	anger	0.12	0.63	0.36
	avoidance	anger	0.24	0.55	0.49
High Problem Solving:	problem solving	–			
n=33	coercion	anger	0.16	0.57	0.43
	avoidance	sadness	0.14	0.64	0.41
High Avoidance:	problem solving	–			
n=20	coercion	–			
	avoidance	sadness	0.22	0.57	0.51
High Coercion/Avoidance:	problem solving	–			
n=17	coercion	–			
	avoidance	–			

It was found that anger predicts self coercion and sadness predicts self avoidance for the group of average wives. However, satisfaction predicts self coercion whereas anger predicts self avoidance for the problem solving wives. The only significant relationship found among the group of non-avoiding wives was that anxiety predicts self avoidance. Lastly, it was found that among the group of coercive/avoiding wives, anger predicts self coercion.

In contrast, among the group of average husbands it was found that anger predicts both self avoidance and self coercion, and satisfaction predicts self problem solving. Among the group of problem solving husbands, anger only predicts self coercion, and sadness predicts self avoidance. Likewise, sadness predicts self avoidance among the group of avoiding husbands. None of the specific emotions were found to predict self behavior within the group of coercive/avoiding husbands.

In conclusion, in contrast to the results from the analyses of variance discussed above, results from the regression analyses indicate that specific emotions do play differing roles in the conflict process. Moreover, these results suggest that processes underlying conflict interactions are very complex indeed.

CHAPTER 4

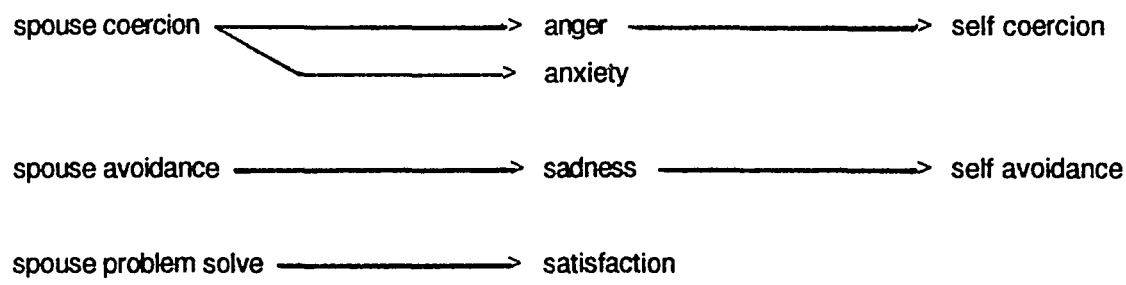
DISCUSSION

The present study attempts to achieve three goals. The first goal involves identifying subgroups of spouses and couples based on the pattern of conflict behaviors they endorse. Previous research has identified three basic types of conflict behaviors--problem solving, coercion, and avoidance--but has not examined how these three types of behaviors fit together to form conflict management profiles that typify a spouse's reaction to marital dispute. The results of the present study support three conclusions regarding spouses' perception of their conflict behavior: that spouses see themselves acting in fairly typical patterns in conflict situations, that these patterns are not idiosyncratic and can be used to identify groups of spouses, and that these patterns consist of differing amounts of problem-solving, coercive, and avoiding behaviors. In addition, it appears that there is significant overlap in the types of conflict patterns endorsed by husbands and wives. The first two conflict profiles identified in the present study were identical for husband and wives, and the last profile was equivalent. The fact that the third cluster represents opposite profiles for husbands and wives is consistent with past research which has found that husbands tend to be more avoiding than wives.

