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Dispositional empathy, dyadic perspective-taking, and interpersonal perceptions among married persons in relation to marital adjustment

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DISPOSITIONAL EMPATHY, DYADIC PERSPECTIVE-TAKING,
AND INTERPERSONAL PERCEPTIONS AMONG MARRIED
PERSONS IN RELATION TO MARITAL ADJUSTMENT

by

Mark E. Morgenstern

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
August 1996

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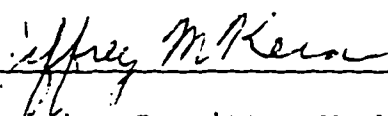
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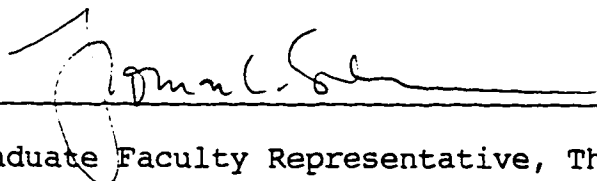
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August 1996

ABSTRACT

Several studies have shown that various aspects of empathy are important in relationship satisfaction. In addition, the similarity, assumed similarity, and accuracy of interpersonal perceptions among married couples have also been shown to be positively related to marital adjustment. The present study examined these variables in a sample of 42 married couples. It was found that Perspective-Taking and Empathic Concern, as well as Dyadic Perspective-Taking were positively associated with marital adjustment. In addition, it was observed that accuracy of interpersonal perceptions was positively related to marital satisfaction and satisfaction regarding conflict resolutions. This significant correlation did not remain, however, when the effects of similarity and assumed similarity were taken into account. Finally, it was proposed that Perspective-Taking ability would be positively related to accuracy of interpersonal perceptions. This hypothesis was largely unsupported.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is associated with numerous positive outcomes. Married persons have lower death rates, lower rates of suicide, less need for psychiatric care, and in general exhibit less physical and mental difficulty than non-married individuals (Lauer, Lauer, & Kerr, 1990). These benefits have led researchers to examine a multitude of variables that correlate with marital happiness, adjustment, and stability.

Personality factors in relation to marital happiness have been among those most widely studied. Studies utilizing the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), for example, have shown that when personality scale scores among married couples indicate dysfunction, marital discord is also high (Cookerly, 1974). In addition to personality factors, patterns of interaction within marriage have also come under the scrutiny of researchers (e.g., Raush, Barry, Hertel, & Swain, 1974). It is generally agreed that effective communication plays a major role in the satisfaction that the members of a couple feel with their relationship.

Empathy

Empathy as an aspect of personality, in contrast, has received relatively little attention in marital research. This lack of attention may be due to the lack of consensus among researchers regarding what empathy is and the corresponding lack of valid and reliable instruments for its assessment.

Historical Approaches in the Measurement of Empathy

Dymond (1949) was perhaps the first investigator to attempt to systematically study empathy. Her definition of empathy was "the imaginal transposing of oneself into the thinking, feeling, and acting of another and so structuring the world as he does" (p. 127). In studying this rather broadly defined construct, Dymond (1949) constructed a test that contained the following six traits: self-confidence, superior-inferior, selfish-unselfish, friendly-unfriendly, leader-follower, and sense of humor.

Subjects provided four separate ratings of each of these six traits using five-point scales. If two individuals A and B were tested regarding their empathic ability, the procedure for individual A would be as follows: A rates him or herself, A rates B as he or she

(A) sees him or her, A rates B as he or she thinks B would rate himself or herself, and A rates him or herself as he or she thinks B would rate him or her. Individual B would follow the same procedure in reverse.

Although it is unclear whether or not Dymond's (1949) test actually measured empathy, it did allow for the comparison of how two individuals perceived themselves and each other. Thus it would appear that Dymond's (1949) empathy test was misnamed: It was more an interpersonal perceptions test. Furthermore, obtaining "empathy" scores with this test is a cumbersome process and questions regarding its validity and the methodology with which it was developed hindered its use in subsequent studies (Hastorf & Bender, 1952).

In developing his empathy scale, Hogan (1969) defined empathy as the "intellectual or imaginal apprehension of another's condition or state of mind without actually experiencing that person's feelings" (p. 308). His scale consists of 64 items from the MMPI (Hathaway & McKinley, 1943) and the California Psychological Inventory (Gough, 1964) that discriminated between individuals rated as being high and low in empathy using the definition cited above. Hogan's (1969) definition was somewhat more precise than that of Dymond

(1949), although it focused exclusively on the cognitive process of taking the perspective of another person and ignored the feelings that accompany this process.

Mehrabian and Epstein (1972) pointed out, that until the time of their investigation, the study of empathy had followed two fairly distinct paths, focusing either on the cognitive or affective aspects of the empathy construct. Two examples of cognitively oriented approaches to empathy are those described above. In Dymond's (1949) approach, empathic persons were seen as being able to imaginatively take the role of another and accurately predict the other's thoughts, feelings and actions, but no attention was paid to the emotional response on the part of the person doing the predicting. In a similar vein, Hogan (1969) explicitly excluded "feelings" from his definition of empathy.

Mehrabian and Epstein (1972) espoused a second approach to empathy that focused more on its affective component. According to their view, empathy could be defined as "a vicarious emotional response to the perceived emotional experiences of another" (p. 525). In order to assess this type of response, the authors developed the Questionnaire Measure of Emotional Empathy (QMEE). In its final form the QMEE consisted of 33 items

that were chosen on the basis of three considerations; insignificant correlations with the Crowne and Marlow (1960) social desirability scale, significant (.01) correlations with the total QMEE score, and content validity for scale items, which was inferred in part from factor analyses of a larger item pool.

Each of the three measures reviewed above (i.e. Dymond's (1949) Empathy Test, Hogan's (1969) Empathy Scale, and Mehrabian & Epstein's (1972) QMEE purportedly assess empathy. However, it is clear that the operational definitions used in their constructions were quite different. This ambiguity has made it difficult to systematically determine the role empathy plays in interpersonal relationships in general and marriage in particular.

Davis (1980, 1983a, 1983b) and his colleagues (Davis & Oathout 1987, 1992; Davis & Kraus, 1991) have addressed the need for a more concrete approach to the study of empathy by proposing a multidimensional model of dispositional empathy. Rather than focusing on either the cognitive or affective components of empathy, Davis and his colleagues posit that empathy can best be described as a set of constructs, both cognitive and affective, which are related to each other in that they

all concern responsivity to others, but which are nonetheless clearly discriminable from each other. Furthermore, Davis and his colleagues propose that the cognitive and affective aspects of individuals' empathy are stable and long lasting parts of their personalities. Hence, the term dispositional empathy.

In accord with this model, Davis (1980) constructed the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), a 28-item self-report measure consisting of four subscales, each of which tap some aspect of the global concept of empathy. The four subscales of the IRI are Perspective-Taking (PT), Empathic Concern (EC), Personal Distress (PD), and Fantasy (FS).

According to the model of empathy proposed by Davis and his colleagues, individuals who are high in PT habitually make efforts to take the psychological point of view of others. Due to their ability to adopt the perspective of others, such individuals are thought to be relatively tolerant of others, to be accommodating in relationships, and to exhibit a relative lack of selfishness and egocentrism. This subscale of the IRI, according to Davis and his colleagues, assesses the "cognitive aspect" of dispositional empathy, which corresponds with Hogan's (1969) definition of empathy.

The EC subscale of the IRI was conceptualized by Davis and his colleagues as an index of the tendency for individuals to experience feelings of warmth, sympathy, and compassion for others. This subscale is similar to the QMEE developed by Mehrabian and Epstein (1972).

Both PT and EC were thought to be positively related to relationship satisfaction but for different reasons. Davis (1980, 1983a, 1983b) and his colleagues (Davis & Oathout, 1987, 1992; Davis & Kraus, 1991) have proposed that relationships involving high levels of PT are more satisfying due to their lack of negative features (e.g., selfishness, egocentrism), whereas relationships characterized by high levels of EC are more satisfying due to the presence of positive features (e.g., warmth, sympathy).

In addition to PT and EC, which are supposedly associated with more satisfying relationships, Davis and his colleagues also proposed two aspects of dispositional empathy that were seen as negative or not particularly relevant to relationship satisfaction. The PD (Personal Distress) subscale of the IRI assesses the extent to which an individual experiences feelings of anxiety and discomfort in response to the negative emotional experiences of others. Along with the EC

subscale, the PD subscale taps into the emotional aspects of dispositional empathy. However, whereas high EC scores are associated with more satisfying relationships, Davis and Kraus (1991), drawing from the results of several studies, characterized individuals high in PD as being relatively non-supportive in relationships, poor communicators, and as being relatively immature and insecure. The fourth subscale of the IRI, FS (Fantasy), measures the tendency of individuals to identify with fictional characters in books, movies, or plays. No significant relationship has been observed between this subscale and marital adjustment.

Davis and his colleagues have provided evidence for the utility of their multidimensional model in a variety of social relationships (see Davis & Kraus, 1991, for a review). Overall, the PT subscale of the IRI has been shown to have the strongest positive correlation with the satisfaction experienced by individuals in various social relationships, while the EC subscale exhibits somewhat weaker positive correlations with satisfaction. The PD subscale has been shown to be negatively correlated with satisfaction in social relationships, with the magnitude of this correlation generally falling

between the correlations observed for the EC and PT scales. The FS scale has shown no consistent association with satisfaction in relationships.

Although the approaches to empathy discussed thus far have focused on fairly broad interpersonal relationships, much of the research related to empathy has taken place within the context of client-therapist relationships. For example, Barkham and Shapiro (1986) examined the relationships between counselor verbal responses and the experienced empathy of therapy clients. In addition, comparisons were made between clients' and counselors' perceptions of the degree of empathy shown by therapists at four points in the therapy process. Barkham and Shapiro (1986) found that the counselor verbal response modes of reflection, exploration, and interpretation were most strongly associated with client perceived empathy, both during initial and ongoing sessions. General advisement or advice giving was negatively related to client perceived empathy. In examining client and therapist perceptions of counselor empathy, they found that for ongoing therapy sessions, both client and therapist perceptions of the degree of counselor empathy were high. However,

during initial sessions, clients (but not counselors) perceived a lower degree of therapist empathy.

In light of this finding, Barkham and Shapiro (1986) suggested that clients may initially perceive the counseling relationship as less positive than the counselor. Once the client and counselor have a more well established relationship however, both participants have a relatively favorable view of the relationship.

Another study that examined client perceptions of therapist empathy was done by Bachelor (1988), who attempted to determine what constituted a therapist's empathic response from the perspective of clients. To this end, descriptions of empathic perceptions were collected from a group of therapy clients as well as from a comparison group of non-clients. Bachelor (1988) delineated four distinct styles of client-perceived empathy, which were labeled therapist cognitive empathy, therapist affective empathy, therapist sharing empathy, and therapist nurturant empathy. The same four styles were observed among the non-client control group. Perceived cognitive empathy was described as occurring when the helper accurately recognized the client's ongoing inner experience, state, or motivation. Client-perceived affective empathy was said to occur when the

counselor was perceived as taking part in the same feeling or emotion experienced by the client at a given moment. In the perceived sharing empathic style, the therapist was seen as empathic when he or she readily disclosed to the client personal opinions or experiences relevant to the client's ongoing communication.

