Follow-through in conflict resolution as a factor in marital satisfaction and personal happiness

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Follow-through in conflict resolution as a factor in marital satisfaction and personal happiness

Turner, Carol Hemington, M.A.

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1994
FOLLOW THROUGH IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION
AS A FACTOR IN
MARITAL SATISFACTION AND PERSONAL HAPPINESS

by

Carol Hemington Turner

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
Psychology

Department of Psychology
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May, 1994
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May, 1994
ABSTRACT

Satisfaction in our intimate relationships, especially marriage, is central to our happiness in life. One of the most important factors in marital satisfaction and marriage duration is the successful resolution of conflicts. A distinguishable difference between happy and unhappy couples is that happy couples are able to resolve their conflicts satisfactorily. The success of conflict resolution has been measured in two ways: (1) The extent to which an agreement was reached, and (2) How satisfactory the resolution process was -- the degree to which it was positive and not damaging to the relationship. The purpose of this study was to measure the outcome of conflict resolution in a third way: degree of follow-through. The questions asked were, “Do satisfied and dissatisfied couples follow through differently on their agreed-upon behavior changes?” and “Are there gender differences in follow through?” The present study assessed the conflict resolution behaviors of 37 couples. The couples were asked to identify, discuss, and propose solutions to problems in their relationship. Questionnaires measured such variables as satisfaction with the marriage, personality characteristics, and demographics. A follow-up was conducted approximately three weeks after the discussions to assess the degree of each partner’s follow-through on resolutions. Results indicated that 1) Satisfied couples followed through on their agreed upon behavior changes significantly more than did dissatisfied couples; 2) Husbands perceived their wives as following through more than the husbands on both the husbands and wives’ issues, whereas wives perceived both husbands and wives as
following through more on their own issues and less on their spouses; 
3) There was no significant correlation between follow through and 
sexual satisfaction. Minor hypotheses are discussed which involve 
the relationship of follow-through, selfishness, and equity of 
household task distribution.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

What makes for a happy life? Philosophy through the ages has offered various possibilities such as peace of mind, pleasure, moderation, material possession, asceticism, simplicity, virtue, a life of service, and the pursuit of knowledge. Today, science is taking an objective, empirical look at emotional well-being and assessing representative groups of people to see what effects various factors have on their sense of satisfaction with life. Intimacy, especially as experienced in marriage, has been found to be one of the central and essential components of happiness.

The Importance of Intimacy/Marriage

Myer's (1992) review of the "pursuit of happiness" research indicated that wealth, age, gender, parental status, place of residence, race, education level, and even tragic disability account for very little of the variation when measuring well being. He concluded that one of the most important variables for happiness is intimacy -- having an open, warm, and caring relationship. People in stable loving relationships seem to enjoy greater well-being (Coombs, 1991; Gove, Hughes, & Style, 1990; Lewinsohn, Redner & Seeley, 1990).

Freedman (1978) examined what makes people happy and also found that happiness was closely related to intimate relationships. Love and friendship have been found to have a profound effect on
both health and happiness (Greeley, 1981; Lynch, 1977; House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988; Israel & Antonucci, 1987). A longitudinal study conducted at the University of California at Berkeley, tracking 300 people over 65 years, reported that happiness tended to hinge on a satisfying marriage and good health (Clausen, 1993).

Brehm (1992) found that even those enjoying apparent accomplishment and success felt their lives to be empty and meaningless when discontent existed in their intimate relationships. Intimacy, she concluded, is the most important aspect of a sense of happiness in life. Drawing on research in various disciplines in the social sciences, Brehm concluded that married people are happier, healthier, and live longer than those who are not married, that if our marriages are stable and supporting then we find it easier to meet stressors, and that the central relationship in our life has a powerful influence on our daily emotional state.

**Factors Important to Marital Satisfaction**

If the quality of our marital relationship is so important to our health, longevity, and satisfaction with life in general, then it is important to know what variables affect our marital satisfaction in order to minimize distress and to develop as intimate a relationship as possible. Researchers tend to group the variables that have been found to affect our satisfaction with our marriages in the following categories: background and value similarity, expectations, commitment, personality characteristics, sexual satisfaction, equity, effect of children, gender differences, context and circumstances, and communication/conflict management skills.
Background and value similarity. How much we love or care about our partner can be an important variable motivating our willingness to comply with our spouse's requests and engage in problem solving activity and compromise. The more we care for our partner, the greater is our tendency to be willing to "transform our valences" -- to change our values and expectations (Kelley, 1979).

After a year or so of living together though, passionate love and idealization tend to wear off. Whether a couple manages to remain happy with each other and stay together may depend on how similar their values are (Brehm, 1988; Cimbalo et al., 1976). The factor of realistic appraisal of the marital partner at the beginning of a relationship is important in the establishment of a lasting, satisfying marriage. Cupid needs help from our rationale faculty. The title of one of Aaron Beck's books reflects this: Love is Never Enough (1988). Compatibility in background, attitudes, and interests can take over when passion fades (Condon & Crano, 1988). If a couple enjoys the same activities, they can enjoy time spent together, and if their philosophy and values are similar, they can have the satisfaction of validating each other. Reciprocity of feeling has been found to be an important factor in attraction; we tend to enjoy those people who like what we like (Curtis & Miller, 1986). The more couples can share with each other, the more time they can enjoy together.

Expectations. One's sense of satisfaction with a relationship is relative; it depends on how the present seems compared to what a person is used to, and to whom a person compares him/herself (Veenhoven, 1991). A social exchange model can be used to analyze
the components of a relationship as it develops (Rusbult, 1983). Outcome, measured by satisfaction with a relationship, is determined by rewards minus costs. Expectations play a role in this, as the lower the expectations a person has, the less rewarding the relationship needs to be to produce satisfaction. Those marriage partners who have experienced good family relationships as they were growing up will have higher expectations for their own marriages (Kelley, 1979). Satisfaction with a relationship also depends on the options people feel they have for alternative relationships.

Certain expectations seem to be especially important in determining marital satisfaction. Each partner plays a role in the script of a marriage, and harmony depends in large measure upon compatibility in the partner's expectations about the roles they play. Expectations about division of household labor is an important issue now that women are employed outside the home. In a study by Atkinson and Huston (1984), wives were found to contribute two times as much to household tasks and enjoy 15 fewer hours of leisure each week than their husbands. Nettles and Loewinger (1983) went so far as to say that what differentiates problem marriages is the different expectations and attitudes about who does what in the home.

Marital roles also include important expectations about intimacy, sexual relationship, economic contribution, and parenting. Traditional roles have been changing so much with women working that some couples feel there are no precedents, and things are so different they need to “wing it” and work things out as they go.
Commitment. A person's level of commitment, or persevering quality, is an important personality characteristic that helps determine the endurance of a marriage. The determination to stay with a decision and "make" it work is especially important in marriages that challenge one's expectations.

Commitment to a relationship is strengthened by the investment a person has in it -- what could not be recovered should it end. In one study of college students in dating relationships, commitment was the important predictor of the endurance of the relationship (Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988).

Wedding vows today often reflect reduced willingness to commit to long-term relationships. Some couples are replacing "till death do us part" with "as long as our love shall last." This unwillingness to remain in an unsatisfactory marriage may be due to easier divorce requirements and the fact that there are more employment opportunities for women. Even with children, women are no longer so dependent upon a marriage.

Personality characteristics. Certain personality traits have been found to be associated with happiness: self-esteem, sense of control in one's life, optimism and extroversion (Meca, Smelsere, & Vasconcellos, 1989; Pavot, Diener, & Fumnita, 1990). Personality traits that were found important to happiness when many studies were reviewed and factor-analyzed were: agreeableness, emotional stability, extroversion, conscientiousness, and openness to experience (Costa & MacRae, 1988). Empathy was added by Davis (1980). If it is true, as it is sometimes said, that "Happy people make happy
marriages,” then personality factors would be important in marital satisfaction.

It may be that personality characteristics that are found attractive in others are also important in maintaining a good relationship. Personality characteristics that have been found attractive in others are a sense of humor, kindness, and intelligence, which were all rated more important than earning power or physical attractiveness (Buss, 1986). Fokes and Sears (1977) found people were attracted to those who like things rather than to those who express negative opinions. It is likely that people who possess these characteristic are also easier to live with.

There do seem to be some personality types that lead to congenial relationships, and others which cause difficulty. Kelly and Conley (1987) found evidence that individuals with certain personality types have more harmonious marriages, but Kerckhoff (1974) and Levinger (1983) concluded that personal dispositions have generally failed to account for more than a small portion of the variance. It has been found that focusing on what is going on between individuals tends to be more important in predicting marital quality than focusing on individual personality traits (Gottman, 1979).

**Sexual satisfaction.** Couples that have sex more often than they argue tend to be happily married (Howard & Dawes, 1976), and sexually active couples are more likely to maintain their relationship than sexually inactive couples (Peplau, Rubin, & Hill, 1977). Gottman and his colleagues (1976) refer to this as the marital bank account -- couples are happier if there are more positive sexual deposits than
argumentative withdrawals. However, the quality is more important than the quantity of sexual intercourse. Sexual satisfaction predicts marital satisfaction better than sexual frequency. Also more important than frequency itself is how satisfied each partner is with the frequency (Terman et al., 1938). The most common view is that the sexual relationship reflects the general quality of the relationship -- couples enjoy each other’s company in and out of bed to about the same extent (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1987).

There are gender differences however associated with marital sexual satisfaction (Peplau & Gordon, 1985): men emphasize the physical in sex whereas women emphasize the emotional (Glass & Wright, 1985). Also, men report more permissiveness in their sexual values and report being more likely to enjoy sex without intimacy (DeLamater, 1987; Whitley, 1988). For example, in relation to marital distress, women’s extramarital affairs are likely to reflect her marital unhappiness, whereas men’s seem relatively unrelated to how happy they are with their marriage (Rubin, et al., 1981; Thompson, 1984; Vallacher, 1983).