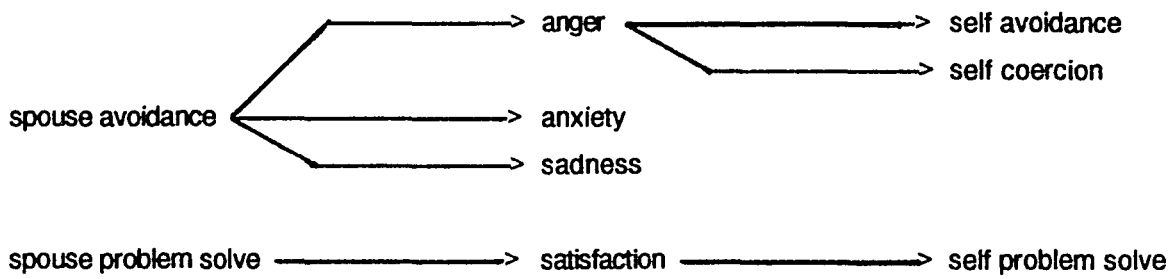
The particular conflict profiles that were identified also support the idea that spouses can be functional and dysfunctional in different ways. Spouses who endorse either the average profile or the high problem solve profile report they engage in problem solving behaviors frequently during marital disputes. Given that previous research has linked problem solving behaviors to marital satisfaction, these two groups of spouses can be considered having functional conflict management styles. The husband and wife profiles which consist of high amounts of coercion represent the dysfunctional

end of the spectrum given that coercion has consistently been linked to marital dissatisfaction. It is not surprising that coercion was found paired with avoidance except in the case of the group of six wives. Previous research has found a positive correlation between coercion and avoidance (Julien, Markman, & Lindahl, 1989; Rands, Levinger, & Mellinger, 1981.) In addition, it is reasonable to expect that spouses who engage in high levels of coercion must also engage in significant levels of avoidance to prevent run-away negative escalation which can destroy a marriage. The fact that wives endorsing a low avoidance conflict profile experience more positive affect and less negative affect in their marriage than average suggests that this conflict style is also functional. Likewise, the fact that the group of husbands endorsing a high avoidance conflict profile experience less positive affect and more negative affect than average suggests this style is dysfunctional.

Probably the most interesting finding involves the second goal of this study: to identify relationships among perception of spouse conflict behavior, specific affect, and reported self conflict behavior. Unexpectedly, it was found that these relationships vary widely depending upon the gender and the conflict profile endorsed by the subject. In order to better understand the role of specific emotions in marital conflict interaction, data from tables 4 and 5 were combined to form Figures 2a through 2d. These figures demonstrate how specific emotions serve as both reactions to perception of partner behavior and as motivators of self behavior. Results from a study by Shaver et al. (1987) help clarify these relationships. Shaver et al. had subjects write accounts of emotional experiences describing what happened, how they felt, what they thought, and what they did. Other subjects described their perceptions of typical emotional situations rather than their actual experiences. Responses were coded and the data were collapsed



Average Wives



Average Husbands

Figure 2a. Predictive Relationships Among Perception of Spouse Conflict Behavior, Specific Affect, and Reported Self Conflict Behavior Within the Average Subgroup of Husbands and Wives.