Perceived nurturant empathy was described by clients when they felt that the helper was exhibiting a totally supportive, security-providing, or attentive presence. Client self-reports fell into the four categories as follows: therapist cognitive empathy (44%); therapist affective empathy (30%); therapist sharing empathy (18%); and therapist nurturant empathy (7%).

Bachelor (1988) noted that her results indicated the existence of different perceptual styles in different clients; clients were receptive to four distinct types of empathy, in part due to their perceptual style. In addition, Bachelor (1988) examined the role of counselor verbal response style in relation to the perception of empathy on the part of clients. She found that therapist communication of his or her understanding of clients was differentially significant to clients, depending on their empathic style. For

example, clients who were receptive to therapist cognitive empathy placed more importance on counselor verbal communication than did clients who were receptive to therapist nurturant empathy.

These results led Bachelor (1988) to espouse the importance of determining clients' perceptual styles during therapy and keeping these perceptual styles in mind when choosing a form of verbal response in therapy. In addition, Bachelor (1988), like Davis (1980), stressed the importance of conceptualizing empathy as a multidimensional construct, not as a global unidimensional trait.

Empathy and Romantic Relationships

Two studies (Davis & Oathout, 1987, 1992) have examined dispositional empathy in relation to romantic relationships. Davis and Oathout (1987) presented a model of romantic relationship satisfaction based on the notion that personality factors in general and certain aspects of dispositional empathy in particular affect relationship satisfaction through their influences on specific mediating behaviors. This model delineates two main points: (a) The perspective-taking of one partner is positively related to the relationship satisfaction

of the other, and (b) satisfaction with the relationship is positively related to the perceptions of the partner regarding specific relationship behaviors (see Figure 1 for the general theoretical model).

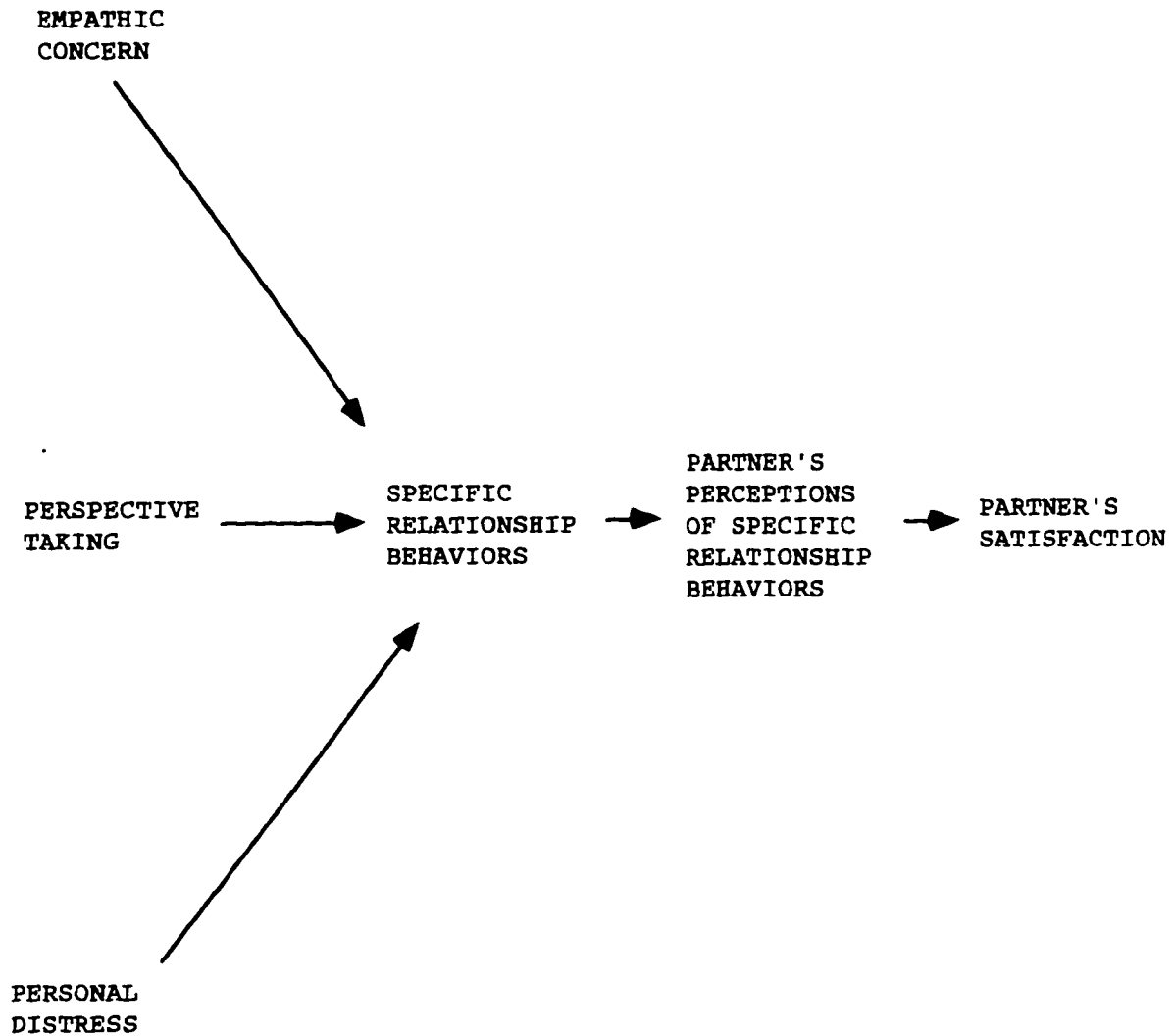


Figure 1. The general theoretical model of dispositional empathy and relationship satisfaction proposed by Davis and Oathout (1987, 1992).

Through a path-analytic approach, Davis and Oathout (1987) showed that dispositional empathy (specifically the PT and EC factors of the IRI) was positively related to marital adjustment as assessed by the Marital

Adjustment Test (Locke & Wallace, 1959). Similarly, Davis and Oathout (1992) examined heterosocial anxiety (i.e., anxiety arising from real, anticipated, or imagined interactions with others of the opposite sex) as a potential moderating factor in the relationship between dispositional empathy and relationship satisfaction. Although the evidence regarding the moderating effect of heterosocial anxiety on marital satisfaction was mixed, the authors did replicate their earlier findings with regard to the positive effects of PT and EC scores on dyadic adjustment as well the negative association between PD scores and dyadic adjustment.

It must be noted, however, that both of these studies (Davis & Oathout, 1987, 1992) utilized samples of premarital college student couples and measured dispositional empathy (via the IRI) only in general social interactions with others, not in the context of marriage or similar dyads. Long (1990) proposed that because the positive relationship between the PT subscale of the IRI and relationship satisfaction has consistently been shown to be of greater magnitude than any of the other IRI subscales, researchers should focus more on this aspect of dispositional empathy. Further,

Long (1990) pointed out that perspective-taking may not be stable across relationships and situations, citing research that indicates that spouses act more negatively with each other than with strangers (Birchler, Weiss, & Vincent, 1975; Ryder, 1968; Winter, Ferreira, & Bowers, 1973).

For these reasons Long (1990) developed two scales for the measurement of dyadic perspective-taking. The Self Dyadic Perspective-Taking Scale (SDPT) is a questionnaire designed to assess the extent of an individual's perspective-taking within their marriage. The Other Dyadic Perspective-Taking Scale (ODPT) is a similar measure designed to assess the extent to which an individual perceives his or her partner as a perspective taker. Two studies (Long, 1990; Long & Andrews, 1990) have provided initial evidence for the reliability and validity of these scales, and have shown that a positive association exists between dyadic perspective-taking and marital adjustment.

Specifically, individuals' self-reported dyadic perspective-taking (SDPT) scores were significantly positively correlated with their partners' satisfaction scores for both men and women, and perceptions of a partner's dyadic perspective-taking (ODPT) was a

significant positive predictor of one's own marital adjustment for both men and women.

Interpersonal Perceptions

The fact that both self perceptions and perceptions of partner are important facets of the model espoused by Davis and Oathout (1987, 1992) and of Long (1990) and Long and Andrews (1990), illustrates that the study of empathy and the study of interpersonal perceptions are related. Long (1990) bridged the gap between these two fields somewhat by constructing scales that directly measure the perceptions of both members of a couple with regard to perspective-taking. Interpersonal perceptions of a more general nature have been examined in numerous studies of marital satisfaction and will be reviewed below.

Interpersonal Perceptions and Marital Satisfaction

As was the case for investigating empathy, Dymond (1954) was among the first researchers to examine the relationship between the interpersonal perceptions of married couples and their relationship satisfaction. To measure interpersonal perceptions, Dymond (1954) chose 115 MMPI items: 100 on the basis of their relevance to interpersonal interactions, with the 15 Lie Scale items

making up the remainder. To assess perceptions, each partner responded to each item twice, yielding the following four responses: (1) Husband's own answer; (2) Husband's prediction of wife's answer; (3) Wife's own answer; and (4) Wife's prediction of husband's answer.

From these four sets of endorsements, Dymond (1954) computed scores for understanding (accuracy of perceptions), similarity, and assumed similarity. In the case of husbands, for example, understanding was determined by comparing their predictions of their wives' responses with their wives' actual responses. Similarity was determined by comparing husbands' and wives' responses, whereas assumed similarity was determined by comparing husbands' responses with their predictions of their wives' responses. Analogous procedures were followed to obtain indices of understanding, similarity, and assumed similarity for wives. All of these variables were examined in relation to marital satisfaction. The criterion for marital happiness was a combination of couples' self-ratings and ratings made by the experimenter.

The results indicated that happy couples showed significantly more understanding (i.e., were significantly better at predicting their spouses'

responses to MMPI items) than did unhappy couples. Dymond (1954) further demonstrated that in this sample happy couples were significantly more similar in terms of the personality attributes assessed than were unhappy couples. With regard to assumed similarity (i.e., predictions of spouse which corresponded to spouse's own replies) no significant difference was observed between happy and unhappy couples. However, differences were observed between these groups in the types of errors made in predicting spouse's responses.

Dymond (1954) pointed out that two types of errors of perception are possible: (1) Where an actual similarity between self and spouse exists but a difference is predicted, and (2) when a spouse is assumed to be similar but in fact he or she differs. Happy couples in this sample made both types of errors with roughly the same frequency, whereas unhappy couples made significantly more errors of the second type. Thus, the members of unhappily married couples in this study tended to underestimate the differences between themselves and their spouses. However, the opposite was found in a more recent investigation in which subjects completed the entire MMPI for themselves and their spouses. Newmark, Woody, and Ziff (1977) observed that

less happily married couples made more errors of the first type, overestimating differences between themselves and their spouses.

