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Couple Identity Gaps and the Management of Stress and Conflict in Romantic Relationships

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Communication

by

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ABSTRACT

Couple Identity Gaps and the Management of Stress and Conflict in Romantic Relationships

By

Anne Francisca Merrill

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of couple identity (or the degree to which one's partner and relationship are central to one's personal identity; Acitelli, Rogers, & Knee, 1999) in romantic partners' communicative and physiological management of stress associated with relational conflict. The current study extends the research on couple identity by introducing the concept of identity gaps (Hecht, 1993) into relational contexts as a way to explain why couples vary in their ability to manage stress. With assumptions that perceptions of couple identity are beneficial to stress management and that perceptions of couple identity gaps are detrimental to stress management, it was hypothesized that these variables would predict romantic partners' a) perceptions of anxiety, stress, and negativity associated with a conflict-inducing discussion and b) their salivary alpha-amylase (sAA) and salivary cortisol reactivity and recovery in response to a conflict-inducing discussion. One hundred eighteen couples participated in a laboratory study, in which they engaged in a discussion about conflict-inducing topic and provided saliva samples to assess biological stress markers. The couples were also randomly assigned to one of three conditions (couple identity prime, individual identity prime, or control) to test whether priming partners' sense

of couple identity (compared to individual identity) prior to the conflict-inducing discussion influenced the results. The results showed that perceptions of couple identity predicted perceptions of conflict negativity, but not anxiety or stress. Overall, perceptions of couple identity gaps emerged as a stronger predictor in this study than perceptions of couple identity. Perceptions of couple identity gaps were associated with greater conflict anxiety, stress, and negativity, as well as heightened cortisol and sAA reactivity. Intriguing results emerged when testing the possibility of interaction effects between the type of prime (couple identity or individual identity) and individuals' pre-existing perceptions of couple identity (and couple identity gaps) on conflict and stress outcomes. The interaction effect patterns suggest that for some outcomes, priming *couple* identity for those who have weak perceptions of couple identity or have high couple identity gap perceptions increases stress associated with conflict (self-reported and physiological). On the other hand, the interaction effects revealed some evidence that priming *individual* identity for those who have strong perceptions of couple identity or those with low couple identity gap perceptions increases stress associated with conflict (self-reported and physiological). The current study contributes to the existing research on couple identity by highlighting its role in the romantic partners' experiences and management of stress associated with relational conflict. The study also is the first known to the author to translate identity gaps from the individual context to a dyadic context. Furthermore, the predictive power of couple identity gaps in this study was noteworthy and further supports the viability of this concept in future relationship research. Finally, the study integrated multiple approaches to studying stress (cognitive, behavioral, and physiological) in a novel and theoretically-rich way.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Being in a loving, intimate, and committed relationship can be one of the best ways people can improve their overall well-being throughout the lifespan (Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999; Lucas & Dyrenforth, 2006; Stillman & Baumeister, 2009). Numerous theories and empirical studies highlight the importance of close relationships for healthy personal and relational functioning (e.g., Aron, Paris, & Aron, 1995; Berg, Meegan, & Deviney, 1998; Floyd, 2002). Close relationships contribute to individual fulfillment by creating a sense of belonging within a relational unit. As part of a couple, individuals assume a "couple identity" that represents the aspects of the self that are influenced by the partner and the relationship. Just as individuals self-define based on group identities, they also can have relational or couple identities that can influence their cognitions, emotions, and behavior in powerful ways (Brewer & Gardener, 2005; Giles & Fitzpatrick, 1984), and which likely impact overall personal and relational health. The current study investigated how differences in romantic partners' perceptions of their "couple identity" influence their ability to manage stress and conflict in their relationships.

Couple identity is conceptualized as the extent to which individuals view themselves as a part of a couple and incorporate their relationship into their personal identity such that they create a new representation of a "you-and-me" aspect of their identity (Acitelli, Rogers, & Knee, 1999). When partners' perception of couple identity is stronger, they are more likely to think of "the relationship as a team, in contrast to viewing it as two separate individuals, each trying to maximize gains" (Stanley & Markman, 1992, p. 596). Couples likely vary in the degree to which they have a strong or well-formed sense of their couple

identity (or "couple-hood"). In order to better understand the ways in which variations in couple identity manifest in romantic relationships, the current study translated the concept of *identity gaps* from the communication theory of identity (CTI; Hecht, 1993) into a dyadic context. CTI proposes that people have multiple frames of their identity and that identity gaps can arise when these frames are inconsistent with each other (Jung & Hecht, 2008). Research on identity gaps thus far has demonstrated that perceptions of identity gaps are linked to negative outcomes, such as feeling less understood and poor mental health (Jung & Hecht, 2004; 2008). However, this research has only tested the impact of identity gaps on individuals and their personal identity. Identity gaps likely arise between partners as well, concerning each partners' view of their couple identity and the consistency between these views. The presence of identity gaps in partners' couple identity likely carries negative consequences for how well partners are able to confront stressors as a couple, given that these partners do not perceive agreement in a shared couple identity. Given this argument, the current study tested how couple identity gaps predict romantic partner's communicative and physiological management of stress.

Previous research on couple identity and related constructs (e.g., cognitive interdependence, inclusion of other in the self) has found that generally, couple identity is positively related to marital satisfaction and relationship functioning (Acitelli et al., 1999; Reid, Dalton, Laderoute, Doell, & Nguyen, 2006; Scott, Furhman, & Wyer, 1991; Stanley & Markman, 1992). While research suggests that couple identity is linked to improved relational outcomes, less is known about how couple identity impacts partners' ability to communicatively navigate and manage stress associated with difficult situations. Given that a strong sense of self can act as a coping mechanism for stressors throughout the lifespan

(Mann, Hosman, Schaalma, & de Vries, 2004), it is equally likely that a strong sense of couple identity helps couples cope with stressful situations. Accordingly, this study examined how perceptions of couple identity influence partners' management of stress associated with a communicatively challenging situation – relational conflict.

A recurring source of stress in romantic relationships is relational conflict. Conflict is a common occurrence in close relationships, yet the way in which conflict is managed between partners has been found to be a key predictor of the satisfaction and stability of the relationship (Beach, Fincham, & Katz, 1998; Fincham & Beach, 1988; Sher & Weiss, 1991). Consequently, the current study examined how variations in couple identity perceptions impact romantic partners' ability to communicate about stressful, conflict-inducing relational topics, and how these communication patterns foster risk or resilience in the relationship. Specifically, partners who have strong perceptions of their couple identity should experience less negativity and stress during a conflict interaction than those who have weaker or inconsistent perceptions of their couple identity.

Even though conflict is natural and often necessary in romantic relationships, it can negatively affect the physical health of relational partners (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1993; Malarkey et al., 1994). As a result, relationship research has been increasingly focused on understanding the influence of interpersonal communication (e.g., conflict) on individuals' physical stress levels. Relationships with chronically stressful conflict can take a physical toll on individuals over time (Burman & Maroglin, 1992; Robles, Slatcher, Trombello, & McGinn, 2013). Furthermore, when individuals experience chronic or repeated stress, it places a great burden on many of the body's systems (McEwen, 1998). Two biological systems that are implicated in the stress response are the sympathetic nervous system (SNS)

and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis (Laurent & Powers, 2006; Nater et al., 2005). During times of stress (including interpersonal stressors, such as conflict), the HPA responds by secreting the hormone cortisol and the SNS releases the enzyme alpha-amylase into the body. Salivary cortisol and alpha-amylase are reliable, noninvasive markers of psychosocial stress and anxiety (Nater et al., 2005; Shirtcliff, Granger, Booth, & Johnson, 2005). These two biomarkers were relevant to the current investigation in that these markers are influenced by the presence (and absence) of quality communication in people's close relationships (Kiecolt-Glaser, Glaser, Cacioppo, & Malarkey, 1998; Laurent & Powers, 2006; Robles, Shaffer, Malarkey, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2006).

Overall, partners with strong perceptions of their couple identity should be better equipped to communicatively *and* psychologically manage stress and conflict. Using a multidimensional measurement approach, the study examined romantic partners' stress responses during conflict as well as how these stress responses vary as a function of their couple identity perceptions. The current study explored how perceptions of couple identity (and couple identity gaps) predict partners' biological stress responses. Romantic partners' biological stress responses to a relational conflict were assessed by examining reactivity, recovery, and baseline levels of sAA and cortisol. Examining these markers provides a more accurate perspective of partners' experiences of stress during conflict than self-report measures alone. The current study extends previous research by introducing couple identity and couple identity gaps as factors that likely contribute to how couples communicatively and physiologically manage stressors in their relationship.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Dimensions of Couple Identity

Psychological aspects of couple identity. Given that thinking relationally is typically necessary for behaving and communicating relationally (Acitelli, 2002; Acitelli et al., 1999), there are important psychological variables that likely contribute to individuals' sense of couple identity. Processes related to closeness and commitment in close relationships, such as inclusion of other in the self, cognitive interdependence, and behavioral affirmation, are likely implicated in the formation of couple identities in the minds of romantic partners. These closeness-fostering processes should be characteristic of partners with high perceptions of couple identity because they involve restructuring of the individual's cognitive system to integrate aspects of the partner and the relationship into one's sense of self (Cross & Gore, 2004). Furthermore, these psychological factors have been found to promote pro-relationship behaviors (Finkel & Rusbult, 2008; Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999), which are arguably essential to maintaining high perceptions of couple identity.

Close, intimate relationships shape the self-system over time through the integration of the relationship into the individual's identity (Prager & Roberts, 2004). Specifically, there are cognitive structures that promote relationship thinking and the formation of a couple identity (Acitelli et al., 1999). According to self-expansion theory (Aron & Aron, 1986), one way individuals form these structures is through including the close other in one's sense of self. Close relationships can help expand the self when individuals include their partner into their sense of self, because individuals assume the attributes, interests,

resources, and experiences of their partner as they form close bonds in the relationship. Inclusion of other in the self (IOS; Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992) has been associated with constructs such as closeness, interdependence, and commitment (Agnew, Loving, Le, & Goodfriend, 2004). Therefore, the overlapping of the other and the self represent a sense of "we-ness" or strong couple identity (Reid et al., 2006). Based on an understanding of self-expansion and IOS, it seems reasonable that partners who can optimally meet self-expansion needs for one another are also likely to have high perceptions of their couple identity.

A related construct central to an understanding of how individuals form a sense of couple identity is cognitive interdependence. Cognitive interdependence is the mental state characterized by a pluralistic, collective representation of the self-in-relationship (Agnew & Etcheverry, 2006; Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998). The process of cognitive interdependence is thought to develop as individuals become increasingly committed to their relationship and begin to identify themselves as part of a collective unit with their partner (Agnew & Etcheverry, 2006). In fact, research has demonstrated that cognitive interdependence is positively related to perceived overlap between the self and partner (i.e., inclusion of other in the self; Agnew et al., 1998), commitment to and trust in a partner (Agnew et al., 1998; Wieselquist et al., 1999), willingness to sacrifice personal behavioral choices for the benefit of the partner and the relationship (Finkel & Rusbult, 2008; Van Lange et al., 1997), and perceived superiority of one's own relationship compared to others' relationships (Rusbult, Van Lange, Wildschut, Yovetich, & Verette, 2000). Furthermore, individuals who have highly interdependent self-construals (i.e., high perceptions of couple identity) are more likely to be closer and more committed to their partners, as well as more responsive to their partners' needs (Aron, 2003). These findings

parallel the current argument that partners who have stronger couple identities should be better able to manage stress associated with relational conflict than those who do not possess these qualities, because of their pro-relationship thoughts and behaviors.

Furthermore, maintaining pro-relationship thoughts and behaviors is important for couples' long-term relationships, particularly during times of stress and conflict when partners may not be their "best selves." Drigotas et al. (1999) claim that when partners validate one another's ideal selves through behavioral affirmation (i.e., behaving in ways that allows for the partner to realize aspects of his/her ideal self), partners should be increasingly coordinated in their cognitions and behaviors over time, rather than constantly competing with one another. This process, termed the Michelangelo phenomenon, links partner coordination to overall enhancement of relationship functioning. Relatedly, Kelley and Thibaut's (1978) notion of the "transformation of motivation" argues that as partners become more committed in their relationships, they shift from their own self-interest to a direct interest in the good of the relationship. These arguments could be made for partners who share high perceptions of couple identity – that strongly identifying as a couple should foster increased motivation, coordination, and correspondence between partners, which should confer increased benefits to their ability to function as a collective unit during stressful times. Partners with high perceptions of couple identity should be "in tune" with one another and be able move collectively toward shared goals with greater ease, which is an important advantage in times of stress and conflict. In sum, the processes outlined by the Michelangelo phenomenon (Drigotas et al., 1999; Kumashiro, Rubsbult, Wolf, & Estrada, 2006) and interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) have implications for relational behaviors that rely upon partner coordination, such as stress and conflict management.

The aforementioned constructs point to the significance of psychological congruence and positive relational beliefs between partners as predictors of beneficial behaviors in close relationships. In other words, when partners *think* "relationally," they are more likely to *behave* in ways that foster healthy relational functioning. However, couple identity involves not only the mental structures promoting self-partner integration but also the communicative aspects that reflect and reinforce this identity. Couple identity is a psychological construct, but it is also communicated between partners and to others outside the relationship on a regular basis. It is also because this identity is shared by two partners that the potential for inconsistencies or discrepancies in couple identity to arise between partners should not be ignored. The following section elaborates upon the communicative components of couple identity and how these components can strengthen or threaten a couple's identity.

Communicative Aspects of Couple Identity. Scholars have argued that it is through every-day, mutual communication that couple identities are defined, developed and continuously changed (Giles & Fitzpatrick, 1984; Jung & Hecht, 2004). Hecht's communication theory of identity (CTI) proposes that identity is co-created in relationships between partners but also is evident in individuals' communication (Hecht et al., 2004). Similarly, I argue that there are likely ways in which couples communicate that either serve to strengthen or weaken their sense of couplehood. Furthermore, the concepts of CTI can be extended to dyadic relationships in order to understand the ways in which each partner views his or her couple identity and the extent to which the views between partners are consistent. Specifically, the concept of *identity gaps* from CTI can be applied to the context of relational identities.

The communication theory of identity (CTI) focuses on the interplay between identity and communication, and conceptualizes identity as communication rather than merely a product of it (Hecht, 1993; Hecht, Warren, Jung, & Krieger, 2004; Jung & Hecht, 2004). The theory claims that social relationships and roles are internalized by individuals as identities, and then these identities are communicated through social interaction (Hecht, 1993). CTI incorporates both individual-level and social aspects of identity (Jung & Hecht, 2004), which makes it an ideal framework from which to build an understanding of couple identity.

According to CTI, individuals' identity can take on four types of identity frames: personal, enacted, relational, and communal (Hecht et al., 2004; Jung & Hecht, 2004). The personal frame consists of an individual's self-concept based on personal attributes. The relational frame is an individual's perception of how others view him or her (an ascribed identity), as well as the sense of identity that stems from relationships with others. The enacted frame is the individual's identity as it is expressed in communication and social behavior. Finally, the communal frame refers to society's ascription of an identity based on collective, social groups.

One of the most important implications of CTI's four identity frames is that the frames may contradict each other in some situations, resulting in identity gaps. Identity gaps arise when aspects (frames) of people's identity are inconsistent with each other (Jung & Hecht, 2008). Previous research on identity gaps has examined inconsistencies between identity frames for individuals (e.g., Jung & Hecht, 2004, 2008; Kam & Hecht, 2009, but not yet explored the possibility of inconsistencies between partners' perceptions of their relational identity. Although not yet tested, *couple* identity gaps could arise between

partners (intra-relationship), where one partner's sense of couple identity conflicts with the other's sense of couple identity. In other words, this type of identity gap could manifest in notions about how "who *I* think 'we' are" does not correspond with "who *you* think 'we' are." Another way in which identity gaps can emerge for couples is through inconsistencies between how the couple views its identity and how outside others view it (extra-relationship). In this case, although the partners may have similar or consistent perceptions of their couple identity, they are unable to accurately convey this identity to others. This possibility for extra-relationship identity gaps would be similar to a personal-enacted identity gap, in that the perception of couple identity is not consistent with the identity that is communicated (or enacted) to others.

Identity gaps are associated with how people feel about their interactions with others and in turn, how they feel about themselves. Research on discrepancies in perceptions of the self has shown that the extent to which we perceive our actual selves diverging from our ideal selves predicts sadness, dejection, and frustration (Strauman & Higgins, 1988). Research on CTI has shown that identity gaps, particularly gaps between personal and enacted identities, are negatively associated with communication satisfaction, feeling understood, and conversational appropriateness (Jung & Hecht, 2004). People who feel understood by others also report less personal-enacted identity gaps (Jung & Hecht, 2004). Relatedly, Kelly (2000) found that individuals' ability to communicate a sense of self competently to others and feel understood by them is positively associated with mental health. Furthermore, experiences of personal-relational identity gaps, as well as problems with communicating one's sense of self, have been shown to be associated with poor mental health outcomes, such as depression (Higgins, 1987; Jung & Hecht, 2008). Kam and Hecht

(2009) found evidence for identity gaps being closely linked to communication and relational outcomes in the context of close, family relationships. Specifically, they found that the personal-enacted identity gap was related to greater topic avoidance and decreased communication and relationship satisfaction for young adults in their relationships with their grandparents. Arguably, these negative relationship outcomes might also arise for romantic partners who perceive couple identity gaps in their relationship.

Relatedly, research on discrepancies in the context of romantic relationships offers some insight into what impacts couple identity gaps might hold for couples. Based on the ideal standards model (ISM; Simpson, Fletcher, & Campbell, 2001), individuals evaluate current relational partners by their ideal standards for relational partners (most commonly along dimensions of warmth, attractiveness, and status). Research applying ISM has found that when people perceive a standards discrepancy in their relationship (i.e., either that they fall short of their partner's standards or that the partner falls short of their standards), the experience of these discrepancies begets negative emotional and motivational responses. Typically, perceptions of standards discrepancies in romantic relationships predict relational dissatisfaction (Afifi, Joseph, & Aldeis, 2012; Joseph, Afifi, & Denes, in press; Lackenbauer & Campbell, 2012; Vangelisti & Alexander, 2002; Vangelisti & Daly, 1997). Furthermore, Murray, Holmes, and Collins (2006) found that when people felt that their partner is not meeting their standards, they tend to engage in self-regulatory behaviors in order to avoid situations that could maintain or increase dependency on that partner and relationship. The research on discrepancies in relational standards between partners in romantic relationships provides some traction for extending a concept such as identity gaps into a relational context. Specifically, the literature demonstrates a link between perceiving discrepancies

(from some ideal or expectation) in romantic relationships and negative relational outcomes. Therefore, it is reasonable to predict that the presence of couple identity gaps, as a type of relationship discrepancy, could increase the stressfulness and negativity associated with relational conflict.

There are likely ways in which partners approach relational conflict that influence the stressfulness of it, and these ways are likely dependent, in part, on their perceptions of couple identity. Greater perceptions of couple identity can be linked to decreased stress and negativity during conflict for a number of reasons. For example, Giles and Fitzpatrick (1984) found that people perceive satisfied, well-adjusted couples as having open and cooperative communication patterns. Also, thinking in interdependent ways reveals itself in interdependent ways of communicating, even with simple word choice patterns, such as using plural pronouns (e.g., Agnew et al., 1998), and these word choices can, in turn, improve relational functioning (e.g., Reid et al., 2006). Within the context of relational conflict, cognitions and behaviors such as benevolent attributions, validation, compliments, and displays of positive affect contribute to relational satisfaction and positive physical health indices (Ditzen et al., 2009; Robles et al., 2006; Robles et al., 2013). Given that higher perceptions of couple identity are likely associated with these positive, pro-relationship forms of communication during conflict, it is also likely that individuals with greater perceptions of couple identity experience relatively lower stress and expressed negativity during conflict with their partners.

On the other hand, weaker perceptions of couple identity (or greater perceptions of couple identity gaps) might be linked to increased stress and negativity during relational conflict. For example, individuals in distressed relationships are more likely to engage in

hostile or negative conflict (Malarkey et al., 1994), denigrate a partner's view point or sense of self, or even the avoid or withhold affection (Gottman &, Notarius, 2002). In fact, the influence of close partners on individuals' identity according to the Michelangelo effect can be just as negative as it is positive if the partner *disconfirms* aspects of the individual's "ideal self" (Drigotas et al., 1999). Disconfirming communication and other expressions of negativity during relational conflict are likely to place partners under higher stress, as well as serve to escalate conflict and decrease productivity or resolution of the conflict. It could be argued that weak or inconsistent perceptions of couple identity may be an indicator of relationship distress or dissatisfaction, which may also manifest in communicative symptoms, such as greater negativity in general and particularly in conflict.

Given these arguments, there is also likely a reciprocal relationship between the perceptions of couple identity and the prevalence of negativity during relational conflict. Specifically, partners with weak or unstable couple identities may be less equipped to approach conflict and stress in their relationship in productive, pro-relationship ways compared to couples with strong couple identities. Furthermore, increased negativity and stress experienced during relational conflict is likely to wear on partners' sense of couple identity over time, which could have consequences for how partners' continue to manage conflict and the stress associated with it. With this in mind, the following sections detail the ways in which couple identity and related communication behaviors influence couples' abilities to respond to stress and conflict in their relationships.

Impact of Couple Identity on Stress and Conflict Management

Based on the arguments thus far, cognitions and behaviors that foster increased closeness and interdependence are likely to provide a foundation upon which partners can

confront and manage life's stressors as a collective unit, rather than as separate individuals. More broadly, partners' perceptions of couple identity should have implications for how couples manage positive life events that encourage celebration and thriving (Algoe et al., 2010; Lambert, Clark, Durtschi, Fincham, & Graham, 2010; Maisel, Gable, & Strachman, 2008) and negative life events that require coping and resilience (Badr & Acitelli, 2007). For a number of reasons, partners with strong couple identities should be equipped to meet these opportunities and challenges adaptively, while partners with weak couple identities are likely to manage them inefficiently and even destructively. In fact, researchers argue that nondistressed couples are better able to set limits to their negative communication and its consequences compared to distressed couples (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1994). Similarly, couples in higher quality marriages tend to manage conflict more effectively, due to their tendency to engage in more relationship-maintaining communication (e.g., less cross-complaining and criticizing, and more comforting and validation) (O'Brien, DeLongis, Pomaki, Puterman, & Zwicker, 2009). Prior studies on relational conflict have linked communication behaviors, like positive and negative affect, attributions, criticism, and demanding, to relational satisfaction and physical health (Robles et al., 2013). Therefore, it is important to understand the factors, like couple identity, that might predict how couples manage the stress of relational conflict.

Conflict is one of the most common stressors in romantic relationships (Gottman & Notarius, 2002). However, how couples manage conflict is one of the most important determinants of relationship success and personal well-being (Gottman & Notarius, 2002). Given that a great deal of life's stressors are appraised and acted upon with close others (Afifi, Hutchinson, & Krouse, 2006; Berg et al., 1998; Lyons, Mickelson, Sullivan, &

Coyne, 1998), it then makes sense that higher perceptions of couple identity should help couples manage stressors together as a cohesive unit. Couple identity likely influences conflict processes in two important ways: 1) partners with a strong sense of couple identity are likely to behave in ways that keep conflict in the relationship to a minimum, and 2) when conflict does arise, these partners are likely to manage the communicative episode constructively. In fact, research on marital adjustment and conflict has found that couples with higher levels of marital adjustment not only react less negatively to conflict when it arises, but also appear to recover from it quicker (i.e., not let it continue to strain the relationship; O'Brien et al., 2009). In both of these ways, the pro-relationship thoughts and behaviors of couples should help minimize the anxiety, stress and negativity often associated with conflict. In fact, couples with a high perceptions of couple identity might view conflict as an opportunity for growth and communicate in ways during the conflict that propel the conflict in that direction (e.g., Feeney & Lemay, 2012).

Scholars have argued that the interpersonal perspective-taking that occurs between partners promotes a sense of "we-ness" and is "integral to cooperation, companionship, negotiating differences, problem solving, feeling supported emotionally, and feeling motivated to support each other in being who the other is" (Reid et al., 2006, p. 248). Consequently, it is likely that individuals who embrace this sense of "we-ness" engage in behaviors to help reduce relational conflict overall, as well as manifest healthy conflict behaviors when conflict does arise. Furthermore, Sillars, Roberts, Leonard, and Dun (2000) found that partners who engage in severe conflict also engage in less perspective taking and more blaming and misattributions of their partner. While researchers have found that individuals have a bias to be self-enhancing when attributing their own behavior compared

to their partners' behavior in conflict, it is also the case that conflict between partners can be more effective and less stressful when partners are more other-oriented than self-oriented (Sillars et al., 2000; Sillars & Parry, 1982). Rather than blaming one's partner, partners with higher perceptions of couple identity might be more likely to approach conflict as an effort toward collective understanding and mutual problem solving, because they are more inclined to be relationship-oriented. In this way, strong couple identity should be associated with less negativity and stress during conflict and more constructive conflict behaviors.

In a similar vein, another example of constructive conflict behaviors might be the tendency to attribute partner behavior in positive (or at least in less negative) ways. Benevolent partner attributions have been associated with greater marital satisfaction and more constructive conflict management (Baucom, Sayers, & Duhe, 1989; Fincham & Beach, 1988; Sillars et al., 2000). Agnew et al. (1998) claim that partners with greater cognitive interdependence may be more inclined to form benevolent attributions for partner behavior. These attributions have been associated with biological stress responses and recovery. Laurent and Powers (2006) found that attributing responsibility to a partner for negative behaviors predicted slower cortisol (i.e., stress hormone) recovery following a conflict discussion in dating couples. Relatedly, Murray and Holmes (1997) discovered that individuals with positive illusions of their partner perceived greater efficacy in their ability to manage conflict and difficulties in their own relationship compared to what they thought of most other couples. If having a strong couple identity involves positive illusions and benevolent attributions, it is likely that these couples perceive conflict as less relationship-threatening and, as a result, are able to manage it more competently when it does arise compared to couples with weaker identities. In terms of resilience, the increased efficacy of

couples with strong identities likely equips them to persist through difficulties that others might perceive as insurmountable (Murray & Holmes, 1997; 1999; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996).

Another approach to understanding couples' stress and conflict management draws upon the theory of emotional capital (Gottman, Driver, & Tabares, 2002). Gottman and colleagues have proposed that positive emotional capital in romantic relationships can buffer couples from stress and relationship threats to explain why some relationships are better able to weather difficult times than others (Gottman et al., 2002). Partners can build emotional capital through exchanging and experiencing positive emotional experiences with one another, and essentially turning "toward each other rather than away in every-day, mundane interactions" (Feeney & Lemay, 2012, p. 1004). Essentially, a stressor or threat to the relationship should not be detrimental to couples with high emotional capital, because their "bank account" of positive experiences is full, whereas these stressors can be debilitating for couples who do not have this emotional capital and find their "accounts overdrawn" from the stressor (Feeney & Lemay, 2012; Gottman et al., 2002).

Partners who have higher perceptions of their identity as a couple have likely accumulated large amounts of positive emotional capital. Building a history of positive shared experiences likely aids in the formation and growth of a strong couple identity to begin with. For instance, experiencing many shared, positive emotional experiences with a romantic partner should contribute to partners feeling more and more like a couple or team rather than as separate individuals. In fact, couple identity maintenance and emotional capital accumulation may be co-evolving, mutually-influential processes, such that a history of positive shared experiences helps partners see themselves more as a couple and

developing this relational identity, in turn, helps those couples continue to exchange and experience positive emotions over time. Therefore, the buffering effect of emotional capital on stress and negativity in relationships suggests that partners who have higher perceptions of couple identity should experience conflict interactions as less anxiety-producing, less negative, and less stressful compared to couples with weaker couple identity perceptions.

However, individuals with weak couple identities or who perceive couple identity gaps in their relationship may either not have had the time to build enough positive emotional capital in their relationship or experience barriers to doing so (e.g., more negative interactions, more conflict). Therefore, these individuals likely experience conflict as more stressful because they may not have a comfortable buffer of positive relational experiences. Research has shown that high stress during interpersonal conflict can hinder people's normal cognitive processing, often leading to harmful thoughts (e.g., attributions of blame) and less effective communication (Sillars & Parry, 1982). Because perspective-taking, benevolent attributions, and relationship-orienting requires cognitive effort, individuals who have weak or inconsistent couple identities may be unable to overcome the stress associated with conflict to engage in pro-relationship thoughts and communication – particularly if they lack positive emotional capital. In essence, these arguments based on previous literature suggest that the stress and negativity associated with conflict for individuals with weaker couple identities inhibits their ability to improve their relationship, leading to a cycle of increased stress and negativity pervading the relationship.

Taking this research into account, there is likely a link between partners' perceptions of couple identity and their ability to manage conflict and stress in their relationship. The experience of conflict can often be stressful for romantic partners, especially given that

successful intimate relationships often require the partners' continual negotiation of competing needs. The following sections outline a multidimensional approach to assessing the physical, psychological, and relational nature of stress.

A Multisystem Approach to Studying Stress

The goal of this study is to understand how couple identity might explain differences in couples' communicative and physiological management of stress. Researchers can obtain a more complete assessment of the experience of stress by measuring stress with self-report data and biological markers of stress, particularly if individuals are not fully aware of their stress. Biological indicators of stress may be a more accurate assessment of stress, even if they are sometimes inconsistent with self-report measures (Dickerson & Kemeny, 2004; Powers, Pietromonaco, Gunlicks, & Sayer, 2006). Furthermore, previous research examining associations between couples' conflict behaviors and various biosocial markers (e.g., blood pressure and immunological changes) found significant effects of negative behaviors on physiology even in samples of couples who self-report as highly satisfied with their relationship (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1993). Given that individuals in dating relationships consistently report high satisfaction and low stress on average, adopting a multisystem method for assessing stress could be particularly useful.

The current study focused on salivary alpha-amylase and salivary cortisol as biological markers of the body's stress response systems (the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis respectively). Recently, scholars have adopted an multi-systems perspective, arguing that a more complete understanding of stress can be garnered by tapping into multiple stress response systems that work in conjunction with one another when the body is stressed (Afifi, Granger, Denes, Joseph, &

Aldeis, 2011; Bauer, Quas, & Boyce, 2002; Floyd & Afifi, 2010; Gordis, Granger, Susman, & Trickett, 2008). Studying these markers together enables researchers to address multiple stress response systems in the body, providing a more holistic assessment of how bodies respond stress.

Salivary alpha-amylase (sAA) and salivary cortisol are noninvasive markers of psychosocial stress (Nater et al., 2005; Shirtcliff et al., 2005). These markers are products of two biological systems implicated in the stress response – the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis. The SNS is a branch of the automatic nervous system activates the "fight or flight" response that people often experience when they are faced with an impending challenge or threat (Diamond, 2001). It is typically activated by situations that are novel and challenging (Hellhammer, Wust, & Kudielka, 2009) as well as those that are under a person's control. The SNS is responsible for controlling the secretion of sAA through the salivary glands. The enzyme alpha-amylase helps in digestion in the oral cavity because it breaks down bacteria (Scannapieco, Torres, & Levine, 1993). sAA is also thought to capture stress-related changes in the body that reflect the activity of the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) (Chatterton, Vogelsong, Lu, Ellman, & Hudgens, 1996; Granger, Kivlighan, El-Sheikh, Gordis, & Stroud, 2007; Nater, Rohleder, Schultz, Ehlert & Kirschbaum, 2007). More specifically, researchers argue that it can be an indicator of arousal, anxiety, or stress (see Afifi et al., 2011; Nater & Rohleder, 2009). Research has found that sAA peaks immediately after an acute physiological or psychological stressor and this reaction is short lived (Gordis et al., 2006; Nater et al., 2005). sAA also exhibits a stable circadian pattern similar to that of salivary cortisol, making it a suitable marker to test in conjunction with cortisol (Rohleder, Nater, Wolf, Ehlert, &

Kirschbaum, 2004). Even though researchers tend to study the HPA and SNS as separate systems, the hypothalamus, pituitary gland, and adrenal glands work in concert with one another to release stress hormones when the body experiences stress (Gordis et al., 2008).

The other biosocial marker central to this investigation is cortisol. The activation of the HPA axis is initiated by the hypothalamus discharging corticotrophin releasing hormone (CRH), leading to the release of adrencorticotropin hormone (ACTH) from the pituitary, which signals to the adrenal cortex to release cortisol (Floyd & Afifi, 2011). Cortisol has been long been shown to be a reliable biological indicator of stress (Dickerson & Kemeny, 2004; Kirschbaum & Helhammer, 1994). Cortisol is activated on a normal circadian rhythm (i.e., diurnal rhythm), which peaks shortly after waking (approximately 30 minutes) in the morning and declines steadily throughout the rest of the day and reaches its lowest point at midnight (Stone et al., 2001). During acute stress tasks, an adaptive cortisol response would evidence a peak in cortisol about 15 minutes after the task to combat the stressor, followed by a steady progression downward (i.e., recovery). The HPA axis is crucial for regulating normal stress responses, and cortisol plays a large role in both mobilizing the body's energy resources as well as regulating immune system functioning (Dickerson & Kemeny, 2004).

The HPA reaction is a normal and healthy reaction to stress, but can become dysregulated under conditions of chronic stress in the environment. McEwen (1998) refers to the term of allostasis as the body's ability to return to homeostasis following physiological arousal. When individuals experience chronic or repeated stress, it places a great burden on many of the body's systems, resulting in allostatic load (McEwen, 1998). However, the quality of social interactions (e.g., social support, social integration, positive relationship experiences) over the course of an individual's lifetime is associated with lower

allostatic load (Seeman, Singer, Ryff, Love, & Levy-Stroms, 2002). Allostatic load harms the body's ability to effectively respond to stress over time, as well as presents risks to physical health (McEwen, 1998). Allostatic load can lead to different types of cortisol dysregulation, such as abnormal baseline cortisol levels, hypercortisolism (abnormally high cortisol reactivity) and hypocortisolism (abnormally low cortisol reactivity; McEwen, 1998). Furthermore, hypercortisolism can manifest in individuals being unable to adjust their cortisol arousal to repeated stressors, as well as prolonged recovery periods where cortisol remains elevated longer than the average person (Floyd & Afifi, 2011). In an acute stress task, a person's cortisol response might be considered abnormal if it is too high or too low, delayed, erratic, or the person is unable to sufficiently recover back to baseline levels from the stress-inducing task. Recovery is the process by which cortisol levels return to their pre-stressor levels after the stressor has passed (Powers et al., 2006). In addition to examining reactivity, recovery is thought of as a reflection of a maladaptive stress response if recovery fails to occur (Dickerson & Kemeny, 2004).

For the purposes of the current study, romantic partners' biological stress responses to a relational conflict were assessed by examining reactivity, recovery, and baseline levels of sAA and cortisol. Examining these markers should provide a more accurate and multi-faceted perspective of partners' experiences of stress during conflict than self-report measures alone. The current study extends previous research by introducing couple identity and couple identity gaps as factors that likely contribute to how couples communicatively and physiologically manage stressors in their relationship.

The Association between Relational Processes and Biological Stress Responses

Close relationship researchers have more recently begun to adopt a biosocial approach to understanding the connections between physical and relational well-being (e.g., Brooks, Robles, Dunkel Schetter, 2011; Powers et al., 2006). Researchers studying stress hormones (e.g., cortisol) in married couples have found associations between biological stress responses and the quality of relationship functioning and communication (Robles & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2003). For example, Pendry and Adam (2007) found couples with satisfied or high functioning marriages had healthier cortisol levels. However, in distressed or poor functioning marriages, couples had elevated average and waking levels of cortisol, suggesting that the added stress of chronic marital difficulties may be contributing to hypercortisolism. These findings are explained well by the stress buffering hypothesis (Cohen & Wills, 1985). The stress buffering hypothesis (Cohen & Wills, 1985) states that social support acts as a buffer against the impact of stress on individuals' health and well-being. Specifically, having quality social support resources in times of distress reduces the negative impact of the stress on individuals' well-being and physical health. Moreover, people with quality social support resources tend to have better psychological and physical health in general (Cohen & Willis, 1988). Given that individuals in healthy relationships likely have greater access to social support and higher quality social support from their partners (c.f., Drigotas et al., 1999; Feeney, 2004; Reid et al., 2006), the stress buffering hypothesis explains why individuals in satisfied, high functioning relationships have healthier cortisol levels than those in distressed relationships. The stress buffering hypothesis contributes to the current couple identity approach in that partners with strong couple identities are likely to have quality social support from one another, as well as from others outside the relationship in times of need (c.f., Agnew, Loving, & Drigotas, 2001;

Etcheverry & Agnew, 2004; Lehmiller & Agnew, 2006; Neff & Karney, 2005). As a result, individuals with strong couple identities likely experience the physical benefits (i.e., healthier cortisol and sAA patterns) of support in their relationship to a greater degree compared to individuals with weaker or unstable couple identities.

Although conflict is a normal and natural occurrence in close relationships, the way in which it is managed between partners is central to the satisfaction and stability of the relationship (Beach, Fincham, & Katz, 1998; Fincham & Beach, 1988; Sher & Weiss, 1991; Sillars et al., 2000; Sillars & Parry, 1982). Conflict is considered as an interpersonal stressor with the potential to induce physiological reactivity (Malarkey, Kiecolt-Glaser, Pearl, & Glaser, 1994; Powers et al., 2006) because it represents a threat to the relationship (Mikulincer, Gillath, & Shaver, 2002). Scholars argue that the reason why conflict can be such a challenging communicative experience – often leading to ineffective communication – is that a high degree of stress infuses these interactions (Sillars & Parry, 1982). The overall higher levels stress that dissatisfied couples experience on a more frequent basis compared to satisfied couples arguably stems from not only an increased prevalence of conflict in the relationship, but also from destructive communicative patterns during conflict episodes. Relationships with chronically stressful conflict likely exact a physiological toll on the individuals. In fact, numerous studies have linked hostile or negative communication behaviors during conflict to dysregulated hormonal levels in married couples (Malarkey et al., 1994; Robles et al., 2006). Specifically, Malarkey et al. (1994) found that newlywed couples' hostile or negative behaviors during a conflict discussion task increased levels of several neuroendocrine hormones (i.e., epinephrine, norepinephrine, adrenocorticotropic hormone, and growth hormone) that are associated with stress and immunological

functioning. This finding was noteworthy in lieu of the study's highly satisfied sample, suggesting that the results underestimate the impact of stressful conflict on the body. Malarkey et al.'s findings are also important with regard to the current couple identity framework; it is likely that couples who have a stronger couple identity possess resiliency that equips them with better conflict management and stress management skills, which should result in less stress (perceived and physiological) compared to their counterparts with a weaker couple identity.