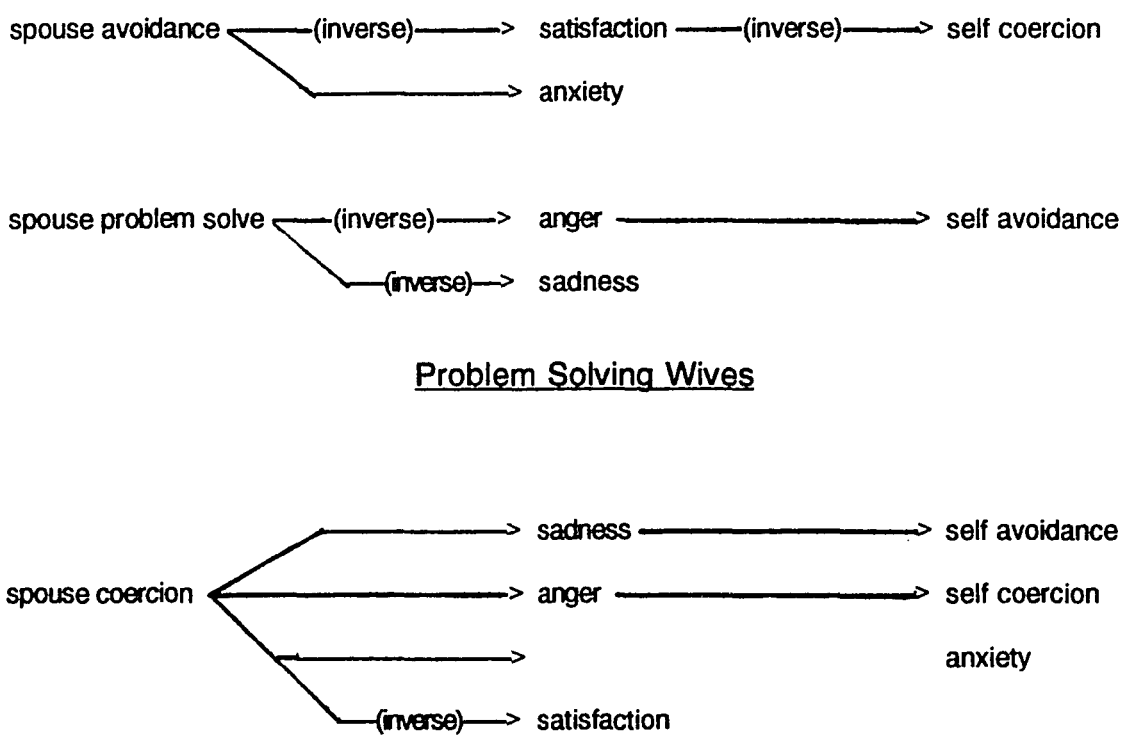
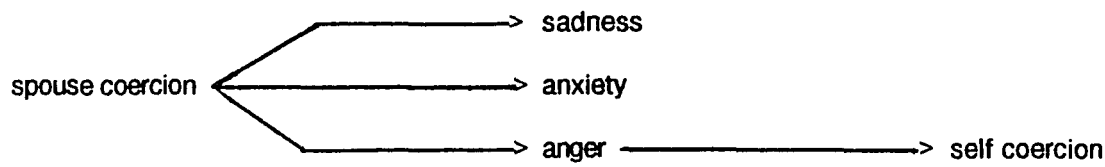
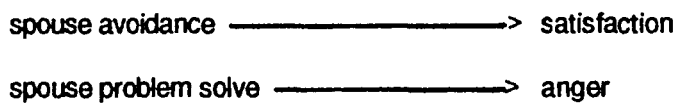


Figure 2b. Predictive Relationships Among Perception of Spouse Conflict Behavior, Specific Affect, and Reported Self Conflict Behavior Within the Problem Solving Subgroup of Husbands and Wives.



Coercive/Avoiding Wives



Coercive/Avoiding Husbands

Figure 2c. Predictive Relationships Among Perception of Spouse Conflict Behavior, Specific Affect, and Reported Self Conflict Behavior Within the Coercive/Avoiding Subgroup of Husbands and Wives.