Dymond's (1954) findings regarding the relationship between the similarity of spouses and their marital happiness have been replicated by other investigators in a variety of studies (Corsini, 1956a, 1956b; Creamer & Campbell, 1988; Newmark, Woody, & Ziff, 1977). Indeed, homagamy (like choosing like) has emerged in several reviews as a consistent predictor of marital satisfaction (O'Leary & Smith, 1991). However, findings regarding the effects of understanding and assumed similarity on marital satisfaction have been less consistent.

Marital happiness: interpersonal perceptions versus social roles.

Subsequent research regarding the relationship between interpersonal perceptions and marital satisfaction examined the effects of social roles in this relationship. Corsini (1956a), for example, replicated Dymond's (1954) findings regarding similarity but reported different results concerning the role of understanding in marital satisfaction. Rather than

having subjects answer items taken from the MMPI, he compiled 50 adjectives indicative of social perceptions and personality styles. He then asked individuals to sort them into ten piles of five cards (adjectives) each, with adjectives describing them well at one end and adjectives describing them poorly at the other end. Each subject completed four sorts: (1) As they would describe themselves; (2) As they would describe their spouse; (3) As they believe their spouse would describe him or her self; and (4) As they believe their spouse would describe them. Thus, while Dymond (1954) was able to assess husbands' and wives' predictions concerning their spouse's answers, Corsini (1956a) went a step further by asking individuals to predict how their spouses would rate them.

Corsini (1956a) found that the only significant correlations between understanding and marital happiness were those in which the husband was the object of the predictive card sort. In other words, congruence between husbands' self perceptions and wives' perceptions of husbands, as well as congruence between wives' perceptions of husbands and husbands' predictions of their wives' perceptions of them were significantly positively correlated with marital satisfaction.

Taken at face value, Corsini's (1956a) results seemed to indicate that the correlations involving both spouses' "understanding" were related to the quality of the relationship. However, the same results were observed with randomly assigned non-couples taken from the same sample. This unexpected result led Corsini (1956a) to propose a stereotypical good husband, exhibiting characteristics congruent with the traditional male role. Couples in which both the husband and the wife perceive the husband as similar to this ideal are happier. Whether this conclusion is justified is open to debate. In any event, Corsini's (1956a) procedure of checking every conclusion with respect to couples by drawing random samples of non-couples and then duplicating the experimental operations makes good methodological sense.

Luckey (1960a, 1960b) reported results consistent with those found by Corsini (1956a, 1956b) while simultaneously expanding the study of interpersonal perceptions to include the concepts held by married couples of their parents. Rather than utilizing MMPI items or adjective Q-sorts as her measure of personality, Luckey (1960a, 1960b) used the Interpersonal Check List (ICL, Leary, 1957). The ICL

contains 128 descriptive self-referent items which represent 16 interpersonal variables, each of which is made up of eight items. These variables are arranged in a circular profile and are combined into descriptive octants in such a way that the opposite octant represents an opposing variable. Thus, each intersecting line on the profile may be thought of as a continuum with the subject's score located according to the number of items checked within that specific category.

For the purposes of her studies, Luckey (1960a, 1960b) combined each of the two octants making up a continuum into four scales as follows: Scale 1, Managerial-autocratic vs. Modest-self effacing; Scale 2, Competitive-exploitive vs. Docile-dependent; Scale 3, Blunt-aggressive vs. Cooperative-over conventional; and Scale 4, Skeptical-distrustful vs. Responsible-overgenerous (see Figure 2).

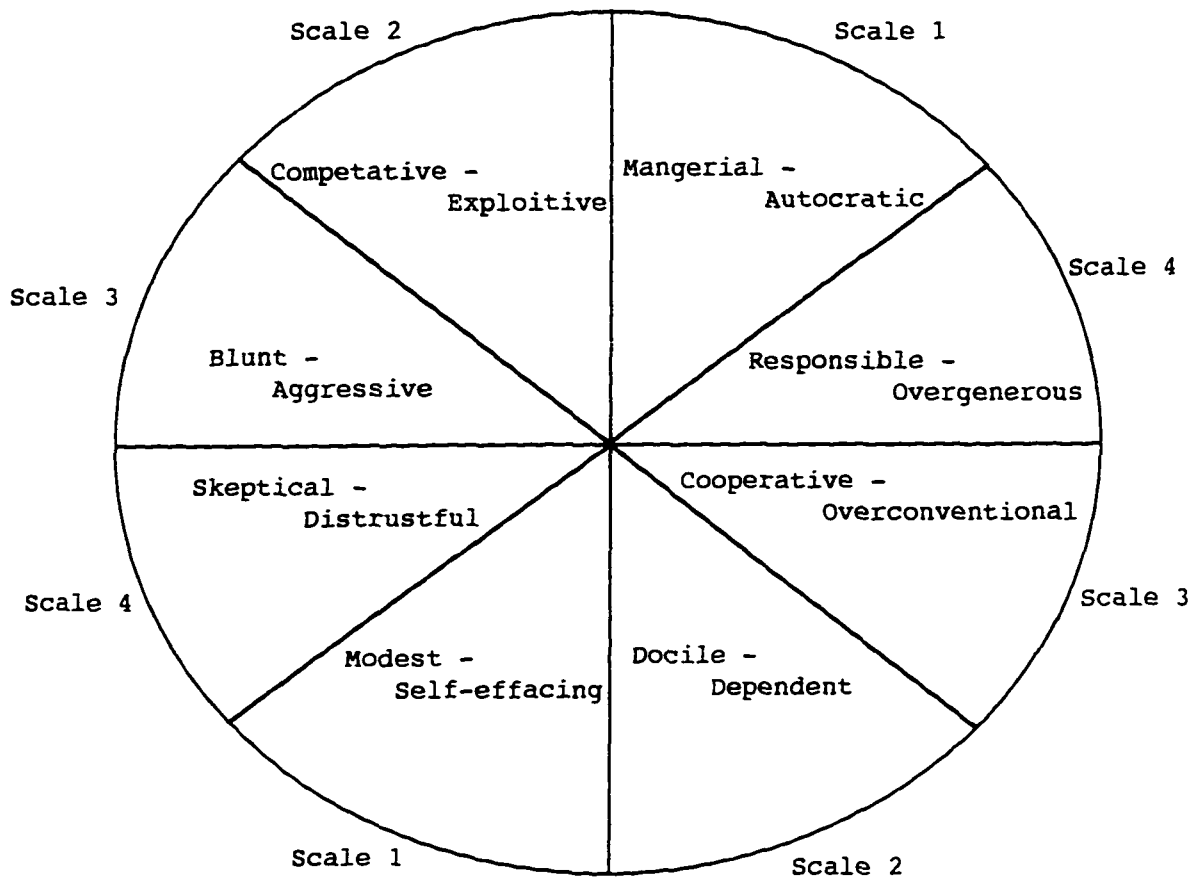


Figure 2. The Interpersonal Check List utilized by Luckey (1960a, 1960b).
Adapted from Leary (1957).

Using these four scales derived from the ICL, Luckey (1960a, 1960b) examined the effects on marital adjustment of: (a) Congruence between individuals' self perceptions and their perceptions regarding their same-sex parents; (b) Congruence between individuals' perceptions of their spouses and their perceptions of their opposite-sex parents; and (c) Congruence between

individuals' self perceptions and their spouses' perceptions of them.

Luckey (1960b) reported that men who were more satisfied with their marriages saw themselves as significantly more similar to their fathers on three of the four scales than were men who were dissatisfied with their marriages. For women, no such similarity with their mothers was observed. Similar findings were reported concerning the effect of congruence between individuals' perceptions of their spouses versus their perceptions related to their opposite-sex parents. Women who were high in marital satisfaction perceived their husbands and fathers as being more similar than did women who rated low in satisfaction. For men the findings were less consistent: Men who were more satisfied were found to have a significantly greater congruence of perceptions of wives and mothers on two of the four ICL scales.

Finally, Luckey (1960a) showed that congruence between wives' perceptions of their husbands and their husbands' self perceptions was significantly related to satisfactory marriages. Again, this result was not found regarding congruence between wives' self perceptions and husbands' perceptions of wives. All of these findings

are consistent with those reported by Corsini (1956a, 1956b). The only significant relationship between marital satisfaction and congruent self-spouse perceptions was observed for perceptions of husbands. With regard to congruent spouse-parent and self-parent perceptions, the same relationships were observed: Husbands who saw themselves as similar to their fathers and wives who saw their husbands and fathers as similar were more satisfied in their marriages.

In discussing her results, Luckey (1960a, 1960b) proposed that the husband-father role may reflect more stability than the wife-mother role. Hence, men who saw themselves fulfilling the husband role as they perceived their fathers fulfilling it were more satisfied. On the other hand, women of that era (i.e. the late 1950's) who were highly satisfied may not have identified themselves as closely with the wife role as it was fulfilled by their mothers. As Luckey (1960b) put it, "Elements other than her allegiance to or expectation of the role of wife and mother as she saw it portrayed in the previous generation are evidently of greater import in her (the wife's) marriage" (p. 201). This view has great intuitive appeal given that the women's movement grew in strength during that period. Had Luckey (1960a, 1960b)

checked her results via Corsini's (1956a, 1956b) method however, additional evidence concerning the validity of this view may have been provided. In any event, it would be interesting to investigate whether or not the results regarding the effects of social roles on the relationship between interpersonal perceptions and marital satisfaction discussed above (Corsini, 1956a, 1956b; Luckey, 1960a, 1960b) still hold today.

Accuracy of perception: True understanding or a function of homogamy?

Corsini (1956a, 1956b), as we have seen, observed that conclusions regarding the effects of interpersonal perceptions on marital happiness within couples should be checked by comparing them to the results observed for randomly assigned non-couples. In a similar vein, Newmark, Woody, and Ziff (1977) questioned the observation that more satisfied individuals are better able to predict the responses of their spouses. These authors investigated understanding (accuracy of perceptions) and similarity in relation to marital adjustment using a procedure similar to that of Dymond (1954). They required participants to complete the entire 550-item MMPI for themselves and their spouses.

Newmark, Woody, and Ziff (1977) suggested the possibility that the greater understanding (accuracy of perceptions) previously reported for happily married couples versus unhappily married couples (e.g., Dymond, 1954) is a function of the greater similarity among these couples. Newmark, Woody, and Ziff (1977) stated this potential confound as follows: "Because the satisfactorily married couples answered many questions similarly a higher probability existed than for the unhappily married couples of accurately predicting through projection or assumed similarity rather than as a function of understanding" (p. 85).