Equity. Power and who has it in a relationship can be important. If power is not equal, then the one who cares less can exploit the one who cares more (Waller & Hill, 1951). Power is often analyzed from the perspective of social exchange (Burgess & Nielsen, 1977; Emerson, 1962), where power is based on the control of valuable resources. The availability of alternative sources of desired resources is important in determining dependence. The partner who is less dependent on the relationship has more power.
The capacity not to abuse power in a relationship could be a definite factor in the satisfaction experienced in a marriage. When couples share decision making and enjoy activities together, and both feel they get about the same amount of benefit from the relationship, their chances for sustaining satisfaction are good (Walster, Walster, & Traupmann, 1978). The perception of fairness in the division of labor on household tasks and child care appears to have a strong association with marital satisfaction (Hochschild, 1989).

**Effect of children.** If the relationship has survived the first year or two of adjustment and a divorce has not occurred by the 4th year, when the divorce rate peaks, then most couples feel the impact of the arrival of children in their lives. Despite our emphasis on family values, research has shown that as children enter the marriage, positive interactions between spouses and marital satisfaction decrease, particularly for wives, and conflict increases (Hoffman & Manis, 1978; Spanier, Lewis, & Cole, 1975). There is a decline in marital satisfaction anyway, as romance fades (Huston, McHale & Crouter, 1986), but the decline is not as sharp as when children are present and need the attention that previously went to the relationship (McLanahan & Adams, 1976, 1987).

There is some indication that after this initial decline, marital satisfaction may begin to increase (Burr, 1970; Rollins & Galligan, 1978). This U-shaped pattern is closely associated with the arrival and departure of children (Tucker, James & Turner, 1985). Overall, childless couples report greater satisfaction in their marriage (Glenn & McLanahan, 1982; Houseknecht, 1979; Ryder, 1973; Veroff, Douvan, & Kukla, 1981). Married couples with children stay together
longer, though (Rankin & Manaker, 1985), and the negative effects of children on the marital relationship are moderated by the improved quality of life in general, as the parents enjoy their children and family-type activities (MacDermid, et al., 1990).

Context and circumstances. The context within which a relationship functions also has impact on marital satisfaction (Campbell, 1981). Cultural values, the state of the society, and community standards are the large framework within which a marriage functions. An example of a cultural value that affects men's and women's relationships and marriage is society's view of masculinity and femininity. A new model of adrogeny (Cook, 1985) may affect some of the differences that develop due to socialization and greatly impact on the war of the sexes. Masculinity and femininity have long been seen as end points on a continuum (Bem, 1974; Spence & Helmreich, 1978). The adrogenous model posits masculinity and femininity as independent variables. An emotionally healthy person would be considered strong in both of these variables. Within this model it is desirable for both men and women to develop all of the positive qualities of both the masculine and feminine -- assertiveness, rationality, sensitiveness, and nurturing abilities for example. If conditioned gender differences fade, the conflicts that have long existed between the sexes may be minimized.

Other contextual variables that can affect satisfaction with marriage include stressful events such as war, unemployment, unplanned pregnancy, the birth of a handicapped child, major illnesses or accidents, and so on. These can affect any marriage at
any time. However, people have been found to maintain their individual happiness range homeostatically across the years, going up and down with circumstances but then adjusting again to their usual level of happiness as time goes on (Thomas & Chess, 1986).

**Gender differences.** Different perspectives, which seem to be gender based, often make for conflict. For example, difference in communication style is often an underlying cause of misunderstanding (Tannen, 1990). Females disclose more that is personal and feeling oriented, such as talking about love, whereas the discussions by males are more informational, factual and emotionally neutral or positive, such as talk about sports (Aries & Johnson, 1983; Morton, 1978). Women are better at detecting nonverbal cues (Hall, 1978), superior as senders of clear nonverbal messages (Rosenthal & DePaulok, 1979), more attentive listeners (Miller, Berg & Archer, 1983), more comforting (Burleson, 1982), and more analytical of relationships (Pratt et al., 1989).

Women also tend to be more emotional in their communication and more expressive of negative affect during conflict (Gottman, 1979, Notarius & Johnson, 1982). Men tend to remain calmer and problem-oriented during conflict, and to emotionally withdraw and be unresponsive to their partner’s concerns (Block, 1973; D’Andrade, 1966). The man often sees this difference in his wife’s communication style as hysterical and irrational, and the wife often sees her husband as cold and uncaring. These perspectives have often been referred to as the “communication gap” between the sexes. Tannen (1990) suggests that once we realize that the opposite sex has a different world view, then we can refrain from judging
them by our own standards and make allowances for their perspective.

**Communication and conflict management skills.** Psychology often uses the term "self-disclosure" to mean intimacy or the sharing of our deepest thoughts and feelings (Burke, Weir, & Harrison, 1976; Cozby, 1973). Open disclosure of one’s feelings and the responsive acceptance of the other’s disclosures are important ingredients of building and maintaining communication and intimacy (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Reis & Shaver, 1988). Knowledge of a couple’s personalities and their environment is insufficient for predicting how harmoniously they will live together (Fincham & Bradbury, 1990). It is also necessary to know about the couple’s interaction patterns and their style of dealing with conflicts. A pair’s problem-solving style is important in determining their compatibility (Fincham & Bradbury, 1990).

Communication is a critical factor in the development and duration of intimate relationships (Dindia & Fitzpatrick, 1985; Markman, 1981). People cannot live together intimately without experiencing conflicts of interest and disagreements. Couples may have conflict in any of the aforementioned areas. What is important to marriage satisfaction is how these conflicts are handled. Whether or not they are resolved plays a critical role in determining whether a relationship will remain satisfactory or deteriorate (Peterson, 1979; Storaasli & Markman, 1990).
Marital Conflict

Research on conflict behavior has shown that happy couples behave more constructively during conflict. Satisfied couples have been labeled “nondistressed” in the experimental literature, and dissatisfied couples are known as “distressed.” Satisfied couples experience conflict but they are able to resolve disagreements in a positive manner that preserves their satisfaction with their relationship (Sillars, 1981). They have fair fights (Bach & Wyden, 1968). Their handling of disagreements promotes their intimacy and allows the relationship to grow (Holmes & Boon, 1990; Knudson, Sommers, & Golding, 1980; Peterson, 1983).

Confronting differences may be costly in the short run but contributes to the viability of a marriage in the long run, as problems are taken care of and do not build up to explosions, resentments, or dissatisfactions that can eventually end the marriage (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Peterson, 1983). The outcome of a “good” fight is that couples feel better, gain information, resolve issues, and feel closer. Couples who cannot fight productively are more likely to be unhappy.

Distressed vs Nondistressed Couples. It is worthwhile to see how distressed and nondistressed couples confront conflict differently, because if these differences can be identified, then the positive behaviors can be taught to couples before they marry as preparation to meet conflict constructively, and they can be incorporated into intervention programs to help couples already involved in conflict to make beneficial changes.
Conflict resolution is generally broken down into communication skills and problem solving skills. Good communication contributes to constructive solutions. To examine the nature of the conflict resolution process, recent researchers (Gottman, 1977, 1989; Markman, 1981; Christensen & Heavey, 1990) have developed a methodology that involves bringing couples into a laboratory where they are videotaped having a problem-solving discussion. These videotaped discussions are then coded and rated. The couple's success at conflict resolution is typically measured in two ways: the degree of resolution achieved, and the satisfaction the couples felt with the process of the discussion.

The development of data-analytic techniques allow examination of relationship properties such as patterns and sequences of behavior in marital interactions. These techniques have revealed important differences in the behavior exchanges of maritally distressed and nondistressed spouses (Weiss & Heyman, 1990).

Gottman (1979) found that happy couples validated each other, that is, they recognized and acknowledged the validity of what the partner said, looked for compromise, contracted those compromises, and had positive attitudes -- they assumed their partner had good motives. They dealt in good faith, with good will, did not think revenge, and tried to undo any harm caused. They treated the other person as though they were as important as themselves.

Other findings are that satisfied couples show more empathy (Birchler et al, 1984); humor (Schaap, 1984); positive physical touch (Revernstorf et al, 1984); problem description (Margolin & Wampold,
1981); and involvement (Margolin et al., 1989). Happy couples were also found to describe their feelings more and ask more questions (Ting-Toomey, 1983). They made more specific complaints about behavior rather than personality complaints, were more likely to agree when their partners complained about them, and were more likely to use positive emotion when making complaints (Alberts, 1988).

Distressed couples were found to cross-complain, to make counter proposals, to use hostile, critical types of mindreading, to have difficulty cooperating, and when arguing to "kitchensink" -- bring everything in rather than focusing on one problem (Gottman, 1979). Dissatisfied couples also criticized and complained more (Hooley & Hahglweg, 1989), used put-downs (Schapp, 1984), denied responsibility (Revenstorf et al., 1984), made no response (Revenstorf et al., 1984), and used negative emotion when complaining (Alberts, 1988). Distressed wives expressed more negative emotion than did nondistressed wives. They were more likely to immediately reciprocate their husband's negativity. They also were more likely to react positively to their husband's positive affect which seems to indicate that distressed wives are generally more emotionally reactive (Gottman, 1979).

Distressed and nondistressed couples were also distinguishable by the pattern of their behavior exchanges. The structure of typical interactions of dissatisfied couples included: confront-confront, confront-defend, complain-defend, and defend-complain sequences (Ting-Toomey, 1983). Distressed couples were more likely to respond to complaints with counter complaints (Alberts, 1988). They
were found immediately to reciprocate negative behaviors (Hooley & Hahlweg, 1989). Husband withdrawal evoking wife hostility accounted for 20% of the variance between satisfied and dissatisfied couples.

**Physiological measures.** Levenson and Gottman (1983) found that “physiological linkage” -- how closely spouse's physiological responses matched one another during interactions -- accounted for 59% of the variance in marital satisfaction. However, physiological linkage was not related to satisfaction three years later (Levenson & Gottman, 1985). Individual measures of physiological arousal did predict satisfaction.