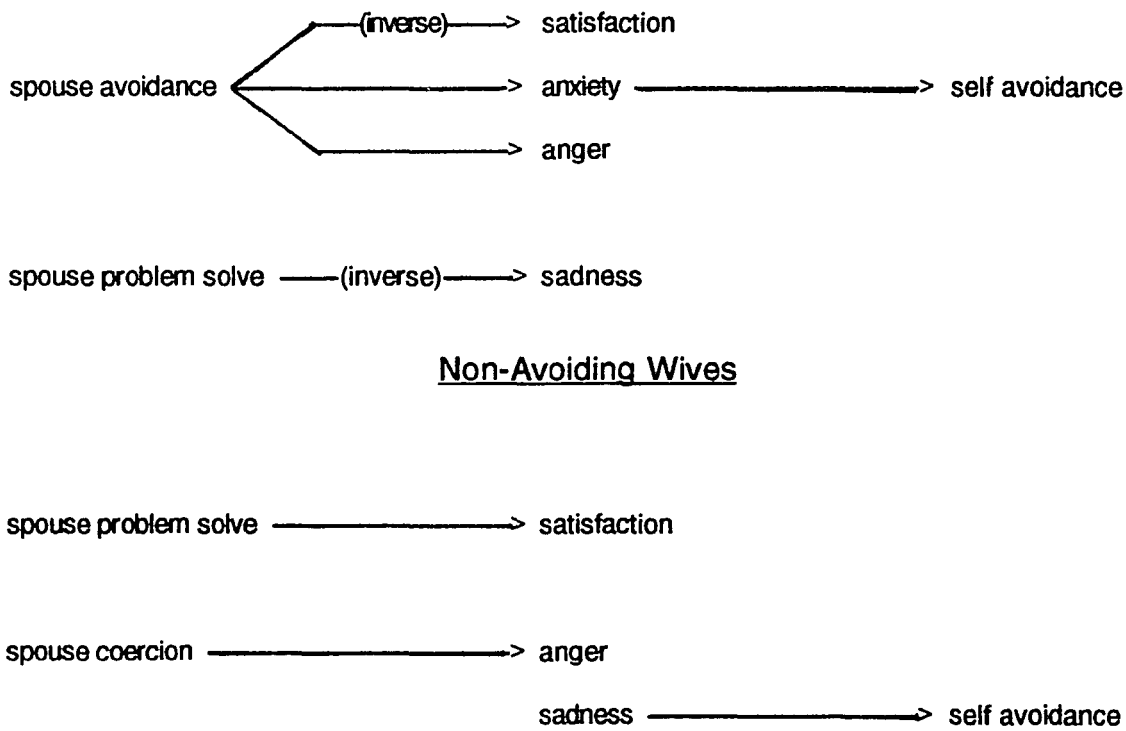


Figure 2d. Predictive Relationships Among Perception of Spouse Conflict Behavior, Specific Affect, and Reported Self Conflict Behavior Within the Avoiding Subgroup of Husbands and the Non-Avoiding Subgroup of Wives.

into prototypes of anger, fear, sadness, joy and love. The anger prototype usually begins when the behavior of another person is perceived as interfering with the first person's goal-directed behavior or as being harmful in some way. In addition, the other person's behavior is seen as illegitimate or unfair. The angry person tends to become self righteous and attempts to rectify the situation, apparently in any manner that is deemed to be effective, although there is also a tendency to suppress expressions of anger. The fear prototype begins with the perception of a potentially dangerous event, most likely involving physical harm, loss, rejection, or failure. In addition, this event includes a set of factors that increase the person's vulnerability to the threat or decrease the person's chances of coping effectively. The person responds with physiological arousal, flight, and/or hiding from the problem. The sadness prototype is very similar to the fear prototype except that the initial threat has already be realized. This negative outcome often involves some type of loss which the sad person discovers he or she is helpless to change. Since attempts to flee or hide are useless, the sad person responds by becoming listless, lethargic and withdrawn--essentially giving up. The joy and love prototypes were found to be very similar except that love could be conceptualized as a personalized form of joy. Joy accounts begin with positive outcomes frequently involving a success in the achievement domain or the social domain. The joyful person becomes energetic, socially outgoing, and feels free from trouble.

Emotion as a Reaction

Examination of the links between perception of partner behavior and specific emotion across the clusters of husbands and wives reveals that four of the groups' emotional reaction tends to be linked to one type of partner behavior, rather than the experience of specific emotions varying with different types of partner conflict