To explore this alternative explanation, Newmark and his colleagues (1977) examined accuracy of prediction with regard to similarly endorsed and dissimilarly endorsed MMPI items for satisfied and dissatisfied couples. It was observed in their sample of 70 couples that both satisfied and dissatisfied couples accurately predicted a significantly greater percentage of dissimilarly endorsed items when compared with those items similarly endorsed. In addition, there were no significant differences between satisfied and dissatisfied couples with regard to the number of predictions of their spouses that corresponded to their

own answers. Thus, Newmark and his associates concluded that, in their sample, there was no evidence to suggest that accuracy of prediction was enhanced by similarity.

Interpersonal Perceptions and Conflict Resolution

Knudson, Sommers, and Golding (1980) are, to this author's knowledge, the only investigators who have examined interpersonal perceptions in the context of conflict between the members of married couples. These authors chose to investigate three types of perceptions, based on the work of Laing (1961) and his colleagues (Laing, Philipson, & Lee, 1966). Direct perspective perceptions are those in which an individual perceives him or herself in relation to another person (i.e., this is how I see myself in relation to you in this situation). Metaperspective perceptions are those in which an individual perceives him or herself from the perspective of their partner (i.e., this is how I see you seeing me in this situation). The third type of perceptions investigated by Knudson, Sommers, and Golding (1980) were meta-metaperspective perceptions (i.e., this is how I see you, seeing me, seeing you).

Each of these three types of perspectives (direct, meta, and meta-meta) is associated with a corresponding

object of perception, in this study, either self or spouse. For example, the direct perspective perception stated above focuses on self in relation to spouse. There is a corresponding direct perspective perception focused on the spouse as well (i.e., this is how I see you in relation to me in this situation). Knudson and his colleagues (1980) focused on the six perspectives produced by combining these three levels of perspective with two objects of perception (self and spouse) at each level.

These authors recruited 33 married couples who identified and role played a conflict situation from their marriage. Couples were subsequently assigned to one of two groups on the basis of experimenter ratings regarding their method of conflict resolution. Twenty couples were classified as having resolved their conflict through engaging the issue, whereas 13 couples were classified as having resolved their conflict via avoidance. The conflict-resolution role plays were videotaped so that both spouses could view themselves and report their interpersonal perceptions at three inquiry points during the role play: pre-conflict, conflict, and termination.

The conflict and termination inquiry points were determined by asking couples when their conflicts began and ended; the pre-conflict inquiry point was set prior to the conflict point for all couples. Knudson and his colleagues (1980) assessed the interpersonal perceptions of both spouse at all three inquiry points via a semistructured interview organized to yield responses that corresponded to the octants of Leary's (1957) Interpersonal Checklist (see Figure 2). Knudson and his colleagues (1980) examined discrepancies in the perceptions held by members of engaged versus avoidant couples at the pre-conflict point. In addition, changes in couples' perceptions from pre-conflict to termination and from conflict to termination were investigated for both engaged and avoidant couples.

At the pre-conflict point, couples classified as avoidant showed greater discrepancies with regard to interpersonal perceptions. However, only two of these discrepancies were significantly greater for avoidant versus engaged couples. Thus, engaged couples showed less discrepancy with regard to husband's and wife's perceptions overall, but only two discrepancies were significantly greater for avoidant couples.

In examining changes in perceptions from pre-conflict to termination, Knudson, Sommers, and Golding (1980) observed that discrepancies in each of the 16 variables examined increased for avoidant couples, with discrepancies in three of these variables increasing significantly from pre-conflict to termination. Thus, both members of the avoidant couples exhibited less agreement regarding perceptions of both themselves and their spouses as the conflict progressed. The opposite trend was observed with engaged couples, with discrepancies in 13 of the 16 variables decreasing over the course of the interaction. For this group, the only interpersonal comparisons which changed slightly in the direction of increased discrepancies were indices of feeling understood and an index of wives' feeling agreed with about themselves.

The pattern of results reported for the interval between conflict and termination is consistent with those reported from pre-conflict to termination. For the conflict engagement subgroup, discrepancies in 14 of the 16 comparisons decreased from the conflict to termination inquiry point. For the avoidance subgroup, discrepancies in 12 of the 16 comparisons increased during this interval. Moreover, in the conflict

engagement subgroup, increases in interpersonal agreement about both husbands and wives were matched with intrapersonal levels of feeling agreed with.

In contrast, the avoidance subgroup exhibited decreases in interpersonal agreement. This decrease in agreement was associated with slight increases in feeling agreed with. Thus, for the avoidance subgroup, even though agreement had actually decreased, there was an increase in the extent to which both husbands and wives felt agreed with.

Thus, Knudson, Sommers, and Golding (1980) showed that in their sample couples who resolved conflicts by avoiding rather than engaging the issue tended incorrectly to perceive agreement even when disagreement increased. This result is consistent with Dymond's (1954) observation that unhappy couples tended to underestimate their differences. However, Knudson and his colleagues did not assess the marital satisfaction of their participants, so it is unclear whether couples who tended to avoid conflictual issues were less satisfied than couples who resolved conflict by engaging the issue at hand. Furthermore, it is unclear whether the role-plays in this study were representative of the

type of conflicts experienced by the participants outside of the laboratory.

The Relationship Between Interpersonal Perceptions and Empathy

Creamer and Campbell (1988) are, to this author's knowledge, the only investigators to examine the relationship between interpersonal perceptions and empathy. They proposed that interpersonal perceptions, that is, the way people perceive themselves and their partners, are important indicators of marital adjustment. However, they also pointed out that any measure of understanding (accuracy) must take into account three factors: (1) the judge's self-description; (2) the self-description of the person who is being judged; and (3) the judge's prediction of the other's self-description. This view corresponds with observations made by others (e.g., Newmark, Woody, & Ziff, 1977) that any index of interpersonal perception must take into account the potential effects of similarity and assumed similarity on understanding.

In their investigation, Creamer and Campbell (1988) asked the members of couples to complete the California Psychological Inventory (Gough, 1964) twice: once for

themselves and once predicting how their partner would answer. Creamer and Campbell (1988) obtained measures of similarity, assumed similarity, and accuracy as follows: comparing the individual's self-descriptions with the self-descriptions of the partner yielded an index of similarity; comparing the individual's self-descriptions with their prediction of their partner's self-description provided a measure of assumed similarity; and comparing the individual's prediction of their partner's self-description with the actual self-description of their partner yielded an index of accuracy. They advanced two hypotheses: 1) There would be a significant positive correlation between accuracy and dyadic adjustment as well as real similarity and dyadic adjustment; and 2) there would be a significant positive correlation between accuracy scores and scores on the Hogan Empathy Scale (Hogan, 1969).

Creamer and Campbell's (1988) first hypothesis was supported in part: The correlation between accuracy and dyadic adjustment was significant for females but not males. This finding is in line with previous reports (e.g., Barry, 1970; Corsini, 1956a, 1956b, Luckey, 1960a, 1960b) that indicated that congruence between husbands' self concept and wives' concepts of husbands

is important to marital satisfaction. The correlations between real similarity and dyadic adjustment reported by Creamer and Campbell (1988) were significant for both husbands and wives. This finding is also congruent with the idea that homogamy plays a major role in marital satisfaction.

Creamer and Campbell's (1988) second hypothesis was also supported in part: The correlation between accuracy scores and empathy scores was significant for men but not for women. Creamer and Campbell (1988) did not offer an explanation for this finding other than the opinion that the two concepts (empathy and accuracy of interpersonal perceptions) are not linked by definition. Thus, Creamer and Campbell (1988) posit that individuals need not be empathic to be accurate in their perceptions of others. It seems likely to this author, however, that the relationship between empathy and interpersonal perceptions might better be investigated utilizing empathy measures that tap into both its cognitive and affective domains (e.g., Davis' IRI, 1980), or using instruments that directly assess perspective-taking (i.e., Long's SDPT and ODPT, 1990).

In addition, the types of perceptions investigated thus far in relation to marital adjustment have

typically been rather general measures of personality (i.e., MMPI items, CPI items, and scores on the ICL). Although Knudson, Sommers, and Golding (1980) examined interpersonal perceptions during role-plays of conflict situations, they did not assess perceptions specifically related to relationship issues or actual marital conflicts.

Relationship Beliefs, Interpersonal Perceptions, and Dyadic Adjustment

A potentially fruitful avenue of research may be to investigate the associations between relationship-specific perceptions, various aspects of empathy, and dyadic adjustment. A study along these lines was conducted by Möller and Van Zyl (1991). These authors investigated the extent to which relationship beliefs, as assessed by the Relationship Beliefs Inventory (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982), were related to marital adjustment in a sample of 46 couples. The Relationship Beliefs Inventory (RBI) was developed to assess couples' beliefs about intimate relationships and includes five subscales: Disagreement Is Destructive; Mind-Reading Is Expected; Partners Cannot Change; Sexual Perfectionism; and The Sexes Are Different. Each subscale consists of

eight items that are scored via five-point scales. High scores on each of the five subscales of the RBI indicate high levels of dysfunctional relationship beliefs.

In addition to examining the effects of relationship beliefs on marital adjustment, this study was designed to (1) determine whether extreme evaluations, irrespective of the content of relationship beliefs, were associated with marital adjustment; and (2) determine the extent to which the accuracy of a spouse's perception of his or her partner's relationship beliefs and the similarity between their relationship beliefs were associated with their levels of marital adjustment. To measure their subjects' interpersonal perceptions related to relationship beliefs, Möller and Van Zyl (1991) followed the procedure outlined by Creamer and Campbell (1988), obtaining similarity, assumed similarity, and accuracy scores for both members of married couples with regard to their relationship beliefs. Relationship beliefs, extreme evaluations, and interpersonal perceptions were examined for couples high and low in marital adjustment, based on a median split of Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976) scores.

Möller and Van Zyl (1991) reported that two RBI subscales (Disagreement Is Destructive and Sexual

Perfectionism) were significantly negatively correlated with marital adjustment. In addition, the members of couples who were low in marital adjustment made significantly more extreme evaluations regarding their partners than did couples who were high in adjustment. With regard to interpersonal perceptions, several results were reported. When compared to couples low in marital adjustment, the high adjustment group showed significantly greater male assumed similarity on the following RBI scales: Mind-Reading Is Expected; Partners Cannot Change; Sexual Perfectionism; and The Sexes Are Different. Females in this group showed significantly greater assumed similarity on the scales Disagreement Is Destructive, Mind-Reading Is Expected, and Partners Cannot Change.

The only other significant difference between high and low DAS couples reported by Möller and Van Zyl (1991) was for female accuracy on the Partners Cannot Change scale, on which the low DAS group showed significantly more accuracy than did the high DAS group. This finding was contrary to prior research, which showed greater accuracy, in general, on the part of better-adjusted couples. In addition, no significant differences between the groups were found with regard to

similarity, a direct contrast to previous studies (e.g., Creamer & Campbell, 1988) in which similarity was correlated significantly with dyadic adjustment. Möller and Van Zyl (1991) noted however, that most previous studies examined personality traits rather than relationship beliefs and tested the hypothesis that homogamy was related to marital adjustment.