Gottman (1990) saw the wife as the “emotional barometer” of the relationship, but because there was a strong association between the husband’s physiological responses and later satisfaction, it may be that the husbands were not reporting their swings in emotion (Fincham & Bradbury, 1990). Levenson and Gottman’s (1985) study also indicated husband withdrawal as the key factor in decreased marital satisfaction. Deteriorating marriages had uninvolved husbands with wives who were trying to draw them out.

**Gender differences.** Floyd (1988) tested the “sentiment-override” hypothesis -- that spouse's behaviors have more to do with global feelings of affection than with the actual present stimulus. He found that males typically employed sentiment override whereas females decoded accurately if they were not distressed.

Filsinger and Thoma (1988) found that 80% of couples with high levels of female interruptions of the male dissolved over a 5-
year period. They also found that maritally distressed couples were more likely to respond in a tit-for-tat manner.

Rubin, Peplau, & Hill (1981) found some evidence that the degree of female dissatisfaction with a relationship is a better predictor of whether the relationship will end than is males' unhappiness. Brehm (1992) interpreted these findings as indications that women may be more sensitive to and aware of relational problems; or heterosexual relationships may work better to fulfill the expectations and desires of men (Bernard, 1972). This latter interpretation would fit the data that men benefit from marriage more than women do (Horwitz, 1982; Kessler & McRae, 1984; Morton, 1978; Veroff et al., 1981).

Cleek and Pearson (1985) found that men and women were equally likely to cite communication problems when divorcing, but women emphasized basic unhappiness and incompatibility more than men did. And whereas both men and women cited gender role conflicts about appropriate activities for men and women, men were more likely to cite "women's liberation" as a specific cause contributing to divorce.

In the sexual arena, Buss (1989) argued that men are more upset by sexual withholding whereas women are upset by sexual aggression. Another difference in men's and women's responses to relational problems is that men are more likely than women to blame the end of a relationship on their partner's sexual involvement with another person (Buunk, 1987). Women are more likely than men to initiate divorce (Fletcher, 1983; Hagestad & Smyer, 1982; Jacobson, 1983). Brehm (1992) suggested though that it may be that
men actually wanted the divorce and behaved in ways that drove their wives to ask for it.

Attributions. Besides the communication problems that contribute to conflict behavior, thoughts and beliefs can also affect the constructiveness of conflict. There are major differences in the pattern of attributions exhibited by happy as compared with unhappy couples (Stillars, 1981). How we interpret our own and our partner's behavior is more important than what is actually said and done (Fincham, Bradbury & Grych, 1990b). Orvis, Kelley, and Butler (1976) offer a causal attribution explanation for conflict behavior: when disagreements occur, we are motivated to search for the causes. We are usually initially concerned with the facts -- who did what to whom. But disagreements about facts can turn into a clash about motives -- why it was done. We usually believe our own motives are good and if we did anything wrong it was a temporary mistaken response to the situation (Snyder, Higgins & Stucky, 1983). However, anything our partner did wrong was no doubt caused by a permanent feature of his or her flawed disposition (Jones & Nisbett, 1972). We have a self-serving bias that allows us to attribute the problem solely to our mate.

Our style of making attributions often reflects the state of our relationship (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990; Holtzworth-Munroe & Jacobson, 1987). Happy couples tend to make enhancing attributions: positive behavior by the partner is seen as characteristic and negative behaviors are seen as unusual. The good is exaggerated and the bad minimized. Distressed couples do the opposite (Brehm & Kassin, 1990). Unhappy couples are more likely to see their partner
as selfish. Such attributions are likely to increase hostile behavior during conflict. Whether dissatisfied partner's attributions are true, or whether some individuals are prone to make negative attributions with little provocation, is not known.

Whatever the cause, early premarital reports of conflict were the best predictor of later marital conflict in a study by Kelly, Huston, and Cate (1985). Some partners may be a bad match to begin with. They may have an attributional style that provokes conflict (Baucom, Sayers, & Duhe, 1989; Doherty, 1982). According to a study by Jacobson, Follette, and McDonald (1982), unhappy couples were more responsive to both negative and positive events. They were volatile in their emotional reactions whereas happy couples appeared more stable (Margolin, John, & O'Brien, 1989).

After reviewing the research on attributions, Fincham and Bradbury (1990) concluded that the future study of marriage satisfaction and conflict resolution should: 1) employ a longitudinal study; 2) use physiological measures of affect; 3) consider the psychoneuroimmunology factor (the mind/body connection) because coercion causes dissatisfaction that leads to depression that leads to negative health; 4) use more representative recruitment procedures; 5) use sequential analyses as well as baselines; and 6) is likely to find that withdrawal from conflict will emerge as a critical factor in distress.

Demand-Withdraw Pattern. Christensen & Heavey (1990) also found withdrawal to be a central factor in distressed relationships. They characterized this as a demand-withdraw pattern in which one spouse attempts to engage in a problem-solving discussion,
sometimes applying pressure and demands while the other spouse withdraws from the discussion (Christensen, 1987). Women were typically in the demanding role whereas men attempted to avoid the discussion by withdrawing (Napier, 1978; Wile, 1981). Research has indicated that this destructive style of marital interaction leads to increasing deterioration in the relationship (Levenson & Gottman, 1985). Similarly, Roberts and Kroko (Kroko, 1990) found that among dissatisfied couples, husbands' withdrawal was associated with their wives becoming hostile.

Christensen and Heavey (1990) offered two possible causal explanations for the gender differences in the demand/withdraw pattern of interaction. They suggested an individual-differences perspective in which the difference in interaction was due to stable personality or biological differences. For example, men's higher level of physiological reactivity (Gottman & Levenson, 1986) may lead them to try to avoid the conflict in order to escape being uncomfortably aroused, or men may avoid discussions because they are socialized to be independent. By contrast, women may engage in problem-solving discussion as a way of seeking closeness and intimacy because they are socialized to be relationship-oriented (Gilligan, 1982; Rubin, 1981). Christensen (1987) did find that the partner's degree of desire for closeness versus independence was associated with their degree of demand/withdraw behavior.

The second possible explanation, a conflict structure argument, is that because men in our society have more power, they have less interest in discussing making changes in the relationship. Because men have traditionally held the power in marriage relationships
(Hendrick, 1988), they may not have felt a need to comply with their partner’s wishes.

To explore these two explanations, Christensen and Heavey (1990) had couples discuss two issues, one in which the man desired a change and one in which the woman wanted change. The individual-differences argument would predict that there would be no difference in the demand/withdraw roles because the stable traits of wanting either closeness or independence would be involved. The social structure perspective would predict that the demand/withdraw roles would reverse in the two discussions as the spouse who wanted the change would be invested in engaging in the discussion and would be demanding, whereas the other, who would not benefit from the discussion, would withdraw.

They found that the husbands and wives were equally likely to engage or withdraw in the discussion of the husband’s issue, but the husband withdrew significantly more often when discussing the wife’s issue. Christensen and Heavey concluded however, that because the couples were restricted in this study to discussing child rearing, in which the wives wanted more change than did the husbands, it was not a sufficient test of the hypotheses.

Their next study (Heavey, Layne & Christensen, 1993) allowed the couple to choose their own problem to discuss, and the level of change requested by each partner was matched for importance. Also, a 12 month follow-up of their marital satisfaction level was added because cross-sectional assessments can be different from longitudinal ones: discussion of disagreements can be painful in the present but lead to improvement in the long run. The hypothesis
was that the demand/withdraw behavior would be related to longitudinal deterioration in marriage satisfaction because the problem would be less likely to be resolved and therefore would fester.

The satisfaction of each spouse with the outcome of the discussion was also measured after each of the two discussions. The expectation was that the demand/withdraw pattern would leave one or both spouses dissatisfied with the interaction because it would interfere with problem resolution.

The results of the Heavey, Layne and Christensen (1993) study above replicated the finding that when discussing the issue identified by the woman, men were more likely to withdraw. They suggested that future studies are needed to measure the effect of the demand/withdraw pattern on long-term satisfaction and to gain insight into the causes of this destructive interaction. Additional information could be gathered about the personality characteristics of the spouses, such as the closeness/independence dimension and the levels of power and commitment that exist in the relationship.

Because of the finding that wives are equally engaged in the discussion of both their own issue and their husband’s issue whereas husbands tend to withdraw from the discussion of their wife’s issue (Christensen & Heavey, 1990), the possibility is raised that not only are the wives more willing to talk about problems in the relationship, they may also be more willing to do more. That is, for the sake of the relationship they may be more willing than husbands to make changes in their behavior in order to resolve problems. A husband’s demands may result in changes in his wife’s behavior whereas a
wife's demands may be met by her husband's passive resistance. Over time, as more problems remain unresolved, this imbalance may increase the wife's dissatisfaction with the marriage and contribute to its dissolution.

Previous studies (Christensen & Heavey, 1990, Levenson & Gottman, 1985; Levenson & Krokoff, 1989; Roberts & Krokoff, 1990) have taken two measures of conflict resolution: the degree of agreement reached, and the degree of satisfaction with the process used to attempt resolution. The present study adds a third measurement, that of actual follow through with the resolutions reached.

**Present Study**

The present study was designed to investigate the degree to which spouses follow through on the resolutions they make when discussing areas of conflict in their relationship. It was expected that there would be a difference in follow through between distressed and nondistressed couples, and that husbands would follow through less than their wives.

The following procedure was used: Each partner in this study chose an issue in the relationship to discuss and try to resolve. The couples were videotaped while discussing these two issues. At the end of the discussions they were given a resolution sheet and asked to continue the discussion until they were able to write down behavior changes each was willing to make to resolve the problem. The couples were then contacted by telephone approximately three weeks later and asked to what degree they had followed through on their agreements.
The study attempted to answer the following questions:

**Question #1.** Is there an association between couples' level of satisfaction with their marriage and the extent to which they follow through with agreed-upon behavior changes?

**Hypothesis:** Couples who are more satisfied with their marital relationship will follow through more with their resolution agreements.

**Rationale:** Couples who follow through on their agreements will resolve problems as they occur. Couples who do not follow through on their agreements will have the same problems repeatedly resurface, and it would be expected that the couple would become more distressed as more problems go unresolved.