behavior. Specifically, coercive/avoiding wives experience of all three negative emotions is linked to the perception of partner coercion. Likewise, all emotion experience of problem solving wives is linked to partner coercion. On the other hand, average husbands' experience of all three negative emotions is linked to the perception of partner avoidance. Likewise, non-avoiding wives experience of three of the four specific emotions is linked to partner avoidance. These findings suggest that for average husbands and non-avoiding wives, the emotional quality of their marital relationship is closely tied to the degree to which they see their partners behaving in an avoiding manner; whereas the emotional quality of coercive/avoiding wives' and problem solving wives' marriage is closely tied to the degree to which they see their husbands behaving in a coercive manner. It makes sense that non-avoiding wives would be sensitive to avoiding behavior given that they likely would expect their husbands to reciprocate their efforts to refrain from avoiding tactics. Likewise, it makes sense that problem solving husbands would be sensitive to coercion given that they would expect their wives to reciprocate their reliance of constructive approach tactics as opposed to destructive approach tactics. Coercive/avoiding wives sensitivity to coercive behavior suggests some ignorance on their part: perhaps they feel justified in behaving in a coercive manner and are unaware of how this behavior increases the likelihood that their partners will behave in a coercive manner. Average husbands' sensitivity to partner avoidance is a more difficult finding to explain. Perhaps they believe the emotional quality of their martial relationship depends upon the ability to confront problems. Clearly, each of these four groups of spouses attribute special meaning to one specific type of partner conflict behavior.

The relationships among perception of partner conflict behavior and specific emotions are more complex for the other four groups of spouses. If anger is elicited by the perception of illegitimate harm or interference, then it should result when a spouse perceives his or her partner behaving in a destructive manner, but only if the spouse assesses this behavior as violating the power structure in the marriage. Figures 2a through 2d show that anger is linked to spouse coercion, the lack of spouse problem solving behavior, and to the presence of spouse problem solving behavior. The fact that average wives and avoiding husbands tend to feel angry when perceiving their partners behaving in a coercive manner suggests these two groups of spouses believe coercion is an illegitimate or harmful use of power. Why no consistent link between partner coercion and anger is not found among other groups of spouses is a puzzling question that warrants further research. Another puzzling question is why do coercive/avoiding husbands tend to feel angry when they perceive their wives engaging in problem solving behaviors. Results from the Shaver et al. study (1987) suggest these men equate problem solving behaviors with the illegitimate control. If so, their perceptions are unique relative to all other groups of spouses and probably contribute to marital distress. The inverse link between problem solving wives' anger and the perception of husband problem solving behavior makes more sense. Given that these wives place particular value on problem solving behavior, the perception that their husbands are not reciprocating their efforts to behave constructively is likely to violate their expectations.

Since fear tends to result from the perception of potential harm in a person who believes they have a limited ability to cope effectively, then the experience of anxiety in marital interactions suggests what partner behaviors are most threatening to different

groups of spouses, and also suggests a power structure. Likewise, the experience of sadness suggests a similar but more extreme reaction in which the person feels powerless and gives up completely. For example, average wives tend to experience anxiety when they perceive their partners engaging in coercive behaviors, although this relationship is not as strong as the relationship between their anger and partner coercion. Nevertheless, the link with anxiety suggests that under some circumstances, these wives find partner coercion to be especially threatening to the quality of their marriage, but feel powerless to respond effectively. The fact that these wives tend to feel sad when their husband's avoid suggests that they feel particularly threatened by partner avoidance and powerless to respond at all. Likewise, problem solving wives also seem to be threatened by their husband's avoiding behaviors and have a difficult time dealing with this behavior, but to a lesser degree than average wives. Perhaps these women are anxious with their husband's avoiding tactics because they believe they already engage in high rates of constructive problem solving behavior--if their husbands still respond by pulling away, what else can they do? As much as problem solving wives feel unable to deal with their husband's avoidance behavior, they seem to feel helpless to the point of giving up when they believe their husband's are not engaging in problem solving behaviors. However, it must be remembered that there is a stronger link with anger than sadness and lack of partner problem solve behavior among problem solving wives. Further research is necessary to determine under what circumstances problem solving wives become indignant and what circumstances they become hopeless when they believe their husbands are not engaging in enough constructive conflict management tactics.