Relatedly, affection exchange theory (Floyd, 2002; 2006) lends additional support to the idea that partners with a strong couple identity might be buffered from the physical consequences of stress. Affection exchange theory (AET) posits that giving and receiving affection with close others is evolutionarily adaptive, because it promotes pair bonding and physical health (Floyd, 2002). More specifically, AET states that giving and receiving affection activates neuroendocrine responses that prepare the body to fight against stress and buffer the body from the harmful effects of stress (Floyd, 2006). For instance, when individuals experience affection, the hormone oxytocin, which is linked to increased trust and warmth, is released and suppresses cortisol (Ditzen et al., 2009; Floyd, 2006; Floyd et al., 2009; Floyd & Riforgiate, 2008). Therefore, individuals who are in affectionate close relationships are given "booster shots" to the ill effects of stress through the exchange of affection. Taken together, a strong couple identity should act as a buffer against the physiological effects of stress in that it should provide individuals with both social support resources and the evolutionarily-adaptive source of affection that comes from being a part of a romantic pair bond.

While a strong couple identity likely promotes healthy stress management, weak or inconsistent (gapped) couple identity may contribute to unhealthy, problematic stress management during conflict. Conflict experiences can often escalate and become severe when stress is communicated in dysfunctional ways (Sillars & Parry, 1982). Interestingly, research has shown that husbands' and wives' daily cortisol fluctuations and negative moods are correlated with one another and for dissatisfied couples, this correlation is stronger (Saxbe & Repetti, 2010). In other words, dissatisfied partners exert greater negative influence over one another with respect to both mood and biological stress patterns. Thus, it is possible that couples with a weaker couple identity may experience more stress contagion effects where one person's stress spills over onto another, compared to couples with a stronger couple identity. Individuals in satisfied relationships tend to be buffered against stress and negativity more than those couples in dissatisfied relationships. The current study tested the likelihood that couple identity is a possible mechanism in this buffering effect.

Furthermore, Robles et al. (2006) found that conflict behaviors are significantly associated with wives' cortisol levels but not husbands' cortisol levels. This finding is consistent with other research that indicates that women may be more attuned to emotional aspects of romantic relationship interactions (Afifi & Joseph, 2009) and react to a greater degree to these interactions than men (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001; Sillars et al., 2000). Consequently, there may be important differences that emerge in men's and women's biological stress responses in the current study. Overall, the theory and research on marital conflict and biological stress response highlight how relationship feelings and behaviors, like satisfaction, affection, and support, influence stress activation and recovery patterns. Couple identity has so far been logically linked to pro-relationship processes, such as

support, and affection, making it a fitting construct through which to understand stress management within romantic relationships. This area of research is a prime illustration of how relationship qualities, communication, and the body's biological stress responses are mutually influential, and as such, need to be studied collectively.

CHAPTER THREE

HYPOTHESES

Thus far, theoretical and empirical evidence for the links between romantic partners' "couple identity" and the pro-relationship cognitions and behaviors that promote a couple's resiliency to stress have been reviewed. In sum, the argument can be made that partners with higher perceptions of their couple identity are more likely to engage in constructive, pro-relationship communication with one another, particularly in times of stress or conflict, compared to partners with lower perceptions of couple identity. Based on the arguments that have been made, there should be individual differences in romantic partners' perceptions of couple identity. Couples who have a stronger couple identity should find conflict interactions less anxiety- and stress-producing and engage in less negativity during the conflict interaction. Given these predicted differences among couples, the first hypothesis was posed:

H1: Partners who have higher perceptions of their couple identity will experience less perceived anxiety, stress, and negativity during conflict than partners who have lower perceptions of their couple identity.

In addition, relationships with strong couple identity should arguably have increased social support and affection, which are linked to lower stress levels according to the stress buffering hypothesis and AET. Based upon this argument, the partners with strong couple identities likely engage in behaviors that promote healthier physiological responses to stressful events, such as conflict, which led to the second hypothesis:

H2: Partners who have higher perceptions of their couple identity will have a) lower baseline cortisol and sAA levels, b) less cortisol and sAA reactivity

and c) have quicker cortisol and sAA recovery than partners who have lower perceptions of their couple identity.

While most of the prior theoretical and empirical literature reasonably supports the aforementioned predictions, the current study also tested the possibility of bolstering partners' sense of couple identity in the moments prior to difficult or stressful interactions as a "booster shot" for predicting improved conflict and stress management. Previous research on security priming (i.e., priming secure attachment relationships) has demonstrated that priming relational schemas through both explicit and subliminal primes can influence written thought, word choice, emotions, and behavior in pro-relationship ways (Carnelley & Rowe, 2010; Rowe & Carnelley, 2003). Furthermore, McLeish and Oxoby (2011) found that individuals behave more cooperatively with others when primed with a shared identity (via a writing task), but less cooperatively when primed with distinctiveness. Accordingly, the current study predicted that exposure to a couple identity priming task (i.e., couple identity-focused writing task) should serve as a buffer against individuals' perceptions of stress, anxiety, or negatively in response to a conflict interaction. This type of relationship-centered task should remind partners of the importance of their relationship and their strengths as a couple, which should help them approach conflict in a more constructive manner and, subsequently, also help their bodies adapt physiologically to stressful communicative events. In order to test this, participants were randomly assigned to engage in either a writing task about their couple identity, a writing task about their individual identity, or no writing task at all (control) prior to discussing conflict-inducing topics. Based on the arguments about the differences between these types of discussions, the following hypothesis was posed:

H3: Partners who are given a couple identity prime prior to conflict will experience less perceived stress, anxiety, and negativity during a conflict-inducing discussion than partners who are given an individual identity prime or those who receive no prime prior to a conflict-inducing discussion.

Furthermore, couples who are reminded of their couple identity through this priming task prior to discussing conflict-inducing topics should not only report being less stressed by conflict but also evidence this reaction physiologically. Based on Floyd's research (Floyd, 2006; Floyd et al., 2009; Floyd & Riforgiate, 2008), communication that is focused on pair-bonding (e.g., spouses' reports of affectionate communication) is related to healthier physiological stress responses and lower serum cholesterol levels. Therefore, it was reasonable to propose that couple-focused writing may predict healthier physiological stress responses to conflict such that:

H4: Partners who are given a couple identity prime prior to conflict will have a) less cortisol and sAA reactivity and c) have quicker cortisol and sAA recovery than partners who are given an individual identity prime or those who receive no prime prior to a conflict-inducing discussion.

Thus far, the predictions have proposed that there should be separate main effects on conflict and stress outcomes from perceptions of couple identity and from the type of identity prime. In addition, there may be an interaction between partners' perceptions of their couple identity and the type of prime they receive prior to a conflict discussion on their subsequent perceptions of their conflict discussion. Partners who already have strong perceptions of their couple identity and who engage in the couple identity priming task should be positively predisposed to their conflict discussion, but possibly not above and

beyond their normal tendencies toward productive, pro-relational conflict communication. However, encouraging a couple identity frame for partners with weaker or unstable perceptions of their couple identity may improve their perceptions of their relationship such that subsequent conflict is managed in a more pro-relationship manner than might be typical for their relationship. Simply reminding partners that they are a couple and having them focus on their partner and their relationship prior to the conflict discussion might put them in a more benevolent, relationship-focused state, which could positively influence their conflict discussion both communicatively (e.g., less negative perceptions of it) and physiologically (e.g., less sAA and cortisol reactivity). As a result, it could be hypothesized that partners' perceptions of their couple identity will moderate the effect of the couple identity prime on stress and conflict outcomes such that partners with weaker perceptions of their couple identity *and* who engage in a couple identity writing task prior to conflict will experience less perceived stress, anxiety, and negativity during conflict, have less cortisol and sAA reactivity, and have quicker cortisol and sAA recovery than partners with similarly weak couple identity perceptions who do not receive a couple identity prime prior to conflict.

However, an opposing argument can be made that for some couples with weaker couple identification; being asked to think and write about their couple identity actually may create *more* stress, anxiety, and negativity during conflict. Priming couple identity for couples who have incompatible or unstable perceptions of this identity may emphasize their relational problems or weaknesses, instead of reminding them of their strengths and positive qualities (as they may not have many that come to mind, for example). Instead of helping these couples feel stronger or more cohesive as a couple, they may feel frustrated or disappointed when they are prompted to focus on their couple identity. Due to these

competing arguments, non-directional hypotheses about the nature of the interaction between individuals' perceptions of their couple identity and the effect of priming couple identity on stress and conflict outcomes were set forth:

H5: There will be an interaction between partners' perceptions of their couple identity and being primed with couple identity on perceived stress, anxiety, and negativity during a conflict-inducing interaction.

H6: There will be an interaction between partners' perceptions of their couple identity and being primed with couple identity on cortisol and sAA reactivity and recovery.

The study incorporates a CTI approach with the prediction that partners with weak or unstable couple identities likely experience *couple identity gaps*. These gaps should be evident in the inconsistencies between each partner's view of the relationship (i.e., how I see us as a couple is not the same as how my partner sees us as a couple) as well as the inconsistencies between how the partners view their identity and how they "enact" or communicate it. The presence of couple identity gaps are important to explore as they may be markers of relational distress and instability, as well as of detriments to personal well-being. Research on CTI and individuals' identity gaps has shown that the perceptions of personal-relational and personal-enacted identity gaps are positively related to depression and poor mental health (Jung & Hecht, 2008). Likewise, perceiving discrepancies between one's own and one's partners' view of the relationship likely leads to negative emotions (e.g., sadness and frustration) because it reminds individuals that their relationship is not what it could be. Scholars note that these perceptions of unmet standards can motivate behavioral changes in the relationship as well, such as avoidance or distancing (Murray et

al., 2006). Arguably, these perceptions and the subsequent negative emotional and behavioral consequences likely take a toll on partners, limiting their ability to collectively manage conflict effectively. As a result, the current study predicted that perceptions of these gaps in couple identity will be associated with stress and conflict outcomes, such that:

H7: Partners' perceptions of couple identity gaps will be positively associated with perceptions of stress, anxiety, and negativity during conflict.

H8: Partners who perceive greater couple identity gaps will experience greater cortisol and sAA reactivity and delayed cortisol and sAA recovery after the conflict task.

Moreover, it is proposed that perceptions of couple identity gaps might impact stress management during conflict differently depending on whether partners are primed with a couple identity frame of mind. Based on the competing arguments previously mentioned with regard to perceptions of couple identity and the effect of priming couple identity, the current study also proposed non-directional hypotheses about the nature of the interaction between individuals' perceptions of their couple identity gaps and the effect of priming couple identity on stress and conflict outcomes:

H9: There will be an interaction between partners' perceptions of couple identity gaps and being primed with couple identity on perceived stress, anxiety, and negativity during a conflict-inducing interaction.

H10: There will be an interaction between partners' perceptions of couple identity gaps and being primed with couple identity on cortisol and sAA reactivity and recovery.

Finally, previous literature has demonstrated gender differences in perceptions of relationship discrepancies (Afifi & Joseph, 2009; Afifi, Joseph, & Aldeis, 2012) conflict behaviors (Levenson & Gottman, 1985), and physiological stress responses to conflict (Robles et al., 2006). While investigating gender differences was not a central pursuit of the current study, it was reasonable to anticipate gender differences for the hypothesized patterns involving perceptions of couple identity (and couple identity gaps) and stress and conflict outcomes. As a result, the following research question was posed as a consideration in assessing the study's hypothesized associations:

RQ1: Are there differences between men and women in how perceptions of couple identity (and perceptions of couple identity gaps) predict their a) perceptions of anxiety, stress, and negativity and b) sAA and cortisol reactivity and recovery in response to a conflict-inducing discussion?

CHAPTER FOUR

METHOD

Participants

One hundred eighteen couples in committed, dating relationships participated in a two-hour laboratory interaction study. Couples were required to be in their relationship for a minimum of six months in order to participate in the study. The participants were undergraduate students enrolled in Communication courses and their partners, who represented a wide variety of majors. Lower-division students participated in exchange for course research credit and upper-division students were given extra credit for participation. Participants' average age was $M = 20.74$ (SD = 2.47, range = 18-39). Almost half of the participants reported their ethnicity to be White or European (46.9%), with Asian American (20.5%), Hispanic American (15.6%), African American (4%), and Other or Mixed Ethnicities (12.9%) comprising the remaining categories. There were 65 intra-ethnic/racial couples and 47 inter-ethnic/racial couples in the study. The average relationship length for the couples was 19.31 months (SD = 17.46), with considerable variation around that mean (range = 6-86 months). The majority of couples were not cohabiting (79.9%) and not in a long-distance relationship (77.2%). Three couples' data were eliminated from the analysis because they indicated that they had dating for less than the six month requirement (resulting sample size for analysis: 115 couples).

Participants were prescreened for their inclusion in the study. Couples were not allowed to participate in the study if one or both of them had any type of endocrine disorder, diabetes, were currently undergoing chemotherapy, had thyroid problems, were taking steroids, or were currently taking other medications that could affect their hormones.

Procedures

Prior to their lab appointment, couples were randomly assigned to one of three conditions. In condition one, partners each completed a "couple identity" writing task prior to their conflict discussion. In condition two, partners completed an "individual identity" writing task prior to engaging in the conflict discussion task. The distinction between condition one and two writing tasks was to test whether priming a couple or relational identity frame, compared to an individual identity frame, prior to a conflict discussion altered the nature of how partners talked about their conflict. Condition three was a control group in which partners completed the conflict discussion task without any writing task before it. Condition one consisted of 42 couples, condition two consisted of 36 couples, and condition three consisted of 34 couples.

When participants signed up for the study, the researcher emailed them an introductory email to inform them about the requirements of the study and obtain their partners' email address. The researcher then emailed links to both partners to an online pre-interaction questionnaire. The online questionnaire took approximately 30 minutes to complete. Participants were assigned a unique participant code that they used for all questionnaires and materials both online and in the laboratory, in order to be able to link their responses to one another while maintaining the confidentiality of their responses. Participants and their partners were given instruction in this email that the questionnaires must be completed separately from one another in private and must be finished by both partners at least two days prior to their laboratory visit. Once both partners had completed

the online questionnaire, they were sent email reminders the day before their scheduled lab appointment with instructions to follow for the study. Participants were instructed to *not* do the following prior to their visit: 1) eat or drink anything or brush teeth within 45 minutes prior to the appointment, 2) exercise rigorously, smoke, consume alcohol or caffeinated beverages within 12 hours prior to the appointment, 3) use drugs (including Adderall and marijuana) within 48 hours of the appointment, and 4) go to the dentist within 48 hours of the appointment. Furthermore, because cortisol levels follow a daily circadian rhythm, the study restricted the lab hours to afternoon and evening times to partially control for the time of data collection.

Upon arrival to the lab, partners read and signed consent forms and then provided their first saliva sample. The first saliva sample (sample one) was collected before completing questionnaires or engaging in any discussion or writing tasks, to serve as the baseline sample. Each time participants provided a saliva sample, they were separated into private rooms and instructed to imagine eating their favorite food and passively drool into a straw inserted into a small plastic vial with their heads tilted forward (Granger et al. 2007) until they filled the tube to a certain level (1.5 ml). The vials were labeled with participant codes, sealed, and immediately placed in frozen storage (-20 °C) until shipped on dry ice to a laboratory at the University of California, Davis to be assayed for cortisol and sAA. Samples were assayed for cortisol using radioimmunoassay (RIA).

After completing saliva sample one, participants completed a brief medical information inventory. The medical questionnaire asked about general information about behaviors (e.g., eating, drinking, dentist appointments, smoking, medications, etc.) that could affect their hormones and the quality of the saliva samples. Next, participants

completed a conflict listing sheet where they listed three topics that are typically conflict-inducing in their relationship. From this sheet, the researchers selected one topic for the couple to discuss in the conflict discussion task. From the potential six topics, researchers chose the topic that was rated by the participant as the most stressful in order to increase the chances that the discussion task would elicit a physiological stress response. Researchers did not select stressful conflict topics if they were too sensitive for the couple to discuss in the laboratory. Topics that were mutually reported by both partners were chosen first. However, if the couple did not share any of the same conflict topics, the most stressful topic between both of the partners' sheets was selected. The researchers also selected an alternate topic from the two lists in the event that the couple indicated that they were uncomfortable discussing the primary topic.

Of the topics discussed and coded by the research team, 74 were mutually reported topics, 23 were reported by the female partner, and nine were reported by the male partner. The types of topics discussed by couples and their frequencies are displayed in Table 1. Eight categories of topics emerged from coding the discussed topics: *communication and compatibility* (e.g., communication or personality issues that caused conflict), *time spent together* (e.g., not spending enough time together or not being about to balance time with friends and alone time as a couple), *jealousy and trust* (e.g., interacting with opposite sex friends or past partners), *future plans and relationship status* (e.g., what will happen after graduation, moving for careers, and study abroad), *family and friends* (e.g., issues with meeting each other's' families, parent or friend disapproval), *general lifestyle* (e.g., concerns about mental and physical health, money), *long-distance* (e.g., struggling with being long-distance, logistics of visiting), and *substance use* (e.g., partying, alcohol and drug use, how

substance use impacts their relationship). The types of topics discussed by the couples reflected the lifestyle and concerns of a sample of emerging adults.

If the participants were in conditions one or two, they next completed either the couple identity writing task or individual identity writing task. For these tasks, the partners were separated into private rooms. These writing tasks were completed online and took about 10-15 minutes for participants to complete. Both writing tasks had three similar prompts with text boxes in which participants typed their responses. The three prompts for couple identity writing task as well as for the individual identity writing task are provided in Table 2. If participants were in condition three (control condition), the partners moved on to the conflict discussion task shortly after completing the conflict topic listing sheet without completing any writing task. Immediately following each writing task, participants completed a linguistic implications form (Wegner & Giuliano, 1980), which is a sentence completion task designed to test their pronoun choice (See Appendix). The first-person plural pronouns (i.e., we, our, us) are thought to reflect collective or relational focus, whereas first-person singular pronouns (i.e., I, me, my) are thought to reflect self focus. This sentence completion task was used as a manipulation check for the identity primes to test that participants primed with their couple identity should choose more first-person plural pronouns and that participants primed with their individual identity should choose more first-person singular pronouns.

The conflict discussion task was videotaped and took place in an interaction room in the laboratory, which consisted of a living room setting with a couch. Partners were brought together in the interaction room and instructed that they were to have a discussion about a topic that was typically conflict inducing in their relationship. They were instructed that

they had 15 minutes for the discussion, to use the full amount of time if possible, to talk with one another as they normally do, and to attempt to work toward a resolution or solution to their topic. The researcher told the couples that their topic for discussion was selected at random from their listing sheets. They were provided with the specific topic and instructed to try to stay focused on this topic for the entire discussion.

Immediately following the conflict discussion task (regardless of condition), participants provided three additional saliva samples over the course of the following 40 minutes to adequately capture the reactance and recovery in sAA and cortisol. Saliva sample two was obtained immediately after the conflict discussion (to measure increases in sAA), sample three was collected 15 minutes after the task (to measure increases in cortisol and recovery in sAA), and finally, sample four was obtained 40 minutes post-task (to measures recovery in cortisol and sAA). After all of the saliva samples were taken, partners completed a final online questionnaire on separate computers in private rooms. This post-conflict questionnaire asked the partners about their perceptions of the conversation that just occurred. This final questionnaire took approximately 15 minutes to complete. At the end of the study, the researcher debriefed the couples.

The saliva vials were labeled with participant codes, sealed, and immediately placed in frozen storage (-20 °C) after collection until shipped on dry ice to the clinical endocrinology laboratory at the University of California, Davis to be assayed for cortisol and sAA. Samples were assayed for cortisol in duplicate using radioimmunoassay (RIA) kits (Siemens) and for sAA using enzyme immunoassay (EIA) kits (Salimetrics LLC, State College, PA). Intra-assay coefficient of variation and inter-assay coefficients of variation

for sAA were 6.88 and 13.36 respectively. Intra-assay coefficient of variation and inter-assay coefficients of variation for salivary cortisol were 6.99 and 9.37 respectively.

Measures

Self-reported anxiety, stress, and negativity. Six items were used in the pre-laboratory questionnaire (time one), an entry questionnaire upon arriving at the lab (time two), and the post-interaction questionnaire (time three) to measure state anxiety. Example items included "I feel tense" and "I feel worried," and were measured along a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 *not at all* – 4 *very much*). The reliabilities for state anxiety for all three time points were both consistently high (male T1 Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$, male T2 Cronbach's $\alpha = .79$, male T3 Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$, female T1 Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$, female T2 Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$, female T3 Cronbach's $\alpha = .79$).

Conflict-related stress was measured in the post-questionnaire (time three) with five Likert-type items which asked how participants felt talking about the conflict topic with their partner. Item stems began with "Talking to my partner about the conflict topic made me feel…" and example responses ranged from 1 *Not stressed at all* to 7 *Extremely stressed*. Cronbach's Alpha for these items was .91 for men and .93 for women.

Finally, one item in the post-interaction questionnaire (time three) measured how negatively participants felt the discussion task was. This item stem stated "I felt the discussion with my partner was…" with a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 *Extremely negative* – 7 *Extremely positive*). Scores on this item were reverse coded so that higher scores represented greater negativity scores.

Couple identity. Participants' couple identity was measured in the pre-laboratory questionnaire (time one) and the post-interaction questionnaire (time three) using three

different measures. First, two items from Acitelli et al. (1999) asked how well (and how important) is being "part of a couple" for the way participants see themselves. These items were measured along 5-point Likert-type scales from 1 *Not at all well* (or *Not at all important*) to 7 *Extremely well* (or *Extremely important*). These items were internally consistent at both time points for men and women (male T1 Cronbach's α = .89, female T1 Cronbach's α = .79, male T3 Cronbach's α = .83, female T3 Cronbach's α = .83).

The next measure of couple identity used was the six-item couple identity subscale of Stanley and Markman's (1992) commitment inventory, which was also measured in the pre-laboratory questionnaire (time one) and the post-interaction questionnaire (time three). Sample items included, "I am willing to have or develop a strong sense of an identity as a couple with my partner" and "I like to think of my partner and me more in terms of 'us' and 'we' than 'me' and 'him/her.'" These items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 *strongly disagree* – 7 s*trongly agree*). The reliability of this subscale was high (male T1 Cronbach's α = .89, female T1 Cronbach's α = .79, male T3 Cronbach's α = .83, female T3 Cronbach's α = .83).

Finally, the S-RISC scale (Linardatos & Lydon, 2011) was measured in the pre-laboratory questionnaire (time one) and the post-interaction questionnaire (time three). This scale included relationship-specific identification with items such as "My current romantic relationship is an important reflection of who I am" and "When I think of myself, I often think of my partner also." The scale consisted of eleven Likert-type items with responses ranging from 1 *strongly disagree* to 7 *strongly agree*. The reliability of this scale was high (male T1 Cronbach's α = .83, female T1 Cronbach's α = .79, male T3 Cronbach's α = .83,

female T3 Cronbach's α = .83). For all items on these three measures, higher scores indicated stronger couple identities.

When all three of these measures of couple identity were subjected to exploratory factor analysis using promax rotation, a one factor solution emerged based on Cattel's scree plot. Based on this, all three measures tapping into the couple identity construct were combined into one composite variable for all of the analyses. The reliability for this global couple identity variable was high (male T1 Cronbach's α = .89, female T1 Cronbach's α = .79, male T3 Cronbach's α = .83, female T3 Cronbach's α = .83). Again, time one represents the scores on the pre-laboratory questionnaire and time three represents the scores on the post-interaction questionnaire.

Couple identity gaps. Gaps in partners' perceptions their couple identity were measured at time one (pre-laboratory questionnaire) and time three (post-interaction questionnaire) with two adapted scales of personal-relational identity gaps and personal-enacted identity gaps from Jung and Hecht (2004). Both scales were originally worded to reflect individuals' personal identities, so the items were reworded to reflect gaps in couple or relational identities. Eleven items from the original personal-relational gap scale were revised to describe situations in which a participant's dating partner ascribed characteristics to the relationship are either consistent or inconsistent with the way the participant viewed the relationship (i.e., their perceptions of intra-relationship couple identity gaps). Consistencies were described with items such as "I feel that my partner sees our relationship as I see it" and inconsistencies were measured with items such as "I feel that my partner has the wrong image of our relationship." This scale was measured on 7-point Likert-type scales (l *strongly disagree* – 7 s*trongly agree*). The reliability of this subscale was high

(male T1 Cronbach's α = .88, female T1 Cronbach's α = .84, male T3 Cronbach's α = .86, female T3 Cronbach's α = .87).

Another eleven items from the original personal-enacted identity gap scale were revised to describe situations in which participants felt that they and their partner were able to be their "real selves" with others or situations in which they feel they are inconsistent in communicating about their relationship to others – their perceptions of extra-relationship couple identity gaps. Example items included, "My partner and I express the 'real us' in communication with others" and "There is a difference between the "real us" as a couple and the impression my partner and/or I give others about our relationship." This scale was measured on 7-point Likert-type scales (l *strongly disagree* – 7 s*trongly agree*). The reliability of this subscale was very high (male T1 Cronbach's α = .91, female T1 Cronbach's α = .90, male T3 Cronbach's α = .91, female T3 Cronbach's α = .92). The items on both of these subscales were recoded so that higher scores represent greater perceptions of gaps.

Additional measures. Two additional scales were used to measure variables that would serve as additional manipulation checks. First, communal coping was measured with Afifi et al.'s (2006) communal coping scale. Participants responded to seven items assessing the degree to which individuals felt they and their partners cope well with stressors together as a couple (e.g., "We address problems as a team," and "We feel like we are both 'in this together'"). The Likert-type scale ranged from 1 S*trongly disagree* to 5 S*trongly agree*. Higher scores represent greater use of communal coping (α =.91 for men and .92 for women). The second measure included was an adapted scale of relationship optimism from Murray and Holmes (1999). Participants responded to statements based on their perceptions

of the likelihood of a variety of positive and negative events occurring in their relationship relative to the typical or average romantic relationship (of approximate length as their relationship). The scale items included example events such as "The love my partner and I share continuing to grow" and "My partner and I discovering areas in which our needs conflict in a serious way." The scale included 17 items on a Likert-type scale from 1 *Much less likely to occur in my relationship* to 5 *Much more likely to occur in my relationship*. Negative event items were reverse-coded so that higher scores on items in this scale represented higher relationship optimism (α =.89 for men and .91 for women).

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS

Data Analysis Plan

Dyadic data present challenges for analysis because data for each partner are related to one another, violating the assumptions of independence of observations (Kenny, 1996). When data are nonindependent, statistical analyses that account for both dyad and individuals as units of analysis simultaneously are required. Nonindependence also suggests that there is reciprocity, influence, or synchrony in the dyad (Alferes & Kenny, 2009). The couples in this study are considered distinguishable dyads, which means that each person in the relationship has a different role than the other (e.g., husband and wife) or can be ordered by a variable such as gender (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). Dyadic data are thought of as homogenous and interdependent (Kenny, 1996). Homogeneity refers to the tendency for individuals within a couple to have similar thoughts, behaviors, and feelings as a result of being part of the same relational unit. Furthermore, these individuals are also considered interdependent, in that each partner in the dyad exerts some degree of influence on the other in terms of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Because of the homogeneity and interdependence of this data, statistical techniques that can account for the nonindependence of these observations were used.

Multilevel modeling accounts for nonindependence of data by estimating variance at both the level of the individual and the couple, and it has become a preferred method for analyzing dyadic data (Campbell & Kashy, 2002; Kenny & Cook, 1999). In this study, level one included the individuals' data and level two contained the couples or dyads. In this way, individual observations for each partner (level one) were nested within each couple (level two). Multilevel modeling (MLM) allows for simultaneous estimation of between-

and within-person effects and their interaction (Reis & Gable, 2000). In addition, MLM can test multiple continuous predictors and account for missing data (Reis & Gable, 2000). Mixed models in SPSS Version 22 were used to estimate multilevel models of the couples' data. For hypotheses one, three, five, and seven, multilevel models with level 1 (i.e., individual perceptions of couple identity, individual perceptions of identity gaps) and level 2 predictors (i.e., writing task condition) were estimated to predict partners' perceptions of stress, anxiety, and negativity of the conflict discussion. For hypotheses two, four, six, and eight, dyadic growth curve modeling was used to examine the influence of the predictors on partners' cortisol and sAA response and recovery patterns to the discussion task. For all of these analyses, the dyad was considered a level two variable. Dyadic growth curve analysis is based on a combination of the over-time and dyadic data structures (Kashy & Donnellan, 2012). The repeated measures cortisol data are assumed to follow a pattern of reactivity and recovery, making a dyadic growth curve modeling approach appropriate (Laurent & Powers, 2006).

Data Preparation

To prepare data for analysis, reliabilities for the variables of interest were checked and then composite variables were formed. In addition, the predictor and control variables were grand mean centered based on male and female sample means. Centering variables is important when conducting MLM. Grand mean centering the predictor variable rescales the variable such that the sample (grand) mean is subtracted from every score, regardless of group membership (Preacher, Zyphur, & Zhang, 2010). Because the data for cortisol and sAA variables demonstrated skew statistics over 1.0 (indicating substantial positive skew), these variables were also transformed using a natural log transformation. Dummy coded

variables (0 and 1) were created to distinguish between male and female intercepts (Kashy & Donnellan, 2008).

Preliminary Analyses

The means and standard deviations for the variables of interest for men and women are presented in Table 3. On average, partners reported moderately high perceptions of couple identity, low perceptions of intra- and extra-relationship identity gaps, and low to moderate levels of conflict anxiety, stress, and negativity. Tables 4 and 5 provide correlations for the variables for men and women. As expected, perceptions of couple identity were negatively associated with the two types of couple identity gaps (intra- and extra-relationship gaps) for both men and women. Perceptions of couple identity were only associated with perceived negativity during the conflict discussion task – such that when partners had higher perceptions of couple identity, the less negatively they perceived their interaction during the discussion task. This association was only significant for men however. For women, perceptions of intra-relationship identity gaps were positively associated with perceptions of anxiety, stress, and negativity during the discussion task. Perceptions of extra-relationship gaps were positively associated with anxiety during the conflict discussion task for women. For men, both types of couple identity gaps were positively related to their perceptions of stress and negativity.

Multiple manipulation checks were used to determine differences in relationship-focus versus self-focus between conditions one and two. The linguistic implications form (Wegner & Giuliano, 1980; see Appendix) – a sentence completion task involving pronoun choice – was used to test for differences in self- versus relational-focus after the couple identity and individual identity writing tasks. Unfortunately, pronoun choice differences did

not emerge between condition one and condition two. In fact, the modal pronoun choice (regardless of whether it was first-person singular or first-person plural) was the same for 21 out of 22 sentence completion items between the two conditions. This indicated that participants did not complete the sentences with different pronouns after writing about their relationship or themselves as individuals, and that rather, participants completed sentences quite uniformly. The fact that this manipulation check failed to detect differences between conditions suggested that there may not be differences in self- versus relational-focus across conditions. However, it could be possible that the linguistic implications form was not an appropriate manipulation check to test the efficacy of the couple identity and individual identity writing primes.

Measures in the post-discussion questionnaire were also used as additional manipulation checks of differences across condition. Specifically, if participants in the couple identity priming condition (condition one) were more relationally-focused, this orientation should evidence itself in greater perceptions of couple identity, relationship optimism (Murray & Holmes, 1999), and communal coping (Afifi et al., 2006) and fewer perceptions of couple identity gaps. To test these outcomes, multilevel models were estimated using two separate dummy-coded variables to represent the conditions. One dummy-coded variable represented condition one (i.e., couple identity prime) as 1 and all other conditions as 0. The second dummy coded variable represented condition two (i.e., individual identity prime) as 1 and all other conditions as 0. Each dummy variable was entered into the model separately. When an outcome variable was also measured at time one, the time one variable was included in the model as a control variable.

Different results emerged for men and women, but overall demonstrated more negative outcomes in condition two (individual identity prime) relative to condition one (couple identity prime) or three (control). For women, the individual identity prime was slightly associated with lower communal coping (B = -.18, SE = .13, t = -.1.39, p = .16) and lower perceptions of relationship optimism (B = -.22, SE - .12, t = -1.86, p = .07). For men, the individual identity prime was associated with lower perceptions of relationship optimism (B = -.20, SE - .12, t = -1.67, p = .10) and greater perceptions of extra-relationship gaps (B = -.22, SE = .13, t = -1.63, p = .10). In addition to finding that the individual identity prime was associated with more negative outcomes, results also revealed that the couple identity prime was associated with more positive outcomes. For example, when controlling for perceptions of couple identity at time one, the couple identity prime was associated with greater perceptions of couple identity for women (B = .14, SE = .09, t = 1.56, p = .12). The results of these tests reveal that despite the failure of the sentence completion task as a manipulation check, important differences in other identity-related constructs did emerge between conditions one and two consistent with predictions.

Hypothesis One: Couple Identity and Perceptions of Conflict

Hypothesis one predicted that partners' perceptions of their couple identity would be negatively associated with reported negativity during the discussion task. Models were conducted separately for each outcome – anxiety, stress, and negativity. When testing models for hypothesis one, pre-discussion anxiety and pre-discussion stress (measured on the conflict topic listing sheet) were included as control variables in their respective models where time two anxiety and time two stress were considered (there was no prior measure of conflict negativity).

For the estimates of the full models, see Table 6. Controlling for pre-discussion self-reported anxiety, the association between perceptions of couple identity and anxiety during the conflict was not significant for men or for women. When controlling for pre-discussion stress, perceptions of couple identity were inversely associated with post-discussion perceptions of stress for men at the 0.07 level. This association was not significant for women. Finally, perceptions of couple identity were inversely associated with conflict negativity and this was significant for men and women. Overall, higher perceptions of couple identity are associated with decreased perceptions of negativity during conflict for both men and women, and it appears that higher perceptions of couple identity may also be slightly linked to men's decreased stress during conflict. In sum, hypothesis H1a was not supported, H1b was partially support for men, and H1c was supported for both men and women.

Hypothesis Two: Couple Identity and sAA and Cortisol Responses

Hypothesis two stated that partners who have stronger perceptions of their couple identity will have a) lower baseline cortisol and sAA levels, b) less cortisol and sAA reactivity and c) have quicker cortisol and sAA recovery than partners who have weaker perceptions of their couple identity. The following equation was used to model curvilinear growth in cortisol and sAA for the dyads:

$$Yij = \beta flj(\text{female intercept})ij + \beta f2j(\text{female linear})ij + \beta f3j(\text{female quadratic})ij + \beta m4j(\text{male intercept})ij + \beta m5j(\text{male linear})ij + \beta m6j(\text{male quadratic})ij + eij$$

Yij is the cortisol score i for couple j, with i = sAA (and cortisol) time points and j = 1 . . .115 couples. Male and female trajectories were modeled separately within each couple at Level 1. Grouping individual growth trajectories within a dyad allows researchers to

examine gender differences while accounting for the interdependent nature of the partners' data (Laurent & Powers, 2006; Kashy & Donnellan, 2008). Separate dummy codes for men and women were entered into the models simultaneously to create a male intercept and a female intercept (Kashy & Donnellan, 2008, 2012). As a result, traditional intercepts were not included in the models.

The dummy variables were crossed with linear and quadratic time to estimate separate slopes for men and women. Quadratic time was included in these models because the cortisol stress response typically follows a quadratic trajectory over time (Laurent & Powers, 2006). Participants were expected to experience a cortisol reaction immediately after the conversation at time two (given that they were likely reacting during the task itself) and/or 15 minutes later during time three (given that cortisol tends to peak 15 minutes after a stressor). Given that sAA responds quickly to an acute stressor, participants should likely have a response immediately after the discussion task (time two). Finally, participants should experience recovery in sAA at time three and cortisol at time four. Baseline scores (time one) started at 0, linear time was coded then as 0, 1, 2, and 3, and quadratic time (time*time) was coded as 0, 1, 4, and 9. Quadratic time gives information about change (i.e., acceleration or deceleration) in linear time (Hoffman, 2014). A quadratic slope function can either make the linear slope more positive, less positive, more negative, or less negative.

The first part of hypothesis two stated that perceptions of couple identity will predict baseline cortisol and sAA levels. Before adding couple identity as a predictor in the model, unconditional models for cortisol and sAA were estimated and revealed that both men (cortisol: $\beta = 2.03$, SE = .06, $t = 31.64$, $p < .001$; sAA: $\beta = 4.51$, SE = .06, $t = 70.03$, $p <$

.001) and women (cortisol: β = 1.95, SE = .06, t = 34.74, $p < .001$; sAA: β = 4.60, SE = .07, t = 67.38, $p < .001$) varied significantly in their baseline cortisol and sAA levels. Men and women showed similar average cortisol levels at baseline. Next, separate conditional models were tested with perception of couple identity as the predictor of baseline cortisol and sAA. The results for the cortisol model revealed that perceptions of couple identity were not predictive of men's (β = -.03, SE = .07, t = -.43, $p = .67$) or women's baseline cortisol levels (β = -.05, SE = .07, t = -.80, $p = .43$). Similarly, perceptions of couple identity were not related to men's (β = -.06, SE = .07, t = .81, $p = .42$) or women's baseline sAA levels (β = -.05, SE = .08, t = -.60, $p = .55$). Hypothesis 2a was not supported.