Although the relationships between similarity, accuracy, and marital adjustment reported by Möller and Van Zyl (1991) were not consistent with the findings of previous research (e.g., Corsini, 1956a, 1956b; Creamer & Campbell, 1988; Dymond, 1954; Luckey, 1960a, 1960b), some evidence for the effect of assumed similarity (i.e., the degree of overlap between a spouse's relationship beliefs and his or her prediction of the other's relationship beliefs) on marital adjustment was presented. Significant differences were found for both males and females between high- and low-adjustment groups, thus supporting Möller and Van Zyl's (1991) hypothesis that assumed similarity in relationship beliefs is positively related to dyadic adjustment.

Möller and Van Zyl's (1991) investigation illustrates a trend in the study of interpersonal perceptions toward the examination of more discrete

relationship perceptions rather than broadly defined personality traits. The present study attempts to extend this shift by investigating the relationships between empathy, dyadic perspective-taking, interpersonal perceptions regarding conflict, dyadic adjustment, and satisfaction with conflict resolution.

Overview of the Present Investigation

The present investigation focused on the effects of empathy, dyadic perspective-taking, and interpersonal perceptions regarding dyadic perspective-taking on marital adjustment. In addition, interpersonal perceptions of conflict situations were examined in relation to spouses' satisfaction with the outcomes of problem-solving discussions. The measures utilized in the present study included the Interpersonal Reactivity Index, (Davis, 1980), the Self and Other Dyadic Perspective-Taking Questionnaires (Long, 1990), the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976), and the Pre- and Post-Discussion Questionnaires (Adapted from Heavey, 1991).

As has been demonstrated by Davis and Oathout (1987, 1992) and others (Long, 1990; Long & Andrews, 1990), several aspects of dispositional empathy measured

by the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), as well as the Self Dyadic Perspective-taking Scale (SDPT), and Other Dyadic Perspective-taking Scale (ODPT) are related to marital adjustment. The first hypothesis tested in the present investigation was the replication of these earlier findings.

The first set of hypotheses examined in the present study are as follows:

Hypothesis 1

Dispositional empathy will be related to marital adjustment. This was broken down into five more specific hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1a.

The Perspective-Taking (PT) subscale of the IRI will be positively correlated with both spouses' dyadic adjustment.

Hypothesis 1b.

The Empathic Concern (EC) subscale of the IRI will be positively correlated with both spouses' dyadic adjustment.

Hypothesis 1c.

The Personal Distress (PD) subscale of the IRI will be negatively correlated with both spouses' dyadic adjustment.

Hypothesis 1d.

Self dyadic perspective-taking (SDPT) will be positively correlated with both spouses' dyadic adjustment.

Hypothesis 1e.

Individuals' perceptions of their spouses' dyadic perspective-taking ability (ODPT) will be positively correlated with their own dyadic adjustment.

The second issue addressed in the present study concerns the relationship between the interpersonal perceptions held by the members of married couples and their satisfaction with their marriage. Previous research (i.e., Corsini, 1956a, 1956b; Creamer & Campbell, 1988; Luckey, 1960a, 1960b) has shown that interpersonal perceptions play a role in the satisfaction experienced by married persons. Female accuracy (i.e., congruence between husbands' self-perceptions and wives' perceptions of husbands), for example, has been shown to be significantly associated

with marital adjustment. This leads to the second set of hypotheses researched in the present investigation.

The second set of hypotheses examined in the present study are as follows:

Hypothesis 2

Accuracy of interpersonal perceptions will be positively related to dyadic adjustment and the satisfaction couples feel regarding the outcomes of problem discussions. This hypothesis was examined with regard to interpersonal perceptions related to dyadic perspective-taking and interpersonal perceptions related to marital problem-solving discussions.

Hypothesis 2a.

Accuracy of interpersonal perceptions regarding dyadic perspective-taking will be positively correlated with dyadic adjustment after controlling for the effects of similarity and assumed similarity. The participants' SDPT and ODPT scores will be utilized to obtain indices of the accuracy of their interpersonal perceptions.

Hypothesis 2b.

Accuracy of interpersonal perceptions regarding conflict discussions will be positively correlated with

the satisfaction experienced by couples with the outcomes of these discussions, after controlling for the effects of similarity and assumed similarity. The participants' Pre-Discussion Questionnaire (Pre-DQ; Adapted from Heavey, 1991 by this author) and Post-Discussion Questionnaire (Post-DQ; Heavey, 1991) scores will be utilized to obtain indices of the accuracy of their interpersonal perceptions.

The Pre-DQ is a self-report measure designed to assess an individual's cognitive and affective disposition related to an impending discussion, as well as the individual's perception of his or her partner's cognitive and affective disposition related to the discussion. The Post-DQ is a self-report measure designed to assess an individual's cognitive and affective reactions to a discussion that has just taken place, as well as the individual's perceptions of his or her partner's cognitive and affective reactions to the discussion.

Only one study (Creamer & Campbell, 1988) has, to the author's knowledge, examined the relationship between the accuracy of an individual's interpersonal perceptions and their empathic ability. It would seem likely, however, that empathic ability and the ability

to assess accurately the perceptions of others are related. This supposition leads to the third and final hypothesis to be investigated in the present study.

The third set of hypotheses examined in the present study are as follows:

Hypothesis 3

The accuracy of interpersonal perceptions will be related to certain aspects of dispositional empathy. That is, perspective-taking ability (as assessed by the PT subscale of the IRI and the SDPT) will be positively correlated with accuracy of interpersonal perceptions.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Subjects

The participants of this study were 42 married couples who were recruited via newspaper advertisements, a campus news bulletin, and from undergraduate psychology courses at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. All of the subjects in the present study took part in a larger investigation of factors thought to influence marital satisfaction and the efficacy of problem-solving discussions. Each couple was paid \$75.00 to complete the three parts of the investigation. Couples were chosen on the basis of having been married for at least one year and by the fact that both members of the dyad were under the age of 55.

Approximately half way through data collection it was noticed that the selection process was in general producing couples with high marital satisfaction. To ensure variability with regard to marital satisfaction, the remaining couples (approximately half of the total number of couples) who participated were screened by telephone interviews for their level of relationship satisfaction. Those who expressed their relationship

satisfaction as being at six or below on a scale of relationship satisfaction ranging from one (very little satisfaction) to ten (very satisfied) were accepted into the study.

The mean ages of participants were 33.6 (SD=8.5) and 31.9 (SD=7.6) years for husbands and wives, respectively. The median ages for the participants were 24.9 and 23.3 years for husbands and wives, respectively. The mean duration of marriage for the participants of this study was 4.7 years (SD=4.8). The median duration of marriage for the participants of this study was 2.1 years. The mean incomes for participants in the present study were \$22,557 (SD=\$13,790) and \$15,357 (SD=\$12,438) for husbands and wives, respectively. The median incomes for participants in the present study were \$15,000 and \$5,000 for husbands and wives, respectively. The mean years of education for the participants in the present investigation were 13.4 years (SD=3.3) and 14.5 years (SD=2.9) for husbands and wives, respectively.

Of the 84 participants in the present study, 67 (80%) were Caucasian, 8 (10%) were Hispanic, 3 (4%) were African American, and 2 (2%) were Native American. One participant (1%) described herself as "other", and 2

participants (2%) left the item pertaining to ethnicity blank.

Measures

Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI; Davis, 1980)

The IRI is a 28-item self-report questionnaire, which consists of four seven-item subscales, each of which assesses a specific aspect of dispositional empathy. Responses are scored via a five-point scale from 0 - "Does not describe me very well" to 4 - "Describes me very well." Three of the four subscales were used in this study.

The Perspective-Taking (PT) subscale assesses the tendency to adopt the point of view of other people in every day life. A sample item from the PT subscale is, "I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective."

The Empathic Concern (EC) subscale assesses the tendency to experience feelings of warmth, compassion, and concern for other people. A sample item from the EC subscale is, "I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me."

The Personal Distress (PD) subscale also assesses typical emotional reactions. It taps one's own feelings

of personal discomfort and unease in reaction to the negative experiences of others instead of other-oriented feelings of concern. A sample item from the PD subscale is, "Being in a tense emotional situation scares me."

Davis (1980) reported the psychometric properties of the IRI. All four scales have satisfactory test-retest reliability (ranging from .62 to .71) and internal consistency reliability (ranging from .71 to .77). Significant sex differences exist for each scale, with females scoring higher than males on all four scales.

Self Dyadic Perspective-Taking Scale (SDPT; Long, 1990)

The SDPT is a 13-item self report scale measuring the tendency for an individual in a romantic relationship to take the perspective of his or her partner. Responses are scored via a five-point scale mirroring that of the IRI. Items included in the SDPT were drawn from the PT scale of the IRI (Davis, 1980), The Hogan Empathy Scale (Hogan, 1969), The Relationship Inventory (Barrett-Lennard, 1962), and the Peer Role-Taking Questionnaire (Moser, 1984). Only those items from the above scales that denoted a cognitive or intellectual understanding of the point of view of the

partner were included in the SDPT. A sample item from this scale is, "In my relationship with my partner I believe that there are two sides to every question, and I try to look and think about both sides."

Other Dyadic Perspective-Taking Scale (ODPT; Long, 1990)

The ODPT is a 20-item self-report scale that evaluates the extent to which an individual perceives his or her partner to be a perspective taker. Responses are scored by means of the same five-point scale used in the IRI and SDPT, with the exception that the anchor points are "Does not describe my partner very well" and "Does describe my partner very well." A sample item from this scale is, "When involved in an argument with me, my partner is the type of person who will consider and take into account my point of view and compare that with his/her own."

Reports on the psychometric properties of both the SDPT and ODPT were provided by Long (1990) and Long and Andrews (1990). Convergent validity for the SDPT was established via a significant correlation between this measure and the PT scale of the IRI (the correlations were .43 and .53 for wives and husbands, respectively). In addition, there were significant positive

correlations between self-reported perspective-taking (SDPT) and perceived perspective-taking ability of partners (ODPT). Internal consistency alphas for the SDPT were .86 and .88 for husbands and wives, respectively. For the ODPT, these values were .93 and .95 for husbands and wives, respectively.

Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976)

Relationship quality was assessed via the DAS, a 32-item self-report scale with four subscales: Dyadic Consensus, Dyadic Satisfaction, Affectional Expression, and Dyadic Cohesion. The total Dyadic Adjustment score for an individual is the sum of their subscale scores. The total Dyadic Adjustment score was used in the present study as the measure of marital adjustment. Spanier (1976) reported internal consistency alphas ranging from .73 to .94 for the four subscales, with an internal consistency alpha of .96 for the total scale.