Links between perceived partner behavior and satisfaction provide information regarding which partner behaviors are considered to be positive, or are perceived by spouses to result in a successful outcome. One would anticipate that problem solving would be linked to satisfaction, but this was true of only two groups of spouses; average wives and avoiding husbands. Perhaps avoiding husbands are avoiding coercive interactions rather than conflict per se. The inverse link between partner avoidance and satisfaction found for problem solving wives is also not surprising given the apparently high value these women place on approaching problems directly. However, why the other groups did not link their experience of satisfaction to their partner's problem solving behavior or to the lack of destructive behavior on their partner's part is a mystery. Perhaps spouses tend to take constructive problem solving on their partner's part for granted and so do not feel particularly pleased when they receive it. One of the most unexpected finding regarding the links between perception of partner behavior and spouse's specific emotions was the link between partner avoidance and satisfaction found for coercive/avoiding husbands. Apparently these husbands do not want their wives to acknowledge that there are any problems in their marriage.

Emotion as a Motivator

Given that the relationships among specific emotion and ratings of self behavior are less strong than the relationships among perceived partner behavior and specific emotion suggest several possibilities. Perhaps spouses are less aware of how their emotions influence their behavior. Perhaps the role of emotion as a motivator to one's behavior is weaker than the role of emotion as a reaction to one's social environment. It may be that the relationship between emotion and self behavior is more idiosyncratic than relationships between partner behavior and emotion and thus weaken group results.

Results from Shaver et al. (1987) suggest that the experience of anger leads people to believe that any means to correct the situation is justified. Consequently, it is not surprising that for most groups of spouses, anger is linked to behaving in a coercive manner. However, both problem solving wives and average husbands link their anger to behaving in a avoiding manner. Perhaps these two groups do not wish to let their anger interfere with their ability to deal with conflict constructively and so become avoiding until their anger subsides to manageable levels.

If it is true that people experience anxiety when they feel powerless to respond to adversity except to flee, then one would expect anxiety to be linked to self avoidance. Likewise, since sadness results in a tendency to give up, then one would also expect sadness to be linked with self avoidance. Indeed the former pattern was found in the present study, but only for non-avoiding wives. No other links between anxiety and self behavior were found. Likewise, sadness was only found to be linked to self avoidance for three different groups; problem solving husbands, average wives, and avoiding husbands.

Links between satisfaction and self behavior were also not surprising. Consistent with the finding that joyful people tend to become energetic and outgoing, average husbands linked their problem solving behavior to their satisfaction. On the other hand, the strongest link between specific emotion and self behavior was the inverse link between satisfaction and problem solving wives' coercive behavior. Perhaps since they are already adept at engaging in constructive conflict management, feelings of satisfaction energize these wives so that they are better able to inhibit destructive behaviors.

Compatible and Incompatible Couples

So far, all results have been discussed with the individual spouse as the unit of interest. However, once the links among perception of partner behavior, specific emotions, and self behaviors have been identified across the different groups of spouses, whether or not two spouses fit together to form a couple can be determined. To do so, the information in figures 2a through 2d was used to identify types of couples who are compatible and types of couples who are not. Two conflict styles are compatible when their interaction tends to result in positive affect and/or problem solving behaviors. Likewise, two styles are incompatible when their interaction tends to result in negative affect and/or avoiding or coercive behaviors. By reviewing the data in figures 2a through 2d, it can be seen that average wives are incompatible with coercive and avoiding husbands, and are compatible with problem solving husbands. Average husbands are incompatible with avoiding wives and are compatible with problem solving wives. Problem solving wives are incompatible with avoiding husbands and are compatible with problem solving husbands. Problem solving husbands are incompatible with coercive wives. Coercive/avoiding wives are incompatible with coercive husbands and coercive/avoiding husbands are incompatible with problem solving wives but compatible with avoiding wives. Non-avoiding wives are incompatible with avoiding husbands and compatible with problem solving husbands. Lastly, avoiding husbands are compatible with problem solving wives, but incompatible with coercive wives.

Table 8 reorganizes information from table 3 so that spouses' conflict profiles are distributed within each husband and wife cluster. In addition, compatible and incompatible couples are identified based on each spouse's perspective with plus signs for compatible, and minus signs for incompatible. It is interesting to note that in all

Table 8. Distribution of Spouses' Conflict Profile within Each Wife and Husband Cluster.* N=182 couples.