In order to examine cortisol response and recovery, an unconditional model was tested first to determine whether there was significant variability in cortisol for men and women. (see Table 7). The unconditional model revealed that there were significant variation in cortisol on average for both men and women (i.e., significant variation in men's and women's intercepts for cortisol), and significant variation in rate of change for women's cortisol. While women's cortisol appeared to follow a quadratic trajectory, men's cortisol followed a slightly linear trajectory (linear time for men was only approaching significance). The covariance of men's and women's cortisol intercepts was significant, meaning that men's and women's baseline cortisol levels were significantly correlated. However, the covariance of the slopes was not significant, suggesting that the cortisol slopes (i.e., rate of change) for men and women were not significantly correlated. The covariance of women's intercepts and slopes was significant, indicating that women's rate of change in cortisol over time was correlated to their baseline levels. Similarly, the covariance of men's intercepts

and slopes was significant, indicating that their cortisol trajectory was correlated to their baseline levels.

Next, the hypothesized model was tested including partners' perceptions of couple identity as predictors of cortisol response and recovery. Model results (see Table 8) indicate that perceptions of couple identity did not significantly predict linear or quadratic changes in men's and women's cortisol over the course of the study. Average cortisol levels at each time point for men and women based on a mean split of their perceptions of couple identity are graphed in Figure 1. While women with lower couple identity perceptions have a slightly higher peak in cortisol in response to the conflict discussion (time two), the overall cortisol trajectories for men and women appear to have similar, gradual declining patterns. In sum, hypothesis two is unsupported for cortisol response and recovery.

The unconditional model for sAA (see Table 7) revealed that there were significant variation in sAA on average and over time for both men and women (i.e., significant variation in intercepts and slopes for sAA). Both linear and quadratic time functions for sAA were significant for both men and women. Furthermore, men and women exhibited significant variance in their sAA intercepts, but not in their slopes. Finally, within-person and between-person covariances were not significant, indicating that individuals' intercepts did not impact their rate of change as well as that men's and women's intercept and slopes for sAA were not correlated.

Next, the conditional model with perceptions of couple identity as a predictor of sAA response and recovery was tested. The results (see Table 8) revealed that perceptions of couple identity predicted men's quadratic trajectory in sAA, but only at the 0.09 level. Figure 2 depicts that sAA levels are higher for with greater perceptions of couple identity,

and that they experience a higher peak in sAA immediately after the discussion task. Perceptions of couple identity did not significantly predict women's sAA trajectory. Overall, hypothesis two is unsupported, although the data suggest that men's perceptions of couple identity may influence their sAA response during a conflict inducing task.

Hypothesis 3: Couple Identity Prime and Perceptions of Conflict

Hypothesis three predicted that partners who engage in a couple identity writing task prior to conflict will experience less perceived stress, anxiety, and negativity during a conflict-inducing interaction than partners who engage in an individual identity writing task or those who do not engage in any writing task prior to conflict. In order to test this hypothesis, dummy variables were created to distinguish between conditions. One dummy-coded variable represented condition one (i.e., couple identity prime) as 1 and all other conditions as 0. The second dummy coded variable represented condition two (i.e., individual identity prime) as 1 and all other conditions as 0. Control variables for pre-discussion anxiety and stress were used in the models testing conflict anxiety and conflict stress.

Model results revealed that neither the couple identity prime (condition one) nor individual identity prime (condition two) significantly influenced partners' perceptions of anxiety, stress, or negativity associated with their conflict discussion (see Table 9). Follow-up analyses of variance were conducted for men and women by condition. While there were lower means for stress and negativity for men in condition one compared to condition two ($stress^1$ M = 2.51, $stress^2$ M = 2.87, $negativity^1$ M = 2.33, $negativity^2$ M = 2.61) and lower means for women's negativity in condition one compared to condition two ($negativity^1$ M =

2.52, negativity[2] M = 3.00), ANOVA results revealed that these differences were not statistically significant. Therefore, hypothesis three is not supported.

Hypothesis 4: Couple Identity Prime and sAA and Cortisol Responses

Hypothesis four stated that partners who engage in a couple identity writing task (condition one) prior to conflict will have less cortisol and sAA reactivity and have quicker cortisol and sAA recovery than partners who engage in an individual identity writing task (condition two) or those who do not engage in any writing task (condition three) prior to conflict. Dyadic growth curve modeling was used to test how priming in the two conditions may have influenced participants' sAA and cortisol responses.

First, the model for the couple identity prime (condition one relative to other conditions) and cortisol response was tested. Results showed that the condition one significantly predicted men's linear cortisol responses, but not women's cortisol responses (see Table 10). As a result, men's cortisol data were graphed by condition (see Figure 3). The cortisol trajectories for men in condition one (couple identity prime) and condition two (individual identity prime) were different. Men's cortisol levels gradually declined over the course of the study in condition two, whereas men's cortisol evidenced a slight peak in response to the conflict discussion followed by a gradual decline in condition one. While men in both condition one and condition two had almost identical baseline cortisol levels, men in condition one experienced a slight peak in cortisol in response to the conflict discussion and men in the other two conditions did not.

The model for couple identity prime predicting sAA response did not reveal significant effects for men or women. However, a main effect for condition one (couple identity prime) was approaching significance for women only (see Table 10). As depicted in

Figure 4, the graph of men and women's sAA response by condition revealed that in general, participants' sAA trajectories followed a similar pattern (peaking at time 2 and recovering). However, women in condition one had more elevated sAA levels on average throughout the study (baseline, response, and recovery) compared to other conditions.

Overall, the hypothesized effects of the primes (couple identity vs. individual identity) on cortisol and sAA response was unsupported. Women in condition one had higher sAA levels consistently over the course of the study, although the pattern of their sAA trajectory was similar to those in other conditions. However, the results for women were only approaching significance and cannot be reliably attributed the effects of the priming task, given that baseline sAA levels for women appeared to be different for condition one compared to the other conditions (i.e., *before* they took part in the priming task). Therefore, hypothesis four did not receive support for women. For men, the significant effect of condition on cortisol was different than hypothesized; while men in condition one were hypothesized to have less cortisol reactivity to the conflict discussion than men in the other two conditions, it was men in condition one (couple identity prime) who evidenced a cortisol response to the conflict discussion and not the men in the other two conditions (individual identity prime or control). While the cortisol response for men in the couple identity prime condition was slight and followed a pattern that would be considered a normal cortisol response to a stressor, the fact that the men in the other two conditions did not experience a similar elevated pattern (instead these men did not exhibit cortisol reactivity to the task) indicates that hypothesis four is unsupported for men.

Hypothesis 5: Couple Identity and Prime Interaction on Perceptions of Conflict

Hypothesis five proposed that there would be an interaction between partners' perceptions of their couple identity and being primed with couple identity on stress, anxiety, and negativity during a conflict-inducing interaction. Separate models were tested for each condition dummy-coded variable predicting the three outcome variables, resulting in six models total. Of the six models (see Table 11), no significant interaction effects for couple identity perceptions and conditions on perceptions of anxiety, stress, and negativity were found. Given the lack of significant interaction effects, hypothesis five was unsupported.

Hypothesis 6: Couple Identity and Prime Interaction on sAA and Cortisol Responses

Hypothesis six stated that there would be an interaction between individuals' perceptions of couple identity and being primed with couple identity (condition one) on their cortisol and sAA reactivity and recovery in response to a conflict discussion. Separate models were tested for each condition and for cortisol and sAA trajectories, resulting in six models total. Testing the models for condition one (see Table 12) and condition two (see Table 13), no significant interaction effects were found for cortisol or sAA. However, the effect for men's sAA response was approaching significance in the models for condition one and condition two. Figures 5 and 6 show sAA trajectories across conditions for men who have higher and men who have lower couple identity perceptions based on a mean split of the data (M = 5.24). Men who have higher couple identity perceptions appear to have higher sAA levels and a higher peak in sAA in response to the conflict discussion when in condition two (individual identity prime) compared to the other conditions.

When testing models for condition three (Table 14), no significant effects were found for sAA, but effects for cortisol were significant for men and approaching significance for women. Figures 7 and 8 depict cortisol trajectories by condition for men

with higher and lower couple identity perceptions based on a mean split of the data. Men with lower couple identity perceptions evidence different cortisol trajectories depending on their condition. Specifically, men with lower couple identity perceptions in conditions one (couple identity prime) and three (control) had higher cortisol levels at each time point than men in condition two (individual identity prime), as well as reacted slightly to the conflict discussion. However, men in condition two with similarly low couple identity perceptions evidenced a gradual, linear decline in cortisol with no cortisol reactivity.

Figures 9 and 10 depict cortisol trajectories by condition for women with higher and lower couple identity perceptions based on a mean split of the data (M = 5.03). Women with higher couple identity perceptions in condition one (couple identity prime) had higher baseline cortisol levels than women in the other two conditions (individual identity prime, control). The differences in cortisol slopes for women with higher couple identity perceptions cannot be reliably attributed the effects of the priming task itself, given that baseline cortisol levels for women appeared to be different for condition one compared to the other conditions. However, women with lower couple identity perceptions did differ slightly in their cortisol trajectories based on condition. While women with lower couple identity perceptions in conditions two and three exhibited slight cortisol reactivity in response to the conflict discussion (and then quick recovery), women with lower couple identity perceptions in condition one did not recover as quickly post-task.

Overall, the results showed that the interaction between condition and couple identity perceptions did not significantly affect women's sAA responses, but was approaching significance for men. Although most men exhibit relatively similar sAA trajectory patterns, men with higher couple identity perceptions who were primed with individual identity

appeared to have a higher sAA reaction that those in other condition or those with lower couple identity perceptions (however, their sAA levels recovered quickly like other men). For cortisol, the condition appeared to influence men who have lower couple identity perceptions, such that these men did not experience cortisol reactivity when in condition two, but did in condition one (and three). Furthermore, women with lower couple identity perceptions in condition one had slower cortisol recovery post-conflict than did women with similarly low couple identity perceptions in conditions two and three. Women with higher couple identity perceptions had more elevated cortisol levels overall in condition one than when in conditions two and three, which is counter to the hypothesized pattern. However, this is likely due the elevated baseline cortisol for these women specifically. The results for this hypothesis reveal that, although some of the effects were approaching significance, the type of prime appeared to affect men's sAA and cortisol depending upon their perceptions of couple identity. Hypothesis 6 was partially supported.

Hypothesis 7: Couple Identity Gaps and Perceptions of Conflict

Hypothesis seven predicted that partners' perceptions of couple identity gaps would be positively associated with perceptions of stress, anxiety, and negativity during conflict. Models were tested separately for each outcome. Since the study measured two types of couple identity gaps – intra- and extra-relationship gaps – separate models were tested for each of these predictors, resulting in a total of six models. When testing models for hypothesis seven, pre-discussion measures of anxiety and stressfulness were included as control variables. Model results are presented in Table 15.

Intra-Relationship Couple Identity Gaps. When controlling for pre-discussion anxiety of the conflict topic, intra-relationship gaps were positively associated with anxiety

during the conflict discussion. This association was significant for men and approaching significance for women at the 0.06 level. While controlling for pre-discussion stress associated with the conflict topic, intra-relationship gaps was positively associated with stress during the conflict discussion task for both men and women, but these associations were only approaching significance ($p = 0.08$ and $p = 0.09$ respectively). Finally, intra-relationship gaps were positively associated with perceived negativity of the conflict discussion. This effect was significant for women and approaching significance for men at the 0.09 level. Overall, the results suggest that greater perceptions of intra-relationship gaps are associated with higher anxiety, stress, and negativity during conflict for men and women.

Extra-Relationship Couple Identity Gaps. When controlling for pre-discussion anxiety of the conflict topic, extra-relationship gaps were positively associated with anxiety during the conflict discussion. This association was significant for men and approaching significance for women ($p = 0.06$). When controlling for pre-discussion stress associated with the conflict topic, extra-relationship gap was positively associated with stress during the conflict but only for men and not for women. Finally, extra-relationship gaps were positively associated with perceived negativity of the conflict discussion. This effect was significant of women and approaching significance for men ($p = 0.07$). In sum, greater perceptions of extra-relationship gaps was associated with higher perceived anxiety and negativity for men and women, and higher perceived stress for men during conflict. Although some of the relationships were approaching significance depending on partner sex, each test in these models was supported in the hypothesized direction for at least one partner, providing support for hypothesis seven.

Hypothesis 8: Couple Identity Gaps and sAA and Cortisol Responses

Hypothesis eight stated that partners who perceive greater couple identity gaps will experience more cortisol and sAA reactivity and delayed cortisol and sAA recovery after the conflict task. Because two types of couple identity gaps were measures, separate models were tested for each of these predictors, resulting in four models total.

Intra-Relationship Couple Identity Gaps. The results for the model testing intra-relationship gaps predicting cortisol response and recovery revealed that no significant associations. For men, however, the association between intra-relationship gap perceptions and cortisol response over time was approaching significance ($p = 0.10$; see Table 16). To follow-up on this finding, cortisol data were graphed based on a mean split of men's perceptions of intra-relationship gaps (M = 2.61). The graph (see Figure 11) of the data shows that men with lower perceptions of intra-relationship gaps experienced higher cortisol levels throughout the study than did men with higher perceptions of intra-relationship gaps. However, both groups of men appear to exhibit gradual declines in cortisol over time. This finding, although only approaching significance, is inconsistent with the hypothesis that those with higher perceptions of intra-relationship gaps would experience higher cortisol reactivity in response to the conflict than those with lower gap perceptions.

Model results for intra-relationship gap perceptions predicting sAA response and recovery did not find significant relationships. These data do not support the prediction that perceptions of intra-relationship gaps would predict sAA trajectories.

Extra-Relationship Couple Identity Gaps. The results for extra-relationship couple identity gaps showed that the association with cortisol was significant, but only for women (see Table 17). To follow-up with this finding, cortisol data were graphed based on

a mean split of women's perceptions of extra-relationship gaps (M = 2.32; see Figure 12). The graph of these data showed that women with higher perceptions of extra-relationship gaps had higher levels of cortisol than did women with lower perceptions of extra-relationship gaps, and that these higher levels were sustained over time. This pattern is consistent with the prediction that those with higher perceptions of extra-relationship gaps would experience higher levels of cortisol than those with lower gap perceptions. Furthermore, although the model results did not show significant effects for extra-relationship gaps for men's cortisol levels over time (linear or quadratic), there was a significant effect of extra-relationship gaps on men's baseline cortisol levels. Men with higher perceptions of extra-relationship gaps had higher cortisol levels at the start of the study compared to men with lower perceptions of extra-relationship gaps (see Figure 12). Cortisol levels declined for these men over the course of the study to levels similar to men with lower perceptions of extra-relationship gaps.

The fourth model was tested to determine how extra-relationship gap perceptions influence sAA response and recovery. Model results revealed that perceptions of extra-relationship gaps were significantly associated with sAA change over time, but for women only. As a result, sAA data were graphed based on a mean split of women's perceptions of extra-relationship gaps (see Figure 13). The graph of these data show that women with higher perceptions of extra-relationship gaps had higher levels of sAA initially and a higher peak in sAA immediately after the conflict discussion than did women with lower perceptions of extra-relationship gaps.

Overall, hypothesis eight was partially supported in that perceptions of intra-relationship gaps predicted men's cortisol response and recovery (although this was only

approaching significance) and perceptions of extra-relationship gaps predicted women's cortisol and sAA response and recovery as well as men's baseline cortisol levels. These results suggest that the type of couple identity gaps are associated with different patterns of women's and men's biological stress response.

Hypothesis 9: CID Gaps and Prime Interaction on Perceptions of Conflict

Hypothesis nine predicted that there would be an interaction between partners' perceptions of couple identity gaps and being primed with couple identity on perceived stress, anxiety, and negativity during a conflict-inducing interaction. In order to assess the presence and nature of this interaction effect, separate models with the each identity gap variable interacting with the type of prime to predict the three conflict outcome variables were tested, resulting in six models for condition one and six models for condition two.

Intra-Relationship Couple Identity Gaps and Couple Identity Prime. Model results are presented in Table 18. When testing the interaction between condition one (or the couple identity prime) and perceptions of intra-relationship gaps, the effect on anxiety was approaching significance for men ($p = .10$), but no significant effects were found for men's stress or negativity. The interaction between condition one and perceptions of intra-relationship gaps on the conflict outcomes were not significant for women.

Follow-up analyses were conducted to investigate the nature of the interaction effect for anxiety by comparing men across conditions with higher and lower perceptions of intra-relationship gaps based upon a mean split of the data (M = 2.61). Figure 14 shows that overall, men with lower intra-relationship gap perceptions experience less anxiety than men with higher intra-relationship gap perceptions – except when in condition two (individual identity prime). Being in condition two for men with lower intra-relationship gap

perceptions was predictive of higher self-reported anxiety during the discussion than when men with similarly low gap perceptions were in conditions one (couple identity prime) or three (control). In other words, being primed with an individual identity frame compared to a couple identity frame or the control (no prime) appears to slightly increase men's anxiety, but only if they have low intra-relationship gap perceptions. Interestingly, the reverse was true for men with higher intra-relationship gap perceptions. Being in condition two (individual identity prime) for these men resulted in lower conflict anxiety relative to men with similarly high gap perceptions in conditions one and three. Therefore, the effect of the type of prime (individual or couple) impacted men's anxiety during the discussion differently depending on their perceptions of intra-relationship gaps (although this effect was only approaching significance).

Intra-Relationship Couple Identity Gaps and Individual Identity Prime. When testing the interaction between condition two (individual identity prime) and perceptions of intra-relationship gaps, no significant interaction effects were found for partners' perceptions of anxiety, stress, or negativity.

Extra-Relationship Couple Identity Gaps. Model results are presented in Table 19. No significant interaction effects were found for men or women when testing the interaction between condition two (or the individual identity prime) and perceptions of extra-relationship gaps. Similarly, no significant interaction effects were found for men or women when testing the interaction between condition one (or the couple identity prime) and perceptions of extra-relationship gaps. However, an interaction effect was approaching significance for men's anxiety. Follow-up analyses were conducted to investigate the nature of this interaction effect by comparing men across conditions with higher and lower

perceptions of extra-relationship gaps based upon a mean split of the data (M = 2.52). Figure 16 shows that for men in condition two relative to the other two conditions, conflict anxiety levels were different based on their perceptions of extra-relationship gaps. Specifically, men with higher extra-relationship gap perceptions experienced slightly less anxiety during conflict in condition two compared to conditions one and three. Furthermore, this interaction was reversed for men with lower extra-relationship gap perceptions, such that these men experienced slightly more anxiety during conflict in condition two compared to conditions one and three. Therefore, while this interaction was only approaching significance and overall anxiety levels were quite low across the entire sample, it seems as though the effect of the type of prime on men's anxiety during the discussion is dependent in part upon perceptions of extra-relationship gaps.

Hypothesis 10: CID Gaps and Prime Interaction on sAA and Cortisol Responses

Hypothesis ten stated that there would be an interaction between partners' perceptions of couple identity gaps and being primed with couple identity on cortisol and sAA reactivity and recovery. In order to test for the presence and nature of this interaction effect, separate models for each condition were tested with the two identity gap variables to predict the sAA and cortisol variables, resulting in twelve models total (separate models for two predictors and two outcomes across three conditions).

Intra-Relationship Gap Perceptions. Out of all six models testing intra-relationship gap perceptions on cortisol and sAA, a significant effect for men's cortisol trajectories in condition one (couple identity prime) was found. Table 20 provides model estimates for intra-relationship gaps on cortisol in condition one. Figure 17 shows the cortisol trajectories for men with high and low intra-relationship gap perceptions across

conditions. While some men did not evidence a typical cortisol response to the conflict task (i.e., men with high gap perceptions in conditions two and three and men with low gap perceptions in condition two and three), men in condition one, regardless of intra-relationship gap perceptions evidenced a slight cortisol response to the conflict. While men with higher intra-relationship gap perceptions in condition one had a slight cortisol response at time two, their cortisol levels began to recover at time three and four. However, cortisol levels for men with lower perceptions of intra-relationship gaps in condition one appear sustained until time four, indicating a slightly slower recovery for this group.

Also, effects for intra-relationship gaps in condition three for women's cortisol and men's and women's sAA trajectories emerged and were approaching significance. Table 21 displays the model results for cortisol and sAA in condition three. Figure 18 displays women's cortisol trajectories by condition and based on a mean-split of their intra-relationship gap scores. As the graph shows, women with lower perceptions of intra-relationship gaps in condition one had the highest cortisol levels throughout the study overall, which is inconsistent with predictions. Overall, most women evidenced slight to no cortisol reactivity in response to the conflict task, with fairly stable, slightly decreasing cortisol levels over time.

In order to determine the nature of the effects for sAA, men and women's sAA data were graphed by condition and based on a mean split of their intra-relationship gap scores. As Figure 19 shows, most women exhibited a peak in sAA in response to the conflict discussion and quickly recovered to lower levels of sAA. However, women with high intra-relationship gap perceptions in conditions one and three had less reactivity to the task from their baseline levels, yet more sustained levels of sAA over time. In fact, women with

higher intra-relationship gap perceptions in condition one have slight increases in sAA from time one to time three. Finally, as was the case with cortisol trajectories, women with lower intra-relationship gap perceptions in condition one evidenced higher levels of sAA overall.

Finally, men's sAA trajectories are graphed in Figure 20. Most men evidenced a similar peak and recover in sAA as that of women's sAA. In condition one, men with higher perceptions of intra-relationship gaps experienced higher levels of sAA at each time point compared to men with lower intra-relationship gap perceptions. However, the reverse pattern appeared in condition two: men with lower intra-relationship gap perceptions exhibited higher sAA at times one and two than men with higher intra-relationship gap perceptions.

Overall, effects of condition and perceptions of intra-relationship gaps on cortisol showed that men in condition one relative to other conditions exhibited a slight cortisol response to the conflict. Of these men, however, those with higher intra-relationship gap perceptions recovered quicker than those with lower intra-relationship gap perceptions. Overall though, men in condition one did not experience cortisol levels markedly different from men in other conditions. Interestingly, women with lower intra-relationship gap perceptions in condition one experienced higher levels of cortisol and sAA overall throughout the study, which was counter to the hypothesized pattern. Only women with higher intra-relationship gap perceptions in condition one experienced sustained sAA reactivity to the task and slower sAA recovery. And while some of these effects were only approaching significance, it appears as though men's sAA responses depend in part upon the interaction between their intra-relationship perceptions and condition. Although the interaction effect of condition and perceptions of intra-relationship gaps appears to

inconsistent for men and women in terms of their cortisol and sAA responses, the results provide tentative support for the possibility of an interaction effect between prime and gap perceptions but that men and women likely experience this interaction differently.

Extra-Relationship Gap Perceptions. Of all six models testing extra-relationship gap perceptions on cortisol and sAA, significant effects were found for cortisol trajectories in condition one (for women and approaching significance for men), condition two (both men and women), and condition three (for men only). Also, significant effects for sAA trajectories were found for women in condition three and an effect for women was approaching significance in condition two. Tables 22, 23, and 24 present the model results for the conditions one, two, and three respectively.

In order to determine the nature of the effects on cortisol, men's and women's cortisol data were graphed by condition and based on a mean split of their perceptions of extra-relationship gaps. As Figure 21 shows, women with high extra-relationship gap perceptions in condition one exhibited the highest levels of cortisol overall over the course of the study, and these levels did not decline until about forty minutes after the conflict. In contrast, women with lower extra-relationship gap perceptions in condition one experienced relatively low and stable cortisol levels over the course of the study and did not react to the conflict discussion. Furthermore, in condition two, women with higher extra-relationship gap perceptions experienced a slight peak in cortisol in response to the conflict, whereas women with lower gap perceptions did not exhibit a cortisol response. As far as men's cortisol, Figure 22 shows that men's cortisol trajectories were similar overall. Men in condition one with higher perceptions of extra-relationship gaps exhibited higher cortisol levels at time one and two than men with similarly high gap perceptions in conditions two

and three. Furthermore, men with lower gap perceptions in condition two appeared to lack any cortisol response over the course of the study (i.e., linear decline in cortisol).

In order to examine the nature of the effects of condition and extra-relationship gaps on sAA trajectories, women's and men's sAA data were graphed (see Figures 23 and 24 respectively). For women with higher extra-relationship gap perceptions, sAA levels peaked highest and maintained high levels when these women were in condition one (couple identity prime). This result suggests that the couple identity prime hurts, rather than helps, women's sAA when they have high perceptions of extra-relationship gaps. Women with lower perceptions of extra-relationship gaps in condition one also experienced relatively high sAA levels at time one and two, but quickly recovered at time three. When in condition two, women with higher perceptions of extra-relationship gaps also had higher sAA peaks in this condition than women with lower perceptions of extra-relationship gaps who were also in condition two. So while it is not necessarily evident that the couple identity prime benefited women with already low perceptions of extra-relationship gaps in terms of their sAA response, it does seem to be the case the women with higher extra-relationship gap perceptions experience higher sAA levels than women with low gap perceptions overall *and* particularly when primed with couple identity.

Finally, when examining men's sAA trajectories (Figure 24), men appear to peak in sAA immediately after the conflict discussion, with quick recoveries back to baseline levels (or lower) at time three. However, men with lower extra-relationship gap perceptions in condition two exhibited the highest sAA response at time two, unlike men in conditions one and three with similarly low gap perceptions. Although men with lower gap perceptions in condition two had higher sAA baseline levels to begin with, their sAA levels were higher

over the course of the study as well, which may be attributed to the individual identity prime. Interestingly, men with higher extra-relationship gap perceptions in condition two exhibited relatively low levels of sAA overall and only a slight peak in sAA at time two. This is contrasted by men with higher extra-relationship gap perceptions in condition one who experienced higher sAA levels. Overall, in the control condition (when given no prime), men with higher extra-relationship gap perceptions experienced higher sAA levels overall than men with lower extra-relationship gap perceptions. However, as noted, the type of condition appeared to interact with these men's existing gap perceptions to affect their sAA levels, such that condition two (individual identity prime) elevated men's sAA with lower gap perceptions and lowered men's sAA with higher gap perceptions.

In sum, the results revealed support for an interaction effect of condition and extra-relationship gap perceptions on men and women's cortisol and sAA. Specifically, women with higher extra-relationship gap perceptions experienced relatively high levels of cortisol and sAA overall, but particularly when in condition one (couple identity prime). Men with higher extra-relationship gap perceptions in condition one also tended to exhibit higher cortisol and sAA levels overall than other men with similarly high gap perceptions in other conditions. Interestingly, the aforementioned effects of extra-relationship gaps and condition appeared to be stronger for women than for men, suggesting that this specific type of gap may make women more physiologically aroused or stressed during conflict with a partner.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

The current investigation extended knowledge on the role of couple identity and couple identity gaps in couples' conflict and stress management. It was predicted that those partners who perceived high levels of couple identity would experience comparatively less anxiety, stress (self-reported and physiological), and negativity during conflict-inducing interactions than partners who have lower couple identity perceptions. However, the results revealed that, in fact, individuals' perceptions of couple identity were not strongly linked to these stress and conflict outcomes, with the exception of the association with perceptions of negativity. There were also mixed results for the proposed interactions between perceptions of couple identity and the type of prime (couple identity versus individual identity) on the conflict and stress outcomes (the following section elaborates upon these findings). The marginal findings for perceptions of couple identity, however, become clearer when understanding the findings for perceptions of couple identity gaps.

Perceptions of couple identity gaps (intra-relationship and extra-relationship gaps) were associated with greater anxiety, stress, and negativity during the conflict discussion, as well as heightened cortisol and sAA reactivity – in general and often depending upon condition. While individuals' perceptions of couple identity arguably are important for relational well-being (c.f., Acitelli et al., 1999; Badr et al., 2007; Reid et al., 2006; Stanley & Markman, 1992), the results of this investigation highlight that these individual perceptions can be undermined if the relationship lacks between-partner consistency or agreement in these views. Merely perceiving that a partner does not share the same view of the relationship (intra-relationship gap) or does not communicate to others in a way to

accurately reflect the relationship (extra-relationship gap) seems to negatively impact effective conflict management. The increased explanatory power of couple identity gaps relative to perceptions of couple identity is consistent with other research on close relationships that demonstrates more powerful effects for negative behaviors and cognitions than for positive, pro-relationship behaviors. Researchers have noted that the increased power of negativity, or "negative potency," is that individuals' subjective evaluations and experiences of negative events are more potent and salient than positive events of equal objective magnitude (e.g., Rozin & Royzman, 2001). For example, Kiecolt-Glaser et al. (1993) found that negative and hostile conflict behaviors were tied to weakened immunological markers and elevated blood pressure in couples over a 24-hour period, whereas positive and supportive conflict behaviors had no association with these physical outcomes. Similarly the current study revealed that some pro-relationship predictors may not be as powerful at predicting stress outcomes from conflict as are those that tap into problematic thoughts and behaviors in the relationship. As such, future research on couple identity processes should capture not only individual partners' perceptions of couple identity, but also their perceptions of agreement or consistency in this identity between self and partner.

This study demonstrated the utility in examining partners' perceptions of couple identity gaps as a predictor of conflict and stress management. A significant contribution of this research is that it successfully translated CTI's (Hecht, 1993) theoretical concept of an identity gap from an individual level to a relational level. Previous research on identity gaps have only tested the effects of these gaps within individuals and frames of their *individual* identity, whereas the current investigation explored the possibility of identity gaps between

relational partners regarding their joint *couple* identity. Furthermore, the present research echoes other work on the importance of perceptions of consistency between partner and self. Extant research has linked relational discrepancies and unmet standards to outcomes such as relational dissatisfaction and avoidance or distancing behaviors (e.g., Afifi et al., 2012; Murray et al., 2006; Simpson et al., 2001). The current study translated CTI's concept of identity gaps from an individual to a relational context (with regard to *couple* identity as opposed to individual identity). In addition, the study also revealed new outcomes impacted by these gaps, such as higher conflict anxiety, stress, and negativity, as well as increased levels of cortisol and sAA in response to conflict. The following sections will discuss the broader implications of the findings in greater detail.

Perceptions of Couple Identity as Predictive of Conflict and Stress Management

Couple identity and perceptions of conflict. Perceptions of couple identity were inversely associated with negativity during the discussion task for both men and women. In other words, higher perceptions of couple identity predicted lower perceptions of negativity during the conflict-inducing discussion task. Couple identity perceptions were also marginally associated with men's perceptions of stress during the discussion. These findings support the prediction that greater perceptions of couple identity should buffer the negativity and stress associated with talking about a conflictual topic with a partner. However, the findings suggest that lower the perceptions of couple identity are positively associated with greater perceptions of negativity for partners. These results are consistent with previous research that has found that higher functioning couples (i.e., satisfied, nondistressed) are better able to minimize negative communication and negative affect reciprocity during conflict than poorer functioning couples (e.g., Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1994;

O'Brien et al., 2009). Moreover, this effect points to a problematic consequence for couples with low or weak couple identity, in terms of negative affect contagion and conflict escalation. With an increased likelihood for negativity during conflict, partners with low couple identity perceptions may be at risk for negative affect reciprocity or contagion, conflict escalation, and hostility.

Numerous studies by Gottman and colleagues have demonstrated the problematic consequences of negative affect reciprocity during conflict for married couples' physical and relational well-being (e.g., Gottman, 1998; Gottman & Levenson, 1988; Levenson & Gottman, 1985; Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1994). For instance, partners who express negative affect and negative affect reciprocity during conflict (e.g., symmetrical patterns of anger, defensiveness, criticism, stonewalling, etc.) are more likely to be in dissatisfied relationships and have a greater likelihood of divorce (Gottman & Levenson, 1988; Levenson & Gottman, 1985; Levenson et al., 1994). Uncovering the link between couple identity and conflict negativity is important to better understanding the predictors of problematic communication behaviors in romantic relationships. It could be the case that efforts to cultivate stronger perceptions of couple identity could minimize expressions of negativity during conflict over time and improve couples' long-term relational well-being. However, it could be equally likely that efforts to reduce negative affect and communication between partners could ameliorate stressful conflict episodes (see Feeney & Lemay, 2012), and these efforts sustained over time could help bolster the partners' perceptions of couple identity. In line with the theory of emotional capital (Gottman et al., 2002), minimizing negativity and increasing positive interactions should bolster a couple's sense of togetherness and also buffer them from any stressors or threats in the future.

Couple identity and sAA and cortisol responses. Perceptions of couple identity also did not significantly predict differences in cortisol or sAA reactivity or recovery as a result of the conflict-inducing discussion task. When testing for an interaction between the type of prime (couple or individual) and couple identity perceptions, however, there were some findings for men's sAA responses and men's and women's cortisol responses. Men with higher couple identity perceptions exhibited higher sAA levels and a higher peak in sAA after the discussion when primed with individual identity compared to the couple identity prime or no prime. This finding, although only approaching significance, suggests that men with higher couple identity perceptions may experience slightly higher sAA responses to conflict-inducing discussions when primed first with their individual identity. However, it is uncertain whether or not the individual identity prime interacting with perceptions of couple identity was the cause of the higher sAA response, due to these men's elevated sAA baseline levels prior to the prime. Similarly, women with higher couple identity perceptions in condition one (couple identity prime) had higher baseline cortisol levels than women in the other two conditions (individual identity prime, control), and therefore, the significant differences in cortisol slopes for women cannot be reliably attributed the effects of the priming task itself. The difficulty determining differences among conditions for this sample is discussed in greater detail in later sections of the discussion.

Interactions between couple identity and prime did emerge when testing the influence on cortisol reactivity and recovery. Men and women with lower couple identity perceptions exhibited different cortisol patterns depending on condition. The condition appeared to influence men who have lower couple identity perceptions, such that these men

did not experience cortisol reactivity when primed with individual identity, but did experience cortisol reactivity in conditions one and three. Also, women with lower couple identity perceptions who were primed with couple identity had slower or delayed cortisol recovery post-task than women with lower couple identity perceptions in the other two conditions (although this association was only approaching significance).

These findings for men and women with lower couple identity perceptions are intriguing for a number of reasons. As a reminder, a non-directional hypothesis was proposed for the possibility of an interaction between the type of prime and perceptions of couple identity because it was unclear based on prior literature whether or not a couple identity prime would hurt or help individuals with already low perceptions of couple identity. The effect of the primes on cortisol response and recovery for individuals with lower couple identity perceptions suggest that being primed with couple identity may not be particularly beneficial for this group. Compared to the individual identity prime, men experienced more cortisol reactivity and women experienced a slower recovery when primed with couple identity. Overall, the sample evidenced fairly low levels of cortisol throughout the study, and so these findings for cortisol reactivity and recovery may not necessarily be considered "unhealthy" or "problematic." However, the differences in cortisol response based on condition for individuals with lower couple identity perceptions provides some initial evidence that certain frames of mind (i.e., an individual identity frame) might reduce this group's physiological experiences of stress compared to other frames of mind (i.e., a couple identity frame). If this is the case, it could be argued that being made to think or focus in a relationship-centered manner when one does not place their relationship as central to their identity may be more stressful in conflict situations. Future research

should continue to test this possibility, as well as explore potential reasons as to why this might be the case. For example, having a relationship-centered orientation in general may feel foreign or uncomfortable for individuals with low couple identity or it could remind them of the ways in which their relationship is lacking – both of which could contribute to greater physiological stress responses during a conflict-inducing discussion with one's partner.

Perceptions of Couple Identity Gaps as Predictive of Conflict and Stress Management

Overall, this investigation revealed noteworthy findings with respect to the two types of couple identity gaps (intra-relationship and extra-relationship couple identity gaps). In the current study, perceptions of intra-relationship gaps refer to a partner perceiving that the other partner does not view the relationship in the same way. On the other hand, perceptions of extra-relationship gaps indicates that partners feel that they do not accurately communicate who they are as a couple to others (their enacted couple identity is inconsistent with their perceived couple identity).

Couple identity gaps and perceptions of conflict. As predicted, both perceptions of intra-relationship gaps and perceptions of extra-relationship gaps were positively associated with perceptions of anxiety, stress, and negativity during the conflict-inducing discussion (although some of these associations were approaching significance depending on partner sex). Therefore, perceptions of discrepancies in couple identity between partners, as well as between the couple and outside others, can contribute to heightened feelings of anxiety, stress and negativity for partners discussing a conflict-inducing topic. As such, it could be the case that these perceptions of couple identity gaps may be an indicator of other problems present in the relationship. In the current investigation, these gaps were related to

poorer stress and conflict management. Arguably, perceptions of couple identity gaps could be indicative of other factors, such as commitment, jealousy, trust, social support, and affectionate communication. Future research should not only examine the extent to which couple identity gaps are associated with relational variables such as these, but also how particular types of gaps (intra-relationship versus extra-relationship) might uniquely predict these outcomes. Specifically, intra-relationship gaps may be more strongly linked to processes internal to the relationship (e.g., a lack of affection and support) whereas extra-relationship gaps may be more strongly associated with processes involving the couple's social network interactions (e.g., a lack of trust, commitment, and/or network approval).

In addition to main effects for conflict outcomes, the results revealed marginal support for the interaction effects between perceptions of couple identity gaps and the type of identity prime. For men with lower intra-relationship gap perceptions, being primed with an individual identity slightly increased men's anxiety during the discussion task compared to couple identity or the control. Interestingly, the reverse was true for men with higher intra-relationship gap perceptions. Being in primed with an individual identity (condition two) for these men resulted in lower anxiety relative to men with similarly high gap perceptions in conditions one (couple identity prime) and three (control). A similar pattern emerged for the interaction between the prime and perceptions of *extra-relationship* gaps for men's anxiety. Men with higher extra-relationship gap perceptions experienced slightly less anxiety during conflict in condition two compared to conditions one and three. Again, this effect was reversed for men with lower extra-relationship gap perceptions, such that they experienced slightly more anxiety during conflict in condition two compared to conditions one and three. Furthermore, women with higher intra-relationship gap perceptions

experienced slightly higher anxiety overall than women with lower gap perceptions. Interestingly, women with higher gap perceptions evidenced higher anxiety particularly when they were in condition one (couple identity prime). On the other hand, women with lower intra-relationship gap perceptions experienced slightly less anxiety in condition one relative to women with similarly low gap perceptions in condition two.