Problem Areas Questionnaire (PAQ; Heavey, 1991)

The PAQ is a self-report measure that asks individuals to rate their level of satisfaction regarding 19 areas of potential conflict within marriage or similar dyads (e.g. handling family finances, demonstration of affection, household tasks). Responses

are made via a seven point scale from 0 - "Completely Satisfied" to 6 - "Very Dissatisfied". Three blank spaces are also included so that individuals can provide their own issues and rate them accordingly. In addition to rating satisfaction related to areas of potential conflict, the PAQ asks subjects to choose an issue (one each for husbands and wives) to discuss and try to resolve.

In choosing an issue to discuss and try to resolve, the PAQ specifically states, "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." This statement was included to ensure that the issues discussed could be resolved. The final two questions included in the PAQ asked subjects to describe from their perspective how the issue they had chosen was a problem and to identify, from their perspective, the cause of the problem.

Pre-Discussion Questionnaire (Pre-DQ; Adapted from Heavey, 1991 by this author)

The Pre-DQ is a 36-item self-report measure that assesses an individual's cognitive and affective disposition related to an impending discussion, as well

the individual's perception of their partner's cognitive and affective disposition related to the discussion. Prior to making his or her responses to items, the Pre-DQ requires the subject to identify the issue about to be discussed, and to describe where and when the issue was last discussed.

The first 20 items of this scale address five cognitive and affective states of the individual related to the impending discussion. These dimensions include amount of anger with the partner concerning the particular problem to be discussed (Anger), efficacy expectancies concerning the productiveness of the impending discussion (Expectancies), amount of anxiety experienced regarding the impending discussion (Anxiety), perceived seriousness related to the impending discussion (Seriousness), and concern for and commitment to the relationship (Concern). Each of these five subscales consists of four items. The Concern subscale is essentially a measure of global relationship satisfaction and was not used in the present study. Thus, only 16 of the first 20 items were used in this investigation.

The next 16 items included in the Pre-DQ assess the individual's perception of his or her partner's thoughts

and feeling regarding the impending discussion along the four dimensions described above (Anger, Expectancies, Anxiety, and Seriousness). Responses on this measure are made by means of a seven-point scale, which ranges from 1 - "Strongly Disagree" to 7 - "Strongly Agree." Heavey (1991) reported mean internal consistency alphas for the four subscales for both men and women as follows: Anger, .75; Expectancies, .76; Anxiety, .84; Seriousness, .72.

Post-Discussion Questionnaire (Post-DQ; Heavey, 1991)

The Post-DQ is a 45-item self-report measure that assesses an individual's cognitive and affective reactions to the discussion which has just taken place. Responses to these items were made via a seven-point scale, ranging from 1 - "Not At All" to 7 - "Very Much."

The first six items of the Post-DQ measure satisfaction regarding the outcome of the discussions. Items included here assessed how much respect individuals felt they received from their partners during the discussion, how much progress they made on their issues, the extent to which they felt understood by their partners during the discussion, whether or not a resolution was reached, whether they felt that their partners were willing to compromise, and whether they

felt that the issue would require further discussion. Heavey (1991) reported a mean internal consistency alpha of .87 for the six items related to satisfaction with discussion outcomes, indicating high internal consistency.

An additional six items ask the same questions as the first six, except that the respondent must provide their perceptions of their partner's feelings. Only the first six items were used to obtain satisfaction scores for individuals. The additional six items were used to compute scores for similarity, assumed similarity, and accuracy of interpersonal perceptions following problem discussions.

Procedure

Couples who were interested in taking part in the present study contacted the primary investigator, who briefly summarized the procedure and goals of the study. Couples who wanted to participate were sent consent forms as well as the first questionnaire packet, which included the IRI, SDPT, and ODPT. Subjects were instructed to complete the questionnaires independently.

After completing the first set of questionnaires, couples scheduled an appointment for the videotaped

portion of the study. Each couple was seen for approximately two hours by the primary investigator or by one of three graduate students in psychology who served as secondary investigators in the study. After handing in the first set of questionnaires and informed consent forms, the participants completed the DAS followed by the second questionnaire packet, which included measures not used in this investigation. Couples were then given copies of the Problem Areas Questionnaire (PAQ). The PAQ asks spouses to rate their levels of dissatisfaction in areas of potential conflict within their relationship. In addition, spouses were asked to choose one such area each to discuss and attempt to resolve while being videotaped.

After completing the PAQ, couples were told which of their issues (husband's or wife's) would be discussed first. The order of the discussions was counterbalanced. The investigator then asked the individual whose issue was to be discussed briefly to describe for their partner the problem from his or her perspective. Their partner was then required to paraphrase the description of the problem until an understanding was reached regarding the problem to be discussed. This summarizing and paraphrasing of the issue to be discussed was done

to prime both members of the couple for the impending discussion.

When both members of the couple agreed what the issue to be discussed would be, they each completed a Pre-DQ. When the Pre-DQs were completed, instructions regarding the problem discussion were given. Couples were instructed to discuss and try to resolve the issue for 10 minutes. They were further instructed that, in the event that a resolution was not forthcoming, they were to try to discuss the issue in greater detail. Finally, couples were told that if they reached what they thought was a full resolution to the problem, they could use the remaining time to discuss another issue.

Once the instructions had been understood, the investigator left the room and the discussion began. After 10 minutes, the investigator re-entered the room and inquired as to whether or not they reached a resolution to the problem. If they had not reached a resolution, the investigator instructed them to continue trying to resolve the issue and again left the room. If, after five more minutes, the couple had still not resolved the issue, they were asked to terminate the discussion. Following the discussion, participants were given Post-DQs to complete.

This procedure was then repeated for the issue identified by the other spouse. After completing their final Post-DQs, each couple received a third packet of questionnaires to complete at home. As with the second questionnaire packet, none of the measures included in the third packet were used in this study. After completing the final set of questionnaires, the couples returned them by mail and were sent a check for \$75.00 for participating in the study.

Measuring Interpersonal Perceptions

Since Long's (1990) scales assess individuals' self-reported perspective-taking ability (SDPT) as well as perceptions of others' perspective-taking ability (ODPT), it is possible to examine interpersonal perceptions regarding dyadic perspective-taking. In the present study, similarity, assumed similarity, and accuracy scores were derived from the SDPT and ODPT, for both husbands and wives.

To arrive at similarity scores in terms of dyadic perspective-taking, the numerical scores on each SDPT item for husbands were compared to the corresponding SDPT scores for wives. The absolute values of the differences between husbands' and wives' scores on each

item were then added together to provide a measure of similarity. For example, if a husband circled the number three on item one of the SDPT, and his wife circled the number five on the same item, the absolute value of the difference between these scores would be two. By summing these difference scores for all SDPT items, a similarity score was obtained. The greater the numerical value of the sum of these difference scores, the less similar spouses can be said to be, with regard to dyadic perspective-taking ability

To arrive at assumed similarity scores regarding dyadic perspective-taking, the same procedure was followed. In this case, however, the numerical scores on each SDPT item for husbands were compared to the corresponding ODPT scores for husbands. This allowed for a comparison of husbands' self perceptions and husbands' perceptions of their spouse. The same procedure was followed to determine wives' assumed similarity. Again, the greater the numerical value of the summed difference scores, the less assumed similarity is present, with regard to dyadic perspective-taking.

To arrive at accuracy scores regarding dyadic perspective-taking the same procedure was followed. In this case however, the numerical scores on each ODPT

item for husbands were compared to the corresponding SDPT score for wives. This allowed for a comparison of husbands' perceptions of their spouse and their spouses' self perceptions. The same procedure was followed to determine wives' accuracy. Again, the greater the numerical value of the summed difference scores, the less accuracy is present, with regard to dyadic perspective-taking.

Analogous procedures were followed to acquire indices of similarity, assumed similarity, and accuracy of interpersonal perceptions for husbands and wives prior to, and following problem discussions, using items included in both spouses Pre-DQs and Post-DQs.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Prior to examining the specific hypotheses of the present study, dependent-sample t tests were performed on the variables of interest to determine whether there were significant gender differences. The variables included in these t tests and the measures used to assess them are as follows: Marital Adjustment (DAS); Perspective-Taking ability (PT scale of the IRI); Empathic Concern (EC scale of the IRI); Personal Distress (PD scale of the IRI); Dyadic Perspective-Taking (SDPT); Perceptions of spouses Dyadic Perspective-Taking ability (ODPT); Accuracy of interpersonal perceptions related to dyadic perspective-taking (both spouses' SDPTs and ODPTs); Assumed similarity related to dyadic perspective-taking ability (both spouses' SDPTs and ODPTs); Accuracy of interpersonal perceptions prior to problem discussions (both spouses' Pre-DQs); Assumed similarity prior to problem discussions (both spouses' Pre-DQs); Accuracy of interpersonal perceptions following problem discussions (both spouses' Post-DQs); Assumed similarity following problem discussions (both spouses' Post-DQs). The

results of the dependent-sample t tests are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1.

Means and standard deviations for husbands and wives on the measures utilized in the present study.

MEASURE	HUSBANDS		WIVES		t(41)
	MEAN	S.D.	MEAN	S.D.	
DAS	108.3	17.8	111.0	15.1	-1.58
PT	16.3	4.7	17.1	5.3	-.83
EC	18.7	5.8	22.6	4.5	-3.23**
PD	6.4	3.7	12.2	6.1	-5.63***
SDPT	32.2	9.8	31.2	10.1	.51
ODPT	44.0	17.4	45.3	18.9	-.45
ACCURACY OF PERCEPTIONS REGARDING DYADIC PERSPECTIVE-TAKING	13.3	5.6	11.3	5.1	2.17*
ASSUMED SIMILARITY REGARDING DYADIC PERSPECTIVE-TAKING	8.5	4.7	8.7	4.1	-.17
ACCURACY OF PERCEPTIONS PRIOR TO PROBLEM DISCUSSIONS	51.9	14.2	52.3	17.5	-.14
ASSUMED SIMILARITY PRIOR TO PROBLEM DISCUSSIONS	47.4	17.9	44.7	20.3	.82
ACCURACY OF PERCEPTIONS FOLLOWING PROBLEM DISCUSSIONS	16.1	8.0	16.5	8.1	-.52
ASSUMED SIMILARITY FOLLOWING PROBLEM DISCUSSIONS	6.9	5.2	6.4	5.1	.59

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

As can be observed in Table 1, there were significant gender differences in three of the variables investigated. Wives were significantly higher in both Empathic Concern and Personal Distress, which is consistent with previously reported results concerning higher scores for females versus males on the subscales of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index. Wives were also significantly more accurate in their interpersonal perceptions regarding dyadic perspective-taking than were husbands.

Scores reflecting the accuracy of interpersonal perceptions are based on discrepancies between the perceptions individuals hold regarding their spouses and their spouses' self perceptions. In effect, due to the fact that scores are based on these discrepancies, higher scores reflect greater inaccuracy in interpersonal perception. Thus, the significantly higher mean for husbands versus wives denotes greater inaccuracy of perception on the part of husbands regarding dyadic perspective-taking ability.