Distribution of Husband Profiles Within Each Wife Cluster	Distribution of Wife Profiles Within Each Husband Cluster
Average	**Average**
+62 Average	+62 Average
-10 High Avoidance	+22 Low Avoidance
+10 High Problem Solving	+15 High Problem Solving
- 6 High Coercion/Avoidance	-11 High Coercion/Avoidance
	2 High Coercion
High Problem Solving	**High Problem Solving**
+15 Average	15 High Problem Solving
+15 High Problem Solving	10 Average
- 5 High Coercion/Avoidance	8 Low Avoidance
- 3 High Avoidance	
Low Avoidance	**High Avoidance**
+22 Average	+10 Average
+ 8 High Problem Solving	4 High Coercion/Avoidance
- 1 High Avoidance	+ 3 High Problem Solving
	- 2 High Coercion
	1 Low Avoidance
High Coercion/Avoidance	**High Coercion/Avoidance**
11 Average	-6 Average
- 4 High Coercion/Avoidance	-5 High Problem Solving
4 High Avoidance	+4 High Coercion/Avoidance
	2 High Coercion
High Coercion	
2 High Coercion/Avoidance	
2 Average	
2 High Avoidance	

*Plus signs indicate compatible relationships and minus signs indicate incompatible relationships as derived from data in figures 2a through 2d.

cases, except for wives who are compatible with coercive/avoiding husbands, there exists a group of spouses with a compatible conflict profile. Yet, 16% of the wives and 13% of the husbands perceive their spouse's conflict styles as incompatible. It is also interesting to note that 9% of the couples consist of spouses who hold an opposite view on the compatibility of their conflict styles.

Limitations of the Present Study

The results discussed above must be evaluated in light of the various limitations inherent in the present study, limitations which should be addressed in future research. Limitations include measurement issues, replication and validity issues, issues of cause and effect, and missing variables. First, the stability of both the SEE questionnaire and the CI questionnaires over time is unknown. In addition, the internal consistency of the CI scales is inadequate. No norms exist for these measures, so it is unknown how typical are the responses from the sample in this study relative to the general population of married couples. The representativeness of the conflict profiles identified in this study is unknown and requires replication. In addition, it is unknown how stable a spouse's conflict profile is over time. This entire study is based on the perspective of each spouse and it is unknown how this translates in to actual behaviors that are displayed during conflict interactions. It is clear that spouses have a very different perspective on who is doing what and when, as well as how they evaluate the quality of their relationship. In addition, all relationships between emotion and perceptual variables identified in this study are correlational in nature. Consequently, causal relationships and the temporal sequencing of variables are unknown. Lastly, future research is necessary to determine why the relationships among various variables found in the present study occur, if indeed these relationships can be replicated. Clearly future research on marital conflict

must begin to include other important variables, such as power structure of the marriage, the meaning attributed to various behaviors and emotions by the different groups of spouses, and how perceptual, cognitive, and affective variables influence actual behavior displayed during conflict interactions.

APPENDIX A

CONFLICT INVENTORY QUESTIONNAIRE

SELF FORM

ID_____

During the last 2 months, when you and your spouse had a difference of opinion or conflicting viewpoint, how often DID YOU exhibit the following behaviors? Indicate your response to each question by circling only one of the six possible responses.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
never (0%)	rarely (10%)	occasionally (10%-30%)	less often than not (30%-50%)	more often than not (50%-70%)	frequently (70%-90%)	almost always (90%)

1. Initiate a discussion to air your different points of view	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
2. Try to hide the tension you feel and act as though nothing much has happened	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
3. Listen attentively to what your partner is saying	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
4. Insult you partner or call him/her names	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
5. Sulk or pout	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
6. Keep distant from your partner until you both cool down	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
7. Threaten the physical well being of your partner	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
8. Get involved in physical activity or work to cool down your emotions	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
9. Feel regret for something you said or did	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
10. State your position clearly	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
11. Leave the room or walk away from your partner in the middle of a discussion	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
12. Blame your partner	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
13. Cry	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
14. Repeat yourself to make sure your point was understood	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
15. Feel closer to your partner at the end of a discussion than when it began	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
16. Talk more critically after having had drugs or alcohol	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
17. Admit your own faults or your responsibility for the problem	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
18. Come up with helpful ideas or solutions	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
19. Think about leaving the relationship altogether	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
20. Stop the discussion early by changing the topic, using humor or simply stating "I don't want to talk about this"	0 1 2 3 4 5 6