Although the interactions between gap perceptions and identity prime on men's and women's anxiety were approaching significance, they are consistent with the aforementioned implications regarding the potential harm in priming couple identity for those who have weak or inconsistent couple identities. Specifically, for men and women with higher perceptions of couple identity gaps, the couple identity prime was marginally associated with greater anxiety. Interestingly, these findings also suggest that priming an *individual* identity for partners who have low perceptions of gaps may increase their anxiety during a conflict-inducing discussion. The reverse effects of the priming based on high versus low gap perceptions could be a sign that these two groups approach conflict with their partners in different ways. Enhancing difference between self and partner (i.e., the individual identity prime) for individuals who perceive little gaps in their couple identity may make discussing conflict-inducing topics more challenging or anxiety-producing, because this may be different than how they typically approach conflict. Similarly, trying to enhance couplehood or couple identity for partners who perceive gaps in their couple identity could be equally anxiety-producing, as this may bring to light discrepancies in their relationship. These findings and their implications, however, should be interpreted with caution, due to the overall low levels of reported anxiety in the sample. Also, the marginal support for these interactions is likely due, in part, to the lack of strong differences across

conditions. Nonetheless, future research should further explore the differences in how individuals approach and experience conflict in their relationships based upon their perceptions of couple identity gaps.

Couple identity gaps and sAA and cortisol responses. Perceptions of intra-relationship gaps alone not have a strong effect on individual's cortisol and sAA responses. However, the association between intra-relationship gap perceptions and cortisol response over time was approaching significance, such that men with lower perceptions of intra-relationship gaps experienced higher cortisol levels throughout the study than did men with higher perceptions of intra-relationship gaps. This pattern is inconsistent with the prediction that those with lower perceptions of intra-relationship gaps would experience relatively less cortisol reactivity in response to the conflict than those with higher gap perceptions. The elevated cortisol levels for men with lower gap perceptions could be that these men experienced more stress throughout the study in general, perhaps as a result of being in a laboratory study, and not necessarily as a result of the conflict discussion task specifically.

In addition, there were some notable findings with regard to perceptions of *extra-relationship gaps* and individuals' physiological stress responses. While perceptions of extra-relationship gaps did not predict men's sAA or cortisol trajectories, they were associated with men's baseline cortisol, such that men with higher perceptions of extra-relationship gaps had higher cortisol levels at the start of the study. This finding is interesting given that men with lower *intra*-relationship gaps had higher cortisol over the course of the study, yet men with higher *extra*-relationship gaps evidenced higher baseline cortisol. However, it should not be assumed that men with lower intra-relationship gaps and men with higher extra-relationship gaps are distinct groups – in fact, it could reasonably

be the case that the same group of men could perceive high extra-relationship gaps *and* low intra-relationship gaps. Again, these findings could suggest that men, in general, may experience heightened cortisol levels in response to a laboratory study on their relationship. Regardless, it would be worthwhile for future research to test differences in daily cortisol rhythm as well as cortisol reactivity to acute stressors in men based on their perceptions of intra- and extra-relationship gaps, because it is likely that certain tasks, events, or stressors may elicit stronger cortisol reactions from men depending upon the types of gaps they perceive in their relationship.

Women, on the other hand, did experience differences in cortisol and sAA reactivity and recovery based on perceptions of extra-relationship gaps. Specifically, women with higher perceptions of extra-relationship gaps had higher levels of cortisol and these higher levels were sustained over time. This pattern is consistent with the prediction that individuals with higher gap perceptions would experience higher cortisol reactivity and slower recovery compared to those with lower gap perceptions. Furthermore, women with higher perceptions of extra-relationship gaps also had higher levels of sAA initially and a higher peak in sAA immediately after the conflict discussion than did women with lower gap perceptions. These results suggest that the *type* of couple identity gap might affect women's and men's biological stress response differently. The effects for extra-relationship gaps were stronger and more predictive of sAA and cortisol variation among women than men, suggesting that women may be particularly sensitive to the presence of extra-relationship gaps (at least in terms of their physiological stress response).

There is research to corroborate the argument that couple identity gaps may be more distressing for women than for men. Based upon explanations from both social roles

explanations and evolutionary theory, women are socialized to emphasize relationships and in turn, having relational skills can confer more status and resources (Baumeister & Sommer, 1997; Gabriel & Gardner, 1999). Prior research has shown that within interdependent relationships, men and women focus on different aspects of these relationships, with women being more concerned with relational aspects than men (Gabriel & Gardner, 1999). Women have higher standards for certain communication patterns in romantic relationships than men, which can make women dissatisfied with their relationships if their standards are unmet (see Afifi & Joseph, 2009; Afifi, Joseph, & Aldeis, 2012; Vangelisti & Alexander, 2002; Vangelisti & Daly, 1997). Therefore, compared to men, women tend to report higher relational self-construal and relationship-linked emotional experiences and are motivated to behave in ways to maintain harmony in their close relationships (Gabriel & Gardner, 1999). These arguments lend insight into the possibility of extra-relationship gaps being more troubling for a women, as she might perceive this type of gap as a signal to others that she might not be a good relational partner or might not be in a happy, healthy romantic relationship (regardless of whether or not that is the case). As such, this study uncovers a potential gender difference in the experiences of extra-relationship gaps.

The study also found significant interaction effects between the type of identity prime and intra-relationship gaps on sAA and cortisol responses. Overall, women with lower intra-relationship gap perceptions evidenced higher levels of sAA, which is inconsistent with predictions that women with higher gaps would experience higher sAA responses than women with lower gaps. However, it was also the case that only women wither higher intra-relationship gap perceptions in condition one (couple identity prime)

experienced sustained sAA reactivity to the task and slower sAA recovery. Interesting patterns emerged for men as well, such that when primed with couple identity, men with higher perceptions of intra-relationship gaps experienced higher levels of sAA at each time point compared to men with lower intra-relationship gap perceptions. This pattern is consistent with aforementioned findings that show that those with weak or inconsistent couple identities may be more stressed or physiologically aroused by conflict when first primed with a couple identity. In addition, the reverse pattern appeared for men with lower intra-relationship gap perceptions, such that these men exhibited higher sAA when primed with an individual identity than men with higher intra-relationship gap perceptions. Although these findings must be interpreted cautiously due to the unclear efficacy of the primes, these results lend additional weight to the possibility that there may be differences in how the two types of identity primes influence individuals' experiences (i.e., physiological stress response) during conflict depending upon their perceptions of couple identity gaps.

When testing for interactions between extra-relationship gaps and the type of prime, the study continued to find patterns that suggest that individuals experience conflict differently when given the same identity prime depending upon their perceptions of identity gaps. Women with high extra-relationship gap perceptions in condition one exhibited the highest levels of cortisol overall over the course of the study, and these levels did not decline until about forty minutes after the conflict. Women with higher extra-relationship gap perceptions experienced relatively high levels of cortisol and sAA overall, but particularly when in condition one (couple identity prime). In contrast, women with lower extra-relationship gap perceptions in condition one experienced relatively low and stable cortisol levels over the course of the study and did not react to the conflict discussion. Similar

interaction effects between extra-relationship gaps and the couple identity prime also emerged for men's sAA and cortisol levels. Furthermore, for men, the individual identity prime appeared to elevate men's sAA when they had lower extra-relationship gap perceptions, but decreased men's sAA when they had higher extra-relationship gap perceptions. Taken together, these results support the prediction that those with higher perceptions of extra-relationship gaps would have greater cortisol and sAA reactivity and slower recovery than those with lower gap perceptions, but also illustrates that these differences are enhanced when couple identity is primed. Also, there is some support for the idea that those with already low perceptions of couple identity gaps might be disadvantaged when primed with individual identity prior to a conflict-inducing discussion with their partner. Interestingly, the interaction effects between extra-relationship gaps and condition appeared to be stronger overall for women than for men, suggesting again that perceptions of this specific type of gap may make women more physiologically aroused or stressed during such a discussion with a partner than men.

Priming Couple Identity versus Individual Identity

The priming manipulation (couple versus individual identity) in this study was designed to test a novel empirical question as to whether couple identity can be momentarily enhanced or primed for partners as a buffer of the potentially negative experiences related to discussing a topic of conflict in their relationships. Previous research has not yet tested whether increasing couple identity salience predicts communicative or relational outcomes in the context of a conflict-inducing discussion. However, related research has demonstrated success in manipulating the accessibility of relational schemas through priming and that these primes are evidenced in written thought, word choice, emotions, and

behavior (Carnelley & Rowe, 2010; Rowe & Carnelley, 2003). Fitzsimmons and Bargh (2003) found that people different interpersonal goals can be activated by mere priming of a close relationship, without physical presence of the relational partner. Also, individuals tend to behave more cooperatively with others when primed with a shared identity (via a writing task), but less cooperatively when primed with distinctiveness (McLeish & Oxoby, 2011). Therefore, based upon this prior research, writing prompts were developed to prime couple identity and individual identity.

Although the intended manipulation check for the primes – a sentence completion task designed to test self-focus – did not yield any differences between the two priming conditions, supplemental analyses revealed many differences in post-discussion outcomes by condition. While men and women appear to be influenced by the priming in different ways (e.g., men's, but not women's, perceptions of productivity were influenced, and women's, but not men's communication satisfaction was influenced), the results revealed that priming couple identity was associated with more benefits post-discussion and priming individual identity was associated with more detriments post-discussion. These results are consistent with the previous research on priming identity (e.g., McLeish & Oxoby, 2011), but also with the broader arguments upon which this investigation was developed – that a strong couple identity promotes pro-relationship thoughts and behaviors which in turn buffer romantic partners from ill effects of stressful experiences as they arise. In addition, the results are consistent with the argument that self-interest or self-focus, particularly in times of conflict, may promote distancing or differentiating thoughts and behaviors between partners, which in turn may exacerbate the negative outcomes associated with stressful events.

Overall, the impact of the priming alone evidenced little to no effects on the outcomes in this study. Specifically, the prediction that the type of prime would influence individuals' perceptions of anxiety, stress, and negativity was unsupported. While there were slight differences in these outcomes across conditions, they were not statistically significant. However, as previously noted, the primes did significantly predict a number of important outcome variables, such as perceptions of couple identity (and gaps), communal coping, and relationship optimism. So while the type of prime may not have influenced individuals' anxiety, stress, and negativity (likely due in part to the low levels of these variables in the sample overall), it was associated with other relevant conflict and relationship perceptions. The associations with these other outcome variables consistently revealed that priming individual identity predicted more negative outcomes and priming couple identity predicted more positive outcomes for these couples, consistent with predictions.

When testing the effects of priming on individuals' sAA and cortisol response and recovery, the couple identity prime significantly predicted men's linear cortisol responses only. Men in condition one were hypothesized to have less cortisol reactivity to the conflict discussion than men in the other two conditions, and yet the results revealed that it was men in condition one (couple identity prime) who evidenced a cortisol response to the conflict discussion and not the men in the other two conditions (individual identity prime or control). However, these men's cortisol response would be considered within the normal or typical cortisol response. Nonetheless, the finding reveals that these men primed with couple identity did experience a slight peak in cortisol in response to the discussion whereas men in other conditions did not evidence any cortisol reactivity. Additional empirical research is

needed to determine the nature of the relationship between priming of couple identity and the physiological stress response during moments of conflict or stress.

While the primes alone were not as predictive of the outcomes on their own, this study shows that the primes likely interact in meaningful ways with individuals' pre-existing attitudes and perceptions about the relationship. Specifically, there were clear and significant findings for priming, with regard to how the effects of the prime on conflict and stress outcomes were dependent upon individuals' perceptions of couple identity gaps. Counter to the findings that couple identity priming was associated with more positive post-discussion outcomes (e.g., relationship optimism, couple identity), the interaction effect results suggest that the couple identity priming task may not be necessarily beneficial for individuals who have weaker or lower perceptions of their couple identity. This pattern is compelling in that it identifies that priming couple identity is not universally positive as well as points to the potential underlying differences between partners with strong, consistent couple identities and those with weak, or inconsistent couple identities. The study had posed non-directional hypotheses concerning the interactions between type of primes and perceptions of couple identity (and couple identity gaps) due to the plausibility that priming one's relationship may actually be *more* stressful for those who have weak perceptions of their couple identity. The results of this study suggest that this, in fact, could be the case, at least within the context of a single conflict-inducing discussion. Future research is needed to determine why the couple identity prime may have affected those with high versus low gap perceptions differently. However, it could be argued that thinking about and writing about one's relationship is more stressful for those who perceive discrepancies or

inconsistencies between self and partner, as the act of doing so might emphasize the inadequacies or unmet expectations in the relationship.

In addition, an unanticipated finding emerged for those who have low perceptions of gaps in that they appeared to have greater stress responses to the conflict when primed with individual identity. Although it was not hypothesized that these individuals would experience adverse conflict outcomes when primed with individual identity, this finding is consistent with McLeish and Oxoby (2011)'s results that individuals tend to be less cooperative when primed with a distinct rather than shared identity. Moreover, this finding is intriguing in that not everyone was adversely affected by the individual identity prime, but only those with already low perceptions of gaps. In fact, for some outcomes, those with higher gap perceptions found the conflict less stressful under the individual identity prime compared to the couple identity prime. Arguably, the individual identity, because it primes distinctiveness between self and partner, may adversely affect individuals' who may not perceive many discrepancies with their partner. Therefore, enhancing difference for partners who do not perceive great differences prior to conflict may increase the stressfulness of conflict for these partners. Assumptions based on Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance offer compelling explanations for why the effect of the type of prime might depend upon individuals' pre-existing perceptions of gaps. Individuals likely experience some degree of cognitive dissonance when asked to write and think about themselves in ways that is not how they might typically view their identity and their relationship. When individuals experience cognitive dissonance, it produces anxiety, which might explain the stressful experiences (both self-reported and physiological) for individuals with high gap

perceptions primed with couple identity and individuals with low gap perceptions primed with individual identity.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite contributing to existing knowledge on couple identity, identity gaps, and romantic partners' management of stress and conflict in important ways, this study was not without several limitations. One of the noticeable issues with the study was the lack of power for some of the analyses. A good number of hypothesis tests were approaching significance, particularly those tests which compared groups of couples (e.g., by condition), resulting in a smaller numbers of observations per group and reducing power. Overall, the findings are noteworthy given the highly satisfied, low-stress couples in the sample. These results were likely conservative estimates due to a lack of power. Given that there was support for some of the hypothesized effects in this sample, the influence of couple identity and couple identity gaps on conflict and stress management is likely stronger in other populations of couples with greater variation in stress, conflict, and perceptions of couple identity and couple identity gaps. A larger sample is necessary to test complex interactions with dyadic growth curve modeling with sufficient power to detect significant differences. Efforts to obtain a sufficient sample size were taken in that couples were recruited to participate in the study for seven months, after which 118 couples had participated. However, it is promising that some effects were found in such a highly satisfied, low-stress sample. This study has provided initial evidence to compel researchers to test these associations in a larger sample with greater variation in stress and relational health.

Even with the researchers' screening and selecting conflict topics for discussion that were rated as highly stressful by one or both of the partners, the perceptions of anxiety and

stressfulness of the discussion tasks were still fairly low in this sample overall. With this study, there are certainly a selection bias to take into consideration. The researcher was unable to compensate both partners for their participation in the study, so only one partner was receiving course credit and had to have their partner willing to also participate in a two-hour laboratory study on their relationship. Consequently, there is likely a selection bias of already highly satisfied, low conflict couples willing to participate in this particular study. Furthermore, undergraduate dating couples probably also do not have the same major life stressors or conflictual topics in their relationship as married couples. For instance, issues such as parenting, money, household duties, and balancing career and family are often common sources of conflict for married couples, but they were rarely mentioned in the current sample. Taken together, the characteristics of this sample provided a highly satisfied, low-stress and low-conflict relational context in which to study stress and conflict management, which is likely why the findings in this study were marginal or modest at times. Also, it is important to take into consideration that the post-discussion questionnaire was completed forty minutes after the discussion task so as to not influence individuals' cortisol or sAA recovery. As a result, individuals' perceptions of anxiety, stress, and negativity may have been attenuated after that much time had passed since the discussion. However, the fact that several hypothesized predictions did receive support from such a conservative data set suggests that the impact of couple identity and couple identity gaps on couple's communicative and physiological management of stress and conflict is likely to be quite significant in other populations. Therefore, future steps in this program of research will examine these associations in other populations, such as married couples, whose

conflict and stress management may depend upon perceptions of couple identity (and gaps) more strongly.

Despite the intriguing findings involving the interactions between primes and couple identity perceptions, there are still important limitations surrounding the identity prime manipulation in this study. First of all, the implicit self-focus manipulation check intended to test differences between conditions failed to find any differences in first-person singular versus first-person plural pronoun choice. It could be the case that the linguistic implications form (Wegner & Giuliano, 1980) is not an appropriate manipulation check for testing the priming differences, as it was originally designed primarily to test self-focus and not specifically relational-focus. Also, although supplemental manipulation checks revealed compelling differences between conditions on other variables (i.e., couple identity, couple identity gaps, relationship optimism, and communal coping), these variables were not measured immediately after the writing tasks, but instead, forty minutes post-discussion. As such, these variables are not ideal proxies for a manipulation check, and additional research is needed to determine the efficacy of this priming manipulation in bringing about shifts in identity focus. In addition, it is very likely that the content of their written responses to the couple identity prime are more predictive of conflict and stress outcomes than simply the act of writing about the relationship. For example, some of the participants in the couple identity priming condition may have simply written more than others (although the time limit of ten minutes was given for all participants), and some may have written in a more positive (or negative) light about their relationship. These variations should be telling in understanding the nature of how partners see their relationship as a component of their identity. Although the content of the written responses were not coded for this investigation,

the next step for this program of research is to code the transcripts of these responses. Relatedly, the couple identity prime may not be effective for couples in which partners perceive couple identity gaps, as the current data would suggest. In other words, priming couple identity might only work when both partners find it relationally-enhancing, as opposed to perhaps highlighting discrepancies in the relationship. In order to test this possibility, another next step for this research would be to compare the content of the written responses between individuals who have higher perceptions of couple identity gaps and those who have lower gap perceptions.

It could also be the case that the benefits of couple identity priming may be more marked when the priming is repeated over time. Research on security priming (i.e., priming attachment security) has found that the benefits for individuals' thoughts, emotions, and behaviors can be longer-lasting if the priming is repetitive (Gillath, Seluck, & Shaver, 2008). Furthermore, in a couple therapy context, Reid et al. (2006) found that sessions designed to induce a sense of "we-ness" or couple identity over the course of six weeks increased couples' "we-ness," which was also related to increases in marital satisfaction. Based upon the findings of these studies, it could be argued that the potential benefits of couple identity priming for effective conflict and stress management may have a stronger effect when it is repeated over time, perhaps particularly so for those with weaker couple identities. However, the results from the current investigation suggest that the couple identity priming may not be particularly beneficial for those with weaker or inconsistent perceptions of their couple identity (as these individuals tended to experience more anxiety physiological stress responses). Given this insight, it is clear that additional research is needed to determine how

these types of primes influence those with both strong and weak perceptions of couple identity.

This study approached conceptualizing and measuring couple identity as a degree of identification with one's partner and one's relationship. However, this is certainly not the only approach to conceptualizing couple identity and research on couple identity should include other considerations. As Miller and Caughlin (2013) note, "thinking about couple identity in terms of degree tells us whether a couple has a joint identity, but it does not tell us anything about the meaning or nature of that joint identity" (p. 67). Indeed, future research needs to explore further the nature of couple identities – how they develop (or change), their shared sense of history, and the events or transitions that serve to redefine them over time. A next step in this research program will be to code transcripts of the couples' discussion, as well as their open-ended responses to the couple identity writing prompts, in order to understand the nature of couple identity. One reason why the couple identity prime did not elicit all of the predicted differences for this sample is that it may matter more *what* they wrote about their relationship in their open-ended responses than just the fact that they wrote about their relationships. What these individuals wrote in response to the couple identity prompts, as well as what they said to one another during the discussion task, should provide additional insight into the potential differences among couples depending on their couple identity and gaps between partners.

Furthermore, it appears as though the couple identity gaps as a variable may be explaining more of the *dyadic* nature couple identity that should be important in extending the current conceptualizations of couple identity. A strong couple identity likely will not manifest in relational benefits for couples unless both partners agree upon the nature of their

couple identity. For example, the couple identity measures tap into the extent to which an individual partner feels that the relationship is central to his/her own identity, but does not take into account if the other partner feels the same way. Rather than assessing the degree to which individuals' think of themselves as part of a couple, measuring their perceptions of "sharedness" or mutuality of this identity with their partner may be more powerful (as was shown here in this investigation).

Relatedly, there are likely ways to tap into the construct of couple identity beyond the dyad itself. As such, another direction for this research program is to extend the investigation of couple identity gaps to studying couples' social networks. It is important to study how couples communicate their sense of couple identity to social network members and how that in turn relates to network support and validation of the couple's relationship. Also, because couples might define their relationship in contrast to other couples with whom they interact, future research should address questions about how socializing with other couples influences how which partners perceive their own relationship and their couple identity. Giles and Fitzpatrick (1984) recommended that research on couple identity should pursue inquiries about inter-couple comparisons, as interactions with other couples can help shape a couple's understanding of their own relationship. These scholars argue that information obtained from observing and interacting with other couples can help inform individual's knowledge of their own relationship with respect to their "meaningfulness" and status – or in other words, the strength of their couple identity. Related to this idea is the work on perceived superiority, or the tendency for people to regard their own relationships better than other people's relationships (Rusbult et al., 2000). Individuals with greater relationship commitment are more likely to perceive their relationships as superior to others

(Rusbult et al., 2000). Based upon the perceived superiority tendency, couples with an already-strong sense of couple identity may be less susceptible to making upward relationship comparisons when interacting with other couples, or at least less likely to perceive other couples as having better relationships. This, in turn, may serve to bolster and solidify their perceptions of couple identity. On the other hand, partners with weak couple identities may be more susceptible to making upward relationship comparisons when interacting with other couples, and as a result, their confidence in their sense of couplehood may be more at risk, unstable (Giles & Fitzpatrick, 1984), and susceptible to widening gaps. Due to the instability in "who they are" as a couple, these couples likely lack feelings of perceived superiority when making relationship comparisons. Future research is needed to confirm these likely connections between couple identity, relationship comparisons, and perceived superiority.

A particularly fruitful future direction for research on couple identity is the investigation of these processes for couples with stigmatized or marginalized identities. Inter-racial, intercultural, interfaith, and same-sex couples are all examples of partnerships that likely face some internal or external difficulties in constructing their sense of couple identity (cf., Solomon, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2004). Unlike heterosexual partnerships where there is a traditional, prescribed way of being a couple with explicit and implicit rules (e.g., monogamy, shared financial and material resources, sharing household responsibilities), there is no such prescribed way of "being" a same-sex couple (Green, 2004), which could produce more struggles between partners or with intra-relationship couple identity gaps. In addition, individuals in nontraditional relationships receive less approval, acceptance, and support from their social network compared to individuals in

traditional relationships (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2006). This perceived social devaluation is significantly associated with lower levels of relationship commitment and stability. The relevance of couple identity gaps for these relationships is noteworthy in that they must constantly negotiate many frames of identities at once (personal, relational, and communal/group) and these frames are likely to conflict with one another (Jung & Hecht, 2008). As a result, I plan in future research to investigate stigmatized or marginalized couples' perceptions their couple identity (and couple identity gaps) to predict their ability to manage stress and conflict in their relationship.

Finally, there are likely momentary fluctuations in couple identity gaps over time as well as relational transitions in which couples may be more (or less) likely to perceive gaps. Specifically, periods of uncertainty, such as early relationship stages, meeting family and friends, moving long distance, or cohabitating, may be important contexts in which couple identity gaps are developed, defined, and modified. As this study has established the viability of identity gaps in a dyadic context, future research is needed to determine what events may trigger fluctuations in gaps (minimizing or amplifying) and in turn, what personal and relational outcomes might be influenced by the short- and long-term experiences of couple identity gaps.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of couple in romantic partners' communicative and physiological management of stress associated with conflict-inducing topics in their relationship. The results revealed that perceptions of couple identity predicted perceptions of conflict negativity, but not anxiety or stress. Interestingly, perceptions of couple identity alone did not predict as many outcomes or predict them as strongly as

anticipated compared to couple identity gaps. Nonetheless, the current findings regarding couple identity extend the existing research on this topic by demonstrating its role in romantic partners' experiences and management of stress during times of conflict, which had not previously been tested.

The present investigation contributes to the existing research on close relationships by transferring the concept of identity gaps from the communication theory of identity (Hecht, 1993) into a dyadic context. Identity gaps were originally conceptualized and previously tested with regard to people's identities as individuals. The idea of identity gaps existing in relation to two partners' perceptions of their *couple identity* makes sense considering previous research has examined discrepancies and unmet standards in romantic relationships with noteworthy findings. In this study, perceptions of couple identity gaps emerged as a stronger predictor in this study than perceptions of couple identity, further supporting the notion that negatively-valenced variables are often more strongly linked to relational and communicative outcomes than positive, pro-relationship variables. Perceptions of couple identity gaps were associated with greater conflict anxiety, stress, and negativity, as well as heightened cortisol and sAA reactivity. Furthermore, evidence suggested that intra-relationship couple identity gaps and extra-relationship couple identity gaps may influence men's and women's stress experiences in different ways. Particularly, women appeared to be more strongly influenced by perceptions of extra-relationship gaps than men. These findings reveal potential future directions for this new area of research on couple identity gaps. The predictive power of couple identity gaps as it relates to both self-reported and physiological stress in this study further supports the viability of this concept in future relationship research.

Compelling results emerged when testing the interaction effects between the type of prime (couple identity or individual identity) and individuals' pre-existing perceptions of couple identity (and couple identity gaps) on the conflict and stress outcomes. Although more research is needed to determine the efficacy of priming couple identity, the results revealed that the effect of such primes likely depends upon individuals' perceptions of couple identity (and couple identity gaps). The overall patterns of the interaction effects suggest that for some outcomes, priming *couple* identity for those who have low perceptions of couple identity or high couple identity gap perceptions increases stress associated with conflict (self-reported and physiological). There was also evidence to suggest the pattern reverses such that priming *individual* identity for those who have high perceptions of couple identity or low couple identity gap perceptions increases stress associated with conflict (self-reported and physiological).

In sum, the current investigation integrates multiple approaches for understanding stress management in close relationships, including psychological, communicative, and physiological experiences. In doing so, the study has paved many new paths for future research on studying couple identity beyond its association with relational satisfaction. Importantly, this study broadened the conceptualization of identity gaps to include couple identities and how these gaps impact the management of relational conflict and physiological stress responses.

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Appendices

Table 1.

Types of Conflict Topics Discussed and Frequencies

Topic Category	Frequency
Communication & Compatibility	19
Time Together	19
Jealousy & Trust	18
Future Plans & Status	13
Family & Friends	11
General Lifestyle	11
Long-Distance	8
Substance Use	7

Table 2.

Priming Task Instructions

Couple Identity Writing Task Prompt
1. Imagine you were to describe you and your partner as a couple to someone who doesn't know you two. Please describe your relationship to this person in as much detail as possible. 2. What is unique about you and your partner as a couple? Please write as much as you can and be as detailed as possible. 3. In what ways does your relationship with your partner contribute to how you see yourself? Please write as much as you can and be as detailed as possible.
Individual Identity Writing Task Prompt
1. Imagine you were to describe yourself as an individual to someone who doesn't know you. Below please describe yourself as an individual to this person in as much detail as possible. 2. What is unique about you as an individual? Please write as much as you can and be as detailed as possible. 3. In what ways are you different or distinct as a person from your partner? Please write as much as you can and be as detailed as possible.

Table 3.

Descriptive Statistics for Predictor Variables and sAA and Cortisol

	Males		Females	
	M	SD	M	SD
Couple Identity Perceptions	5.24	.90	5.03	.96
Intra-Relational CID Gaps	2.61	1.11	2.36	.95
Extra-Relational CID Gaps	2.52	1.08	2.32	.98
Conflict Anxiety	1.50	.51	1.56	.48
Conflict Stress	2.72	1.37	3.14	1.48
Conflict Negativity	2.50	1.26	2.79	1.33
Cortisol Time 1	11.60	30.46	8.74	9.78
Cortisol Time 2	9.00	10.51	8.55	6.43
Cortisol Time 3	7.21	4.99	7.48	6.34
Cortisol Time 4	6.38	4.54	6.17	3.76
sAA Time 1	111.78	73.50	122.84	77.85
sAA Time 2	157.97	104.46	150.93	99.58
sAA Time 3	98.07	62.90	110.64	80.00
sAA Time 4	94.90	61.64	99.75	65.17

Table 4.

Correlation Table of Predictor and Outcome Variables for Men

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Couple ID	1.00	-0.38**	-0.34**	-0.03	-0.15	-0.22*
2. Intra-Rel ID Gaps	-0.38**	1.00	0.68**	0.10	0.32**	0.23*
3. Extra-Rel ID Gaps	-0.34**	0.68**	1.00	0.08	0.38**	0.23*
4. Conflict Anxiety	-0.03	0.10	0.08	1.00	0.45**	0.34**
5. Conflict Stress	-0.15	0.32**	0.38**	0.45**	1.00	0.54**
6. Conflict Negativity	-0.22*	0.23*	0.23*	0.34**	0.54**	1.00

Note: ** = $p < 0.01$, * = $p < 0.05$

Table 5.

Correlation Table of Predictor and Outcome Variables for Women

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Couple ID	1.00	-0.40**	-0.23*	-0.10	-0.14	-0.17
2. Intra-Rel ID Gaps	-0.40**	1.00	0.41**	0.33**	0.23*	0.24*
3. Extra-Rel ID Gaps	-0.23*	0.41**	1.00	0.21*	0.06	0.15
4. Conflict Anxiety	-0.10	0.33**	0.21*	1.00	0.50**	0.48**
5. Conflict Stress	-0.14	0.23*	0.06	0.50**	1.00	0.44*
6. Conflict Negativity	-0.17	0.24*	0.15	0.48**	0.44*	1.00

Note: ** = $p < 0.01$, * = $p < 0.05$

Table 6.

H1 Models for Anxiety, Stress, and Negativity

	B	SE	t	*p*
Model for Anxiety				
Fixed Effects				
Female	3.42	0.18	18.67	0.00
Male	3.25	0.18	17.67	0.00
AnxControl*Female	0.32	0.12	2.59	0.01
AnxControl*Male	0.21	0.09	2.32	0.02
CoupleID*Female	-0.31	0.22	-1.41	0.16
CoupleID*Male	-0.32	0.20	-1.64	0.11
Model for Stress				
Fixed Effects				
Female	3.25	0.15	21.10	0.00
Male	2.96	0.16	18.81	0.00
StressControl*Female	0.14	0.10	1.45	0.15
StressControl*Male	0.25	0.09	2.78	0.01
CoupleID*Female	-0.19	0.18	-1.04	0.30
CoupleID*Male	-0.31	0.17	-1.82	0.07
Model for Negativity				
Fixed Effects				
Female	2.80	0.12	22.54	0.00
Male	2.55	0.12	21.37	0.00
CoupleID*Female	-0.31	0.13	-2.44	0.02
CoupleID*Male	-0.25	0.11	-2.19	0.03

Table 7.

Unconditional Models for Cortisol and sAA

Model for Cortisol					**Model for sAA**				
	B	SE	t	*p*		B	SE	t	*p*
Fixed Effects					**Fixed Effects**				
Female	1.96	0.06	34.21	0.00	Female	4.63	0.07	66.53	0.00
Male	2.02	0.07	30.52	0.00	Male	4.57	0.07	69.77	0.00
Time*Female	0.01	0.03	0.30	0.77	Time*Female	0.09	0.05	2.07	0.04
Time*Male	-0.08	0.04	-2.14	0.03	Time*Male	0.17	0.05	3.54	0.00
TimeQuad*Female	-0.03	0.01	-3.93	0.00	TimeQuad*Female	-0.06	0.01	-4.42	0.00
TimeQuad*Male	-0.01	0.01	-1.20	0.23	TimeQuad*Male	-0.09	0.02	-5.72	0.00
	B	SE	Z	*p*		B	SE	Z	*p*
Random Effects					**Random Effects**				
Female Residual	0.05	0.00	10.02	0.00	Female Residual	0.11	0.01	12.89	0.00
Male Residual	0.03	0.00	10.18	0.00	Male Residual	0.09	0.01	10.63	0.00
Female Intercept	0.33	0.05	6.91	0.00	Female Intercept	0.45	0.07	6.45	0.00
Male Intercept	0.44	0.07	6.76	0.00	Male Intercept	0.37	0.06	5.95	0.00
Female Slope	0.01	0.00	4.56	0.00	Female Slope	0.00	0.00	0.87	0.38
Male Slope	0.02	0.00	4.79	0.00	Male Slope	0.00	0.00	---	---
Female-Male Intercept Covariance	0.12	0.04	2.93	0.00	Female-Male Intercept Covariance	0.06	0.05	1.22	0.22
Female-Male Slope Covariance	0.00	0.00	1.19	0.23	Female-Male Slope Covariance	0.00	0.00	0.10	0.92
Female Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.02	0.01	-2.49	0.01	Female Intercept-Slope Covariance	0.00	0.01	0.41	0.68
Male Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.05	0.01	-3.86	0.00	Male Intercept-Slope Covariance	0.00	0.01	-0.38	0.70

Table 8.

H2 Full Models for Cortisol and sAA

Model for Cortisol					**Model for sAA**				
	B	SE	t	*p*		B	SE	t	*p*
Fixed Effects					**Fixed Effects**				
Female	1.96	0.06	34.21	0.00	Female	4.63	0.07	66.40	0.00
Male	2.02	0.07	30.52	0.00	Male	4.56	0.07	67.21	0.00
Time*Female	0.01	0.03	0.30	0.77	Time*Female	0.09	0.05	2.06	0.04
Time*Male	-0.08	0.04	-2.14	0.09	Time*Male	0.19	0.05	3.81	0.00
TimeQuad*Female	-0.03	0.01	-3.93	0.00	TimeQuad*Female	-0.06	0.01	-4.41	0.00
TimeQuad*Male	-0.01	0.01	-1.20	0.10	TimeQuad*Male	-0.10	0.02	-5.97	0.00
CoupleID*Female	-0.03	0.01	-3.93	0.45	CoupleID*Female	-0.06	0.08	-0.76	0.45
CoupleID*Male	-0.09	0.07	-1.26	0.23	CoupleID*Male	0.06	0.07	0.76	0.45
CoupleID*Female*Time	0.01	0.03	0.38	0.62	CoupleID*Female*Time	-0.02	0.05	-0.39	0.70
CoupleID*Male*Time	0.02	0.04	0.45	0.81	CoupleID*Male*Time	-0.08	0.05	-1.53	0.13
CoupleID*Female*TimeQuad	0.00	0.01	-0.26	0.72	CoupleID*Female*TimeQuad	0.00	0.02	0.08	0.93
CoupleID*Male*TimeQuad	0.00	0.01	0.20	0.76	CoupleID*Male*TimeQuad	0.03	0.02	1.70	0.09
	B	SE	Z	*p*		B	SE	Z	*p*
Random Effects					**Random Effects**				
Female Residual	0.05	0.00	10.01	0.00	Female Residual	0.11	0.01	12.86	0.00
Male Residual	0.03	0.00	10.17	0.00	Male Residual	0.09	0.01	10.61	0.00
Female Intercept	0.33	0.05	6.86	0.00	Female Intercept	0.45	0.07	6.43	0.00
Male Intercept	0.44	0.07	6.72	0.00	Male Intercept	0.38	0.06	5.94	0.00
Female Slope	0.01	0.00	4.56	0.00	Female Slope	0.00	0.00	0.85	0.40
Male Slope	0.02	0.00	4.77	0.00	Male Slope	0.00	0.00	---	---
Female-Male Intercept Covariance	0.11	0.04	2.76	0.01	Female-Male Intercept Covariance	0.06	0.05	1.23	0.22
Female-Male Slope Covariance	0.00	0.00	1.25	0.77	Female-Male Slope Covariance	0.00	0.00	0.13	0.89
Female Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.02	0.01	-2.47	0.01	Female Intercept-Slope Covariance	0.00	0.01	0.32	0.75
Male Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.05	0.01	-3.83	0.01	Male Intercept-Slope Covariance	0.00	0.01	-0.43	0.67

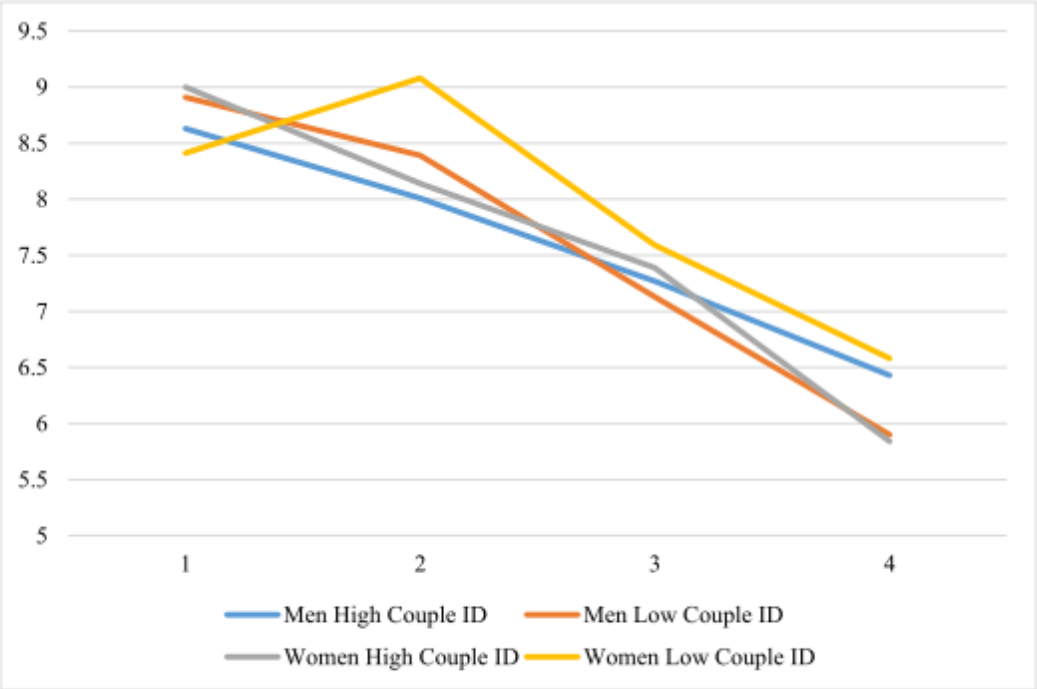


Figure 1. Hypothesis 2: Couple identity perceptions predicting cortisol trajectory

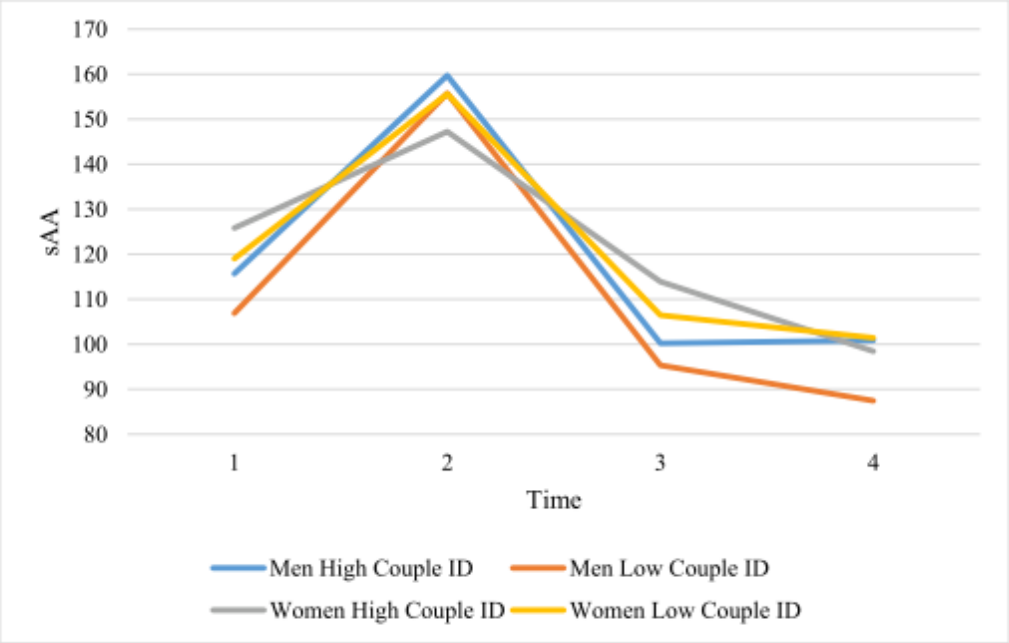


Figure 2. Hypothesis 2: Couple identity perceptions predicting sAA trajectory

Table 9.