Hypothesis 1

To test Hypothesis 1, that dispositional empathy is related to marital adjustment, correlation coefficients

were computed between participants' PT, EC, PD, SDPT, ODPT, and both their own and their spouses' DAS. The results of these correlations are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Correlations between various aspects of dispositional empathy, dyadic perspective-taking, and dyadic adjustment.

	HUSBANDS' DAS	WIVES' DAS
HUSBANDS' PT	.50**	.41**
WIVES' PT	.30	.42**
HUSBANDS' EC	.34*	.30
WIVES' EC	-.01	.12
HUSBANDS' PD	.08	.12
WIVES' PD	-.24	-.33*
HUSBANDS' SDPT	.62**	.49**
WIVES' SDPT	.34*	.60**
HUSBANDS' ODPT	.72**	.56**
WIVES' ODPT	.49**	.73**

PT = Perspective-Taking. EC = Empathic Concern.
 PD = Personal Distress. SDPT = Self Dyadic Perspective-Taking.
 ODPT = Other Dyadic Perspective-Taking.
 DAS = Dyadic Adjustment.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

Hypothesis 1a, which proposed positive correlations between individuals' PT and both their own and their partners' DAS, was generally supported; three of the four proposed correlations were significant. Only the correlation between wives' PT and husbands' DAS failed to reach significance, and that correlation (.30) was in the hypothesized direction.

Hypothesis 1b, which proposed positive correlations between individuals' EC and both their own and their spouses' DAS, was not generally supported. Only one of the four correlations was significant; husbands' EC was significantly correlated with their DAS.

Hypothesis 1c, which posited negative correlations between individuals' PD and both their own and their partners' DAS, was also not generally supported. Again only one of four correlations was significant: wives' PD was significantly negatively correlated with their DAS.

Hypothesis 1d, which posited positive correlations between individuals' SDPT and both their own and their partners' DAS, received strong support. All four of the proposed correlations were significant. The correlations between individuals' SDPT and their partners' DAS were significant for both husbands and wives, as were the

correlations between individuals' SDPT and their own DAS.

Hypothesis 1e, which proposed that individuals' perceptions of their partners' dyadic perspective-taking ability (as assessed by the ODPT) would be positively correlated with their own DAS, also received strong support. For both husbands and wives, significant correlations were observed between individuals' ODPT and their own DAS. In addition, significant correlations were observed between individuals' ODPT and their partners' DAS, for both husbands and wives.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 posited that the accuracy of individuals' interpersonal perceptions regarding dyadic perspective-taking would be positively related to both their own and their spouses' DAS. In addition, the accuracy of individuals' interpersonal perceptions prior to and following problem discussions were hypothesized to be positively related to both their own and their spouses' satisfaction with the discussions.

Hypotheses 2a and 2b further proposed that these associations will exist even after controlling for the effects of similarity and assumed similarity. In order

to investigate these relationships more easily, the simple correlations will be examined first, followed by the correlations controlling for similarity and assumed similarity. The simple correlations are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Correlations between the accuracy of husbands and wives interpersonal perceptions and their dyadic adjustment and satisfaction with problem discussions.

	HUSBANDS' DAS	WIVES' DAS
HUSBANDS' ACCURACY REGARDING DYADIC PERSPECTIVE-TAKING ABILITY.	.40**	.26
WIVES' ACCURACY REGARDING DYADIC PERSPECTIVE-TAKING ABILITY.	.34*	.22
	HUSBANDS' SATISFACTION WITH DISCUSSIONS	WIVES' SATISFACTION WITH DISCUSSIONS
HUSBANDS' ACCURACY PRIOR TO PROBLEM DISCUSSIONS.	.10	.21
WIVES' ACCURACY PRIOR TO PROBLEM DISCUSSIONS.	.03	.17
HUSBANDS' ACCURACY FOLLOWING PROBLEM DISCUSSIONS.	.55**	.57**
WIVES' ACCURACY FOLLOWING PROBLEM DISCUSSIONS.	.49**	.68**

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

As can be seen in Table 3, the accuracy of both husbands' and wives' interpersonal perceptions regarding dyadic perspective-taking were significantly correlated

with husbands' DAS as hypothesized. With regard to the accuracy of interpersonal perceptions prior to problem discussions none of the correlations observed were significant. This result failed to support Hypothesis 2.

In examining the accuracy of interpersonal perceptions regarding satisfaction with the outcomes of problem discussions, all of the correlations observed were significant. For both husbands and wives, the correlations between the accuracy of their interpersonal perceptions at the post discussion point and both their own and their spouses' satisfaction with the discussions were significant.

Hypothesis 2a proposed that the accuracy of interpersonal perceptions regarding dyadic perspective-taking ability would be positively correlated with dyadic adjustment even after controlling for the effects of similarity and assumed similarity. To test this hypothesis two forced-entry multiple regression analyses were performed, one each for husbands and wives.

The dependent variables in these analyses were accuracy scores regarding dyadic perspective-taking. For both husbands and wives, similarity and assumed similarity scores were then regressed onto the accuracy variables. The residuals yielded by these analyses

consisted of accuracy regarding dyadic perspective-taking, with the variance associated with similarity and assumed similarity removed. These residuals were then correlated with both spouses' DAS scores to determine whether the proposed relationship between accuracy and dyadic adjustment would hold after controlling for similarity and assumed similarity. The results of these analyses are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4.

Correlations between spouses' dyadic adjustment and the accuracy of their interpersonal perceptions regarding dyadic perspective-taking ability, controlling for the effects of similarity and assumed similarity.

	HUSBANDS' DAS	WIVES' DAS
HUSBANDS' ACCURACY REGARDING DYADIC PERSPECTIVE-TAKING ABILITY.	.24	.08
WIVES' ACCURACY REGARDING DYADIC PERSPECTIVE-TAKING ABILITY.	.19	.11

As can be seen in Table 4, the proposed relationship between the accuracy of interpersonal perceptions regarding dyadic perspective-taking ability and dyadic adjustment was not supported. None of the correlations observed was significant.

Hypothesis 2b proposed that the accuracy of individuals' interpersonal perceptions regarding conflict discussions (determined via Pre-DQs and Post-DQs) would be positively correlated with the satisfaction experienced by couples with the outcomes of these discussions after controlling for the effects of similarity and assumed similarity. To control for the effects of similarity and assumed similarity, the same procedures were followed here as with Hypothesis 2a.

Four multiple regression analyses were performed in which accuracy scores for both spouses at the pre- and post-discussion points served as the dependent variables. Again, similarity and assumed similarity for both spouses at both the pre- and post-discussion points were regressed onto accuracy scores. These analyses yielded residuals that represent accuracy of interpersonal perceptions with the variance associated with similarity and assumed similarity removed.

As was the case with Hypothesis 2a, these residuals were then correlated with satisfaction scores for both spouses regarding the outcomes of problem discussions. The results of Hypothesis 2b are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5.

Correlations between spouses' satisfaction with discussion outcomes and the accuracy of their interpersonal perceptions at both the pre- and post- problem discussion points, controlling for the effects of similarity and assumed similarity.

	HUSBANDS' SATISFACTION WITH DISCUSSIONS	WIVES' SATISFACTION WITH DISCUSSIONS
HUSBANDS' ACCURACY PRIOR TO PROBLEM DISCUSSIONS.	.05	.10
WIVES' ACCURACY PRIOR TO PROBLEM DISCUSSIONS.	.22	.07
HUSBANDS' ACCURACY FOLLOWING PROBLEM DISCUSSIONS.	.02	.07
WIVES' ACCURACY FOLLOWING PROBLEM DISCUSSIONS.	.03	.17

As Table 5 illustrates, the same pattern of results emerged here as did with Hypothesis 2a. The proposed

relationships between accuracy of interpersonal perceptions and satisfaction with discussion outcomes did not hold when the effects of similarity and assumed similarity were controlled for.

Hypothesis 3

This hypothesis posited that the accuracy of individuals' interpersonal perceptions would be related to certain aspects of their dispositional empathy.

Hypothesis 3 proposed positive relationships between individuals' perspective-taking ability, dyadic perspective-taking ability, and the accuracy of their interpersonal perceptions. The correlations pertaining to Hypothesis 3 for husbands are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6.

Correlations between the accuracy of
husbands interpersonal perceptions and aspects
of their dispositional empathy.

	HUSBANDS' SDPT	HUSBANDS' PT
HUSBANDS' ACCURACY REGARDING DYADIC PERSPECTIVE-TAKING ABILITY.	.42**	.26
HUSBANDS' ACCURACY PRIOR TO PROBLEM DISCUSSIONS.	.08	.19
HUSBANDS' ACCURACY FOLLOWING PROBLEM DISCUSSIONS.	.24	.29

** $p < .01$.

As can be seen in Table 6, Hypothesis 3 was not generally supported for husbands. Only one of the six correlations observed was significant. For husbands, the accuracy of their interpersonal perceptions regarding dyadic perspective-taking ability was significantly correlated with their SDPT but not with their PT. The correlations between husbands' SDPT and the accuracy of their interpersonal perceptions at both the pre- and post-discussion points were not significant. The correlations between husbands' PT and the accuracy of

their interpersonal perceptions at both the pre- and post-discussion points were also not significant.

The results of Hypothesis 3 for wives are presented in Table 7.

Table 7.

Correlations between the accuracy of wives interpersonal perceptions and aspects of their dispositional empathy.

	WIVES' SDPT	WIVES' PT
WIVES' ACCURACY REGARDING DYADIC PERSPECTIVE-TAKING ABILITY.	.20	.13
WIVES' ACCURACY PRIOR TO PROBLEM DISCUSSIONS.	.30	.17
WIVES' ACCURACY FOLLOWING PROBLEM DISCUSSIONS.	.38*	.31*

* $p < .05$.

As can be seen in Table 7, two of the six correlations observed were significant. At the post-discussion point the accuracy of wives' interpersonal perceptions was significantly correlated with both their SDPT and their PT. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported in part for wives.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

There were four central issues addressed in the present investigation. The first issue was the question of gender differences in empathy. The second issue concerned the relationships between aspects of dispositional empathy and dyadic adjustment. The third issue examined here was the relationship between the accuracy of individuals' interpersonal perceptions and dyadic adjustment. Finally, the present investigation explored the extent to which aspects of dispositional empathy were related to the accuracy of individuals' interpersonal perceptions.

Gender Differences in Empathy

Much of the previous research related to aspects of dispositional empathy (e.g., Davis, 1980, 1983a, 1983b; Davis & Oathout, 1987, 1992; Long, 1990; Long & Andrews, 1990) has shown a pattern in which significant gender differences were reported. Women were found to score significantly higher on all of the subscales of the IRI (Davis, 1980) and on the SDPT and ODPT (Long, 1990; Long & Andrews, 1990).

Similarly, the present investigation found that wives scored significantly higher than husbands on the IRI subscales of Empathic Concern (EC), and Personal Distress (PD). However, unlike previous research, there were no significant gender differences on the Perspective-Taking (PT) subscale of the IRI, or the SDPT or ODPT. In addition, wives in the present investigation were significantly more accurate in their interpersonal perceptions related to dyadic perspective-taking ability than were husbands.