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
never (0%)	rarely (10%)	occasionally (10%-30%)	less often than not (30%-50%)	more often than not (50%-70%)	frequently (70%-90%)	almost always (90%)

21. Give in to avoid an argument	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
22. Suggest having sex to make up after an argument	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
23. Take out your anger on someone other than your partner	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
24. Give in but plan to get revenge later	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
25. Hit, push, or slap your partner	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
26. Withhold sex	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

APPENDIX B

CONFLICT INVENTORY QUESTIONNAIRE

SPOUSE FORM

ID_____

During the last 2 months, when you and your spouse had a difference of opinion or conflicting viewpoint, how often DID YOUR PARTNER exhibit the following behaviors? Indicate your response to each question by circling only one of the six possible responses.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
never (0%)	rarely (10%)	occasionally (10%-30%)	less often than not (30%-50%)	more often than not (50%-70%)	frequently (70%-90%)	almost always (90%)

1. Initiate a discussion to air his/her different points of view	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
2. Try to hide the tension he/she feels and acts as though nothing much has happened	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
3. Listen attentively to what you are saying	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
4. Insult you or call you names	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
5. Sulk or pout	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
6. Keep distant from you until you both cool down	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
7. Threaten your physical well being	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
8. Get involved in physical activity or work to cool down his/her emotions	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
9. Feel regret for something he/she said or did	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
10. State his/her position clearly	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
11. Leave the room or walk away from you in the middle of a discussion	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
12. Blame you	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
13. Cry	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
14. Repeat himself/herself to make sure his/her point was understood	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
15. Feel closer to you at the end of a discussion than when it began	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
16. Talk more critically after having had drugs or alcohol	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
17. Admit his/her own faults or his/her responsibility for the problem	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
18. Come up with helpful ideas or solutions	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
19. Think about leaving the relationship altogether	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
20. Stop the discussion early by changing the topic, using humor or simply stating "I don't want to talk about this"	0 1 2 3 4 5 6

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
never (0%)	rarely (10%)	occasionally (10%-30%)	less often than not (30%-50%)	more often than not (50%-70%)	frequently (70%-90%)	almost always (90%)

21. Give in to avoid an argument	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
22. Suggest having sex to make up after an argument	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
23. Take out his/her anger on someone other than you	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
24. Give in but plan to get revenge later	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
25. Hit, push, or slap you	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
26. Withhold sex	0 1 2 3 4 5 6

APPENDIX C

SPOUSE ELICITED EMOTIONS QUESTIONNAIRE

ID _____

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
never			half the time			all the time

Below is a list of emotions that people can experience as a result of interacting with others. Think back over the last 2 months of the different types of emotions you typically felt as a result of talking with your spouse. For each item, use the above scale to indicate how often you felt that emotion while talking with your spouse the last couple of months. Please be sure to rate each item.

DURING THE LAST 2 MONTHS, HOW OFTEN DID YOU EXPERIENCE EACH EMOTION WHEN TALKING WITH YOUR SPOUSE?

1___ distant	15___ ignored	29___ rejected
2___ unimportant	16___ bored	30___ neglected
3___ criticized	17___ blamed	31___ manipulated
4___ attacked	18___ dominated	32___ powerless
5___ understood	19___ accepted	33___ supported
6___ cooperative	20___ valued	34___ respected
7___ nervous	21___ insecure	35___ anxious
8___ worried	22___ afraid	36___ tense
9___ hopeless	23___ lonely	37___ depressed
10___ discouraged	24___ disappointed	38___ weary
11___ satisfied	25___ pleased	39___ contented
12___ fortunate	26___ amused	40___ hopeful
13___ annoyed	27___ irritated	41___ offended
14___ angry	28___ frustrated	42___ resentful

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