H3 Models for Anxiety, Stress, and Negativity

Condition 1 Dummy Variable					**Condition 2 Dummy Variable**				
	B	SE	t	*p*		B	SE	t	*p*
Model for Anxiety					**Model for Anxiety**				
Fixed Effects					**Fixed Effects**				
Female	2.15	0.54	3.97	0.00	Female	1.85	0.55	3.38	0.01
Male	2.43	0.40	6.07	0.00	Male	2.28	0.38	6.00	0.00
AnxControl*Female	0.34	0.12	2.77	0.01	AnxControl*Female	0.35	0.12	2.85	0.01
AnxControl*Male	0.19	0.09	2.13	0.04	AnxControl*Male	0.2	0.09	2.18	0.03
Cond1Dummy*Female	-0.33	0.38	-0.86	0.39	Cond2Dummy*Female	0.44	0.38	1.14	0.26
Cond1Dummy*Male	-0.14	0.35	-0.40	0.69	Cond2Dummy*Male	0.29	0.37	0.77	0.44
Model for Stress					**Model for Stress**				
Fixed Effects					**Fixed Effects**				
Female	2.61	0.43	6.05	0.00	Female	2.44	0.44	5.51	0.00
Male	2.07	0.44	4.68	0.00	Male	1.71	0.41	4.17	0.00
StressControl*Female	0.15	0.09	1.64	0.11	StressControl*Female	0.16	0.09	1.72	0.09
StressControl*Male	0.22	0.09	2.38	0.02	StressControl*Male	0.24	0.09	2.65	0.10
Cond1Dummy*Female	-0.06	0.32	-0.20	0.84	Cond2Dummy*Female	0.35	0.33	1.06	0.29
Cond1Dummy*Male	-0.31	0.32	-0.99	0.32	Cond2Dummy*Male	0.47	0.33	1.42	0.16
Model for Negativity					**Model for Negativity**				
Fixed Effects					**Fixed Effects**				
Female	2.92	0.16	18.33	0.00	Female	2.70	0.15	17.78	0.00
Male	2.59	0.15	17.25	0.00	Male	2.44	0.14	16.9	0.00
Cond1Dummy*Female	-0.30	0.26	-1.15	0.25	Cond2Dummy*Female	0.34	0.27	1.26	0.21
Cond1Dummy*Male	-0.26	0.25	-1.04	0.30	Cond2Dummy*Male	0.14	0.25	0.56	0.58

Table 10.

H4 Models for Couple Identity Prime Condition

Model for Cortisol					**Model for sAA**				
	B	SE	t	*p*		B	SE	t	*p*
Fixed Effects					**Fixed Effects**				
Female	1.94	0.07	26.68	0.00	Female	4.54	0.09	51.83	0.00
Male	2.06	0.08	26.63	0.00	Male	4.57	0.08	54.96	0.00
Time*Female	-0.00	0.04	-0.08	0.94	Time*Female	0.10	0.06	1.67	0.10
Time*Male	-0.12	0.04	-2.70	0.01	Time*Male	0.15	0.06	2.35	0.02
TimeQuad*Female	-0.03	0.01	-2.90	0.00	TimeQuad*Female	-0.07	0.02	-3.60	0.00
TimeQuad*Male	0.00	0.01	-0.29	0.77	TimeQuad*Male	-0.08	0.02	-3.98	0.00
Cond1*Female	0.04	0.12	0.32	0.75	Cond1*Female	0.24	0.14	1.66	0.10
Cond1*Male	-0.17	0.13	-1.34	0.18	Cond1*Male	-0.01	0.14	-0.04	0.97
Cond1*Female*Time	0.03	0.06	0.51	0.61	Cond1*Female*Time	-0.01	0.09	-0.06	0.95
Cond1*Male*Time	0.15	0.07	2.16	0.03	Cond1*Male*Time	0.07	0.10	0.73	0.47
Cond1*Female*TimeQuad	-0.01	0.02	-0.30	0.76	Cond1*Female*TimeQuad	0.01	0.03	0.21	0.84
Cond1*Male*TimeQuad	-0.04	0.02	-1.65	0.09	Cond1*Male*TimeQuad	-0.03	0.03	-0.88	0.38
	B	SE	Z	*p*		B	SE	Z	*p*
Random Effects					**Random Effects**				
Female Residual	0.05	0.00	9.99	0.00	Female Residual	0.11	0.01	12.86	0.00
Male Residual	0.03	0.00	10.15	0.00	Male Residual	0.09	0.01	10.61	0.00
Female Intercept	0.33	0.05	6.88	0.00	Female Intercept	0.44	0.07	6.41	0.00
Male Intercept	0.44	0.07	6.74	0.00	Male Intercept	0.38	0.06	5.93	0.00
Female Slope	0.01	0.00	4.54	0.00	Female Slope	0.00	0.00	0.89	0.38
Male Slope	0.02	0.00	4.80	0.00	Male Slope	0.00	0.00	---	---
Female-Male Intercept Covariance	0.12	0.04	2.97	0.00	Female-Male Intercept Covariance	0.06	0.05	1.19	0.23
Female-Male Slope Covariance	0.00	0.00	1.12	0.26	Female-Male Slope Covariance	0.00	0.00	0.12	0.91
Female Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.02	0.01	-2.50	0.01	Female Intercept-Slope Covariance	0.00	0.01	0.34	0.73
Male Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.05	0.01	-3.84	0.00	Male Intercept-Slope Covariance	0.00	0.01	-0.38	0.70

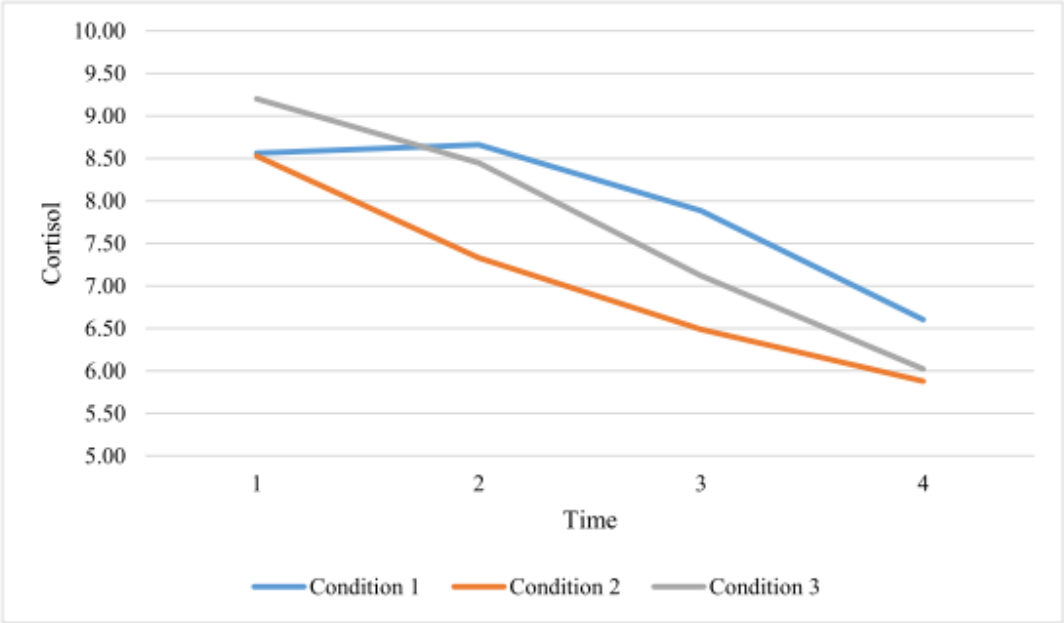


Figure 3. Hypothesis 4 male cortisol trajectories by condition

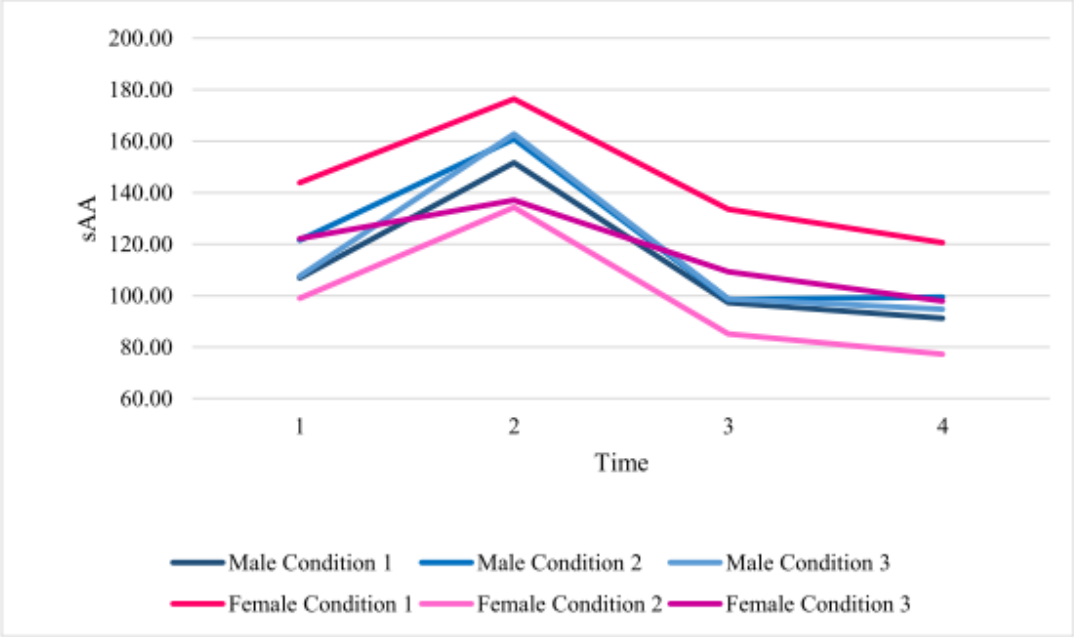


Figure 4. Hypothesis 4 male and female sAA trajectories by condition

Table 11.

H5 Models for Couple Identity Perceptions & Condition Interaction

Condition 1 (Couple Identity)					**Condition 2 (Individual Identity)**				
	B	SE	t	*p*		B	SE	t	*p*
Model for Anxiety					**Model for Anxiety**				
Fixed Effects					**Fixed Effects**				
Female	3.43	0.21	16.01	0.00	Female	3.12	0.20	15.40	0.00
Male	3.00	0.19	15.74	0.00	Male	2.91	0.19	15.46	0.00
Cond1*Female	-0.38	0.35	-1.09	0.28	Cond2*Female	0.49	0.36	1.36	0.18
Cond1*Male	-0.17	0.32	-0.53	0.60	Cond2*Male	0.08	0.33	0.24	0.81
CoupleID*Female	-0.33	0.23	-1.43	0.16	CoupleID*Female	-0.22	0.22	-0.98	0.33
CoupleID*Male	-0.04	0.21	-0.21	0.84	CoupleID*Male	-0.15	0.20	-0.75	0.46
Cond1*CoupleID*Female	0.09	0.43	0.21	0.83	Cond2*CoupleID*Female	-0.40	0.46	-0.87	0.39
Cond1*CoupleID*Male	-0.15	0.34	-0.44	0.66	Cond2*CoupleID*Male	0.14	0.36	0.40	0.69
Model for Stress					**Model for Stress**				
Fixed Effects					**Fixed Effects**				
Female	3.15	0.18	17.59	0.00	Female	3.04	0.17	17.90	0.00
Male	2.86	0.16	17.39	0.00	Male	2.69	0.16	16.64	0.00
Cond1*Female	-0.03	0.29	-0.09	0.93	Cond2*Female	0.33	0.30	1.09	0.28
Cond1*Male	-0.32	0.28	-1.17	0.24	Cond2*Male	0.17	0.28	0.61	0.54
CoupleID*Female	-0.29	0.18	-1.59	0.11	CoupleID*Female	-0.21	0.18	-1.21	0.23
CoupleID*Male	-0.17	0.17	-0.96	0.34	CoupleID*Male	-0.19	0.16	-1.18	0.24
Cond1*CoupleID*Female	0.08	0.34	0.25	0.81	Cond2*CoupleID*Female	-0.18	0.36	-0.49	0.63
Cond1*CoupleID*Male	0.06	0.28	0.23	0.81	Cond2*CoupleID*Male	0.12	0.29	0.42	0.68
Model for Negativity					**Model for Negativity**				
Fixed Effects					**Fixed Effects**				
Female	2.89	0.16	18.29	0.00	Female	2.71	0.15	18.06	0.00
Male	2.64	0.15	17.71	0.00	Male	2.51	0.15	17.09	0.00
Cond1*Female	-0.27	0.26	-1.03	0.31	Cond2*Female	0.32	0.27	1.19	0.24
Cond1*Male	-0.28	0.25	-1.13	0.26	Cond2*Male	0.14	0.26	0.53	0.60
CoupleID*Female	-0.42	0.15	-2.74	0.01	CoupleID*Female	-0.38	0.15	-2.53	0.01
CoupleID*Male	-0.34	0.15	-2.29	0.02	CoupleID*Male	-0.23	0.14	-1.66	0.10
Cond1*CoupleID*Female	0.40	0.29	1.40	0.16	Cond2*CoupleID*Female	0.29	0.30	0.96	0.34
Cond1*CoupleID*Male	0.25	0.24	1.07	0.29	Cond2*CoupleID*Male	-0.06	0.25	-0.23	0.82

Table 12.

H6 Condition 1 (Couple Identity Prime) Models

sAA					**Cortisol**				
	B	SE	t	*p*		B	SE	t	*p*
Fixed Effects					**Fixed Effects**				
Female	4.80	0.12	39.18	0.00	Female	1.97	0.11	18.29	0.00
Male	4.55	0.10	47.30	0.00	Male	1.91	0.12	15.92	0.00
Time*Female	0.09	0.08	1.07	0.29	Time*Female	0.03	0.05	0.73	0.46
Time*Male	0.27	0.09	3.05	0.00	Time*Male	0.02	0.05	0.44	0.66
TimeQuad*Female	-0.06	0.03	-2.25	0.03	TimeQuad*Female	-0.04	0.01	-2.85	0.01
TimeQuad*Male	-0.12	0.03	-4.41	0.00	TimeQuad*Male	-0.04	0.01	-2.71	0.01
CoupleID*Female	-0.16	0.16	-1.00	0.32	CoupleID*Female	0.07	0.14	0.47	0.64
CoupleID*Male	0.05	0.10	0.51	0.61	CoupleID*Male	-0.07	0.12	-0.59	0.56
Time*Female*CoupleID	0.02	0.11	0.14	0.89	Time*Female*CoupleID	-0.05	0.06	-0.87	0.39
Time*Male*CoupleID	-0.14	0.09	-1.52	0.13	Time*Male*CoupleID	0.05	0.05	1.07	0.29
TimeQuad*Female*CoupleID	-0.01	0.04	-0.33	0.74	TimeQuad*Female*CoupleID	0.01	0.02	0.51	0.61
TimeQuad*Male*CoupleID	0.05	0.03	1.56	0.12	TimeQuad*Male*CoupleID	-0.01	0.01	-0.47	0.64
	B	SE	Z	*p*		B	SE	Z	*p*
Random Effects					**Random Effects**				
Female Residual	0.11	0.01	7.63	0.00	Female Residual	0.03	0.00	6.31	0.00
Male Residual	0.11	0.02	6.44	0.00	Male Residual	0.03	0.00	6.40	0.00
Female Intercept	0.51	0.13	3.93	0.00	Female Intercept	0.45	0.11	4.24	0.00
Male Intercept	0.23	0.07	3.30	0.00	Male Intercept	0.51	0.12	4.17	0.00
Female Slope	0.01	0.01	1.00	0.32	Female Slope	0.01	0.00	2.59	0.01
Male Slope	0.00	0.00	---	---	Male Slope	0.02	0.01	3.20	0.00
Female-Male Intercept Covariance	0.01	0.07	0.20	0.84	Female-Male Intercept Covariance	0.11	0.08	1.37	0.17
Female-Male Slope Covariance	0.00	0.01	0.56	0.57	Female-Male Slope Covariance	0.00	0.00	0.45	0.65
Female Intercept-Slope Covariance	0.00	0.02	-0.09	0.93	Female Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.04	0.02	-2.59	0.01
Male Intercept-Slope Covariance	0.02	0.02	1.18	0.24	Male Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.03	0.02	-1.42	0.16

Table 13.

H6 Condition 2 (Individual Identity) Models

sAA					**Cortisol**				
	B	SE	t	*p*		B	SE	t	*p*
Fixed Effects					**Fixed Effects**				
Female	4.42	0.13	34.54	0.00	Female	1.93	0.10	19.94	0.00
Male	4.60	0.12	38.05	0.00	Male	2.09	0.11	19.65	0.00
Time*Female	0.15	0.09	1.75	0.08	Time*Female	-0.04	0.06	-0.63	0.53
Time*Male	0.11	0.09	1.31	0.19	Time*Male	-0.15	0.08	-1.85	0.07
TimeQuad*Female	-0.09	0.03	-3.21	0.00	TimeQuad*Female	-0.03	0.02	-1.37	0.18
TimeQuad*Male	-0.07	0.03	-2.61	0.01	TimeQuad*Male	0.00	0.03	0.16	0.88
CoupleID*Female	0.19	0.16	1.13	0.27	CoupleID*Female	-0.14	0.11	-1.25	0.22
CoupleID*Male	0.22	0.13	1.68	0.10	CoupleID*Male	-0.18	0.11	-1.65	0.11
Time*Female*CoupleID	-0.10	0.11	-0.86	0.39	Time*Female*CoupleID	-0.02	0.08	-0.19	0.85
Time*Male*CoupleID	-0.15	0.10	-1.60	0.11	Time*Male*CoupleID	0.08	0.09	0.89	0.38
TimeQuad*Female*CoupleID	0.02	0.04	0.49	0.63	TimeQuad*Female*CoupleID	0.01	0.02	0.28	0.78
TimeQuad*Male*CoupleID	0.05	0.03	1.79	0.08	TimeQuad*Male*CoupleID	-0.01	0.03	-0.42	0.68
	B	SE	Z	*p*		B	SE	Z	*p*
Random Effects					**Random Effects**				
Female Residual	0.11	0.02	6.65	0.00	Female Residual	0.09	0.02	5.06	0.00
Male Residual	0.11	0.02	6.68	0.00	Male Residual	0.05	0.01	5.51	0.00
Female Intercept	0.47	0.13	3.59	0.00	Female Intercept	0.28	0.08	3.65	0.00
Male Intercept	0.40	0.11	3.55	0.00	Male Intercept	0.30	0.10	3.01	0.00
Female Slope	0.00	0.00	---	---	Female Slope	0.02	0.01	2.38	0.02
Male Slope	0.00	0.00	---	---	Male Slope	0.01	0.01	0.77	0.44
Female-Male Intercept Covariance	0.14	0.09	1.54	0.12	Female-Male Intercept Covariance	0.12	0.07	1.88	0.06
Female-Male Slope Covariance	0.00	0.01	0.44	0.66	Female-Male Slope Covariance	0.00	0.01	-0.85	0.40
Female Intercept-Slope Covariance	0.01	0.02	0.33	0.74	Female Intercept-Slope Covariance	0.00	0.02	-0.22	0.83
Male Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.02	0.02	-0.83	0.41	Male Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.01	0.02	-0.30	0.77

Table 14.

H6 Condition 3 (Control Condition) Models

sAA					**Cortisol**				
	B	SE	t	*p*		B	SE	t	*p*
Fixed Effects					**Fixed Effects**				
Female	4.68	0.10	47.66	0.00	Female	1.94	0.09	21.28	0.00
Male	4.53	0.13	33.89	0.00	Male	2.04	0.10	20.41	0.00
Time*Female	0.03	0.06	0.46	0.65	Time*Female	0.04	0.04	0.89	0.37
Time*Male	0.19	0.09	2.06	0.04	Time*Male	-0.05	0.05	-0.94	0.35
TimeQuad*Female	-0.04	0.02	-2.10	0.04	TimeQuad*Female	-0.04	0.01	-3.13	0.00
TimeQuad*Male	-0.09	0.03	-3.10	0.00	TimeQuad*Male	-0.02	0.01	-1.46	0.15
CoupleID*Female	-0.14	0.09	-1.48	0.15	CoupleID*Female	-0.09	0.08	-1.06	0.30
CoupleID*Male	-0.13	0.15	-0.88	0.39	CoupleID*Male	0.10	0.11	0.92	0.36
Time*Female*CoupleID	0.00	0.06	0.01	0.99	Time*Female*CoupleID	0.07	0.04	1.59	0.11
Time*Male*CoupleID	0.07	0.10	0.64	0.52	Time*Male*CoupleID	-0.17	0.06	-3.09	0.00
TimeQuad*Female*CoupleID	0.00	0.02	0.04	0.97	TimeQuad*Female*CoupleID	-0.01	0.01	-0.99	0.33
TimeQuad*Male*CoupleID	-0.02	0.03	-0.56	0.58	TimeQuad*Male*CoupleID	0.04	0.02	2.58	0.01
	B	SE	Z	*p*		B	SE	Z	*p*
Random Effects					**Random Effects**				
Female Residual	0.12	0.02	6.80	0.00	Female Residual	0.03	0.00	5.75	0.00
Male Residual	0.05	0.01	5.88	0.00	Male Residual	0.02	0.00	5.74	0.00
Female Intercept	0.28	0.08	3.60	0.00	Female Intercept	0.26	0.07	3.77	0.00
Male Intercept	0.48	0.14	3.31	0.00	Male Intercept	0.31	0.08	3.74	0.00
Female Slope	0.01	0.01	1.18	0.24	Female Slope	0.01	0.00	2.91	0.00
Male Slope	0.00	0.00	---	---	Male Slope	0.02	0.01	2.90	0.00
Female-Male Intercept Covariance	0.02	0.08	0.30	0.77	Female-Male Intercept Covariance	0.07	0.06	1.33	0.18
Female-Male Slope Covariance	-0.01	0.01	-0.62	0.54	Female-Male Slope Covariance	0.00	0.00	1.07	0.29
Female Intercept-Slope Covariance	0.00	0.02	0.09	0.93	Female Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.02	0.01	-1.29	0.20
Male Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.02	0.03	-0.56	0.58	Male Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.04	0.02	-2.41	0.02

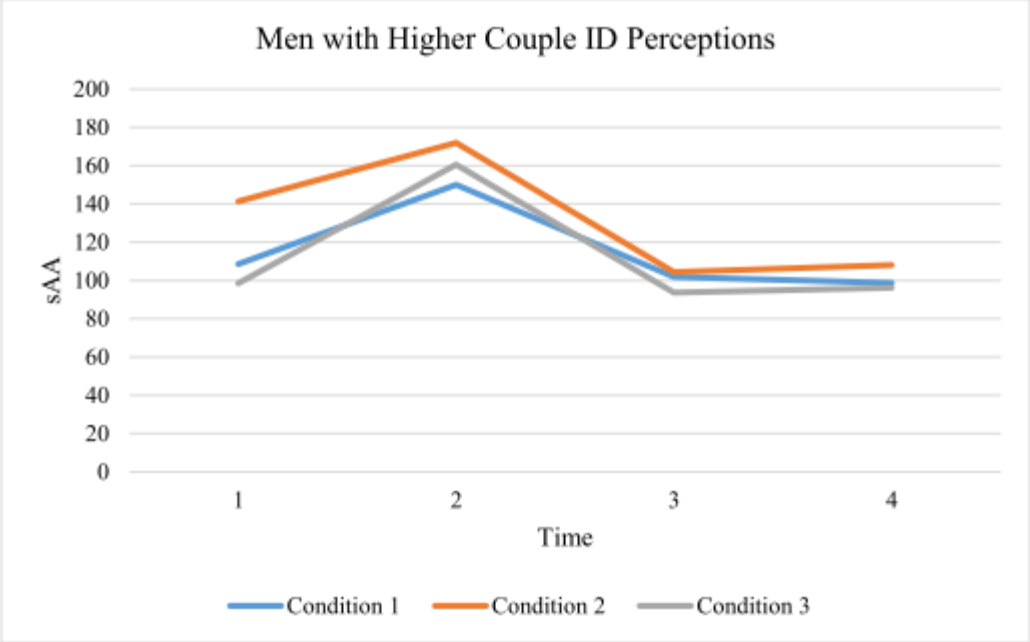


Figure 5. Hypothesis 6 couple identity perceptions and condition predicting male sAA

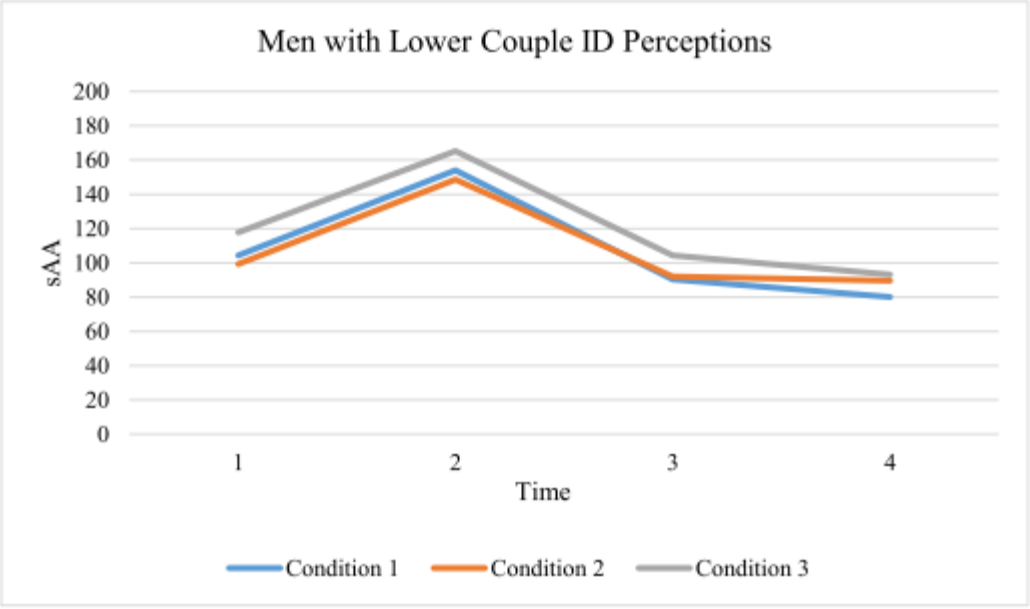


Figure 6. Hypothesis 6 couple identity perceptions and condition predicting male sAA

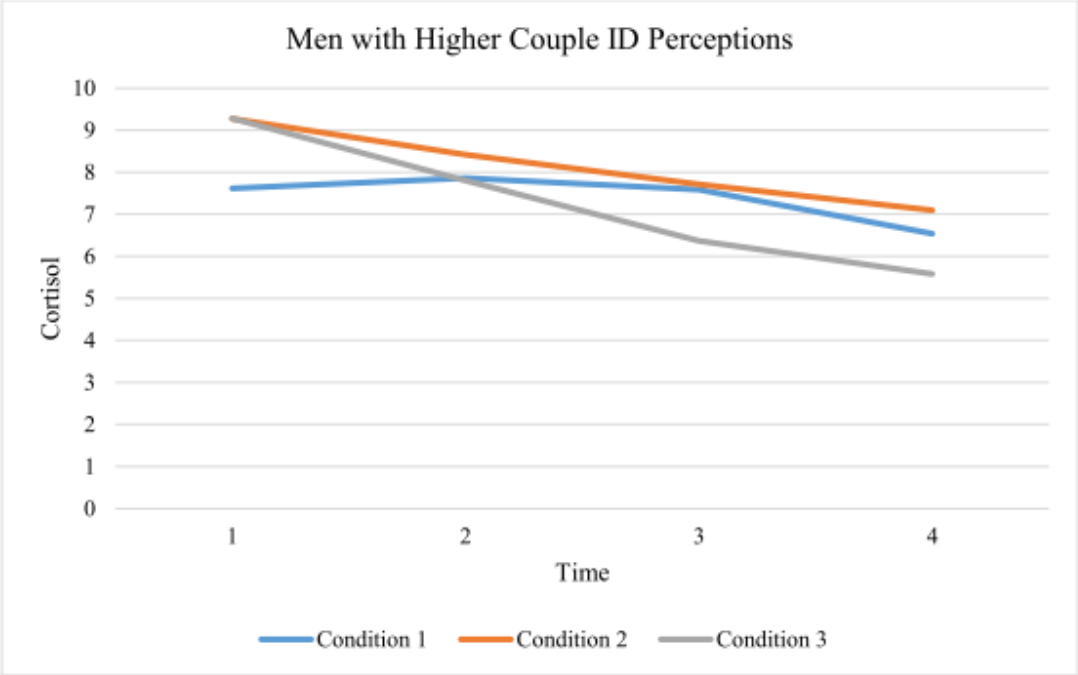


Figure 7. Hypothesis 6 couple identity perceptions and condition predicting male cortisol

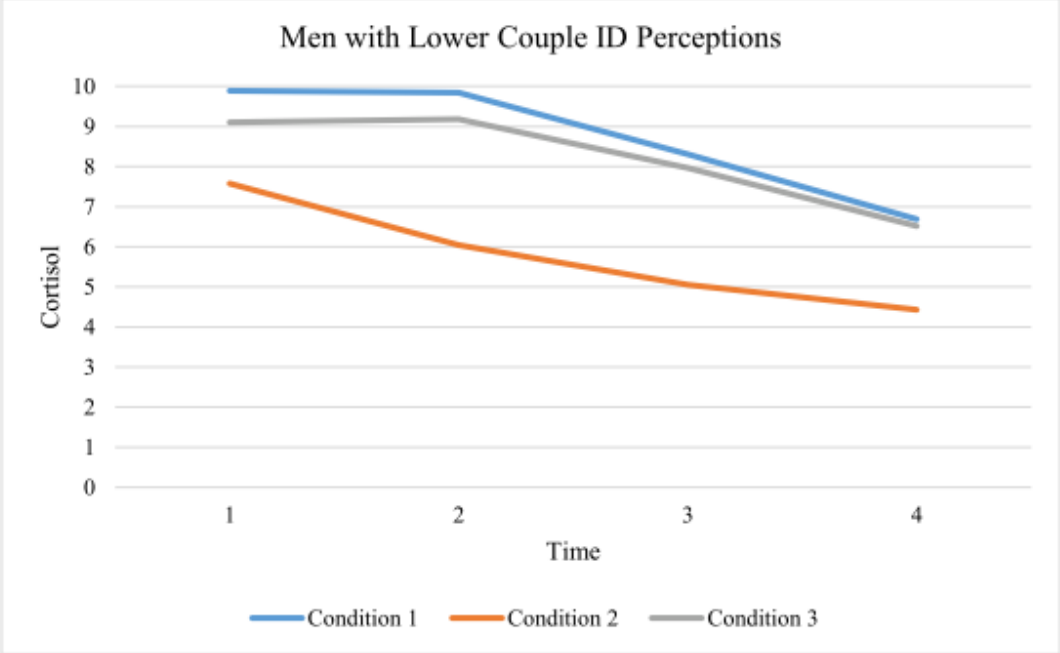


Figure 8. Hypothesis 6 couple identity perceptions and condition predicting male cortisol

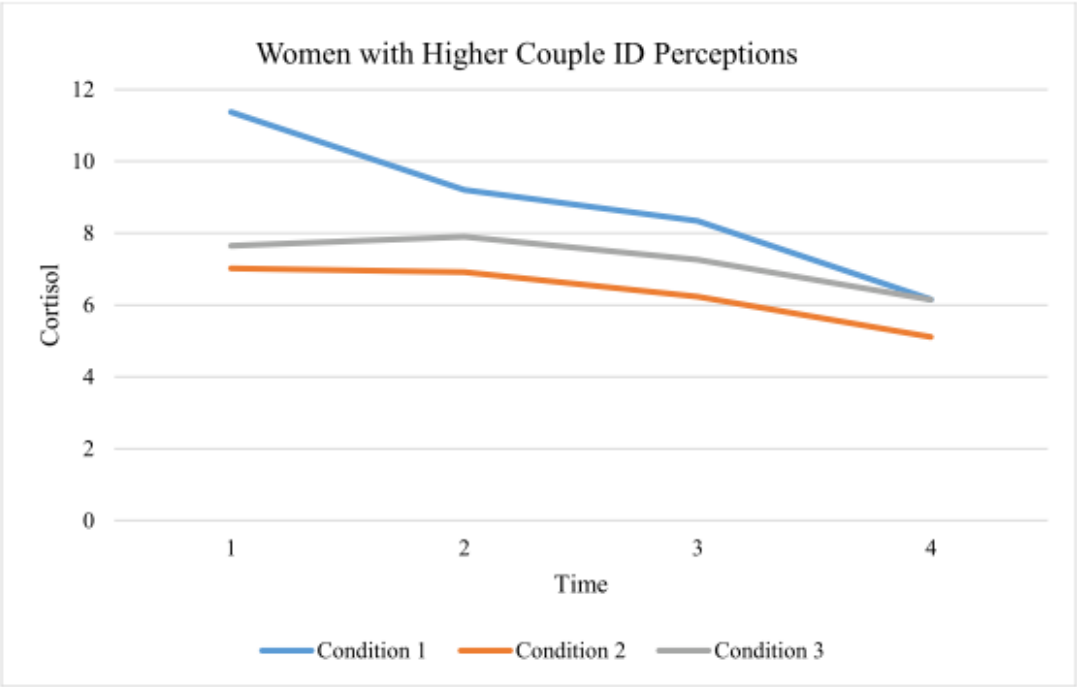


Figure 9. Hypothesis 6 couple identity perceptions and condition predicting female cortisol

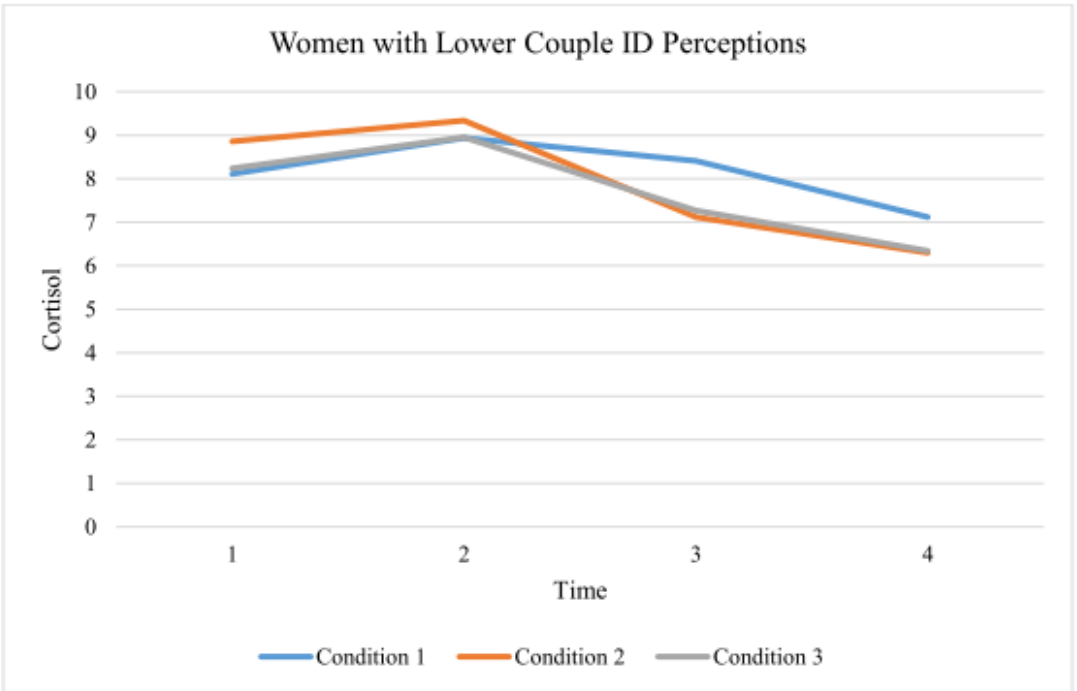


Figure 10. Hypothesis 6 couple identity perceptions and condition predicting female cortisol

Table 15.