The fact that gender differences were significant only with regard to two of the three subscales of the IRI used in this investigation, and neither the SDPT, nor the ODPT, suggests differences between the samples used in those studies and the sample selected in the present investigation. The samples used by Davis and Oathout (1987, 1992) consisted of pre-marital college student couples. The present investigation selected a sample consisting of couples who had been married at least one year, with an average duration of marriage of 4.7 years. Also, in the present investigation, only a minority of the couples who participated were college students; most were recruited from the surrounding community. In addition, the participants in the present

study may be older than those who participated in the research of Davis and Oathout (1987, 1992). The mean ages of the participants of the present investigation were 33.6 and 31.9 years for husbands and wives, respectively. These differences in the samples used may in part account for the discrepancies observed with regard to the aspects of dispositional empathy assessed by the IRI. The samples used in previous research related to dyadic perspective-taking (Long, 1990; Long & Andrews, 1990) consisted of married couples. Thus, the differences observed between this sample and those studied by Long (1990) and Long and Andrews (1990) are more difficult to explain. It should be noted, however, that neither the present investigation nor the investigations of Davis and Oathout (1987, 1992), Long (1990), and Long and Andrews (1990) used random samples. Thus, sampling procedures may in part explain the different results observed with regard to gender differences.

Relationships Between Dispositional Empathy
and Dyadic Adjustment

Previous research with the IRI (Davis, 1980, 1983a, 1983b; Davis & Oathout, 1987, 1992) has suggested that

certain aspects of dispositional empathy, specifically those assessed by the PT, EC, and PD subscales of the IRI are related to the satisfaction individuals feel with social and romantic relationships. Long (1990) and Long and Andrews (1990) expanded on this work in developing and validating the SDPT and ODPT. Their work has provided more evidence in support of the importance of perspective-taking in marital satisfaction.

The results of the present study tend to replicate those of this previous research. Just as did Davis (1980, 1983a, 1983b) and Davis and Oathout (1987, 1990), the present investigation found positive correlations between the PT subscale of the IRI and satisfaction. Husbands' perspective-taking ability was significantly correlated with both their own and their spouses' dyadic adjustment. Wives' perspective-taking ability was significantly correlated with their own dyadic adjustment.

However, the results observed regarding the EC and PD subscales of the IRI were less consistent with those reported previously. Only one of the relationships investigated regarding empathic concern was significant. Husbands' empathic concern was significantly correlated with their own dyadic adjustment. Similarly, only one of

the relationships investigated regarding personal distress was significant. Wives' personal distress was significantly negatively correlated with their own dyadic adjustment.

The results observed in the present investigation regarding dyadic perspective-taking also replicated those reported previously by Long (1990) and Long and Andrews (1990). All of the relationships investigated were significant. For both husbands and wives dyadic perspective-taking was significantly correlated with both their own and their spouses' dyadic adjustment. In addition, the extent to which individuals perceived their spouses as being able to take their perspective was significantly correlated with both their own and their spouses' dyadic adjustment.

The overall pattern of results observed in the present investigation regarding the relationship between aspects of dispositional empathy and dyadic adjustment lends credence to the model proposed by Davis and Oathout (1987, 1992) and expanded by Long (1990) and Long and Andrews (1990). This model delineates two main points: (a) The perspective-taking of one partner should be positively related to the relationship satisfaction of the other, and (b) satisfaction with the relationship

is positively related to the perceptions of the partner regarding specific relationship behaviors. The fact that the relationship between perspective-taking (both in general and within married couples) and dyadic adjustment emerged as the strongest of those studied in the present investigation is consistent with the previous research discussed above.

In all of the studies done by Davis (1980, 1983a, 1983b) and his colleagues (Davis & Oathout, 1987, 1992), perspective-taking exhibited the strongest relationship with relationship satisfaction. In fact, Long (1990) cited this trend as a reason for the construction and subsequent validation of his scales, which focus exclusively on perspective-taking within marital or similar dyads, excluding the other aspects of dispositional empathy assessed by the IRI. The present study yielded results consistent with those cited above. Perspective-taking emerged as the best predictor of satisfaction.

The fact that, in the present investigation, empathic concern and personal distress did not exhibit as strong a relationship with dyadic adjustment as did perspective-taking tends to provide support for the proposition that perspective-taking has the strongest

relationship with marital adjustment. It may be that feeling understood is a more important predictor of marital happiness than is feeling that one's partner is sympathetic. It may not be enough that an individual's partner shows warmth and sympathy. In order to foster a sense of well-being within marriage a person's spouse may also have to demonstrate the ability to see problems from the point of view of their partner.

Relationships Between the Accuracy of Interpersonal
Perceptions and Satisfaction

Previous research, for example, Corsini (1956a, 1956b), and Luckey (1960a), found that the accuracy of interpersonal perceptions was positively related to marital satisfaction. However, in these studies this relationship was found only where husbands were the object of the interpersonal perceptions. In other words, congruence between wives' perceptions of their husbands and their husbands' perceptions of themselves was positively associated with marital satisfaction.

In the present investigation, the accuracy of interpersonal perceptions regarding dyadic perspective-taking was positively related to dyadic adjustment when both husbands and wives were the objects of perception.

The accuracy of both husbands' and wives' interpersonal perceptions regarding dyadic perspective-taking ability were significantly correlated with husbands' dyadic adjustment.

The present investigation also examined the relationships between the accuracy of individuals' interpersonal perceptions prior to and following discussions of marital problems and their satisfaction with the outcomes of these discussions. The results of these analyses varied depending on whether the accuracy of interpersonal perceptions was examined before or after the problem discussions. For example, no significant relationship was observed between the accuracy of interpersonal perceptions prior to problem discussions and satisfaction with the outcomes of these discussions.

However, when the accuracy of interpersonal perceptions was examined following discussions of problem issues, significant positive relationships between the accuracy of both spouses interpersonal perceptions and both spouses' satisfaction with the outcomes of the discussions were observed. The accuracy of both husbands' and wives' interpersonal perceptions following problem discussions were significantly related

to both spouses satisfaction with the outcomes of the problem discussions.

One possible explanation for these disparate results is that for the participants of the present study, being understood by ones' spouse after discussions of problem issues was more important to both husbands and wives, in terms of their satisfaction with the outcomes of these discussions, than was being understood prior to the discussions. This result is similar to that observed by Knudson, Sommers, and Golding (1980) regarding couples who solved problems by engaging the issue being discussed. When couples reach an understanding of how their spouse is feeling about the issue they are discussing, they may feel more satisfied with discussion outcomes.

Prior research, particularly that of Corsini (1956a, 1956b) and Newmark, Woody, and Ziff (1977) has shown that when examining the relationship between the accuracy of interpersonal perceptions and marital satisfaction it is important to take into account the potential effects of similarity and assumed similarity. In the present investigation, no significant relationships remained between the accuracy of interpersonal perceptions and satisfaction, either with

the outcomes of problem discussions, or with overall dyadic adjustment, after controlling for the effects of similarity and assumed similarity. This finding is not consistent with the research of Newmark, Woody, and Ziff (1977). These authors concluded that in their sample there was no evidence to suggest that accuracy of interpersonal perceptions was enhanced by similarity.

However, in the present investigation it was observed that various aspects of interpersonal perceptions (i.e. accuracy, similarity, and assumed similarity) correlate highly with each other. Thus it would appear to this author that the variance shared between these aspects of interpersonal perceptions makes it unlikely that they do not affect each other in some way, although the effect is difficult to find due to this shared variance.

Relationships Between the Accuracy of Interpersonal Perceptions and Aspects of Dispositional Empathy

The present investigation proposed that the accuracy of individuals' interpersonal perceptions would be related to the aspects of dispositional empathy assessed by the IRI and SDPT. Specifically, positive relationships were posited between perspective-taking

and the accuracy of interpersonal perceptions, and dyadic perspective-taking and the accuracy of interpersonal perceptions. The author sought to establish a link between the accuracy of individuals' interpersonal perceptions and their ability to take the perspective of others. Conceptually, these constructs were seen as being very similar. However, the results did not support this supposition.

For husbands, only one of the six correlations examined was significant. The accuracy of husbands' interpersonal perceptions related to dyadic perspective-taking ability was significantly related to their dyadic perspective-taking ability. For wives, two of the six correlations examined were significant. The accuracy of their interpersonal perceptions following problem discussions was significantly related to their perspective-taking ability as well as their dyadic perspective-taking ability. These findings suggest that perspective-taking, both in general, and within the context of marriage are less closely related to the accuracy of interpersonal perceptions than was expected.

It is important to note that perspective-taking and dyadic perspective-taking were assessed via self-report measures which focus on the ability of individuals to

understand the views of others. In contrast, Pre-Discussion Questionnaires and Post-Discussion Questionnaires focus more on the individuals' anger, expectancies, anxiety, and perceptions of the seriousness of the issues being discussed. It may be that the differences in the targets of these measures can in part account for the results observed.

In addition, it is possible that the reason there was little evidence to support the proposed relationship between the accuracy of interpersonal perceptions and self-reported perspective-taking ability and dyadic perspective-taking ability is that, in the present investigation, individuals were not specifically instructed to predict spouses' responses. Rather they were instructed to indicate their perceptions of their spouses' internal states.

Contributions and Conclusions

The present study has provided several contributions to the existing body of work relevant to the effects of dispositional empathy and interpersonal perceptions on marital adjustment. First, the present investigation has added more evidence in support of the importance of perspective-taking, particularly dyadic

perspective-taking, for dyadic adjustment. These findings lend credence to the previous research conducted by Long (1990) and Long and Andrews (1990), which proposed that perspective-taking within the context of marital or similar dyads is a better predictor of dyadic adjustment than are the other aspects of dispositional empathy proposed by Davis (1980).

In addition the present study provided some evidence in support of the notion that a positive relationship exists between the accuracy of interpersonal perceptions and dyadic adjustment. Furthermore, the present investigation has begun to explore the relationship between the study of perspective-taking ability and the accuracy of interpersonal perceptions in relation to dyadic adjustment. As can be observed by the methodology of the present study, there is nothing to prevent researchers for examining these two constructs during the same investigation. The author proposed a positive relationship between these two constructs. Although the results reported here failed to indicate a relationship, future research utilizing larger samples may provide more evidence for or against this proposed relationship.

In light of the findings presented here, a potentially fruitful area of inquiry within the realm of marital research might be to design interventions that focus on increasing couple members' ability to take the perspective of their partner. Such interventions might take the form of having individuals discuss problem issues from the point of view of their partner, as they perceive it, while allowing their partner to interject and clarify their perspective as needed. It would be interesting to ascertain whether or not such interventions can add to individuals' perspective-taking ability. An additional examination of whether or not such interventions can increase the accuracy of individuals' interpersonal perceptions could also be undertaken, utilizing the procedures outlined in the present investigation.

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