**Question #2.** Are there differences in the extent to which husbands and wives follow through with their agreed upon behavior changes?

**Hypothesis:** Husbands will follow through less on their agreed upon behavior changes than will wives.

**Rationale:** Based on the findings that men tend to withdraw when discussing the woman's issue, it is expected that men will also tend not to follow through on their agreements to make changes in their behavior.

**Question #3.** Is there an association between the extent to which couples follow through with agreed upon behavior changes and their level of sexual satisfaction and frequency of sexual intercourse?
Hypothesis: Couples who follow through with their agreements will have higher sexual satisfaction scores and more frequent sexual intercourse.

Rationale: The assumption here is that marital and sexual satisfaction and frequency are associated. If follow through is correlated with marital satisfaction, than the assumption is that it should also be correlated with sexual satisfaction and intercourse frequency.
Chapter 2
Method

Subjects

Thirty seven couples who had been married at least one year, and who were between the ages of 20 and 55, were recruited through advertisements in the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) student newspaper, The Rebel Yell; the UNLV faculty/staff newsletter, The Update; a community newspaper, The Las Vegas Review Journal; a community classified newspaper, The Nifty Nickel; and through solicitation in introductory psychology classes at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Couples who were interested in being paid to participate in a marital study at UNLV were directed to telephone the experimenter for more information. Couples who decided to participate in the study were paid $75 for approximately three hours participation, and some who were students also received extra credit in their classes. The demographic characteristics of this sample are presented in Table 1. A copy of the Consent for Research Participation can be found in Appendix A.

Measures:

Subjects responded to questionnaires during four phases of the study. Only some of these questionnaires were used in this study as it was a part of a larger study that used the additional questionnaires.
# Table 1

**Characteristics of Sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Subjects</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>M 32.76</td>
<td>31.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD 7.89</td>
<td>8.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years Married</td>
<td>M 5.50</td>
<td>5.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD 4.73</td>
<td>4.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Income</td>
<td>M $23,027</td>
<td>$14,851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD $13,682</td>
<td>$13,169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of education</td>
<td>M 14.2</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD 2.6</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAS(^a)</td>
<td>M 108.68</td>
<td>111.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD 16.05</td>
<td>14.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Other Christian</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agnostic &amp; None</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)DAS=Dyadic Adjustment Scale. The DAS is a commonly used measure of marital adjustment with \(M = 114.8, \ SD = 17.8\) (Spanier, 1976).
During phase one the couples filled out questionnaires at their homes. During phase two they filled out questionnaires at UNLV just prior to being videotaped having discussions about problems in their relationship. During phase three the couples again filled out questionnaires at their homes. During phase four, a follow-up interview was administered via telephone approximately three weeks after the videotaped session.

Copies of the questionnaires used in this study can be found in Appendix B. Following are descriptions of these questionnaires.

**Phase 1:**

**Demographic Inventory.** A basic demographic inventory requesting information about age, number of years married, income, educational level, race, and religion, was developed for this study by Dr. Christopher Heavey and the graduate students working with him.

**Phase 2:**

**Dyadic Satisfaction Subscale of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS-DS).** The DAS (Spanier, 1976) is a well validated measure of relationship satisfaction. This instrument has four subscales: Dyadic Consensus, Dyadic Cohesion, Affectional Expression, and Dyadic Satisfaction. Only the Dyadic Satisfaction subscale (DAS-DS) was used in this study. This subscale consists of 10 items and has a Cronbach's internal consistency alpha coefficient of .94. The mean is 40.5 and the standard deviation is 7.2 (Spanier 1976).

**Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS).** The ISS (Hudson, 1982) is a 25-item measure of the degree or severity of a problem in the couple's sexual relationship. Higher scores mean less satisfaction. A score over 30 indicates a clinical sexual problem. A question
assessing sexual frequency was added to this questionnaire for the present study. The ISS has a mean alpha of .92, indicating excellent internal consistency. The ISS correlates positively with the Index of Marital Satisfaction and the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale.

**Selfism Scale (NS).** The NS (Phares & Erskine, 1984) is a 28-item scale designed to measure narcissism, or selfism. A person who scores high on the NS views a large number of situations in a selfish or egocentric fashion. At the opposite end of the continuum are individuals who submerge their own satisfaction in favor of others. Each item of the NS is scored using a 5-point Likert scale to produce NS scores with possible values ranging from 28 to 140. The normative mean is 75. The NS has good internal consistency with a split-half reliability of .84. The NS correlates significantly with the Narcissistic Personality Inventory.

**Problem Areas Questionnaire (PAQ).** The PAQ (Christensen & Heavey, 1990) lists 17 main areas of possible conflict in relationships. The partners each rate how satisfied they are with each of the areas listed on a scale from 0="Completely Satisfied" to 6="Very Dissatisfied." There is also space provided to fill in two additional problem areas of their own choosing and rate their level of satisfaction with them. They are further directed to place an "X" through the number of any item they are not willing to discuss with their partner.

The second part of the PAQ instructs subjects to choose one issue they are willing to discuss with their partners that presents an ongoing difficulty in their relationship. They are asked to choose an issue that could be resolved by a change in their or their partner's
behavior over the next several weeks. They are asked not to chose an issue that is not under their control (such as having more pleasant in-laws). They are then asked to explain in writing, on four lines, how this issue is a problem in their relationship and what they think the reason is for the problem.

**Resolution Summary sheet.** The Resolution Summary sheet was developed for use in this study by Dr. Christopher Heavey and graduate students working with him. At the top of the sheet there is a space to write the topic of the discussion. Below there is space for the wife to write down what she agrees to do to resolve the problem, and a space for the husband to write down the behavior change he has agreed to make.

**Phase 3:**

**Housework questionnaire.** This questionnaire was created for this study by Dr. Christopher Heavey and graduate students working with him. The questionnaire asks who does what of 14 major household tasks and then asks how many hours a week the husband and wife each do of housework. Also included is a scale to indicate how fair each spouse thinks the division of household labor is in their home, ranging from 1=“Unfair to my spouse” to 9=“Unfair to me.”

**Phase 4:**

**Resolution Follow-Up Questionnaire (Interview).** This interview was developed for use in this study by Dr. Christopher Heavey and graduate students working with him. This structured interview consists of ten questions about the husband's issue and the same ten questions about the wife's issue. The questions were
designed to determine the extent of follow through on the agreements that had been made, the satisfaction the couple felt with the resolutions, and the degree to which they felt the issues had been resolved. Each question was answered by giving a number on a scale from 1=not at all to 5=completely. The partners were asked to assess both their own follow through and that of their spouse. This questionnaire was administered as a telephone interview.

Other measures. Other questionnaires not relevant to this study were completed by participants in each of the first three phases.

Procedure

Couples responding to the advertisements for marital study participants telephoned the experimenters and were given a more complete explanation of the study. During this initial telephone contact couples were screened to ensure they had been married for at least a year. Couples who were still interested in participating in the study were mailed the first set of questionnaires and a consent form. The questionnaires took about 30 to 45 minutes to complete.

Several days after the questionnaires were sent, the couples were contacted by telephone to be sure that had received the materials, to answer any questions they had, and to schedule a videotaping session at UNLV.

When couples arrived for their videotaped portion of the study they returned the Phase I questionnaires to the investigator and were given the Phase 2 questionnaires to complete while they waited for the videotaped session to begin. The couples were directed to fill out these questionnaires without discussing them with each other.
Questionnaires that asked sensitive questions, such as those regarding sexual behavior or domestic violence, were completed during this time. These questionnaires took about 30 to 45 minutes to complete.

The couple was then offered a brief break. Then the partners each filled out one of the remaining Phase 2 questionnaires, the Problems Area Questionnaire (PAQ) which lists problems common to married couples. They rated their level of satisfaction in these areas and space was provided to list issues not included on the questionnaire. On the second page of the PAQ, they were directed to choose an issue to discuss and try to resolve.

One of the two issues was selected by the experimenters to be discussed first. The order of discussion was counterbalanced: couples with odd-numbered ID numbers began by discussing the husband’s issue, and even numbered couples the wife’s issue. The spouse whose issue was to be discussed was directed to explain the issue to his/her partner. This explanation was videotaped. Then each spouse was given a Prediscussion Questionnaire to assess his or her thoughts and feelings about the issue and how it was typically handled at home.

Upon completion of the Prediscussion Questionnaire, the couple was directed to discuss and try to resolve the issue while being videotaped for 10 minutes. The experimenter left the room during this discussion. At the end of 10 minutes the experimenter returned and handed the spouse who had raised the issue a Resolution Summary Sheet. The couple was told to continue their discussion until they arrived at a resolution, and then to write the resolution on
the summary sheet. There was space provided for both the wife and husband to list what they each agreed to do in order to resolve the issue.

When the couple had completed their Resolution Summary Sheet, the experimenter returned and handed them a Postdiscussion Questionnaire that assessed their feelings and perceptions about the problem-solving discussion and how the discussion differed from or was similar to the way in which such issues were usually handled at home.

This same procedure was then repeated for the other spouse's issue: The couple filled out a Prediscussion Questionnaire, discussed the issue, filled out a Resolution Summary Sheet and a Postdiscussion Questionnaire.

At the completion of the discussions, questions were answered and the couples were given questionnaires to take home and mail back when completed. These questionnaires required about 30 minutes to complete.

Approximately three weeks (M=23.8 days, SD=7.0 days) after the couple had participated in this discussion, they were contacted by telephone and were independently interviewed using the Resolution Follow-up Questionnaire.
Chapter 3

Results

Table 2 illustrates the frequency of the issues the couples chose to discuss. The topics were fairly evenly divided between the husbands and wives.

The analyses that follow show varying N’s because of missing data in some categories. Two couples had only one of the partners agree to change behavior on an issue, and two couples did not come to resolution on one of their issues.