H7 Models

Intra-Relationship Gaps					**Extra-Relationship Gaps**				
	B	SE	t	*p*		B	SE	t	*p*
Model for Anxiety					**Model for Anxiety**				
Fixed Effects					**Fixed Effects**				
Female	3.39	0.18	18.62	0.00	Female	3.39	0.18	18.47	0.00
Male	2.97	0.19	15.72	0.00	Male	2.98	0.17	17.15	0.00
AnxControl*Female	0.27	0.12	2.21	0.03	AnxControl*Female	0.29	0.12	2.36	0.02
AnxControl*Male	0.12	0.09	1.29	0.20	AnxControl*Male	0.13	0.08	1.59	0.12
Intra-RelGap*Female	0.37	0.19	1.93	0.06	Extra-RelGap*Female	0.37	0.19	1.92	0.06
Intra-RelGap*Male	0.41	0.16	2.61	0.01	Extra-RelGap*Male	0.52	0.15	3.56	0.00
Model for Stress					**Model for Stress**				
Fixed Effects					**Fixed Effects**				
Female	3.23	0.15	21.13	0.00	Female	3.23	0.15	20.90	0.00
Male	2.78	0.16	17.04	0.00	Male	2.76	0.15	18.03	0.00
StressControl*Female	0.15	0.09	1.63	0.11	StressControl*Female	0.17	0.10	1.79	0.08
StressControl*Male	0.18	0.10	1.81	0.07	StressControl*Male	0.18	0.09	2.03	0.05
Intra-RelGap*Female	0.27	0.16	1.71	0.09	Extra-RelGap*Female	0.12	0.15	0.78	0.44
Intra-RelGap*Male	0.26	0.14	1.79	0.08	Extra-RelGap*Male	0.36	0.13	2.72	0.01
Model for Negativity					**Model for Negativity**				
Fixed Effects					**Fixed Effects**				
Female	2.82	0.12	23.11	0.00	Female	2.80	0.12	22.52	0.00
Male	2.45	0.12	20.65	0.00	Male	2.46	0.12	20.87	0.00
Intra-RelGap*Female	0.34	0.12	2.92	0.00	Extra-RelGap*Female	0.32	0.11	2.93	0.00
Intra-RelGap*Male	0.16	0.09	1.72	0.09	Extra-RelGap*Male	0.18	0.10	1.85	0.07

Table 16.

H8 Conditional Models with Intra-Relationship Gaps

Model for Cortisol					**Model for sAA**				
	B	SE	t	Sig.		B	SE	t	Sig.
Fixed Effects					**Fixed Effects**				
Female	1.96	0.06	34.23	0.00	Female	4.62	0.07	66.49	0.00
Male	2.02	0.06	31.86	0.00	Male	4.57	0.07	67.91	0.00
Time*Female	0.01	0.03	0.25	0.80	Time*Female	0.10	0.05	2.08	0.04
Time*Male	-0.05	0.04	-1.33	0.18	Time*Male	0.18	0.05	3.50	0.00
TimeQuad*Female	-0.03	0.01	-3.91	0.00	TimeQuad*Female	-0.06	0.01	-4.41	0.00
TimeQuad*Male	-0.02	0.01	-1.89	0.61	TimeQuad*Male	-0.09	0.02	-5.60	0.00
IntraGaps*Female	0.02	0.06	0.30	0.77	IntraGaps*Female	0.07	0.07	0.94	0.35
IntraGaps*Male	-0.03	0.05	-0.51	0.61	IntraGaps*Male	0.01	0.06	0.20	0.84
IntraGaps*Female*Time	0.01	0.03	0.17	0.86	IntraGaps*Female*Time	0.06	0.05	1.19	0.24
IntraGaps*Male*Time	-0.05	0.03	-1.67	0.10	IntraGaps*Male*Time	-0.01	0.04	-0.26	0.80
IntraGaps*Female*TimeQuad	0.00	0.01	-0.24	0.81	IntraGaps*Female*TimeQuad	-0.01	0.02	-0.90	0.37
IntraGaps*Male*TimeQuad	0.01	0.01	1.39	0.17	IntraGaps*Male*TimeQuad	0.00	0.01	0.11	0.92
	B	SE	Z	Sig.		B	SE	Z	Sig.
Random Effects					**Random Effects**				
Female Residual	0.05	0.00	9.84	0.00	Female Residual	0.11	0.01	12.87	0.00
Male Residual	0.03	0.00	10.13	0.00	Male Residual	0.09	0.01	10.57	0.00
Female Intercept	0.33	0.05	6.83	0.00	Female Intercept	0.44	0.07	6.38	0.00
Male Intercept	0.38	0.06	6.47	0.00	Male Intercept	0.38	0.06	5.93	0.00
Female Slope	0.01	0.00	4.51	0.00	Female Slope	0.00	0.00	0.90	0.37
Male Slope	0.01	0.00	4.10	0.00	Male Slope	0.00	0.00	---	---
Female-Male Intercept Covariance	0.10	0.04	2.61	0.01	Female-Male Intercept Covariance	0.05	0.05	1.04	0.30
Female-Male Slope Covariance	0.00	0.00	0.24	0.81	Female-Male Slope Covariance	0.00	0.00	0.20	0.84
Female Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.02	0.01	-2.36	0.02	Female Intercept-Slope Covariance	0.00	0.01	0.31	0.76
Male Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.03	0.01	-2.65	0.01	Male Intercept-Slope Covariance	0.00	0.01	-0.43	0.67

Table 17.

H8 Conditional Models with Extra-Relationship Gaps

Model for Cortisol					**Model for sAA**				
	B	SE	t	Sig.		B	SE	t	Sig.
Fixed Effects					**Fixed Effects**				
Female	1.95	0.06	34.15	0.00	Female	4.63	0.07	66.93	0.00
Male	1.97	0.06	30.58	0.00	Male	4.56	0.07	68.82	0.00
Time*Female	0.01	0.03	0.31	0.76	Time*Female	0.09	0.05	2.10	0.04
Time*Male	-0.05	0.03	-1.50	0.13	Time*Male	0.18	0.05	3.70	0.00
TimeQuad*Female	-0.03	0.01	-4.03	0.00	TimeQuad*Female	-0.06	0.01	-4.47	0.00
TimeQuad*Male	-0.02	0.01	-1.81	0.07	TimeQuad*Male	-0.09	0.02	-5.78	0.00
ExtraGaps*Female	0.01	0.06	0.18	0.86	ExtraGaps*Female	0.06	0.07	0.87	0.39
ExtraGaps*Male	0.18	0.05	3.62	0.00	ExtraGaps*Male	0.07	0.06	1.23	0.22
ExtraGaps*Female*Time	0.07	0.03	2.27	0.02	ExtraGaps*Female*Time	0.11	0.05	2.33	0.02
ExtraGaps*Male*Time	-0.04	0.03	-1.23	0.22	ExtraGaps*Male*Time	-0.06	0.05	-1.23	0.22
ExtraGaps*Female*TimeQuad	-0.02	0.01	-2.48	0.01	ExtraGaps*Female*TimeQuad	-0.04	0.01	-2.46	0.01
ExtraGaps*Male*TimeQuad	0.01	0.01	0.90	0.37	ExtraGaps*Male*TimeQuad	0.01	0.01	0.80	0.42
	B	SE	Z	Sig.		B	SE	Z	Sig.
Random Effects					**Random Effects**				
Female Residual	0.05	0.00	9.95	0.00	Female Residual	0.11	0.01	12.87	0.00
Male Residual	0.03	0.00	10.31	0.00	Male Residual	0.09	0.01	10.60	0.00
Female Intercept	0.33	0.05	6.90	0.00	Female Intercept	0.45	0.07	6.43	0.00
Male Intercept	0.41	0.07	6.29	0.00	Male Intercept	0.37	0.06	5.93	0.00
Female Slope	0.01	0.00	4.71	0.00	Female Slope	0.00	0.00	1.06	0.29
Male Slope	0.01	0.00	4.27	0.00	Male Slope	0.00	0.00	---	---
Female-Male Intercept Covariance	0.10	0.04	2.56	0.01	Female-Male Intercept Covariance	0.06	0.05	1.20	0.23
Female-Male Slope Covariance	0.00	0.00	0.05	0.96	Female-Male Slope Covariance	0.00	0.00	0.22	0.82
Female Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.02	0.01	-2.56	0.01	Female Intercept-Slope Covariance	0.00	0.01	0.30	0.76
Male Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.03	0.01	-2.62	0.01	Male Intercept-Slope Covariance	0.00	0.01	-0.34	0.73

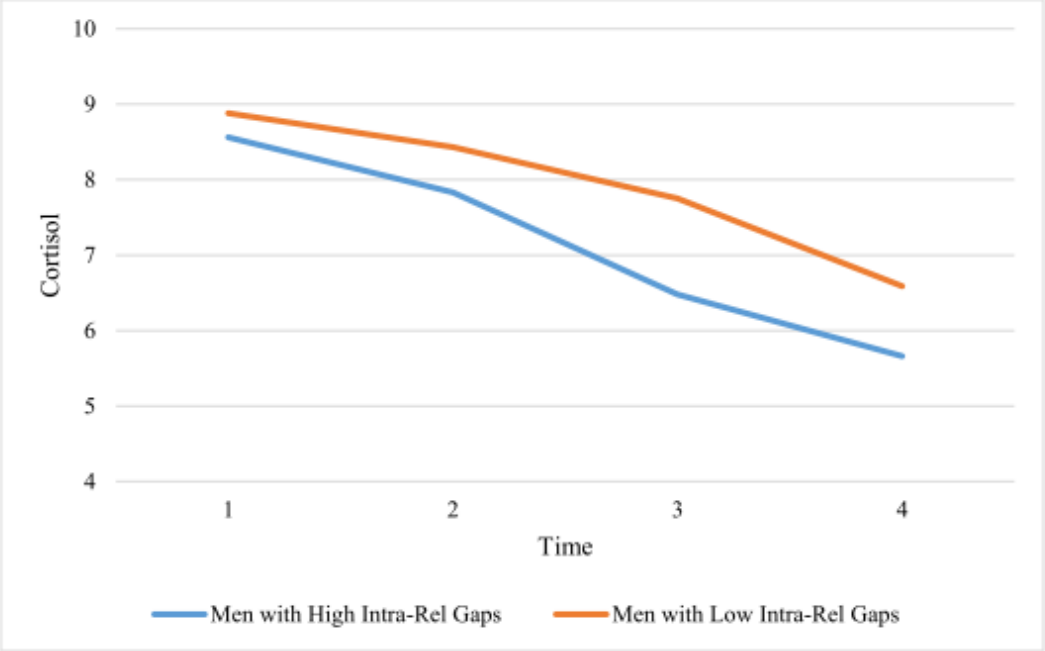


Figure 11. Hypothesis 8 intra-relationship gaps predicting cortisol trajectory for men

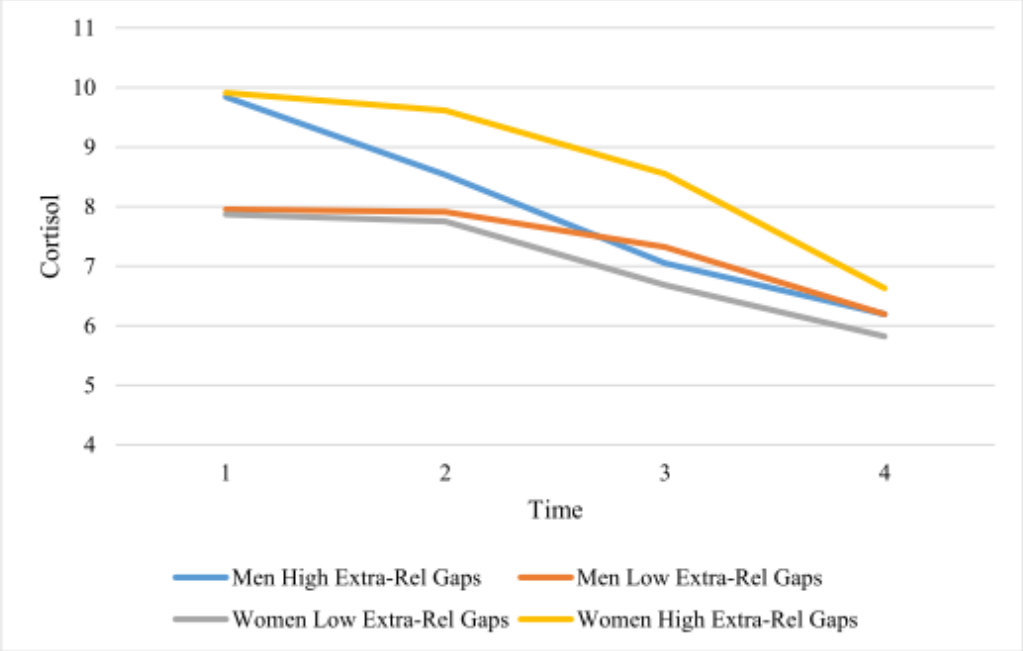


Figure 12. Hypothesis 8: Extra-relationship gaps predicting cortisol trajectory

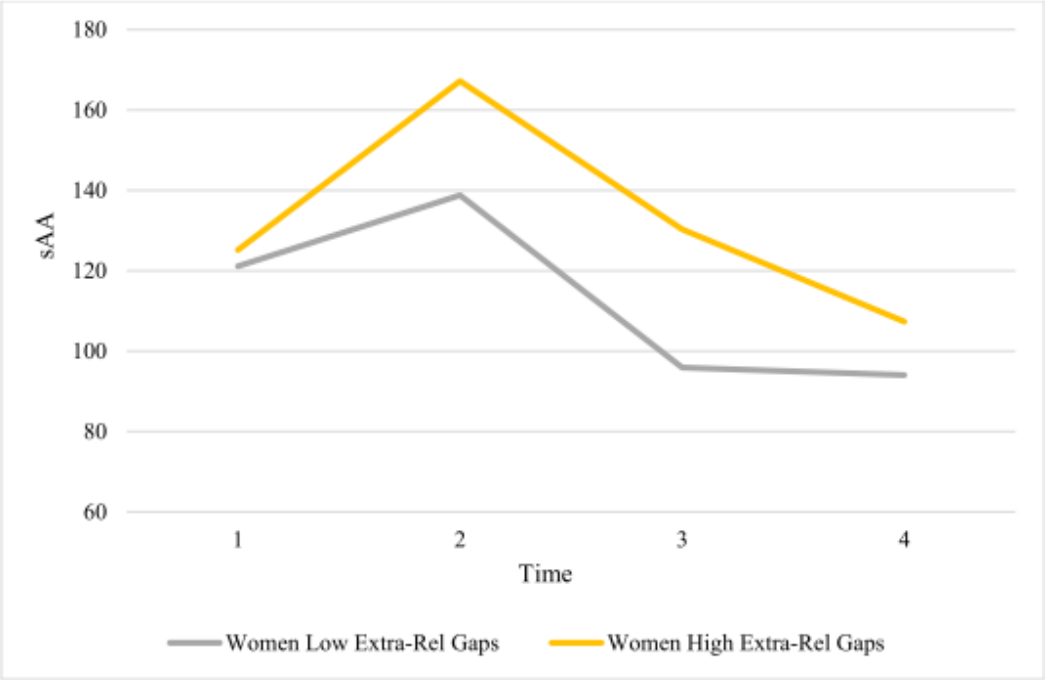


Figure 13. Hypothesis 8: Extra-relationship gaps predicting sAA trajectory

Table 18.

H9 Models for Intra-Relationship Gaps

Condition 1 (Couple Identity Prime)					**Condition 2 (Individual Identity Prime)**				
	B	SE	t	*p*		B	SE	t	*p*
Model for Anxiety					**Model for Anxiety**				
Fixed Effects					**Fixed Effects**				
Female	3.38	0.21	16.06	0.00	Female	3.20	0.20	15.99	0.00
Male	2.90	0.19	15.52	0.00	Male	2.80	0.17	16.15	0.00
Cond1*Female	-0.25	0.35	-0.72	0.47	Cond2*Female	0.42	0.36	1.16	0.25
Cond1*Male	-0.17	0.30	-0.58	0.56	Cond2*Male	0.08	0.32	0.25	0.81
Intra-RelGap*Female	0.52	0.21	2.45	0.02	Intra-RelGap*Female	0.70	0.22	3.20	0.00
Intra-RelGap*Male	0.26	0.16	1.64	0.10	Intra-RelGap*Male	0.51	0.15	3.33	0.00
Cond1*Intra-RelGap*Female	0.01	0.38	0.02	0.98	Cond2*Intra-RelGap*Female	-0.52	0.36	-1.44	0.15
Cond1*Intra-RelGap*Male	0.45	0.27	1.67	0.10	Cond2*Intra-RelGap*Male	-0.29	0.28	-1.01	0.31
Model for Stress					**Model for Stress**				
Fixed Effects					**Fixed Effects**				
Female	3.12	0.18	17.56	0.00	Female	3.08	0.17	18.20	0.00
Male	2.76	0.16	16.92	0.00	Male	2.60	0.15	17.14	0.00
Cond1*Female	0.06	0.30	0.22	0.83	Cond2*Female	0.27	0.30	0.88	0.38
Cond1*Male	-0.28	0.26	-1.07	0.29	Cond2*Male	0.16	0.28	0.58	0.56
Intra-RelGap*Female	0.41	0.17	2.38	0.02	Intra-RelGap*Female	0.47	0.18	2.62	0.01
Intra-RelGap*Male	0.21	0.13	1.61	0.11	Intra-RelGap*Male	0.36	0.13	2.80	0.01
Cond1*Intra-RelGap*Female	-0.06	0.31	-0.19	0.85	Cond2*Intra-RelGap*Female	-0.29	0.29	-0.99	0.32
Cond1*Intra-RelGap*Male	0.24	0.22	1.09	0.28	Cond2*Intra-RelGap*Male	-0.16	0.24	-0.69	0.49
Model for Negativity					**Model for Negativity**				
Fixed Effects					**Fixed Effects**				
Female	2.88	0.16	18.35	0.00	Female	2.77	0.15	18.57	0.00
Male	2.53	0.15	16.41	0.00	Male	2.43	0.14	17.04	0.00
Cond1*Female	-0.12	0.26	-0.48	0.63	Cond2*Female	0.22	0.27	0.82	0.41
Cond1*Male	-0.20	0.25	-0.83	0.41	Cond2*Male	0.01	0.26	0.03	0.97
Intra-RelGap*Female	0.32	0.14	2.22	0.03	Intra-RelGap*Female	0.42	0.15	2.84	0.01
Intra-RelGap*Male	0.16	0.12	1.34	0.18	Intra-RelGap*Male	0.10	0.11	0.88	0.38
Cond1*Intra-RelGap*Female	0.05	0.26	0.18	0.86	Cond2*Intra-RelGap*Female	-0.25	0.25	-1.02	0.31
Cond1*Intra-RelGap*Male	-0.01	0.20	-0.07	0.95	Cond2*Intra-RelGap*Male	0.21	0.21	0.98	0.33

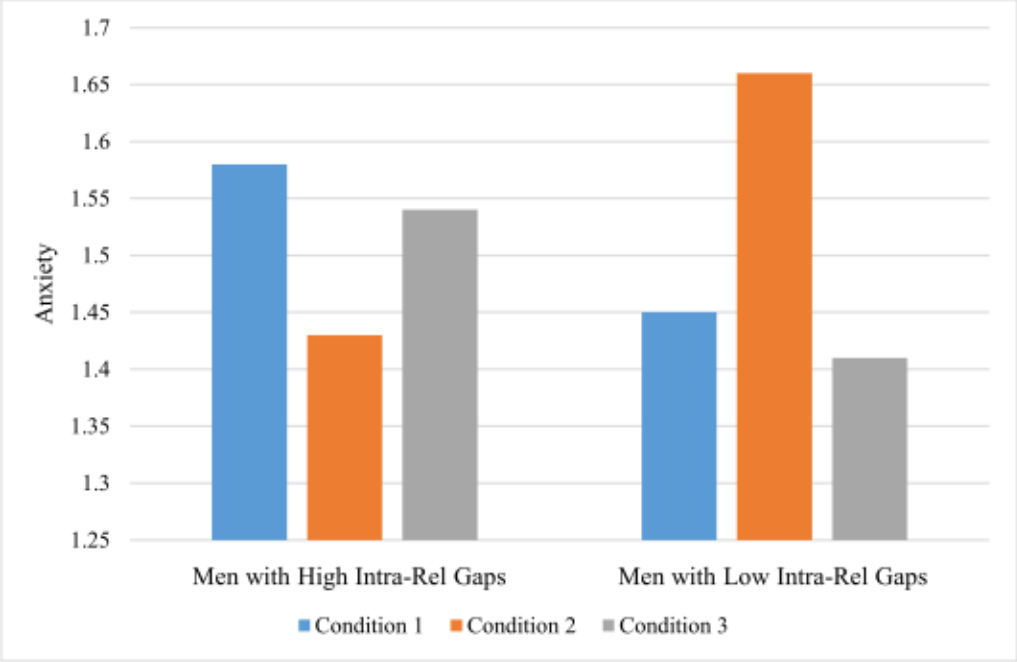


Figure 14. Hypothesis 9 intra-relationship gaps X condition interaction effect for men's anxiety

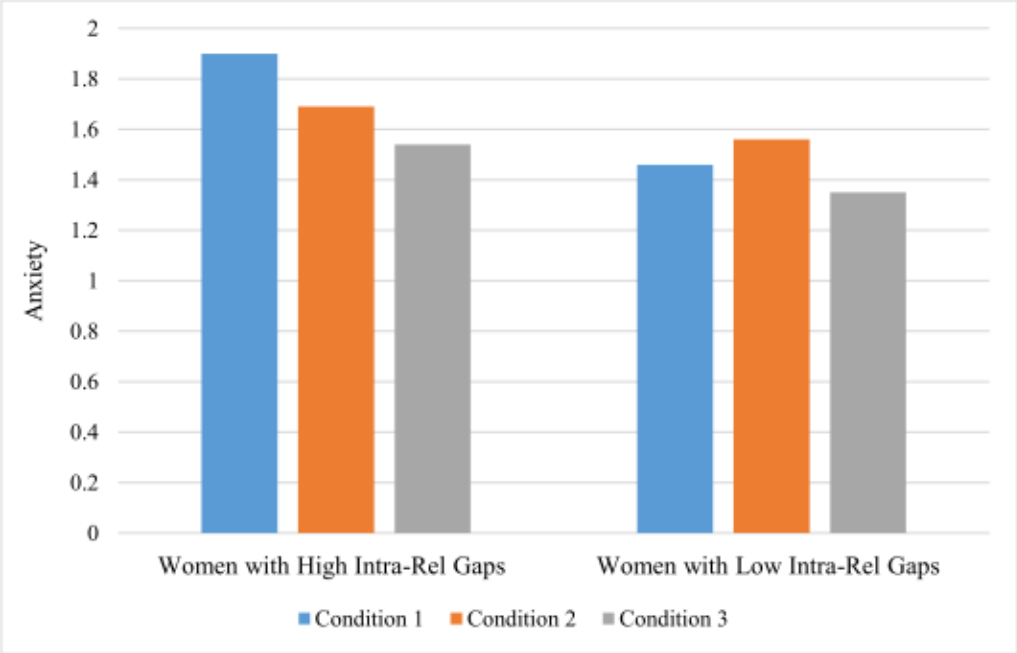


Figure 15. Hypothesis 9 intra-relationship gaps X condition interaction effect for women's anxiety

Table 19.

H9 Models for Extra-Relationship Gaps

Condition 1 (Couple Identity Prime)					**Condition 2 (Individual Identity Prime)**				
	B	SE	t	*p*		B	SE	t	*p*
Model for Anxiety					**Model for Anxiety**				
Fixed Effects					**Fixed Effects**				
Female	3.42	0.21	15.93	0.00	Female	3.12	0.20	15.37	0.00
Male	2.86	0.18	15.80	0.00	Male	2.85	0.17	16.97	0.00
Cond1*Female	-0.36	0.35	-1.03	0.31	Cond2*Female	0.53	0.36	1.48	0.14
Cond1*Male	-0.04	0.29	-0.13	0.90	Cond2*Male	-0.06	0.32	-0.20	0.84
Extra-RelGap*Female	0.30	0.21	1.46	0.15	Extra-RelGap*Female	0.23	0.21	1.10	0.27
Extra-RelGap*Male	0.40	0.15	2.63	0.01	Extra-RelGap*Male	0.58	0.17	3.48	0.00
Cond1*Extra-RelGap*Female	0.00	0.38	0.00	0.99	Cond2*Extra-RelGap*Female	0.24	0.36	0.67	0.50
Cond1*Extra-RelGap*Male	0.41	0.30	1.37	0.17	Cond2*Extra-RelGap*Male	-0.17	0.28	-0.62	0.54
Model for Stress					**Model for Stress**				
Fixed Effects					**Fixed Effects**				
Female	3.16	0.18	17.39	0.00	Female	3.03	0.17	17.66	0.00
Male	2.73	0.16	17.19	0.00	Male	2.63	0.15	17.85	0.00
Cond1*Female	-0.03	0.30	-0.11	0.91	Cond2*Female	0.36	0.31	1.16	0.25
Cond1*Male	-0.19	0.25	-0.73	0.46	Cond2*Male	0.06	0.28	0.21	0.83
Extra-RelGap*Female	0.11	0.16	0.66	0.51	Extra-RelGap*Female	0.11	0.17	0.62	0.54
Extra-RelGap*Male	0.33	0.13	2.59	0.01	Extra-RelGap*Male	0.42	0.14	3.04	0.00
Cond1*Extra-RelGap*Female	0.06	0.30	0.18	0.86	Cond2*Extra-RelGap*Female	0.05	0.29	0.16	0.87
Cond1*Extra-RelGap*Male	0.17	0.25	0.66	0.51	Cond2*Extra-RelGap*Male	-0.08	0.23	-0.36	0.72
Model for Negativity					**Model for Negativity**				
Fixed Effects					**Fixed Effects**				
Female	2.89	0.16	18.25	0.00	Female	2.70	0.15	17.84	0.00
Male	2.55	0.15	16.74	0.00	Male	2.44	0.14	17.19	0.00
Cond1*Female	-0.22	0.26	-0.85	0.40	Cond2*Female	0.33	0.27	1.21	0.23
Cond1*Male	-0.19	0.24	-0.79	0.43	Cond2*Male	-0.01	0.26	-0.05	0.96
Extra-RelGap*Female	0.30	0.13	2.21	0.03	Extra-RelGap*Female	0.28	0.14	2.06	0.04
Extra-RelGap*Male	0.11	0.11	0.97	0.33	Extra-RelGap*Male	0.10	0.12	0.84	0.40
Cond1*Extra-RelGap*Female	0.09	0.25	0.38	0.71	Cond2*Extra-RelGap*Female	0.10	0.23	0.44	0.66
Cond1*Extra-RelGap*Male	0.25	0.23	1.08	0.28	Cond2*Extra-RelGap*Male	0.22	0.21	1.09	0.28

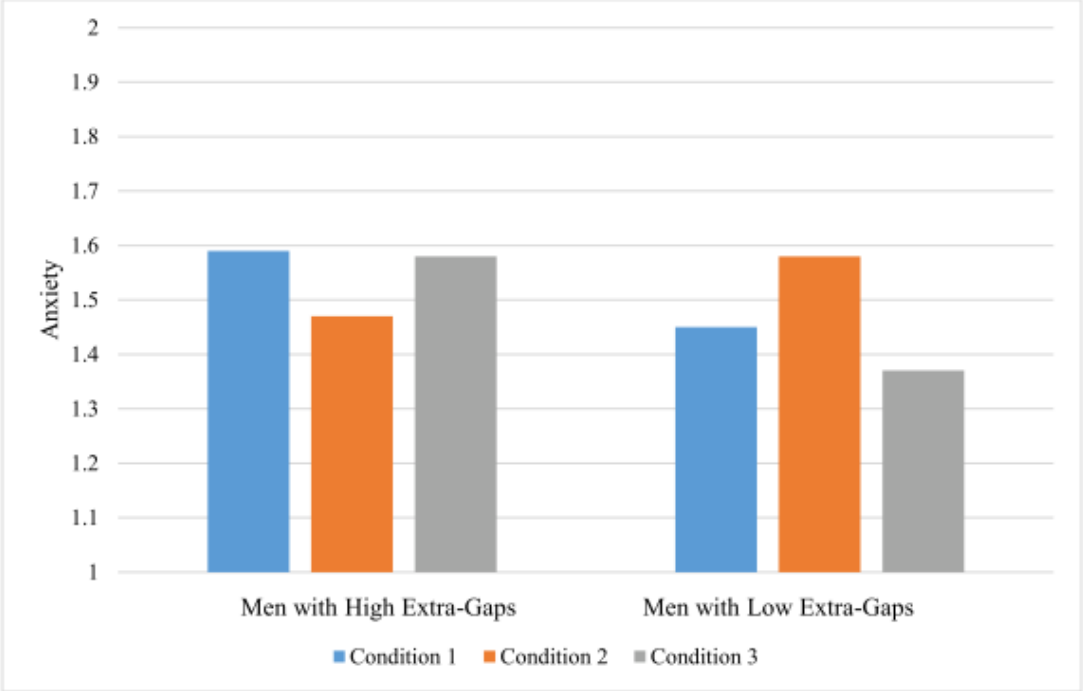


Figure 16. Hypothesis 9 extra-relationship gaps X condition interaction effect for men's anxiety

Table 20.

Hypothesis 10 Models for Condition 1 (Couple Identity Prime) and Intra-Relationship Gaps

Model for Cortisol

	B	SE	t	*p*
Fixed Effects				
Female	1.98	0.11	17.90	0.00
Male	1.89	0.11	16.56	0.00
Time*Female	0.04	0.05	0.78	0.43
Time*Male	0.04	0.05	0.99	0.33
TimeQuad*Female	-0.04	0.01	-2.95	0.00
TimeQuad*Male	-0.04	0.01	-3.24	0.00
Intra-RelGap*Female	-0.05	0.12	-0.41	0.68
Intra-RelGap*Male	0.04	0.10	0.37	0.72
Intra-RelGap*Female*Time	0.06	0.05	1.08	0.28
Intra-RelGap*Male*Time	-0.08	0.04	-1.97	0.05
Intra-RelGap*Female*TimeQuad	-0.02	0.02	-1.02	0.31
Intra-RelGap*Male*TimeQuad	0.02	0.01	1.98	0.05
	B	SE	Z	*p*
Random Effects				
Female Residual	0.03	0.00	6.31	0.00
Male Residual	0.03	0.00	6.36	0.00
Female Intercept	0.44	0.10	4.21	0.00
Male Intercept	0.52	0.12	4.18	0.00
Female Slope	0.01	0.00	2.56	0.01
Male Slope	0.02	0.01	3.28	0.00
Female-Male Intercept Covariance	0.10	0.08	1.28	0.20
Female-Male Slope Covariance	0.00	0.00	0.90	0.37
Female Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.04	0.02	-2.42	0.02
Male Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.03	0.02	-1.54	0.12

Table 21.

Hypothesis 10 Models for Condition 3 (Control) and Intra-Relationship Gaps

Model for Cortisol					**Model for sAA**				
	B	SE	t	*p*		B	SE	t	*p*
Fixed Effects					**Fixed Effects**				
Female	1.95	0.09	21.19	0.00	Female	4.69	0.10	47.07	0.00
Male	2.06	0.10	20.38	0.00	Male	4.50	0.13	33.64	0.00
Time*Female	0.04	0.04	0.83	0.41	Time*Female	0.03	0.06	0.44	0.66
Time*Male	-0.07	0.05	-1.26	0.21	Time*Male	0.23	0.09	2.48	0.01
TimeQuad*Female	-0.04	0.01	-3.12	0.00	TimeQuad*Female	-0.04	0.02	-2.12	0.04
TimeQuad*Male	-0.02	0.02	-1.08	0.29	TimeQuad*Male	-0.10	0.03	-3.47	0.00
Intra-RelGap*Female	0.06	0.10	0.67	0.51	Intra-RelGap*Female	0.07	0.11	0.67	0.51
Intra-RelGap*Male	0.00	0.08	0.05	0.96	Intra-RelGap*Male	0.04	0.11	0.37	0.72
Intra-RelGap*Female*Time	-0.07	0.05	-1.42	0.16	Intra-RelGap*Female*Time	0.09	0.07	1.32	0.19
Intra-RelGap*Male*Time	-0.02	0.04	-0.46	0.65	Intra-RelGap*Male*Time	-0.11	0.08	-1.44	0.15
Intra-RelGap*Female*TimeQuad	0.02	0.01	1.23	0.22	Intra-RelGap*Female*TimeQuad	-0.03	0.02	-1.27	0.21
Intra-RelGap*Male*TimeQuad	0.00	0.01	0.36	0.72	Intra-RelGap*Male*TimeQuad	0.03	0.02	1.23	0.22
	B	SE	Z	*p*		B	SE	Z	*p*
Random Effects					**Random Effects**				
Female Residual	0.03	0.01	5.75	0.00	Female Residual	0.11	0.02	6.90	0.00
Male Residual	0.02	0.00	5.75	0.00	Male Residual	0.05	0.01	5.89	0.00
Female Intercept	0.27	0.07	3.77	0.00	Female Intercept	0.29	0.08	3.65	0.00
Male Intercept	0.30	0.08	3.73	0.00	Male Intercept	0.48	0.14	3.45	0.00
Female Slope	0.01	0.00	2.95	0.00	Female Slope	0.01	0.01	1.02	0.31
Male Slope	0.02	0.01	2.87	0.00	Male Slope	0.00	0.00	---	---
Female-Male Intercept Covariance	0.06	0.06	1.13	0.26	Female-Male Intercept Covariance	0.01	0.07	0.08	0.94
Female-Male Slope Covariance	0.00	0.00	0.56	0.57	Female-Male Slope Covariance	-0.01	0.02	-0.38	0.70
Female Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.02	0.01	-1.38	0.17	Female Intercept-Slope Covariance	0.00	0.02	-0.06	0.96
Male Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.04	0.02	-2.34	0.02	Male Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.01	0.03	-0.35	0.73

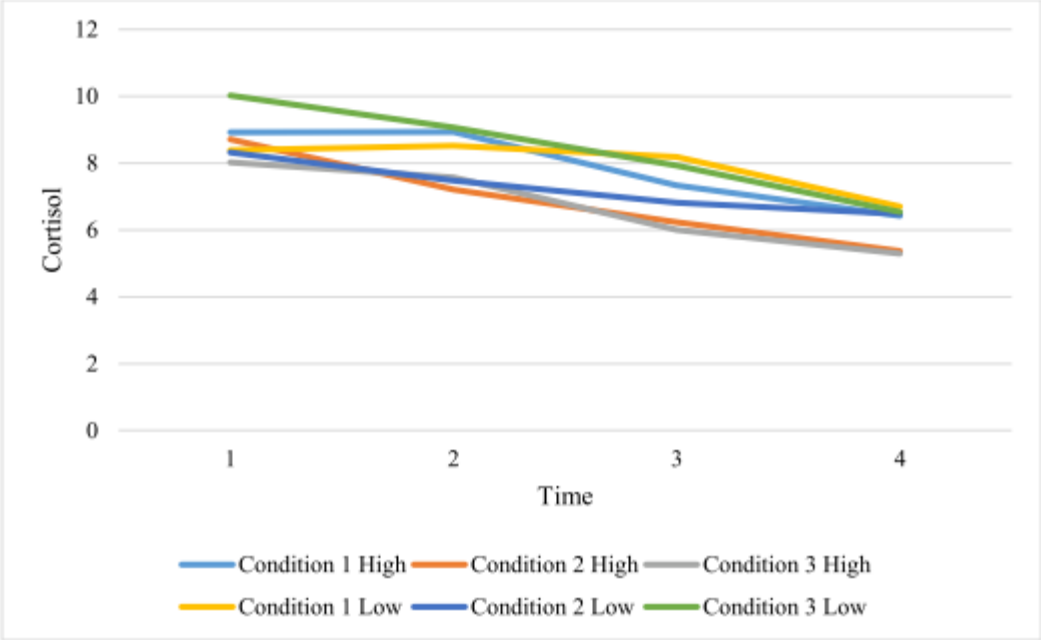


Figure 17. H10 cortisol trajectories for men with high/low intra-relationship gaps

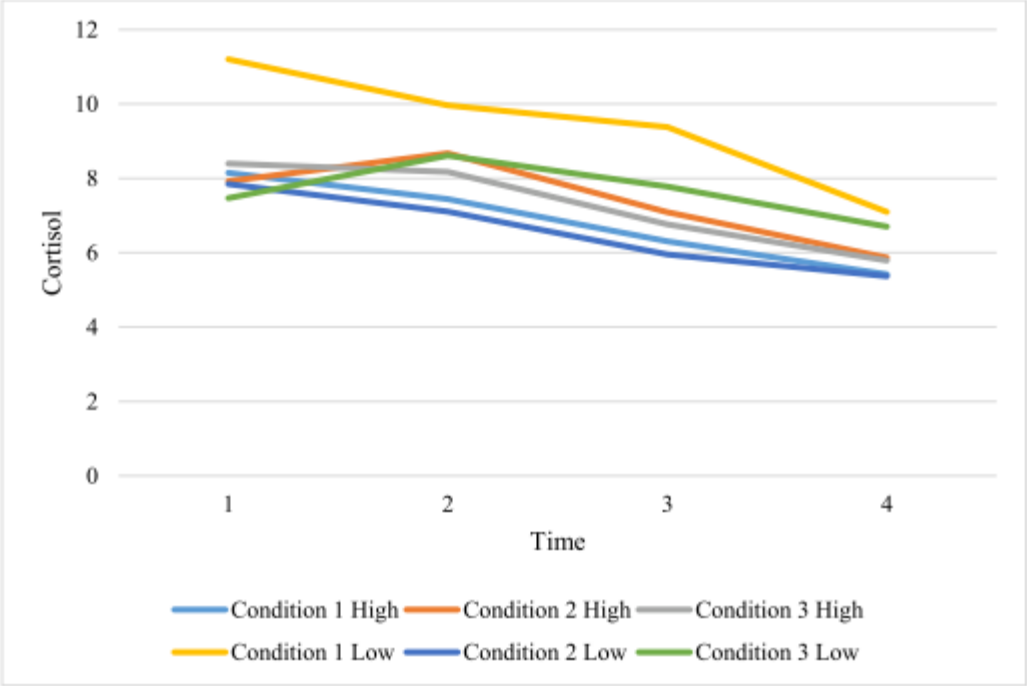


Figure 18. H10 cortisol trajectories for women with high/low intra-relationship gaps

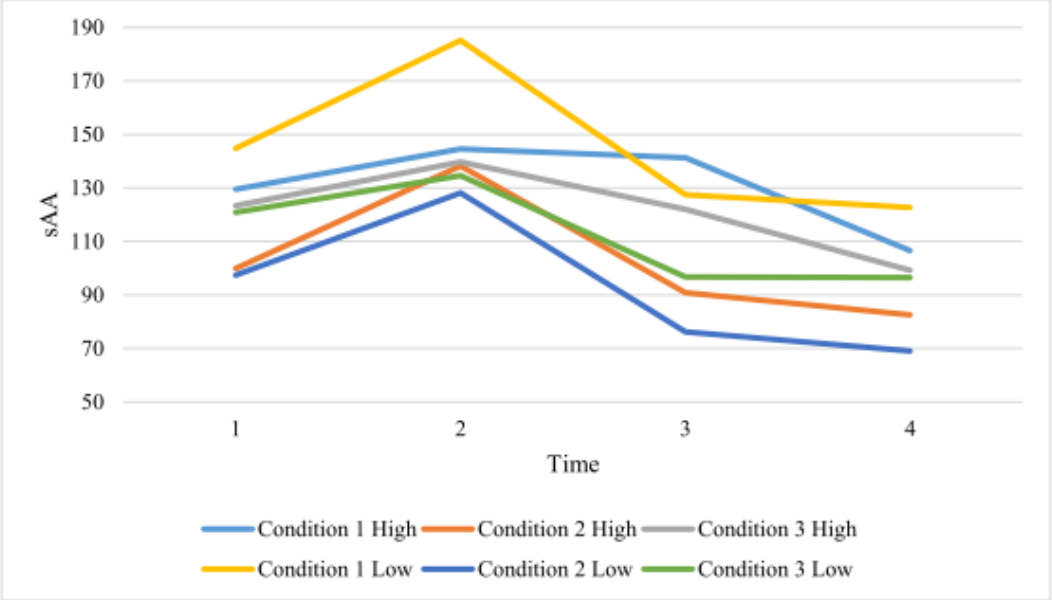


Figure 19. H10 sAA trajectories for women with high/low intra-relationship gaps

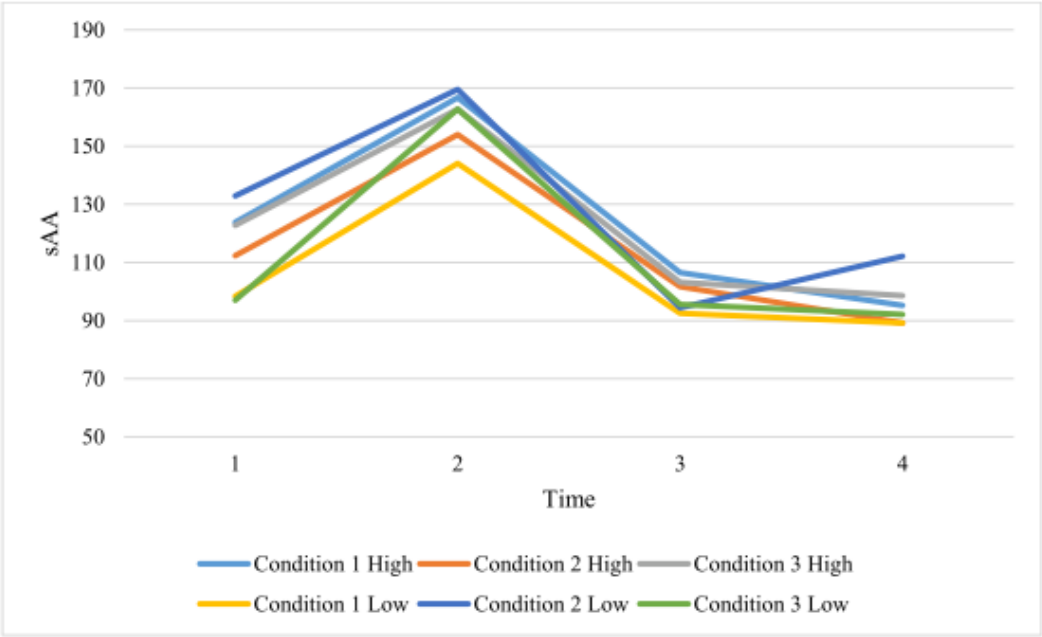


Figure 20. H10 sAA trajectories for men with high/low intra-relationship gaps

Table 22.

Hypothesis 10 Models for Condition 1 (Couple Identity Prime) and Extra-Relationship Gaps

Model for Cortisol

	B	SE	t	*p*
Fixed Effects				
Female	1.98	0.11	18.33	0.00
Male	1.89	0.11	16.55	0.00
Time*Female	0.04	0.04	0.95	0.34
Time*Male	0.03	0.05	0.75	0.45
TimeQuad*Female	-0.04	0.01	-3.14	0.00
TimeQuad*Male	-0.04	0.01	-2.99	0.00
Extra-RelGap*Female	-0.03	0.12	-0.21	0.83
Extra-RelGap*Male	0.02	0.13	0.16	0.87
Extra-RelGap*Female*Time	0.11	0.05	2.13	0.03
Extra-RelGap*Male*Time	-0.09	0.05	-1.62	0.11
Extra-RelGap*Female*TimeQuad	-0.03	0.02	-2.02	0.05
Extra-RelGap*Male*TimeQuad	0.02	0.02	1.34	0.18
	B	SE	Z	*p*
Random Effects				
Female Residual	0.03	0.00	6.31	0.00
Male Residual	0.03	0.00	6.40	0.00
Female Intercept	0.45	0.11	4.27	0.00
Male Intercept	0.52	0.12	4.17	0.00
Female Slope	0.01	0.00	2.71	0.01
Male Slope	0.02	0.01	3.24	0.00
Female-Male Intercept Covariance	0.11	0.08	1.25	0.21
Female-Male Slope Covariance	0.00	0.00	0.83	0.40
Female Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.04	0.02	-2.63	0.01
Male Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.04	0.02	-1.57	0.12

Table 23.

Hypothesis 10 Models for Condition 2 (Individual Identity Prime) and Extra-Relationship Gaps

Model for Cortisol					**Model for sAA**				
	B	SE	t	*p*		B	SE	t	*p*
Fixed Effects					Fixed Effects				
Female	1.93	0.10	20.24	0.00	Female	4.40	0.12	35.58	0.00
Male	1.96	0.12	16.63	0.00	Male	4.65	0.13	36.51	0.00
Time*Female	-0.04	0.06	-0.73	0.47	Time*Female	0.16	0.09	1.87	0.07
Time*Male	-0.22	0.08	-2.66	0.01	Time*Male	0.09	0.09	0.97	0.33
TimeQuad*Female	-0.02	0.02	-1.45	0.15	TimeQuad*Female	-0.09	0.03	-3.30	0.00
TimeQuad*Male	0.03	0.03	1.00	0.32	TimeQuad*Male	-0.06	0.03	-1.99	0.05
Extra-RelGap*Female	0.08	0.09	0.97	0.34	Extra-RelGap*Female	0.16	0.11	1.45	0.16
Extra-RelGap*Male	0.21	0.07	3.13	0.00	Extra-RelGap*Male	-0.03	0.08	-0.37	0.71
Extra-RelGap*Female*Time	0.10	0.05	1.98	0.05	Extra-RelGap*Female*Time	0.13	0.08	1.65	0.10
Extra-RelGap*Male*Time	0.14	0.06	2.42	0.02	Extra-RelGap*Male*Time	-0.02	0.07	-0.22	0.83
Extra-RelGap*Female*TimeQuad	-0.04	0.02	-2.59	0.01	Extra-RelGap*Female*TimeQuad	-0.05	0.03	-1.80	0.07
Extra-RelGap*Male*TimeQuad	-0.04	0.02	-2.31	0.02	Extra-RelGap*Male*TimeQuad	0.00	0.02	-0.14	0.89
	B	SE	Z	*p*		B	SE	Z	*p*
Random Effects					Random Effects				
Female Residual	0.08	0.01	5.29	0.00	Female Residual	0.11	0.02	6.65	0.00
Male Residual	0.04	0.01	5.91	0.00	Male Residual	0.11	0.02	6.58	0.00
Female Intercept	0.28	0.08	3.67	0.00	Female Intercept	0.43	0.12	3.56	0.00
Male Intercept	0.38	0.12	3.07	0.00	Male Intercept	0.42	0.12	3.58	0.00
Female Slope	0.02	0.01	2.65	0.01	Female Slope	0.00	0.00	---	---
Male Slope	0.01	0.01	1.26	0.21	Male Slope	0.00	0.00	---	---
Female-Male Intercept Covariance	0.09	0.07	1.34	0.18	Female-Male Intercept Covariance	0.15	0.09	1.72	0.09
Female-Male Slope Covariance	-0.01	0.00	-1.37	0.17	Female-Male Slope Covariance	0.00	0.01	0.40	0.69
Female Intercept-Slope Covariance	0.00	0.02	-0.27	0.79	Female Intercept-Slope Covariance	0.00	0.02	0.21	0.83
Male Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.02	0.02	-0.89	0.37	Male Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.02	0.02	-0.74	0.46

Table 24.

Hypothesis 10 Models for Condition 3 (Control) and Extra-Relationship Gaps

Model for Cortisol					**Model for sAA**				
	B	SE	t	*p*		B	SE	t	*p*
Fixed Effects					**Fixed Effects**				
Female	1.96	0.09	20.97	0.00	Female	4.67	0.10	47.77	0.00
Male	2.06	0.10	20.81	0.00	Male	4.48	0.13	34.21	0.00
Time*Female	0.04	0.05	0.82	0.42	Time*Female	0.00	0.06	0.07	0.95
Time*Male	-0.06	0.05	-1.07	0.29	Time*Male	0.22	0.09	2.35	0.02
TimeQuad*Female	-0.04	0.01	-3.07	0.00	TimeQuad*Female	-0.03	0.02	-1.80	0.08
TimeQuad*Male	-0.02	0.01	-1.38	0.17	TimeQuad*Male	-0.10	0.03	-3.33	0.00
Extra-RelGap*Female	-0.05	0.08	-0.62	0.54	Extra-RelGap*Female	0.14	0.09	1.56	0.13
Extra-RelGap*Male	-0.04	0.08	-0.43	0.67	Extra-RelGap*Male	0.15	0.11	1.36	0.18
Extra-RelGap*Female*Time	-0.01	0.04	-0.17	0.86	Extra-RelGap*Female*Time	0.16	0.06	2.73	0.01
Extra-RelGap*Male*Time	-0.10	0.04	-2.33	0.02	Extra-RelGap*Male*Time	-0.09	0.08	-1.15	0.25
Extra-RelGap* Female*TimeQuad	0.00	0.01	0.25	0.80	Extra-RelGap* Female*TimeQuad	-0.05	0.02	-2.74	0.01
Extra-RelGap*Male*TimeQuad	0.03	0.01	2.27	0.03	Extra-RelGap*Male*TimeQuad	0.02	0.03	0.87	0.39
	B	SE	Z	*p*		B	SE	Z	*p*
Random Effects					**Random Effects**				
Female Residual	0.03	0.01	5.74	0.00	Female Residual	0.12	0.02	6.80	0.00
Male Residual	0.02	0.00	5.74	0.00	Male Residual	0.04	0.01	5.85	0.00
Female Intercept	0.27	0.07	3.78	0.00	Female Intercept	0.27	0.08	3.62	0.00
Male Intercept	0.30	0.08	3.75	0.00	Male Intercept	0.46	0.14	3.31	0.00
Female Slope	0.01	0.00	2.95	0.00	Female Slope	0.01	0.01	1.24	0.22
Male Slope	0.02	0.01	2.93	0.00	Male Slope	0.00	0.00	---	---
Female-Male Intercept Covariance	0.07	0.05	1.32	0.19	Female-Male Intercept Covariance	-0.02	0.07	-0.33	0.74
Female-Male Slope Covariance	0.00	0.00	0.60	0.55	Female-Male Slope Covariance	-0.01	0.01	-0.49	0.62
Female Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.02	0.01	-1.44	0.15	Female Intercept-Slope Covariance	0.00	0.02	-0.13	0.89
Male Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.04	0.02	-2.48	0.01	Male Intercept-Slope Covariance	-0.01	0.03	-0.39	0.70

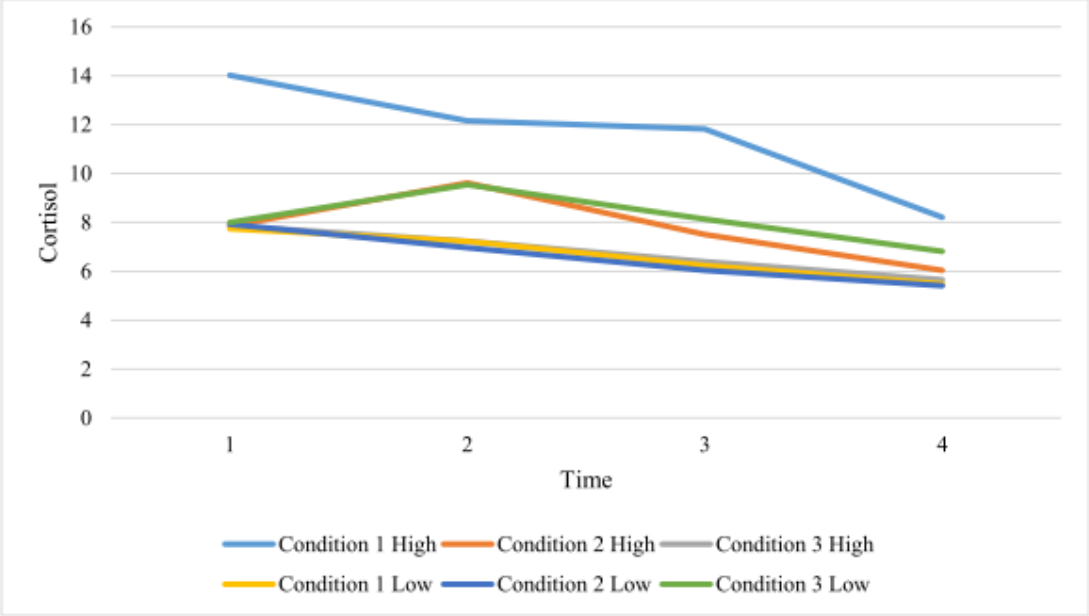


Figure 21. H10 cortisol trajectories for women with high/low extra-relationship gaps

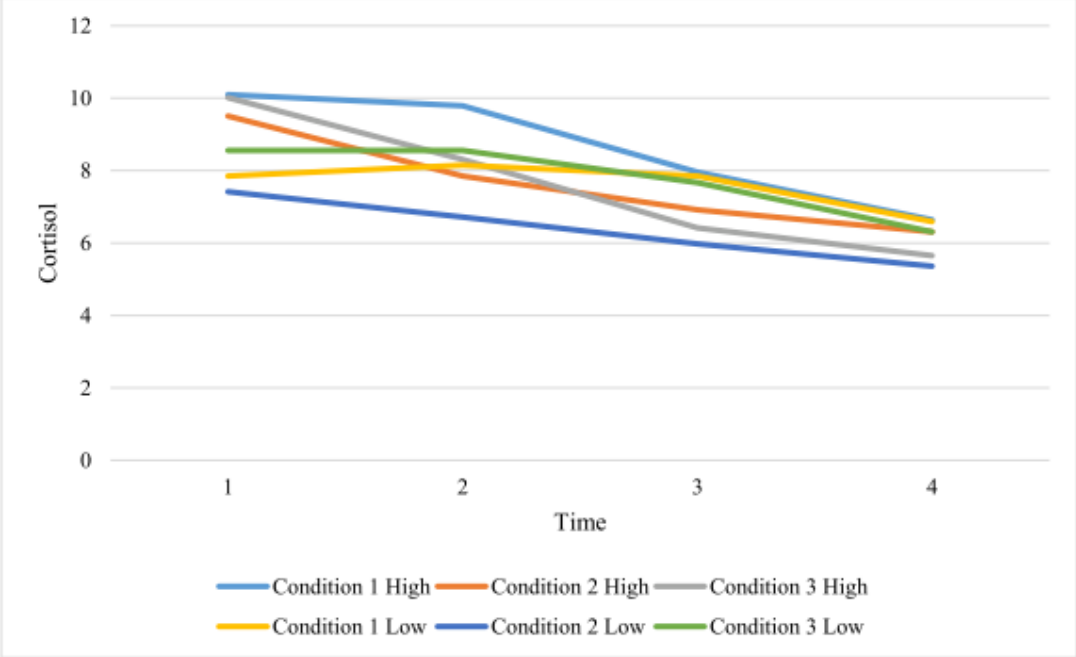


Figure 22. H10 cortisol trajectories for men with high/low extra-relationship gaps

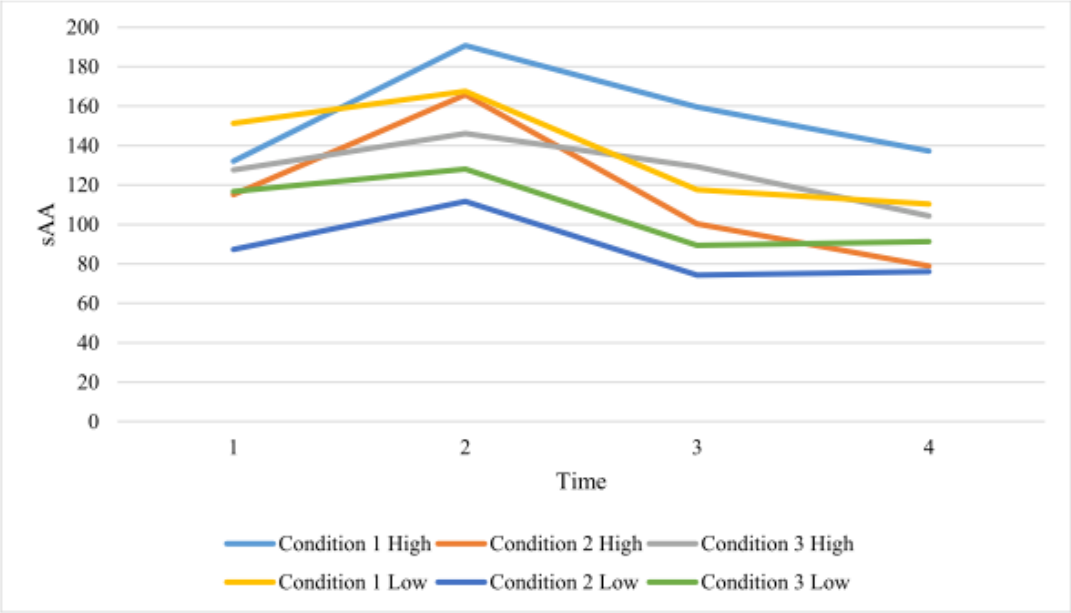


Figure 23. H10 sAA trajectories for women with high/low extra-relationship gaps

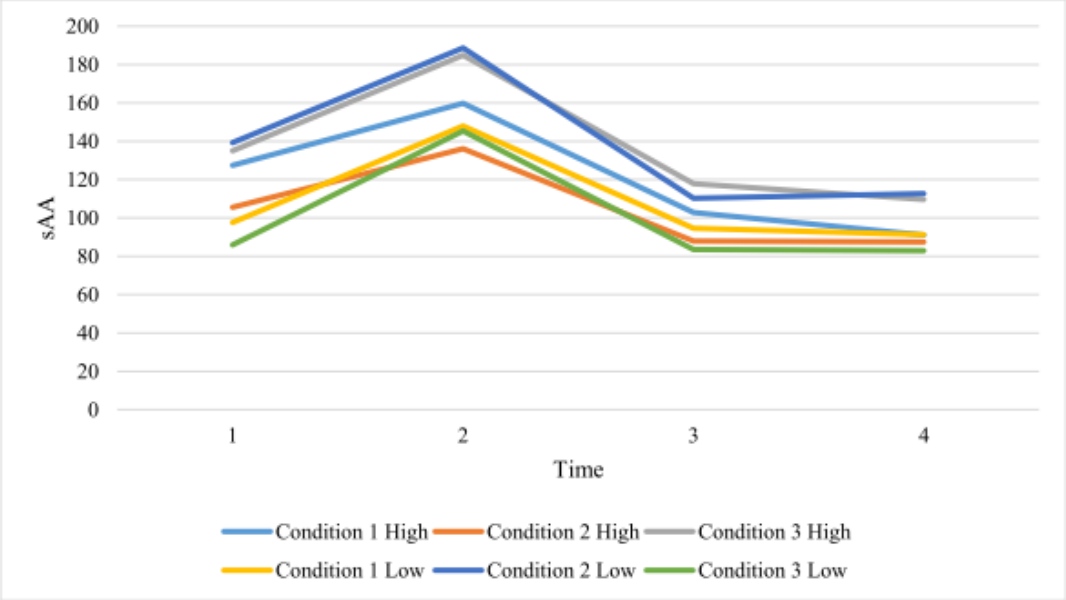


Figure 24. H10 sAA trajectories for men with high/low extra-relationship gaps

Table 25.

Means and Standard Deviations of Outcome Variables by Condition

	Condition 1 (Couple Identity)		Condition 2 (Individual Identity)		Condition 3 (Control)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Conflict Anxiety	1.50	0.49	1.53	0.49	1.46	0.56
Conflict Stress	2.51	1.53	2.87	1.22	2.82	1.30
Conflict Negativity	2.33	1.26	2.61	1.29	2.59	1.23
Cortisol Time 1	9.36	11.57	8.20	4.46	8.56	5.61
Cortisol Time 2	8.88	7.94	7.70	4.50	8.43	5.09
Cortisol Time 3	8.13	7.84	6.57	3.42	7.19	4.31
Cortisol Time 4	6.56	4.84	5.77	3.24	6.13	3.31
sAA Time 1	125.37	78.90	110.20	79.95	114.88	66.82
sAA Time 2	164.01	98.89	147.58	106.00	149.93	101.69
sAA Time 3	115.41	82.51	91.80	60.96	104.00	67.79
sAA Time 4	105.87	69.90	88.35	60.58	96.29	56.81

Pre-Laboratory Questionnaire

1.

Please write in your participant code the researcher gave you in this space (this will help ensure your confidentiality while still allowing us to link your answers to your research participation credit). No one will have access to this code but the researcher. If you forget what your participant code is, please call the researcher, Annie Merrill, at 805-341-3078.

2. Consent Form

Please read the following information about the study before continuing.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to understand how dating partners talk with one another about their relationship and important topics.
PROCEDURES: If you decide to participate, you will complete an online survey prior to your lab visit that should take approximately 30 minutes. During your lab visit, you and your partner will complete more surveys as well as engage in a discussion task during your lab visit. The discussion task may ask you to talk with your partner about a topic that tends to be a source of conflict for you in your relationship. The discussion tasks in this study will be videotaped for research purposes. The lab visit should last about 1.5 hours. We will also be taking samples of your saliva at four points throughout the study. You will be asked to spit into a small tube. The purpose of taking saliva samples is to assess how the body experiences the communication you will engage in in the discussion tasks. Giving us your saliva will not harm you in any way. The entire study will take approximately two hours.
ALTERNATIVES: If you are interested in completing a nonresearch alternative for course credit instead of participating in a research study, you can contact your course instructor for details on the alternative assignment for your course.
RISKS: You may experience some psychological discomfort from discussing a topic that is conflict-producing with your dating partner. However, you and your partner will be able to list which topics you would like to discuss and will never be made to discuss anything you do not agree to.
BENEFITS: There is no direct benefit to you anticipated from your participation in this study. However, there is a chance that you might find it enjoyable or interesting to talk about your relationship with your partner and take part in a shared activity about your relationship.
CONFIDENTIALITY: In order to keep your information confidential, you will be assigned a participant code that you will use for all surveys and materials, so that no identifying information is attached to your responses. Only the researcher will have a list of participant names and codes in order to award credit for participation. There will be no linking of your identifying information to your responses. The video data from your interactions in the lab will be recorded onto a password-protected computer that only the researchers have access to. This computer with the video files is located inside the locked Department's lab. The saliva samples you provide over the course of the study will be labeled with only your participant code - no identifying information. These samples will be kept in a freezer in the Department's locked laboratory.
COSTS/PAYMENT: In appreciation of your time and effort, you will receive 2 hours of research credit for your course. If you withdraw part way through the study, your credit will be prorated based on the amount of time you participated in the study.
RIGHT TO REFUSE OR WITHDRAW: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can stop the study at any time without any penalty. You will also still receive course credit for your participation if you choose to withdraw from the study once it has begun. You may also choose not to answer some of the questions in the surveys with no penalty. The researcher also has the right to stop the study at any time.
QUESTIONS: If you have any questions, please contact the researcher: Anne Merrill at 805-341-3078 or annemerrill@umail.ucsb.edu. If you or your partner feel distressed, please contact the researcher right away. We will be happy to find counseling for you through UCSB Counseling and Psychological Services (805) 893-4411. If you have any questions about your rights and participation as a research subject, please contact the Human Subjects Committee at (805) 893-3807 or hsc@research.ucsb.edu.

After having read the consent form, please indicate whether or not you consent to participate. By clicking "Yes" below, you will be consenting to participate in this research study and the survey will begin

- ○ Yes, I consent to participate in this research.
- ○ No, I do not consent to participate in this research

3. Demographic Information

What is your age?

What is your biological sex?

- Male
- Female

What is your year in college?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Other (please specify)

What is your ethnicity?

- White (European American)
- African American
- Hispanic American
- Native American
- Asian American
- Other (please specify)

How long have you been dating your current partner? (Please indicate in MONTHS)

What is the biological sex of your dating partner?

- Male
- Female

Are you currently living with (cohabiting) your dating partner?

- Yes
- No

Are you and your dating partner in a long-distance relationship?

- Yes
- No

Are you and your partner engaged to be married?

- Yes
- No

Have you and your partner ever talked about getting married?

- Yes
- No

4.

Which of the following best describes the type of family you grew up in?

- Two parent biological
- Two parent adoptive
- Single parent
- Step-family
- Other (please specify)

Who do you typically live with (who do you normally reside with when not at college)?

- Mother
- Father
- Both mother and father
- Other (please specify)

How many siblings do you have (as a whole)?

If your parents are still married, how long (in years) have they been married?

Are your parents divorced?

- Yes
- No

5. Parents

How long were your parents married (in years) before they separated or divorced?

If your parents are divorced, how long (in months/years) have they been divorced?

How many times has your parent been married?

Is your parent remarried?

- Yes
- No
- Other (please specify)

If you answered "yes" to the previous question, how many times has your parent been remarried?

6. Your Well-being

We would like you to think about your current health. Please indicate to the best of your knowledge how often the following items apply to you.

How often do you...

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	A lot	Almost always
Have headaches					
Have a sore throat					
Feel tension					
Feel down					
Feel pressured					
Have an upset stomach					
Have trouble getting to sleep					
Have trouble staying asleep					
Feel lonely					
Feel restless					
Have shortness of breath					
Have low energy/motivation					
Have difficulty relaxing					
Have backaches or neck aches					
Feel nervous					
Feel exhausted					
Feel depressed					

We would like to know about how you have been feeling the past FOUR WEEKS. Please respond as honestly as possible.

	All of the time	Most of the time	A good bit of the time	Some of the time	A little of the time	None of the time
Have you been a very nervous person?	○	○	○	○	○	○
Have you felt so down in the dumps that nothing could cheer you up?	○	○	○	○	○	○
Have you felt calm and peaceful?	○	○	○	○	○	○
Have you felt downhearted and blue?	○	○	○	○	○	○
Have you been a happy person?	○	○	○	○	○	○

7. About You

Please indicate the choice that best describes how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
People with strong opinions easily influence me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I believe in my opinions, even if they are different from other people's opinions.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I judge myself by what I think is important.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel like I am in control of my life situation.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The demands of everyday life get me down.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am good at taking care of my daily responsibilities.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I think it is important to have new experiences.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growing.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I gave up trying to make improvements or changes in my life a long time ago.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Keeping close relationships is difficult for me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
People describe me as a giving person.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel like I have direction in my life.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel like I've done all there is to do in life.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am happy with my life.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I like my personality.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am disappointed about the things I haven't done in my life.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

The following questions ask about your general attitudes and perceptions of your self.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	○	○	○	○	○
At times I think I am no good at all.	○	○	○	○	○
I have high self-esteem.	○	○	○	○	○

We would now like to know how you feel RIGHT NOW. Please respond as honestly as possible.

	Not at all	Somewhat	Moderately	Very Much
I feel calm	○	○	○	○
I feel tense	○	○	○	○
I feel upset	○	○	○	○
I feel relaxed	○	○	○	○
I feel content	○	○	○	○
I feel worried	○	○	○	○

8.

Rate how often you and your partner experience the following when having an argument or disagreement.

	Never or almost never	Once in a while	Frequently
Little arguments escalate into ugly fights with accusations, criticisms, name-calling, or bringing up past hurts.	○	○	○
My partner criticizes or belittles my opinions, feelings, or desires.	○	○	○
My partner seems to view my words or actions more negatively than I mean them to be.	○	○	○
When we have a problem to solve, it is like we are on opposite teams.	○	○	○
I hold back from telling my partner what I really think and feel.	○	○	○
I think seriously about what it would be like to date someone else.	○	○	○
I feel lonely in this relationship.	○	○	○
When we argue, one of us withdraws, that is, doesn't want to talk about it anymore; or leaves the scene.	○	○	○

Below are descriptions of the kinds of arguments people in relationships are likely to experience. Check the number that indicates how much you agree that each statement fits your relationship.

	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly Agree 5
By the end of an argument, each of us has been given a fair hearing.	○	○	○	○	○
When we begin to fight or argue, I think, "Here we go again."	○	○	○	○	○
Overall, I'd say we're pretty good at solving our problems.	○	○	○	○	○
Our arguments are left hanging and unresolved.	○	○	○	○	○
We go for days without settling our differences.	○	○	○	○	○
Our arguments seem to end in frustrating stalemates.	○	○	○	○	○
We need to improve the way we settle our differences.	○	○	○	○	○
Overall, our arguments are brief and quickly forgotten.	○	○	○	○	○

9.

Directions: In the context of dating relationships, your partner may do all kinds of different things for you when you need support, but they probably do so to a greater or lesser extent. Here, we are interested in how much of each behavior you ACTUALLY receive from your partner. Obviously there are no right or wrong answers. We just want to know how much you experience each supportive behavior with your partner. For each of the items below, please indicate how much of each behavior you ACTUALLY RECEIVE from your partner in general.

	Don't Receive at All	Receive Rarely	Receive Occasionally	Receive Regularly	Receive a Great Deal
Telling you that he/she loves you and feels close to you.	○	○	○	○	○
Expressing understanding of a situation that is bothering you.	○	○	○	○	○
Comforting you when you are upset by showing some physical affection (including hugs, hand-holding, shoulder patting, etc.)	○	○	○	○	○
Providing you with hope or confidence.	○	○	○	○	○
Expressing sorrow or regret for your situation or distress.	○	○	○	○	○
Offering attentive comments when you speak.	○	○	○	○	○
Expressing esteem or respect for a competency or personal quality of yours.	○	○	○	○	○
Telling you that you are still a good person even when you have a problem.	○	○	○	○	○
Trying to reduce your feelings of guilt about a problem situation.	○	○	○	○	○
Expressing agreement with your perspective on various situations.	○	○	○	○	○
Assuring you that you are a worthwhile person.	○	○	○	○	○

Directions: We are also interested in learning what you DESIRE from your partner. We want to know what is important and what kind of things you desire from your partner. For each of the items below, please indicate how much of each behavior you desire from your partner.

	Don't Desire at All	Desire Rarely	Desire Occasionally	Desire Regularly	Desire a Great Deal
Telling you that he/she loves you and feels close to you.	○	○	○	○	○
Expressing understanding of a situation that is bothering you.	○	○	○	○	○
Comforting you when you are upset by showing some physical affection (including hugs, hand-holding, shoulder patting, etc.)	○	○	○	○	○
Providing you with hope or confidence.	○	○	○	○	○
Expressing sorrow or regret for your situation or distress.	○	○	○	○	○
Offering attentive comments when you speak.	○	○	○	○	○
Expressing esteem or respect for a competency or personal quality of yours.	○	○	○	○	○
Telling you that you are still a good person even when you have a problem.	○	○	○	○	○
Trying to reduce your feelings of guilt about a problem situation.	○	○	○	○	○
Expressing agreement with your perspective on various situations.	○	○	○	○	○
Assuring you that you are a worthwhile person.	○	○	○	○	○

10.

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements about how you perceive your partner and your relationship.

	Strongly disagree 1	2	3	Neither agree nor disagree 4	5	6	Strongly Agree 7
I feel that my partner sees our relationship as I see it.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I see my relationship differently than the way my partner sees it.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I agree with how my partner describes our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that my partner has the wrong image of our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that my partner has correct information about our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that my partner portrays our relationship not based on information about our actual relationship.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that my partner stereotypes our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that my partner does not realize that our relationship has been changing and still portrays it based on past images.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that my partner knows who we used to be when he/she portrays us.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that there is no difference between who I think we are as a couple and who my partner thinks we are as a a couple.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements about how you and your partner communicate with others (e.g., friends, family, etc.) about your relationship.

	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	Neither agree nor disagree 4	5	6	Strongly Agree 7
When my partner and I communicate with others about our relationship, they get to know the "real us."	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that my partner and I are able to communicate with others in a way that is consistent with who we really are.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that my partner and I can be ourselves when communicating with others.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I express ourselves in a certain way that is not the "real us" when communicating with others.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and/or I do not reveal important aspects of our relationship in communication with others.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
When communicating with others, my partner and/or I often lose our sense of who we are as a couple.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and/or I do not express the "real us" when we think it is different from others' expectations for us.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and/or I sometimes mislead others about who we really are as a couple.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
There is a difference between the "real us" as a couple and the impression my partner and/or I give others about our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I speak truthfully to others about our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I express the "real us" in communication with others.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

11.

Instructions: The following questions refer to your relationship with your romantic partner. Please think about your relationship with your romantic partner when responding to the following questions.

	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly Agree 7
My relationship with my partner is close.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
When we are apart, I miss my partner a great deal.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I disclose important personal things to each other.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I have a strong connection.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I want to spend time together.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I'm sure of my relationship with my partner.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner is a priority in my life.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I do a lot of things together.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
When I have free time I choose to spend it alone with my partner.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I think about my partner a lot.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My relationship with my partner is important in my life.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I consider my partner when making important decisions.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

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

I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner

○ Not at all True ○ A little True ○ Somewhat True ○ Mostly True ○ Almost Completely True ○ Completely True

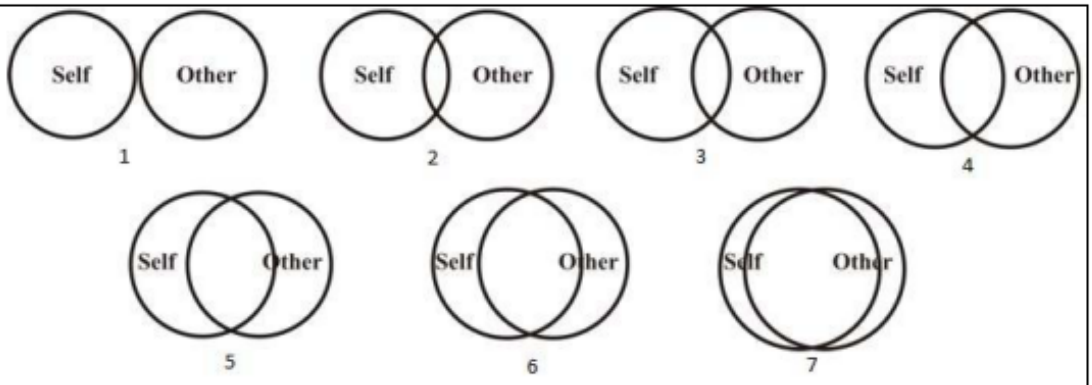
How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?