**Question # 1.** Is there an association between couples’ level of satisfaction with their marriage and the extent to which they follow through with agreed upon behavior changes? It was hypothesized that couples who follow through with their resolution agreements would be more satisfied with their marital relationship.

**Analysis:** To evaluate this hypothesis simple correlations between spouses’ marital satisfaction (DAS-DS) scores and spouses’ overall follow through were examined. The overall follow through scores for husbands and wives were obtained by collapsing husband’s and wife’s follow-through scores across issue and reporter. In other words, each husband’s overall follow-through score consists of both husband’s and wife’s reports of the husband’s follow through on both the husband’s and wife’s issues. The wife’s over-all follow through score was calculated in this manner also.
Table 2

Frequencies of Issues Discussed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue*</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved communication</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moodiness, not being positive</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure time interests &amp; activities</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More attention/affection/time together</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household tasks</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ways of handling children</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol use</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling family finances</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex relations</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious matters</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ways of dealing with parents &amp; In-laws</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correct or proper Behavior</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aims and goals</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finishing Projects</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Categories from Problem Areas Questionnaire
The husbands' satisfaction scores were correlated with their own follow through, $r(37) = .39, p < .05$, and with their wives' follow through, $r(37) = .45, p < .05$. Similarly, the wives' satisfaction scores were correlated with their own follow through, $r(37) = .48, p < .05$, and with their husbands' follow through, $r(37) = .35, p < .05$.

**Question #2.** Are there differences in the extent to which husbands and wives follow through with their agreed-upon behavior changes? It was hypothesized that husbands will follow through less on their agreed-upon behavior changes than will wives.

**Analysis:** This hypothesis was evaluated in three different ways. First, a $t$ test was computed to determine if the means of the husbands' and wives' overall follow through scores differed significantly. Overall follow-through scores were computed as described in the analysis section of Question #1.

Second, to evaluate the pattern of individual follow-through mean scores, a repeated measure analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used.

Third, a planned $t$ test was computed to determine whether there was a significant difference between the husbands' reports of the wives' follow through on the husband's issue, and the wives' reports of the husbands' follow through on the wives' issues.

The first $t$ test, which was computed to determine if the means of the husbands' and wives' overall follow through scores differed significantly, indicated that the over-all follow-through means for husbands ($M = 3.68$) and wives ($M = 3.76$) were not significantly different from each other, $t(30) = -1.45$, ns. Six couples who had incomplete data were not included in this analysis. When the
analysis was performed with all 37 couples, the results did not change significantly.

When the data was subjected to the finer-grain analysis of the ANOVA however, significant differences emerged. The three-way repeated measure ANOVA had three two-level independent variables: Gender (husband or wife), Issue (husband's or wife's issue), and Reporter (husband's or wife's report of follow through). Thus the eight cells were: Husband's report of his follow through on his issue; Husband's report of his follow through on wife's issue; Husband's report of wife's follow through on his issue; Husband's report of wife's follow through on her issue; and the same four cells, with gender reversed. Mean follow-through scores for each of these cells are reported in Table 3.

The analysis of variance indicated no significant main effects. There were two significant interaction effects, an Issue by Follow-through interaction, $F (1,30) = 5.44, p < .05$, and a Reporter by Issue by Follow-through interaction, $F (1,30) = 5.44, p = .05$.

The Issue by Follow-through interaction is illustrated in Figure 2. The cells means displayed in Figure 1 were obtained by collapsing the husbands' and wives' reports of follow through. In other words, the husbands and wives each have two mean follow-through scores, one for the husbands' issues and one for the wives' issues.
Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Resolution Follow-Up Questionnaire
(Interview)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report of:</th>
<th>Husbands</th>
<th>Wives</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Husband's Follow Through</strong></td>
<td>Scale of 1-5*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband's Follow Through on Husband's Issue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent have you fulfilled your part of the agreement?</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>3.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband's Follow through on Wife's Issue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent have you fulfilled your part of the agreement?</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>3.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband's Overall Follow Through</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wife's Follow Through</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife's Follow through on Husband's Issue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent have you fulfilled your part of the agreement?</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>3.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife's Follow through on Wife's Issue</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent have you fulfilled your part of the agreement?</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>3.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife's Overall Follow through</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Husband's &amp; Wife's Follow through</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Overall Husband &amp; Wife Follow through</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1=Not at all, 5=Completely  
N=31
Post-hoc tests of cell means were conducted to explore the nature of the interaction illustrated in Figure 2. An adjusted alpha of .01 was used for these analyses. These analyses attribute the interaction to there being no difference in husbands’ and wives’ level of follow through on the husbands’ issues, $t(34) = .37$, ns, whereas the husbands followed through less than the wives on the wives’ issues, $t(34) = -3.09$, $p < .01$. 

Figure 1  Follow through on Husband's and Wife's Issue, Husband's and Wife's Reports Collapsed Together.
Figure 2 shows the interaction of reporter, issue and follow through. Here the husbands' and wives' reports are looked at separately on the separate issues. As can be seen, collapsing follow-through scores as was done in Figure 2 masked meaningful underlying differences in spouses' follow through. Looking at the reports of husbands and wives individually on the separate issues...
illustrates that the husbands reported that wives generally followed through more ($M=4.0$) than did the husbands ($M=3.7$) on both the husbands’ and wives’ issues. However, the wives reported that both the husbands and wives generally followed through more on their own issues ($M=3.8$) than they did on their spouses’ ($M=3.5$). These differences, however, were not statistically significant.

The final analysis addressing gender differences in follow through was a pre-planned $t$ test for paired samples between husbands' reports of the wives' follow through on the husbands' issues compared to the wives' reports of the husbands' follow through on the wives' issues. The $t$ test revealed that there was a significant difference between the husbands' report of the wives' follow through on the husbands' issues ($M=3.9$) and the wives' report of the husbands' follow through on the wives' issues ($M=3.3$), $t(34) = -2.58, p < .05$.

The final question on the Resolution Follow-Up Questionnaire (Interview) is also relevant to evaluating the degree of follow through. It assessed the degree to which husbands and wives felt their issues had been resolved. A $t$ test revealed that there was not a significant difference in the husbands' and wives' reports. The degree to which the husbands felt their issues had been resolved was $M = 3.5, SD = 1.0$; for wives $M = 3.4, SD = 1.3$.

**Question #3.** Is there an association between the extent to which couples follow through with agreed-upon behavior changes and their level of sexual satisfaction and frequency of sexual intercourse? The hypothesis was that couples who follow through
with their agreements would have higher sexual satisfaction scores and more frequent sex.

**Analysis:** There was no significant correlation between follow through and sexual frequency, \( r (37) = -.05, \text{ ns for husbands, and } r (37) = -.02, \text{ ns for wives, or with follow through and sexual satisfaction, } r (37) = -.26, \text{ ns for husbands, and } r (37) = -.01, \text{ ns for wives. There was also no significant correlation between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction } r (37) = -.30, \text{ ns for husbands and } r (37) = -.21, \text{ ns for wives; or between sexual frequency and marital satisfaction } r (37) = .42, \text{ ns for husbands, and } r (37) = .16, \text{ ns for wives.}
Chapter 4
Discussion and Conclusion

The present study was designed to investigate the degree to which spouses follow through on the resolutions they make when discussing areas of conflict in their relationship. Fincham and Bradbury (1990) had found that withdrawal from conflict (one partner not wanting to discuss an issue) is a critical factor in distressed relationship; this study was designed to assess whether lack of follow through is also characteristic of distressed relationships. Because Christensen and Heavey (1990) found that men are typically the ones who withdraw from discussing the issue raised by the wife, it was expected in this study that husbands might also follow through less than their wives on resolutions to conflict. Another question addressed was whether there would be a correlation between follow through and sexual satisfaction.

The results of this study will be discussed under each hypothesis.

**Hypothesis #1:** Couples who follow through with their resolution agreements are more satisfied with their marital relationship.

This hypothesis was confirmed. Follow-through scores for both husbands and wives were significantly positively correlated with their marital satisfaction scores. It is not clear whether partners who follow through do so because they are satisfied with their marriage,
or if following through on resolutions leads to marital satisfaction, or whether some third factor causes both.

In any case, if follow through is recognized as part of good communication and problem solving skill then some couples may be able to benefit from training in this area. If they did not learn good communication from growing up in a family that had good conflict management skills, then perhaps they could learn the importance of good communication in therapy, or preferably in a premarital presentation.

**Hypothesis #2:** Husbands will follow through less on their agreed-upon behavior changes than will wives.

This hypothesis was only partially supported. The overall follow-through scores for husbands and wives were not significantly different. When the husbands' and wives' reports were considered in more detail however, there were differences in follow-through scores that were significant.

When husbands' and wives' reports of their own follow through and their perceptions of their spouses follow through were combined, the results seemed to support the gender-difference hypothesis that husbands would follow through less than wives. As can be seen in Figure 2, husbands and wives followed through equally on the husbands' issues whereas husbands followed through significantly less than the wives on the wives' issues. This appears similar to the demand-withdraw studies (Christensen & Heavey, 1990) which found husbands and wives equally engaged while discussing the husbands' issues but the husbands withdrawn during discussion of the wives' issues.
A t test supported this view by revealing a significant difference in the husbands' report of the wives' follow through on the husbands' issues ($M=3.9$) and the wives' report of the husbands' follow through on the wives' issues ($M=3.3$). This indicates that the wives perceive less follow through by the husbands on the wives' issues than the husbands perceive follow through by the wives on the husbands' issues.

This, in conjunction with the earlier ANOVA, might have been taken as complete support for the hypothesis of husbands following through less. However, unexpected results were obtained by evaluating the individual reports of husbands and wives with the ANOVA. A different picture and explanation, illustrated by Figure 3 on page 39, emerged that was masked by combining the reports as in Figure 2. The "demand by wife, withdraw by husband" pattern as manifest in follow-through patterns was reported only by the husbands. Husbands perceived that their wives followed through more than husbands on both the husbands' and wives' issues, which supported the hypothesis. The wives, however, reported equal follow through -- both husbands and wives following through more on their own issues and less on their spouses. Why husbands and wives are perceiving follow through differently is not addressed by this study.

It was also expected that wives would be more dissatisfied with the resolution process than the husbands because they would perceive their husbands as following through less. Results indicated, however, that the wives had no reason to resent the husbands following through less on the wives' issues because the wives are
seeing themselves as following through less on the husbands' also. There was no significant difference in the degree to which husbands and wives felt their issues had been resolved, which would also indicate that wives would not be more dissatisfied with the resolution process than the husbands.

What can be said about gender differences in follow through is that husbands' and wives' perceptions of who followed through more, were different from each other. This difference in perspective illustrates a weakness in the measure of follow through used in this study. Only subjective reports were used. Self-reports are subject to falsification, attribution bias, and the social desirability factor. There were no external measures such as observer ratings. Also, the agreed-upon behavior changes were not all of a concrete nature that could be objectively measured. Future studies could possibly be improved by limiting the behavior changes to objectively measurable ones and including observer ratings. These changes, however, could produce problems related to interference in the natural resolution process.

Another factor that could have influenced the results is the representativeness of the sample. Those couples who chose not to participate in the study may have been the ones most likely to withdraw while discussing issues and to avoid following through. It is not possible however to ascertain this.

**Hypothesis #3.** Couples who follow through with their agreements will have higher sexual satisfaction scores and more frequent sexual intercourse.
This hypothesis was not confirmed. There was not a significant correlation found between follow through and either sexual satisfaction or frequency of sexual intercourse. It was expected that couples who followed through more and resolved their issues to a greater extent would be more satisfied with their marriage and would also be more satisfied with their sexual relationship. This was predicated on the assumption that there would be a correlation between marriage satisfaction and sexual satisfaction as is generally assumed (Spanier, 1976). This study however, did not find a significant correlation between marital and sexual satisfaction or frequency. Apparently couples in this sample could report being happy in one area while not in the other.

**Minor Hypotheses.** Several correlations unrelated to the major hypotheses of this study were run on the obtained data and are not included in the main body of this report. Appendix C contains information on minor hypotheses concerning the relationship of the personality trait of selfishness to follow through and to household task distribution, and information about sexual characteristics of this sample.

**Future Studies.** Future studies could evaluate personality factors and other variables responsible for varying degrees of follow through. Because it is not clear whether lack of follow through causes dissatisfied marriages, or whether dissatisfied marriages result in less follow through, a longitudinal study could be designed to clarify this. By starting out with all satisfied couples (for example, those with high DAS scores) or by recruiting those just married and
presumably happy, the course of their relationship could be charted in relation to their satisfaction and follow through on agreements.

**Observations.** An observation made during the videotaped portion of this study was that couples were often very productive during their discussion of their problem areas. They did not seem to be self-conscious knowing there was a microphone above them or a camera on the other side of the one-way mirror. Once into their discussion of the issues in their relationship that they had chosen they seemed to forget about everything else.

When given ten minutes to discuss and try to resolve their issue, most couples spent the ten minutes defining the problem. When the resolution sheet was brought in and they were faced with having to write down changes they were willing to make in order to solve the problem then work at resolution began. The fact that they were being observed presumably put pressure on them to reach agreement and not walk out on the problem or be uncooperative as they might be on their own. Almost all couples came to agreement and many commented on how helpful the session had been.

This "interventionless" therapy produced results yet did not require a therapist. Couples were able to arrive at solutions because they were expected to and because they knew their behavior was being monitored. The thought occurred to this experimenter that if couples were able to have such discussions once a month, perhaps in a community health center, many issues could be resolved on an ongoing basis. Just the fact that couples were making the time to sit down and discuss issues was an important step. The fact that they were having to come up with something to put down in writing was
important. The ingredient of being observed was also important.

Conclusion.

The conclusions of this study are:

1) Happy couples follow through on the agreements they make to resolve conflict more than do unhappy couples. Hypothesis confirmed.

2) There are gender differences in the perception of degree of follow through: Husbands perceive their wives as following through more on both the husbands' and wives' issues. Wives perceive both husbands and wives as following through more on their own issues and less on their spouses. Hypothesis partially confirmed.

3) Those couples who follow through more on their agreements are not more sexually satisfied and do not have sex more frequently. Hypothesis not supported.

A contribution of this study was to provide a new measure of conflict resolution. Communication has long been recognized as an important factor in problem solving. In analyzing communication patterns and processes two measures have commonly been used: measures of the extent to which couples reach resolution, and measures of the quality of the negotiation process. This study added a measurement of follow through. Results of the study indicate that degree of follow through can be considered a possible causal factor in marital distress. Follow through should therefore be considered an important element in the problem-solving process. The problem-solving process then would be considered to include identification of the problem, negotiation, resolution agreement, and follow through.
Many couples in marital therapy hear each other say what the other could do to make their partner happy and to improve the relationship, yet many spouses pay little attention to this information. Therapy could emphasize the importance of realizing that this information is an opportunity to improve the relationship by acting on it and making changes.

Results of this study indicate minimal gender differences in follow through. Although there were significant differences in the perceptions of husbands and wives regarding who was following through more on the agreements, there were not large differences. The means for follow through for both husbands and wives fell between 3.55 and 3.97 on a 5-point scale. In this day of feminist consciousness, the data from this study do not support the need for militancy regarding differences in husband and wife follow through on agreements. Husbands were perceived by the wives to be equally involved in following through.

A contribution of this study might be to introduce a mode of "interventionless" self-therapy that could perhaps be made available at community mental health centers at low cost. A room could be provided with monitoring equipment and the couples could discuss their problems and take their tapes home with them for review. As a model, this study was good for gathering research information and was also good for the couples, many of whom were able to resolve their current issues.

This research study is a small part of a larger study which is engaged in evaluating the differences between satisfied and dissatisfied couples. Follow through on agreements to resolve
conflict is an aspect of problem-solving skill, and problem-solving skill is an important component of marital satisfaction. The overall purpose of this research is eventually to provide information and training for those embarking on marital relationships. The hope is that a premarital presentation program that offers information based on research in such areas as personality, sexuality, expectations, gender differences, and training in communication and problem solving skills, will prepare couples to meet conflict constructively and help them make their journey through life together a more pleasant and enriching experience.
Appendix A

Minor Hypotheses

Besides the major hypotheses which stated that follow through would be associated with marital satisfaction and sexual satisfaction and frequency, minor hypotheses were developed that focused on a possible explanation for lack of follow through. It was speculated that the personality trait of selfishness would be related to less follow through on the resolution agreements. Data from this study also included information about housework hours and it was speculated that selfishness would also be related to lack of equity in household task distribution. Data was checked furthermore for replication of a report that husbands who do more housework also have more frequent sexual intercourse.

A model of the relationship of these variables to each other is presented in the following Figure.

![Diagram showing the relationship of variables measured in this study](image)

**Figure 1.** Relationship of variables measured in this study
Because extensive literature reviews were not undertaken in the areas of selfishness and household task distribution, it is felt that the results obtained in this study in regard to the minor hypotheses are not sufficiently scholarly enough to include in the main body of this work. The results offered here are only for interest, as someone else may decide to pursue these topics in more depth. Future studies on follow through in conflict resolution will most likely focus on personality variables such as selfishness or laziness, in order to explain differences in follow through behavior.

As can be seen in Figure 3, it was expected in this study that nondistressed couples would follow through more because of the personality trait of unselfishness, and that follow through would produce more resolution of issues, which would be associated with more satisfaction in the relationship and more satisfying and frequent sexual intercourse. It was also expected that unselfishness would lead to more equity and fairness in a relationship which could be measured by a fair division of household tasks. A previous article (Kent, 1992) reported that the more hours of housework that a husband did the more frequently he and his wife had sex. This association was measured in this study also for replication purposes.

Following are the minor hypotheses and related results and conclusions.

**Hypothesis #4:** There will be a negative correlation between follow through scores and perceived selfishness of the marriage partner.
**Rationale:** It is possible that a person who is selfish and self-centered would lack the motivation to extend him/herself in an effort to please his/her partner.

**Analysis:** There was no significant difference in the mean selfishness scores for husbands (M=72.7) and wives (M=70.3). There was a significant negative correlation between the husband's selfishness score and his overall follow-through score $r (37) = -.35$, $p < .05$, and between the husband's selfishness score and his wife's report of his follow through on her issue, $r (37) = -.51$, $p = < .05$. There were no significant correlations between the wife's selfishness score and her follow through.

**Discussion & Conclusion.** This hypothesis was supported in regard to the husbands but not the wives. The higher the husband's selfishness score, the less follow through there was on the resolution agreement.

**Hypothesis #5:** There will be a negative correlation between selfishness scores and number of housework hours that will be reported.

**Rationale:** It may be that partners who are selfish lack a sense of fairness and compromise in relationships. A person who is selfish may prefer that others do most of the work. Another variable that may be associated with fairness in a relationship is equity in the division of household labor.

**Analysis:** There was a significant negative correlation between the husbands' selfishness score and the number of housework hours the wives reported that the husbands performed, $r$
(35) = -.51, p < .05. The wives’ selfishness scores did not correlate significantly with housework hours performed.

**Discussion & Conclusion.** The hypothesis was partially supported in relation to the husbands’ scores. The higher the husband’s selfishness score the fewer the number of housework hours the husband did, according to the wife. It may be that the wife’s selfishness score did not correlate with the number of housework hours performed because of gender differences in the expected roles involving housework. Even though many wives are now working outside the home, they still may not completely feel that they have a choice in doing housework because it is/was traditionally expected of them. And even though wives are working, husbands may feel they can choose to do housework or not. And if choice is involved then selfishness could influence the choice.

It should be noted that the difference between hours of housework done each week by husbands and wives in this sample were not as far apart as often reported in other studies. Gillespie (1989, p. 131), for example found that women perform over 70 percent of housework, and Berardo and his colleagues (1987) suggested that wives do about 80%. The mean number of housework hours reported in the present study was 8.2 hours per week for husbands, and 14.9 hours per week for wives. Wives therefore reported that they did about one more hour of housework per day than their husbands.