○ Not at all ○ A little ○ Somewhat ○ Mostly ○ Almost Completely ○ Completely

In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

○ Not at all ○ A little ○ Somewhat ○ Mostly ○ Almost Completely ○ Completely

12.



Which of the above circle representations is best describes your current relationship with your romantic partner?

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7

How well does being part of this relationship with your partner define the way you see yourself?

○ Not at all well ○ Not entirely well ○ Neutral ○ Somewhat well ○ Extremely well

How important is being part of this relationship with your partner to the way you see yourself?

○ Not at all important ○ Not very important ○ Neutral ○ Fairly important ○ Extremely important

Please use the following scale to rate the extent to which you agree with the statements below.

	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	Neutral 4	5	6	Strongly Agree 7
My current romantic relationship is an important reflection of who I am.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
When I feel very close to my romantic partner, it often feels to me like he/she is an important part of who I am.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I usually feel a strong sense of pride when my partner has an important accomplishment.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I think one of the most important parts of who I am can be captured by looking at my partner and understanding who he/she is.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
When I think of myself, I often think of my partner also.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
If a person hurts my partner, I feel personally hurt as well.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
In general, my current romantic relationship is an important part of my self-image.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Overall, my current romantic relationship has very little to do with how I feel about myself.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My current romantic relationship is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My sense of pride comes from knowing who I have as a partner.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
When I establish a romantic relationship with someone, I usually develop a strong sense of identification with that person.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

13.

Next, think about how you think about yourself and your relationship with your partner and indicate which responses best represent how you see yourself.

	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	Neither agree nor disagree 4	5	6	Strongly Agree 7
I want to keep the plans for my life somewhat separate from my partner's plans for life.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am willing to have or develop a strong sense of an identity as a couple with my partner.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I tend to think about how things affect "us" as a couple more than how things affect "me" as an individual.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I like to think of my partner and me more in terms of "us" and "we" than "me" and "him/her".	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am more comfortable thinking in terms of "my" things than "our" things.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I do not want to have a strong identity as a couple with my partner.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

In comparison to other parts of your life (e.g., work, family, friends, religion), how central is your relationship with your partner?

○ My relationship is not at all central to my life ○ My relationship is not as central as most other parts of my life ○ Some things are more central than my relationship ○ My relationship is more central than some things ○ My relationship is more central to my life than most other parts ○ Nothing else is more central to my life than my relationship

How much time do you spend thinking about your relationship with your partner?

○ Not much time at all ○ Very little time ○ Some time ○ A fair amount of time ○ Most of the time ○ All of the time

Among the things that give your life meaning, how important is your relationship with your partner?

○ Not important at all ○ Most other things are more important ○ A few things are more important ○ Fairly important compared to other things ○ Very important compared to other things ○ My relationship is the most important thing

Compared to other aspects of your life, to what degree do events in your relationship affect your overall feelings of life satisfaction?

○ No effect on life satisfaction ○ Very little effect ○ Some effect ○ Moderate effect ○ Strong effect ○ The strongest effect

How often have you personally thought about terminating your relationship?

○ All of the time ○ Most of the time ○ More often than not ○ Occasionally ○ Rarely ○ Never

How often have you and your partner discussed or mentioned terminating your relationship?

○ All of the time ○ Most of the time ○ More often than not ○ Occasionally ○ Rarely ○ Never

14.

The statements below concern how you feel in emotionally intimate relationships. We are interested in how you GENERALLY experience relationships, not just in what is happening in a current relationship. Respond to each statement to indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I get uncomfortable when other people want to be very close to me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I worry about being abandoned	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I tell people with whom I feel close just about everything.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by people with whom I feel close.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I don't feel comfortable opening up to other people.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I worry a lot about my relationships.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I usually discuss my problems and concerns with people with whom I feel close.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I find that other people don't want to get as close as I would like.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I try to avoid getting too close to other people.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I worry that other people won't care about me as much as I care about them.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I don't mind asking other people for comfort, advice, or help.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I get frustrated when other people are not around as much as I would like.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I prefer not to be too close to other people.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I worry a fair amount about losing people with whom I feel close.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It helps to turn to other people in times of need.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I resent it when people with whom I feel close spend time away from me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

15.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following beliefs about relationships IN GENERAL.

	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly Agree 7
Potential relationship partners are either compatible or they are not.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A successful relationship is mostly a matter of finding a compatible partner.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Potential relationship partners are either destined to get along or they are not.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Relationships that do not start off well inevitably fail.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The ideal relationship develops gradually over time.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Challenges and obstacles in a relationship can make love even stronger.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A successful relationship is mostly a matter of learning to resolve conflicts with a partner.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A successful relationship evolves through hard work and resolution of incompatibilities.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

16.

For the following questions, we are interested in how you think others view your relationship with your dating partner. Please focus on how you think others view your relationship when answering the following questions.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree 1	2	3	Neither agree nor disagree 4	5	6	Strongly agree 7
My family thinks that this is a good current romantic relationship for me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My family likes my dating partner as a partner for me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My family usually have positive things to say about my dating partner.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My family enjoy spending time with my dating partner.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My family invites my dating partner to social events and holidays.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My friends think that this is a good current romantic relationship for me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My friends like my dating partner as a partner for me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My friends usually have positive things to say about my dating partner.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My friends enjoy spending time with my dating partner.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My friends invite my dating partner along with me to social events.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

We are interested in finding out your thoughts on how others would feel if your relationship wth your dating partner were to end.

	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	Neither agree nor disgagree 4	5	6	Strongly Agree 7
My friends would not mind it if my partner and I broke up.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My family would not care either way if this relationship ended.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It would be difficult for my friends to accept it if I ended the relationship with my partner.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My friends want to see my relationship with my partner continue.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My family really wants this relationship to work.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My family would not care if I ended this relationship.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

17.

When I tell my partner about something good that has happened to me . . .

	Not at all true 1	2	3	Neutral 4	5	6	Very true 7
My partner usually reacts to my good fortune enthusiastically.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I sometimes get the sense that my partner is even more happy and excited than I am.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner often asks a lot of questions and shows genuine concern about the good event.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner tries not to make a big deal out of it, but is happy for me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner is usually silently supportive of the good things that occur to me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner says little, but I know he/she is happy for me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner often finds a problem with it.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner reminds me that most good things have their bad aspects as well.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
He/she points out the potential down sides of the good event.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sometimes I get the impression that he/she doesn't care much.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner doesn't pay much attention to me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner often seems disinterested.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

18.

How certain are you about...

	Completely or almost completely UNCERTAIN 1	2	3	4	5	Completely or almost completely CERTAIN 6
...how you feel about your relationship?	○	○	○	○	○	○
...your goals for the future of your relationship?	○	○	○	○	○	○
...your view of your relationship?	○	○	○	○	○	○
...how important your relationship is to you?	○	○	○	○	○	○

How certain are you about...

	Completely or almost completely UNCERTAIN 1	2	3	4	5	Completely or almost completely CERTAIN 6
...how your partner feel about your relationship?	○	○	○	○	○	○
...your partner's goals for the future of your relationship?	○	○	○	○	○	○
...your partner's view of your relationship?	○	○	○	○	○	○
...how important your relationship is to your partner?	○	○	○	○	○	○

How certain are you about...

	Completely or almost completely UNCERTAIN 1	2	3	4	5	Completely or almost completely CERTAIN 6
...the current status of your relationship?	○	○	○	○	○	○
...how you can or cannot behave around your partner?	○	○	○	○	○	○
...the definition of your relationship?	○	○	○	○	○	○
...the future of your relationship?	○	○	○	○	○	○

19.

How WELL do the following statements DESCRIBE your relationship with your dating partner?

	Not at all well	Not entirely well	Neutral	Somewhat well	Extremely well
1. Through our joint efforts, my partner and I can resolve any problem in our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○
2. My partner and I are in complete control of the events, both positive and negative, in our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○
3. By working together, my partner and I can prevent undesirable events from occurring in our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○
4. My partner and I possess the communication and problem solving skills necessary to successfully resolve all of our differences.	○	○	○	○	○
5. Through our joint efforts, my partner and I can create the ideal relationship we both desire.	○	○	○	○	○
6. My partner and I can successfully work through any incompatibilities between our needs.	○	○	○	○	○
7. My partner and I are always able to reach mutually satisfying compromises when we discuss conflictual issues our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○
8. My partner and I are always able to make each other feel better no matter how upset we might be about the various pressures confronting us.	○	○	○	○	○
9. My partner and I sometimes feel helpless when we are confronted by a serious problem that we are not sure how to solve.	○	○	○	○	○
10. My partner and I are always successful in influencing one another into adopting better and more compatible ways of dealing with conflict.	○	○	○	○	○

We would like you to think about how you and your partner handle stressful events or difficult times that arise in life. With that in mind, please indicate the best response that represents how you and your partner handle stress and adversity.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
My partner and I talk about how we will get through the experience together.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
We talk about how much we have learned from the experience so far.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
We talk about how much we will grow together from the experience.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
We engage in activities or events together to cope.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
We talk about how we can cope with the situation together.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
We address problems as a team.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
We feel that we are both "in it together."	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

20.

In responding to these statements, please consider whether you believe the stated events are MORE, LESS, OR EQUALLY LIKELY to occur in your relationship IN COMPARISON to the typical or average relationship. Consider a relationship of approximately the same length as your relationship with your partner.

	Much LESS likely to occur in my relationship than in the typical relationship.	Somewhat LESS likely to occur.	Equally probably in my relationship and the typical relationship.	Somewhat MORE likely to occur.	Much MORE likely to occur in my relationship than in the typical relationship.
Becoming closer to my partner even when external forces conspire to tear our relationship apart.	○	○	○	○	○
The love my partner and I share continuing to grow.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I becoming happier and even more satisfied with our relationship than we are today.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I discovering areas in which our needs conflict in a serious way.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner OR I being attracted enough to another person to consider leaving our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I growing further apart as we discover the negative aspects of our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I never tiring of one another's company no matter how much time we spend together.	○	○	○	○	○
Our relationship breaking up within the next 6 months.	○	○	○	○	○
Our relationship leading to marriage.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I always having compatible hopes and desires for our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner or I questioning our involvement with one another as we discover one another's faults.	○	○	○	○	○
The passion my partner and I share remaining as intense as it is today.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I turning	○	○	○	○	○

Medical Information Sheet

Brief Medical History
(all of this information is completely confidential and will not be held against you)

1.Are you currently taking **ANY** medications (over-the-counter, prescription, or medical licenses)? This includes something as small as aspirin and allergy medications.

YES NO

If you answered "YES", please name them and describe them below (and indicate whether they are over the counter or prescription):_____
_____
What is the dosage for each medication? How often do you take the medications?
_____

2. If you are female, approximately when was your last period or menstrual cycle (in weeks/days)? _____.

3. Have you had a fever or symptoms of any other minor illness within the past 48 hours?
YES NO

4. Are you currently taking steroids or any anti-inflammatory medications? YES NO
If "yes," what are they? _____

5. Are you taking any hormone related birth control? YES NO
If yes, what kind?_____

6. Have you visited the dentist within the past 48 hours? YES NO

7. Have you consumed alcohol within the past 12 hours? YES NO

8. How many alcoholic beverages have you had in the past 48 hours? _____

9. Have you brushed your teeth in the last 25 minutes? YES NO

10. Have you consumed a major meal within the past 40 minutes? YES NO

11. Do you smoke cigarettes or cigars or chew tobacco? YES NO
If yes, how many cigarettes (or cigars/tobacco) have you smoked in the past 48 hours?_____

12. Are you currently using any non-prescription drugs (e.g., marijuana, cocaine, meth, nonprescription adderall)
YES NO
If you answered yes, please list them here:
_____

13. For #12, have you taken any of these drugs today? YES NO
If yes, which one(s)? _____

14. Have you exercised in the past hour and a half? YES NO

15. Do your gums bleed when you floss or brush your teeth? YES NO

16. Do you have any cuts or sores in your mouth? YES NO

17. Do you have any untreated cavities? YES NO

18. Have you had any caffeine in the past two hours? (e.g., teas, sodas, chocolate, some juices, energy drinks, over the counter medications, coffee flavored foods) YES NO
If "yes," what did you eat/drink?
_____

19. How much do you weigh? (approx.) _____lbs. What is your height? ____ft. _____in.

20. What time do you normally go to bed? _____ What time do you normally get up? _____

21. How many hours of sleep, on average, do you get a night? _____

Conflict Topic Listing Sheet

Participant Code:_____

Couple Interaction Lab Study

1. If you and your partner arrived at the lab together, please describe what conversation topics you two may have been discussing on your way to the lab. Please be specific and list as much as you remember:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. We would now like to know how you feel RIGHT NOW. Please respond as honestly as possible.

	Not at all	Somewhat	Moderately	Very much
I feel calm	1	2	3	4
I feel tense	1	2	3	4
I feel upset	1	2	3	4
I feel relaxed	1	2	3	4
I feel content	1	2	3	4
I feel worried	1	2	3	4

<u>Instructions</u>. **We would like you to write down three topics that tend to produce conflict between you and your dating partner. These should be problems or topics that you have talked about previously with your dating partner that are a source of conflict or disagreement between you two. It is important that you list conflict topics that you feel are NOT YET RESOLVED between you and your partner.**

TOPIC 1: _____

How stressful is this topic for you currently?

Not stressful						Extremely stressful
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

How anxiety-producing is this topic for you currently?

Not anxiety-producing						Extremely anxiety-producing
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

How would you currently rate the importance of this topic to **you personally**?

Not important						Extremely important
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

How would you currently rate the importance of this topic for **your partner**?

Not important						Extremely important
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

How bothersome is this topic to you (currently)?

Not bothersome						Extremely bothersome
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

How much do you think about this topic (currently)?

I don't think about it that much						I can't stop thinking about it
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

How **often** do you and your partner argue or disagree about this topic?

Never						All of the time
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

How **intense** is the conflict about this topic between you and your partner?

Very mild						Very intense
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

TOPIC 2: _____

How stressful is this topic for you currently?

Not stressful						Extremely stressful
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

How anxiety-producing is this topic for you currently?

Not anxiety-producing						Extremely anxiety-producing
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

How would you currently rate the importance of this topic to **you personally**?

Not important — Extremely important

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

How would you currently rate the importance of this topic for **your partner**?

Not important — Extremely important

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

How bothersome is this topic to you (currently)?

Not bothersome — Extremely bothersome

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

How much do you think about this topic (currently)?

I don't think about it that much — I can't stop thinking about it

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

How **often** do you and your partner argue or disagree about this topic?

Never — All of the time

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

How **intense** is the conflict about this topic between you and your partner?

Very mild — Very intense

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

TOPIC 3: _____

How stressful is this topic for you currently?

Not stressful — Extremely stressful

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

How anxiety-producing is this topic for you currently?

Not anxiety-producing — Extremely anxiety-producing

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

How would you currently rate the importance of this topic to **you personally**?

Not important — Extremely important

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

How would you currently rate the importance of this topic for **your partner**?

Not important — Extremely important

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

How bothersome is this topic to you (currently)?

Not bothersome — Extremely bothersome

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

How much do you think about this topic (currently)?

I don't think about it that much — I can't stop thinking about it

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

How **often** do you and your partner argue or disagree about this topic?

Never						All of the time
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

How **intense** is the conflict about this topic between you and your partner?

Very mild						Very intense
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Linguistic Implications Form

Instructions: We would now like you to complete a sentence completion task. Often in most sentences, one or more words can be guessed from knowledge of the remainder of the sentence. In order to collect some information on how individuals guess missing words from sentences, we would like you to read the following sentences each containing a blank and to choose the word you would choose to complete the sentence. All of the choices of words provided as options are all technically correct, but we want you to choose the word that you feel best completes the sentences.

1. All of (*our, my, his*) answers matched the ones in the back of the book.

2. At first it didn't seem to make any difference, but by later that night the noise from the party was entirely too loud to allow (*her, me, us*) to sleep.

3 . The salesman tried to persuade (*me, her, us*) to buy a set of encyclopedias.

4. The noise got to (*us, them, me*) before long.

5. (*Our, His, My*) idea of fun is sitting at home and listening to music.

6. The sun went in just when (*we, she, I*) decided to go outside.

7. Please don't do this to (*her, us, me*); it is just not fair.

8. It was (her, our, my) understanding that the deadline for the paper had been delayed one week.

9. Except for (*me, us, her*), everyone failed the test.

10. As a result of (*our, my, his*) suggestions, a minor revision in the policy has occurred.

11. (*He, We, I*) spent so much time on the initial planning that it seemed impossible to finish before the deadline.

12. It rained so hard that all of (*our, my, her*) clothes got soaked.

13. For the past two or three months, (*I, we, they*) have had reports of squabbling and dissatisfaction among the workers in the office.

14. According to (*our, my, her*) notes, only five of the original seven laws are still in existence.

15. Someone stopped (*them, me, us*) to get directions to the stadium.

16. (*We, He, I*) waited by the phone for the doctor to return the call.

17. The cashier charged (*her, us, me*) too little for the groceries.

18. The mosquitoes didn't even bother (*him, us, me*).

19. Dinner was waiting on the table when (*he, I, we*) came back from the store.

20. It isn't easy to get lost in this town, but somehow (*I, we, they*) managed it.

Post-Discussion Questionnaire

***1. Please enter your participant code:**

2. We would now like to know how you feel right now. Please respond as honestly as possible.

	Not at all	Somewhat	Moderately	Very much
I feel calm	○	○	○	○
I feel tense	○	○	○	○
I feel upset	○	○	○	○
I am relaxed	○	○	○	○
I feel content	○	○	○	○
I am worried	○	○	○	○

3. In the previous interaction with your partner about the conflict-inducing topic, your partner may have communicated in many possible ways, but they probably do so to a greater or lesser extent. Here, we are interested in how much of each behavior you feel that you ACTUALLY RECEIVED from your partner during that interaction specifically. Obviously there are no right or wrong answers. For each of the items below, please indicate how much of each behavior you ACTUALLY RECEIVED from your partner during the interaction.

	Didn't Receive at All	Received Rarely	Received Occasionally	Received Regularly	Received a Great Deal
Told you that he/she loves you and feels close to you.	○	○	○	○	○
Expressed understanding of a situation that is bothering you.	○	○	○	○	○
Comforted you when you are upset by showing some physical affection (including hugs, hand-holding, shoulder patting, etc.)	○	○	○	○	○
Provided you with hope or confidence.	○	○	○	○	○
Expressed sorrow or regret for your situation or distress.	○	○	○	○	○
Offered attentive comments when you speak.	○	○	○	○	○
Expressed esteem or respect for a competency or personal quality of yours.	○	○	○	○	○
Told you that you are still a good person even when you have a problem.	○	○	○	○	○
Tried to reduce your feelings of guilt about a problem situation.	○	○	○	○	○
Expressed agreement with your perspective on various situations.	○	○	○	○	○
Assured you that you are a worthwhile person.	○	○	○	○	○

4. We are also interested in learning what behaviors you DESIRED OR WISHED YOU RECEIVED from your partner during the previous conflict interaction. We want to know what is important and what kind of things you desired from your partner in this specific interaction. For each of the items below, please indicate how much of each behavior you desired or wished you had received from your partner in the interaction.

	Didn't Desire at All	Desired Rarely	Desired Occasionally	Desired Regularly	Desired a Great Deal
Telling you that he/she loves you and feels close to you.	○	○	○	○	○
Expressing understanding of a situation that is bothering you.	○	○	○	○	○
Comforting you when you are upset by showing some physical affection (including hugs, hand-holding, shoulder patting, etc.)	○	○	○	○	○
Providing you with hope or confidence.	○	○	○	○	○
Expressing sorrow or regret for your situation or distress.	○	○	○	○	○
Offering attentive comments when you speak.	○	○	○	○	○
Expressing esteem or respect for a competency or personal quality of yours.	○	○	○	○	○
Telling you that you are still a good person even when you have a problem.	○	○	○	○	○
Trying to reduce your feelings of guilt about a problem situation.	○	○	○	○	○
Expressing agreement with your perspective on various situations.	○	○	○	○	○
Assuring you that you are a worthwhile person.	○	○	○	○	○

5. We would like you to think back to the conflict discussion task with your partner and indicate how often you experienced the following feelings in the moment.

	Never or almost never	Once in a while	Frequently
My partner criticized or belittled my opinions, feelings, or desires.	○	○	○
My partner seemed to view my words or actions more negatively than I meant them to be.	○	○	○
It was like we are on opposite teams.	○	○	○
I held back from telling my partner what I really thought and felt.	○	○	○
I thought seriously about what it would be like to date someone else.	○	○	○
I felt lonely in this relationship.	○	○	○
One of us withdrew from the argument, that is, didn't want to talk about it anymore.	○	○	○

6. Again thinking of the conflict discussion, indicate how much you agree with each statement about your experience during the conflict discussion with your partner.

	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly Agree 5
By the end of an interaction, each of us had a fair hearing.	○	○	○	○	○
When we began to fight or argue, I thought, "Here we go again."	○	○	○	○	○
Overall, I'd say we were pretty good at solving our problems in the interaction.	○	○	○	○	○
Our argument in the interaction was left hanging and unresolved.	○	○	○	○	○
Our argument in the interaction seemed to end in a frustrating stalemate.	○	○	○	○	○
We need to improve the way we settle our differences.	○	○	○	○	○
Overall, our argument in the interaction was brief and quickly forgotten.	○	○	○	○	○

7. We are interested how well you think your partner communicated with you and how well you communicated with your partner during the conflict discussion.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
My partner was a good communicator.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner was a good listener.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner did not communicate effectively.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner's communication was appropriate to the situation at hand.	○	○	○	○	○
It was hard for my partner to communicate his/her feelings clearly.	○	○	○	○	○
I was a good communicator.	○	○	○	○	○
I was a good listener.	○	○	○	○	○
I did not communicate effectively.	○	○	○	○	○
My communication was appropriate to the situation at hand.	○	○	○	○	○
It was hard for me to communicate my feelings clearly.	○	○	○	○	○

8. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements about how you feel about your conflict discussion with your partner.

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
My partner let me know that I was communicating effectively.	○	○	○	○	○
Nothing was accomplished.	○	○	○	○	○
I would like to have another conversations like this one.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner genuinely wanted to get to know me.	○	○	○	○	○
I was very dissatisfied with the conversation.	○	○	○	○	○
I felt that during the conversation I was able to present myself as I wanted my partner to view me.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner showed me that he/she understood what I said.	○	○	○	○	○
I was very satisfied with the conversation.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner expressed a lot of interest in what I had to say.	○	○	○	○	○

9. In the conflict discussion with your partner, did the way in which your partner communicated and the things he/she said meet your expectations for how they would communicate based on your prior knowledge of and conversations with your partner? My partner's communication in the previous discussion was...

○ 1 Much more negative than I expected ○ 2 Slightly more negative than I expected ○ 3 Exactly as I expected ○ 4 Slightly more positive than I expected ○ 5 Much more positive than I expected

10. I felt ____ discussing the conflict topic with my partner.

○ 1 Extremely UNcomfortable ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 Neutral ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7 Extremely comfortable

11. Talking to my partner about the conflict topic made me ...

○ 1 Not anxious at all ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 Neutral ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7 Extremely anxious

12. Talking to my partner about the conflict topic...

○ 1 Did not phase me in the slightest ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 Neutral ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7 Made me extremely uneasy

13. Talking to my partner about the conflict topic...

○ 1 Did not make me feel stressed at all ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7 Made me feel very stressed

14. Talking to my partner about the conflict topic...

1 Did not make me feel tense at all	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Made me feel very tense

15. Talking to my partner about the conflict topic...

1 Did not make me feel frustrated	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Made me feel very frustrated

16. I feel that the conflict discussion with my partner was...

1 Extremely unproductive	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Extremely productive

17. I feel that the conflict discussion with my partner was...

1 Extremely negative	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Extremely positive

18. My partner and I resolved some issues of conflict between us in the interaction.

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

19. How typical was the conflict discussion compared to other conversations you've had with your partner about the same topics?

1 Not at all typical	2	3	4	5	6	7 Extremely typical

20. The way my partner talked to me in the conflict discussion was very much like he/she normally does.

1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Strongly Agree

21. How do you feel the conflict discussion with your partner went compared to other usual discussions about the same topics?

1 Much more negatively than usual	2	3	4 About the same as usual	5	6	7 Much more positively than usual

22. How much of an effect did the situation (researchers, video camera, etc.) have on the way you and your partner talked to each other?

1 Very much affected it	2	3	4	5	6	7 Did not affect it at all

23. Please indicate how much you have been thinking about the conflict discussion during this waiting time since you and your partner engaged in the task. This consists of thinking about: the topic of the discussion, how you feel the discussion went, and/or how you and/or your partner communicated during the discussion.

	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	Neutral 4	5	6	Strongly Agree 7
I have been repeatedly analyzing and thinking about the conflict discussion.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have been searching my mind many times to try to figure out if there is anything about my personality that contributes to the topic we discussed being a source of conflict in our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I've been thinking about my problems to try and examine how our discussion about this topic could have gone differently.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It has been difficult to get myself to stop thinking about the conflict discussion.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have been absorbed in thinking about the conflict discussion and am finding it difficult to think about other things.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have the feeling that if I think long enough about the conflict discussion, I will find that it has some deeper meaning and that I will be able to understand myself or my partner better because of it.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have been sitting here thinking about the conflict discussion, wondering how I'm going to manage it in the future.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

24. Please indicate the choice that best describes how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
People with strong opinions easily influence me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I believe in my opinions, even if they are different from other people's opinions.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I judge myself by what I think is important.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel like I am in control of my life situation.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The demands of everyday life get me down.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am good at taking care of my daily responsibilities.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I think it is important to have new experiences.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growing.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I gave up trying to make improvements or changes in my life a long time ago.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Keeping close relationships is difficult for me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
People describe me as a giving person.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel like I have direction in my life.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel like I've done all there is to do in life.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am happy with my life.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I like my personality.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am disappointed about the things I haven't done in my life.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

25. Below is a list of statement dealing with your general feelings about yourself.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
One the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	○	○	○	○	○
At times, I think I am no good at all.	○	○	○	○	○
I have high self-esteem	○	○	○	○	○

26. How certain are you about...

	1 Completely or almost completely UNCERTAIN	2	3	4	5	6 Completely or almost completely CERTAIN
...how you feel about your relationship?	○	○	○	○	○	○
...your goals for the future of your relationship?	○	○	○	○	○	○
...your view of your relationship?	○	○	○	○	○	○
...how important your relationship is to you?	○	○	○	○	○	○
...how your partner feel about your relationship?	○	○	○	○	○	○
...your partner's goals for the future of your relationship?	○	○	○	○	○	○
...your partner's view of your relationship?	○	○	○	○	○	○
...how important your relationship is to your partner?	○	○	○	○	○	○
...the current status of your relationship?	○	○	○	○	○	○
...how you can or cannot behave around your partner?	○	○	○	○	○	○
...the definition of your relationship?	○	○	○	○	○	○
...the future of your relationship?	○	○	○	○	○	○

27. We would like to know about how close you CURRENTLY feel with your partner.

	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly Agree 7
My relationship with my partner is close.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
When we are apart, I miss my partner a great deal.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I disclose important personal things to each other.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I have a strong connection.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I want to spend time together.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I'm sure of my relationship with my partner.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner is a priority in my life.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I do a lot of things together.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
When I have free time I choose to spend it alone with my partner.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I think about my partner a lot.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My relationship with my partner is important in my life.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I consider my partner when making important decisions.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

28. Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

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

29. I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner.

○ Not at all True ○ A little True ○ Somewhat True ○ Mostly True ○ Almost Completely True ○ Completely True

30. How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?

○ Not at all

○ A little

○ Somewhat

○ Mostly

○ Almost Completely

○ Completely

31. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

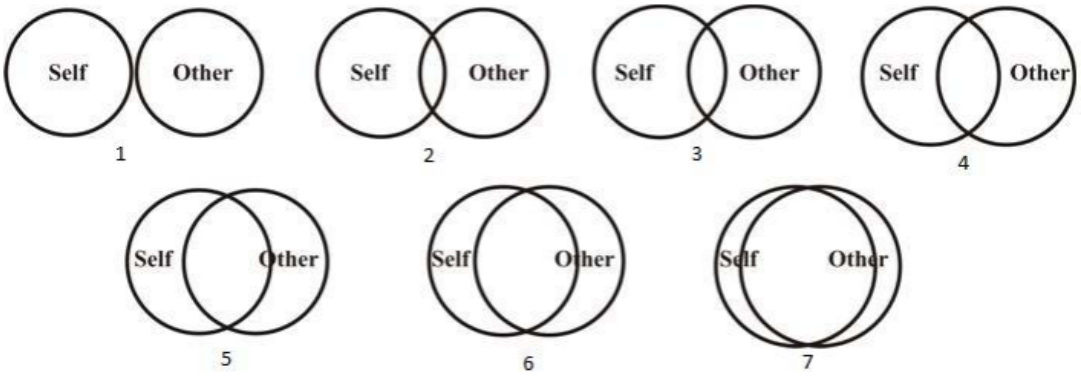
○ Not at all ○ A little ○ Somewhat ○ Mostly ○ Almost Completely ○ Completely

32. How well does being a part of this relationship with your partner describe the way you see yourself?

○ 1 Not well at all ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7 Extremely well

33. How important is being a part of this relationship with your partner to the way you see yourself?

1 Not at all important	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Extremely important



34. Which of the above circle representations is best describes your current relationship with your romantic partner?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

35. Think about how you think about yourself and your relationship with your partner and indicate which responses best represent how you view the relationship.

	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	Neither agree nor disagree 4	5	6	Strongly Agree
I want to keep the plans for my life somewhat separate from my partner's plans for life.							
I am willing to have or develop a strong sense of an identity as a couple with my partner.							
I tend to think about how things affect "us" as a couple more than how things affect "me" as an individual.							
I like to think of my partner and me more in terms of "us" and "we" than "me" and "him/her".							
I am more comfortable thinking in terms of "my" things than "our" things.							
I do not want to have a strong identity as a couple with my partner.							

36. In comparison to other parts of your life (e.g., work, family, friends, religion), how central is your relationship with your partner?

My relationship is not at all central to my life	My relationship is not as central as most other parts of my life	Some things are more central in my life than my relationship	My relationship is more central than some things in my life	My relationship is more central to my life than most other parts	Nothing else is more central to my life than my relationship.

37. How much time do you spend thinking about your relationship with your partner?

○ Not much time at all ○ Very little time ○ Some time ○ A fair amount of time ○ Most of the time ○ All of the time

38. Among the things that give your life meaning, how important is your relationship with your partner?

○ Not important at all ○ Most other things are more important ○ A few things are more important ○ Fairly important compared to other things ○ Very important compared to other things ○ My relationship is the most important thing

39. Compared to other aspects of your life, to what degree do events in your relationship affect your overall feelings of life satisfaction?

○ No effect on life satisfaction ○ Very little effect ○ Some effect ○ Moderate effect ○ Strong effect ○ The strongest effect

40. Please use the following scale to rate the extent to which you agree with the statements below.

	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	Neu 4
My current romantic relationship is an important reflection of who I am.	○	○	○	○
When I feel very close to my romantic partner, it often feels to me like he/she is an important part of who I am.	○	○	○	○
I usually feel a strong sense of pride when my partner has an important accomplishment.	○	○	○	○
I think one of the most important parts of who I am can be captured by looking at my partner and understanding who he/she is.	○	○	○	○
When I think of myself, I often think of my partner also.	○	○	○	○
If a person hurts my partner, I feel personally hurt as well.	○	○	○	○
In general, my current romantic relationship is an important part of my self-image.	○	○	○	○
Overall, my current romantic relationship has very little to do with how I feel about myself.	○	○	○	○
My current romantic relationship is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am.	○	○	○	○
My sense of pride comes from knowing who I have as a partner.	○	○	○	○
When I establish a romantic relationship with someone, I usually develop a strong sense of identification with that person.	○	○	○	○

41. Please indicate your agreement with the following statements about how you perceive your partner and your relationship.

	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	Neither Agree nor Disagree 4	5	6	Strongly Agree 7
I feel that my partner sees our relationship as I see it.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I see my relationship differently than the way my partner sees it.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I agree with how my partner describes our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that my partner has the wrong image of our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that my partner has correct information about our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that my partner portrays our relationship not based on information about our actual relationship.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that my partner stereotypes our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that my partner does not realize that our relationship has been changing and still portrays it based on past images.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that my partner knows who we used to be when he/she portrays us.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that there is no difference between who I think we are as a couple and who my partner thinks we are as a couple.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

42. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements about how you and your partner communicate with others (e.g., friends, family, etc.) about your relationship.

	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	Neither Agree nor Disagree 4	5	6	Strongly Agree 7
When my partner and I communicate with others about our relationship, they get to know the "real us."	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that my partner and I are able to communicate with others in a way that is consistent with who we really are.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that my partner and I can be ourselves when communicating with others.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I express ourselves in a certain way that is not the "real us" when communicating with others.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and/or I do not reveal important aspects of our relationship in communication with others.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
When communicating with others, my partner and/or I often lose our sense of who we are as a couple.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and/or I do not express the "real us" when we think it is different from others' expectations for us.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and/or I sometimes mislead others about who we really are as a couple.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
There is a difference between the "real us" as a couple and the impression my partner and/or I give others about our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I speak truthfully to others about our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I express the "real us" in communication with others.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

43. When I tell my partner about something good that has happened to me . . .

	Not at all true 1	2	3	Neutral 4	5	6	Very true 7
My partner usually reacts to my good fortune enthusiastically.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I sometimes get the sense that my partner is even more happy and excited than I am.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner often asks a lot of questions and shows genuine concern about the good event.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner tries not to make a big deal out of it, but is happy for me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner is usually silently supportive of the good things that occur to me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner says little, but I know he/she is happy for me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner often finds a problem with it.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner reminds me that most good things have their bad aspects as well.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
He/she points out the potential down sides of the good event.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sometimes I get the impression that he/she doesn't care much.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner doesn't pay much attention to me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My partner often seems disinterested.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

44. How WELL do the following statements DESCRIBE your relationship with your dating partner?

	Not at all well	Not entirely well	Neutral	Somewhat well	Extremely well
1. Through our joint efforts, my partner and I can resolve any problem in our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○
2. My partner and I are in complete control of the events, both positive and negative, in our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○
3. By working together, my partner and I can prevent undesirable events from occurring in our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○
4. My partner and I possess the communication and problem solving skills necessary to successfully resolve all of our differences.	○	○	○	○	○
5. Through our joint efforts, my partner and I can create the ideal relationship we both desire.	○	○	○	○	○
6. My partner and I can successfully work through any incompatibilities between our needs.	○	○	○	○	○
7. My partner and I are always able to reach mutually satisfying compromises when we discuss conflictual issues our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○
8. My partner and I are always able to make each other feel better no matter how upset we might be about the various pressures confronting us.	○	○	○	○	○
9. My partner and I sometimes feel helpless when we are confronted by a serious problem that we are not sure how to solve.	○	○	○	○	○
10. My partner and I are always successful in influencing one another into adopting better and more compatible ways of dealing with conflict.	○	○	○	○	○

45. We would like you to think about how you and your partner handle stressful events or difficult times that arise in life. With that in mind, please indicate the best response that represents how you and your partner handle stress and adversity.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
My partner and I talk about how we will get through the experience together.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
We talk about how much we have learned from the experience so far.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
We talk about how much we will grow together from the experience.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
We engage in activities or events together to cope.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
We talk about how we can cope with the situation together.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
We address problems as a team.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
We feel that we are both "in it together."	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

46. In responding to these statements, please consider whether you believe the stated events are MORE, LESS, OR EQUALLY LIKELY to occur in your relationship IN COMPARISON to the typical or average relationship. Consider a relationship of approximately the same length as your relationship with your partner.

	Much LESS likely to occur in my relationship than in the typical relationship.	Somewhat LESS likely to occur.	Equally probably in my relationship and the typical relationship.	Somewhat MORE likely to occur.	Much MORE likely to occur in my relationship than in the typical relationship.
Becoming closer to my partner even when external forces conspire to tear our relationship apart.	○	○	○	○	○
The love my partner and I share continuing to grow.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I becoming happier and even more satisfied with our relationship than we are today.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I discovering areas in which our needs conflict in a serious way.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner OR I being attracted enough to another person to consider leaving our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I growing further apart as we discover the negative aspects of our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I never tiring of one another's company no matter how much time we spend together.	○	○	○	○	○
Our relationship breaking up within the next 6 months.	○	○	○	○	○
Our relationship leading to marriage.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I always having compatible hopes and desires for our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner or I questioning our involvement with one another as we discover one another's faults.	○	○	○	○	○
The passion my partner and I share remaining as intense as it is today.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I turning into people who are almost strangers to one another.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I never feeling angry or frustrated enough to consider leaving our relationship.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I always being able to share our innermost feelings with one another.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I becoming much less attuned to one another's needs.	○	○	○	○	○
My partner and I always making the time to spend alone together no matter how busy we become with outside activities.	○	○	○	○	○

You are now finished with this survey. Thank you for completing it. You can open the door to let the researcher know you are finished.