**Hypothesis #6:** There will be a positive correlation between the number of hours of housework a husband does each week and the reported frequency of sexual intercourse.
**Rationale:** This would be a replication of a previous study (Kent, 1992). The rationale given in the previous report for husbands having more sex when they do more housework, was that when wives are doing all the housework they are too tired for sex, and when the husbands pitch in the wives are less tired and also appreciative, and therefore more affectionate.

**Analysis:** The correlation between the number of hours of housework the husbands reported that they did each week and the number of hours of housework the wives reported that their husbands did each week were not significantly correlated with the frequency of sexual intercourse that husbands reported having, \( r(36) = -.04, \text{ns}, \) and \( r(35) = .06, \text{ns} \), respectively. There was however, a significant correlation between the number of hours of housework the wives performed and the frequency of sex reported by both husbands and wives, \( r(35) = .42, \ p < .05, \) and \( r(35) = .37, \ p < .05 \), respectively.

**Discussion & Conclusion.** The Kent report (1992) was not replicated. There was no significant correlation between the number of hours of housework the husbands did each week and the frequency of sex they reported. There was, however, a significant correlation between the number of hours of housework the wives performed and the frequency of sexual intercourse reported by both husbands and wives. The reason for this is unclear. The present study contradicts the previous finding.

The accuracy of the present study could be called into question with regard to its ability to determine equity in household division of labor. It is likely that the number of hours of housework per se that
husbands do each week is less important than equity in the division of labor. An equitable division would involve counting up the number of hours each spouse spends working and then dividing up the hours of housework so they each have the same number of hours of work and leisure time. This study could be improved upon by comparing only those husbands and wives who work equal number of hours. This study did not distinguish full and part-time work or separate out those husbands and wives who were unemployed, or take into consideration whether there were children in the home.

**Sexual Characteristics of Sample**

What goes on in sexual relationships is fairly private information and even with the Kinsey (1991), Masters and Johnson (1988), and Hite (1987) reports, accurate sexual statistics are still in the stage of being compiled. The more studies that report these statistics the larger the pool of information will become.

For those interested in the sexual demographics of this sample, questionnaire results provided the following information:

1) The mean frequency for sexual intercourse reported by husbands was 1.9 times per week, and by wives 2.0 times per week.
2) The means of desired frequency of sexual intercourse per week were 3.7 for husbands and 3.2 for wives.
3) There was a significant correlation between sexual satisfaction and sexual frequency for husbands $r = .34$ ($N=37$, $p < .05$) and for wives $r = .41$ ($N=37$, $p < .05$),
4) The sexual satisfaction scores (ISS) for husbands ($M=21.8$, $SD=13.2$), and wives ($M=22.4$, $SD=14.9$) were not significantly
different, $t=(37) = . , \text{ns}$, on a scale with a range of 0-100. Scores above 30 indicate a clinical sexual problem.

5) There was no significant correlation between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction $r(35) = . , \text{ns}$, or between sexual frequency and marital satisfaction $r(35) = . , \text{ns}$.
Appendix B

Consent for Research Participation

Human Subjects Participation Consent Form
Consent to Participate in the:  
**Marital Relationships Study**  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

You are being asked to participate in a study concerning marriage. In this study we hope to learn how various aspects of spouses' personality styles and beliefs about relationships are associated with the way both partners interact in their marriage and how they feel about their relationship. This research is being supported by a grant from University of Nevada, Las Vegas. You have been chosen as a possible participant in this study because this is your first marriage, you have been married at least 1 year, and both you and your spouse are under the age of 55.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a number of different questionnaires and you will be videotaped discussing areas of dissatisfaction with your relationship that either you or your partner identify. Some of the questionnaires you will be asked to complete will concern personal issues, including sensitive subjects such as problems in your relationship with your spouse, physical aggression toward your spouse, sex, and your feelings about your marriage. The first several questionnaires and this consent form will be mailed to you and your partner and we will ask you to review this consent form and complete the questionnaires individually. It will take approximately 30 minutes to review this form and complete these questionnaires. If you have any questions after reviewing these materials, please contact Dr. Heavey. After you have completed these questionnaires, a mutually agreed upon time will be arranged for you and your partner to come to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas to complete the next phase of the study.

During this phase of the study, you will be asked to complete some additional questionnaires and to participate in two videotaped interactions with your partner. Both you and your partner will be asked to complete a questionnaire asking about areas of dissatisfaction in your relationship. Each of you will then be asked to choose one issue to discuss and attempt to resolve while being videotaped. You also will be asked to answer questions regarding your thoughts and feelings about these discussions. You will be given the opportunity to indicate that you do not want to discuss certain problem areas. You will be told when the taping begins and ends and you will have the right to review the videotapes to determine whether they should be edited or erased in whole or in part. These videotapes will be used only for the purpose of data analysis related to this study. The purpose of this phase of the study is to learn more about how couples attempt to resolve problems or disagreements. This meeting at the university will last about 1.5 hours.

You will be given some additional questionnaires to take home with you from this meeting to complete and return by mail. Several weeks after this meeting, you will be contacted by telephone and asked some follow-up questions. After you have completed the remaining questionnaires and the follow-up interview, payment for your participation will be mailed to you. It is expected that this final phase of the study will require approximately 1 hour of your time. The total time for participation in this study will be approximately 3 hours.

Although volunteers participating in this type of research typically do not experience any substantial discomfort, there is some risk that feelings such as anger might come up, thereby increasing the chances of interpersonal conflict. Other feelings, such as embarrassment or shame, emotional distress, fear of disclosure, invasion of privacy might also be felt by some people. Following the completion of your participation in this study, you will be provided with written information about various forms of counseling and assistance available for distressed individuals, couples and/or victims of domestic violence.
etc. As an additional safeguard, if you feel the need, the services of a professional therapist will be offered to you for up to 2 hours of free consultation. In particular, if you inform the investigator that you are currently physically abusing your spouse, he will strongly suggest that you and your spouse consult a counselor. However, if physical abuse is reported, the investigator will not inform legal authorities.

The subjects in this study are not expected to be harmed by the questionnaire and/or communication task. The results of the study may contribute to scientific knowledge in general, but it is not expected to provide direct benefits to you as a participant outside of cash payment of $37.50 (or not less than $10.00 per hour) for your participation.

All of the information you provide will remain confidential. Questionnaires and videotapes will be stored in locked file cabinets and will only be identified by a four digit ID number. The principal investigator will be the only person with access to the identifying information which correspond to each ID number. In all probability, there will be publications and/or other educational uses of the data. However, responses to specific questions will be pooled together for presentation in any reports and any identifying information will be deleted. No information which identifies you will be released without your separate consent except as specifically required by law.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to answer any question that you may not wish to answer and to discontinue your participation in this study at any time without prejudice. If, for any reason, you do not wish to continue your participation, please inform the investigator. If you discontinue your participation, you will still be paid $10.00 for each hour that you have participated in this study.

Please feel free to ask any questions you might have at any point during the study. If you have additional questions later, you may contact Chris Heavey, Ph.D. at (702) 895-4662. Dr. Heavey is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Las Vegas, Nevada, 89154-5030.

Circumstances may arise which might cause the investigator to terminate your participation in the study. You will then be paid for the time you have participated. You may also be contacted at a later date by the investigator and asked if you are willing to provide additional information related to this study. If this occurs, you will have the right to refuse any further participation.

If the study or the use of the information you provide is to be changed, you will be so informed and your consent will be reobtained.

Please bring both copies of this form to your meeting at the university. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep.

YOUR SIGNATURE BELOW WILL INDICATE THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO VOLUNTARILY PARTICIPATE AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT AND THAT YOU HAVE READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE.

__________________________________________  _______________________________________
Date                                              Signature of Participant

__________________________________________  _______________________________________
Date                                              Signature of Investigator
TO: Professor Christopher Heavey
FROM: William E. Schulze, Director, Office of Research Administration
RE: Approval of Human Subjects Protocol Project
Entitled: "Marital Relationship Study"
DATE: 8 March 1993

This memorandum is official notification that protocol for the project referenced above was approved on March 8, 1993 by the Social Behavioral Subcommittee of the Institutional Review Board.

If you have any questions or require any assistance, please give us a call.
Appendix C

Marital Relationship Study Questionnaires:
(Only questionnaires used in this study are included)

Phase 1
Demographic Inventory

Phase 2
Dyadic Satisfaction subscale of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS-DS)
Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS)
Selfism Scale (NS)
Problem Areas Questionnaire (PAQ)
Resolution Summary Sheet

Phase 3
Housework Questionnaire

Phase 4
Resolution Follow-Up Questionnaire (Interview)
Marital Relationship Study

Questionnaire One

Please answer all of the questions below as accurately and as honestly as possible.

1. What is the first name of your spouse? ______________________

2. What is your date of birth?
   Month   Day   Year

3. What is your spouse's date of birth?
   Month   Day   Year

4. When were you married?
   Month   Day   Year

5. How long have you been married? __________

6. What is your sex? _____

7. What is your approximate yearly income? ______________

8. What is your Occupation? ______________________

9. What is your partner's approximate yearly income? ______________

10. What is your partner's occupation? ______________________

11. Please list the age and sex of each of your children.
    Age   Sex
    _______ _______
    _______ _______
    _______ _______
    _______ _______
    _______ _______

12. What is your religious preference? (check one)
    __ Catholic
    __ Protestant
    __ Jewish
    __ Agnostic
    __ Atheist
    __ Other (please specify) ____________________
13. How frequency do you attend a religious service (e.g., church, synagogue, etc.)?

___ Weekly or more often
___ Approximately every other week
___ Approximately once a month
___ Approximately once every two months
___ Seldom
___ Never

14. What is the size of community in which you were raised? (check one)

___ Less than 10,000
___ 10,000 to 25,000
___ 25,000 to 100,000
___ 100,000 to 500,000
___ 500,000 to 1,000,000
___ Over 1,000,000

15. What is the size of your family of origin?

Number of brothers _____  Number of sisters _____

16. What is your father's current occupation, or if retired or unemployed, what was his occupation? __________________________________

17. Father's Education (Highest Grade Completed) ________________

18. What is your mother's current occupation, or if retired or unemployed, what was her occupation? _____________________________

19. Mother's Education (Highest Grade Completed) _______________________

20. Your Education (Highest Grade Completed) ___________________

21. Partner's Education (Highest Grade Completed) __________________

22. Were your parents legally married? No _____ Yes _____

23. Were your parents ever divorced? No _____ Yes _____

If yes, how old were you when they were divorced ______

24. What is your race? ___________________

25. During the past week, how many arguments have you and your spouse had? ______

26. On average, how intense or “heated” are the typical arguments you have with your spouse?

Not at all intense 1 2 3 4 5 Very intense

27. How many days do you work (at your job) during a typical work week? ________
PLEASE NOTE

Copyrighted materials in this document have not been filmed at the request of the author. They are available for consultation, however, in the author's university library.

DAS- Graham B. Spanier 65-66
ISS-Walter W. Hudson 67-68
NS-E. Jerry Phares and Nancy Erskine 69-71

University Microfilms International
Problem Areas Questionnaire

Men and women in intimate relationships typically are dissatisfied or have problems or disagreements in some areas of their relationship even when they are satisfied with their relationship on the whole. The following is a list of areas in which couples are often dissatisfied with or have disagreements about each other’s behavior. Please circle the number which represents how dissatisfied you are with how each of the following areas is handled in your relationship. Use the scale of 0 = Completely satisfied with how the issue is handled (Couldn’t be better) to 6 = Very dissatisfied with how the issue is handled (Want a lot of change/improvement). For example, if you want some change in how the two of you handle or spend money, you would circle a 3 for question #1 (Handling family finances). If you want a lot of change and are very dissatisfied, you would circle a 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMpletely Satisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat Satisfied</th>
<th>Very Dissatisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>6</td>
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</table>

1) Handling family finances
2) Having interesting conversations
3) Matters of Recreation
4) Amount of time spent with friends
5) Religious matters
6) Moodiness, not being positive
7) Demonstration of affection
8) Sex relations
9) Correct or proper behavior or appearance
10) Ways of dealing with parents, in-laws
11) Amount of attention received
12) Aims, goals, and things believed important
13) Amount of time spent together
14) Making major decisions
15) Household tasks
16) Leisure time interests and activities
17) Amount of time spent alone
18) Ways of handling children
19) Alcohol or drug use

Are there areas with which you feel dissatisfied that are not included on this list? If so, please write them in below.

20) ____________________________________________ 0 1 2 3 4 5 6
21) ____________________________________________ 0 1 2 3 4 5 6
22) ____________________________________________ 0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Are there any problem areas you are NOT willing to discuss with your partner today? If so, please place an X through the number of the area above.
Review the list of problems you just rated. We would like you to choose one issue which you feel presents an ongoing difficulty in your relationship to discuss with your partner. This should be an issue which you believe could be resolved by some change in your partner’s behavior and/or your behavior during the next several weeks. Do not choose an issue which cannot be resolved by a discussion between you and your partner, such as making more money, or getting your in-laws to be more pleasant. If there are several areas that you feel are a problem, choose the one which is most important to you. Write the number and topic of the issue you have chosen on the following blank.

(#)  (Topic) _______________________________________

Now please describe in one or two sentences how this issue is a problem in your relationship. For example, if you chose “Demonstration of Affection” as the problem area, the problem might be that you feel your partner is not affectionate enough with you or that he or she is too affectionate with you in public places. So please explain specifically what it is that you are dissatisfied with or unhappy about with regard to the issue you have chosen.

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Now please describe what you feel is the cause of this problem or issue in your relationship.

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
Resolution Summary

Once you feel you have reached a satisfactory resolution to the issue you have been discussing, we would like you to write down anything that either of you agreed to do as part of this resolution. Please be as specific as possible regarding any agreed upon changes in behavior and the time frame in which these changes will take place.

Topic of Discussion __________________________________________

If applicable, wife agrees to: ____________________________________

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

If applicable, husband agrees to: _________________________________

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
**Directions:** Certain household tasks are necessary to keep things running smoothly. Who does each of these tasks more often, you or your partner? Circle the number which best reflects you and your partner’s participation in these tasks. Circle “N/A” for “Not Applicable” if neither of you do the task.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Description</th>
<th>I do this all of the time</th>
<th>We do this equally</th>
<th>My spouse does this all of the time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Household repairs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Doing the dishes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Cooking meals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Vacuuming and Cleaning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Laundry and Ironing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Taking out the trash</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Grocery shopping</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Taking care of lawn &amp; garden</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Automobile cleaning and maintenance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Cleaning garage</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Feeding children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Disciplining children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Shopping for children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Playing with or reading to children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. On the average, how many hours a week do you personally spend on household chores like those listed above? ____________ hours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. On the average, how may hours a week does your spouse spend on household chores like those listed above? ____________ hours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. On the average, how many hours a week do you have hired help doing household chores and gardening (do not count hours spent on repairs, and automobile cleaning and maintenance)? ____________ hours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. On the whole, how fair do you feel the division of labor is between you and your spouse? If you feel the division of labor is completely fair to both you and your spouse circle “5.” Otherwise circle the number which represents the extent to which it is unfair to either you or your spouse.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fair to Both</th>
<th>Unfair to My Spouse</th>
<th>Unfair to Me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fair to Both</td>
<td>My Spouse</td>
<td>My Spouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Resolution Follow-Up Questionnaire

Several weeks ago when you and your partner came to the University for the Marital Relationship study, each of you chose an issue to discuss that you considered a problem in your relationship. We would like to ask you a couple of questions about what has happened with regard to these issues since these discussions.

First, I'd like to begin with the issue you identified. This issue was ______________________________. After discussing this issue, the two of you wrote down on the Resolution Summary that you would each make the following changes: (read from resolution summary).

Now I want to ask you a couple of questions about how much each of you followed through on these changes.

1. Have the two of you discussed this issue since you made this agreement three weeks ago, yes or no?
   __________ No  __________ Yes

   1A. If you have discussed it, did you modify your agreement?
   __________ No  __________ Yes --How?

   Wife agreed to: ___________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________
   Husband agreed to: ________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________

Please answer the following questions using a scale of 1 to 5 where:
1 = Not At All
5 = Very Much or Completely.

1. To what extent have you fulfilled your part of the resolution agreement you and your partner reached when discussing this issue 3 weeks ago?
   1  2  3  4  5

2. To what extent will your spouse say that you have fulfilled your part of this agreement?
   1  2  3  4  5

3. To what extent do you feel your spouse has fulfilled his/her part of this agreement?
   1  2  3  4  5
4. To what extent do you believe your partner will say that they have fulfilled their part of this resolution this agreement?

1  2  3  4  5

5. Has your spouse followed through with his/her part of the agreement less this past week than they did during the week immediately after the agreement was reached? Yes ____  No ____

6. How satisfied are you with the resolution you and your spouse agreed to?

1  2  3  4  5

7. How satisfied are you with the extent to which both you and your spouse have followed through with this resolution?

1  2  3  4  5

8. To what extent do you now feel you and your spouse have resolved this issue?

1  2  3  4  5

9. If you have not done what you agreed to do, why haven’t you? ______________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

10. If your spouse has not done what he/she agreed to do, why do you think he/she hasn’t?

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

Second Issue

Now, I’d like to ask you the same questions with regard to the issue your partner identified. This issue was ____________________________. After discussing this issue, the two of you wrote down on the Resolution Summary that you would each make the following changes: (read from resolution summary).

1. Have the two of you discussed this issue since you made this agreement three weeks ago, yes or no?

 _______ No _______ Yes

1A. If you have discussed it, did you modify your agreement?

 _______ No _______ Yes --How?

Wife agreed to: _______________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

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Now, I’d like to ask you the same questions with regard to the issue your partner identified. This issue was ____________________________. After discussing this issue, the two of you wrote down on the Resolution Summary that you would each make the following changes: (read from resolution summary).

1. Have the two of you discussed this issue since you made this agreement three weeks ago, yes or no?

 _______ No _______ Yes

1A. If you have discussed it, did you modify your agreement?

 _______ No _______ Yes --How?

Wife agreed to: _______________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

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1A. If you have discussed it, did you modify your agreement?

 _______ No _______ Yes --How?

Wife agreed to: _______________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

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1A. If you have discussed it, did you modify your agreement?

 _______ No _______ Yes --How?

Wife agreed to: _______________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

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 _______ No _______ Yes --How?

Wife agreed to: _______________________________________________________

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_____________________________________________________________________________________

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 _______ No _______ Yes

1A. If you have discussed it, did you modify your agreement?

 _______ No _______ Yes --How?

Wife agreed to: _______________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

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 _______ No _______ Yes

1A. If you have discussed it, did you modify your agreement?

 _______ No _______ Yes --How?

Wife agreed to: _______________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________
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Please answer the following questions using a scale of 1 to 5 where:
1 = Not At All
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   1  2  3  4  5

2. To what extent will your spouse say that you have fulfilled your part of this agreement?
   1  2  3  4  5

3. To what extent do you feel your spouse has fulfilled his/her part of this agreement?
   1  2  3  4  5

4. To what extent do you believe your partner will say that they have fulfilled their part of this resolution this agreement?
   1  2  3  4  5

5. Has your spouse followed through with his/her part of the agreement less this past week than they did during the week immediately after the agreement was reached? Yes ____ No ____

6. How satisfied are you with the resolution you and you spouse agreed to?
   1  2  3  4  5

7. How satisfied are you with the extent to which both you and your spouse have followed through with this resolution?
   1  2  3  4  5

8. To what extent do you now feel you and your spouse have resolved this issue?
   1  2  3  4  5

9. If you have not done what you agreed to do, why haven't you? __________________________

10. If your spouse has not done what he/she agreed to do, why do you think he/she hasn't?

   __________________________
REFERENCES


