

Dual-Trauma Couples:
Examining the Reciprocal Roles of Dual-Traumatic Exposure
on Dyadic Functioning and Resiliency Processes

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Dedication

To Dan.

My biggest supporter;
the love of my life.

To my younger self.

This is for all of the times you didn't know if you could dream big.

Abstract

Extant literature on traumatic stress has predominately focused on the exploration, identification, and treatment of trauma-related symptoms and diagnoses in individuals. In addition, conceptualization and examination of the role of traumatic stress exposure on couples have generally typified partners as comprised of one primary and one secondary trauma survivor (commonly referred to as “single-trauma couples” (STC). As a result, there are critical gaps in the examination of the lived experiences of dual-trauma couples ([DTC]; i.e., wherein both partners meet diagnostic criteria for PTSD or have a history of exposure to traumatic stress), and in understanding(s) of dual-traumatic exposure on couples’ functioning. The research presented herein aims to address these limitations and expand upon existing dual-trauma scholarship using a mixed methodology, two study approach.

In the first study, I used cross-sectional data from the Relationship Evaluation Questionnaire (RELATE) to analyze and compare the relationship between (a) childhood trauma exposure (i.e., physical and sexual abuse, domestic violence) and (b) relational satisfaction and stability, and perceived partner flexibility in a non-clinical sample ($n=4,308$) of STC and DTC. Principles from the Couples Adaptation to Traumatic Stress (CATS) informed construction of latent constructs (i.e., trauma exposure, relational satisfaction, perceived partner flexibility) that comprised all six actor-partner interdependence models. Actor-partner effects indicated greater exposure to or frequency of childhood trauma had significant adverse effects on STC and DTC relational satisfaction and stability, and DTC perceived partner flexibility. Notable gender differences were found among both STC and DTC samples. Post hoc analyses illustrated that problems in child-rearing had a greater negative effect than childhood trauma exposure on DTC and STC relational constructs.

In the second study, I focused on the DTC non-clinical sample from Study 1 and conducted a data reductive thematic analysis on dual-trauma female partners’ ($n=822$) and male partners’ ($n=831$) perceived relational strengths and weaknesses to ascertain individual and

dyadic resiliency processes. Short-answer participant responses were taken from the Relationship Evaluation Questionnaire (RELATE). Eight salient processes that promoted and hindered couple resiliency emerged from the data, providing insight into the perceptions, behaviors, dyadic interactions, and past experience that may foster or hinder effective resilience in DTC. Further, findings corroborate extant literature and support a balanced (inclusion of adaptive and maladaptive interactions) conceptualization of DTC relational dynamics.

Global implications of both studies illustrate evidence that dual-traumatic exposure has influence on relational constructs (i.e., satisfaction, stability, perceived partner flexibility) and couple interactions. Individual perception of trauma, as well as, the complex delineation of the influence of childhood trauma exposure and the role of daily stress within dual-trauma couples' lives are discussed. Implications for clinical practice are also described. Future directions demonstrate the need for continued empirical studies to ascertain accurate reflection of the lived experiences of dual-trauma couples.

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Introduction

Globally, individuals on average experience 3.2 traumatic events (e.g., sudden death of a loved one, assault, natural disaster) during their lifetimes (Benjet et al., 2015). In the United States, 82.7% of adults have been exposed to at least one traumatic event. Further, each year nearly eight million individuals meet criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of their exposure to said events (Gradus, 2016). These data exclude individuals who manifest trauma-related symptoms but fail to meet diagnostic criteria for PTSD. Dual-trauma couples are described as couples wherein both partners have a history of traumatic exposure (Balcom, 1996). In this definition, history of traumatic exposure is not relegated exclusively to trauma experiences during partnership. It is possible for partners to have individual exposure to differing types and severity of trauma at varying times throughout their lives. Given the magnitude of incidence rates of traumatic events in the U.S., the likelihood of partners being dual-trauma couples is high. However, there is a lack of empirical and theoretical studies to provide adequate understanding of this phenomenon in couple functioning, and/or to inform integrated treatment for traumatic stress exposure.

Due to historical emphases on individual presentations of the effects of trauma-exposure, current scholarship regarding dual-trauma couples is in its infancy. Salient themes include interpersonal patterns that are contingent upon contextual factors such as type of traumatic experience and length of exposure (Blalock et al., 2011; Nelson Goff et al., 2014). For example, in partners with synonymous trauma histories, partner effects of childhood trauma negatively influenced coping mechanisms and relational stability. Incidence and severity of trauma exposure may vary between partners (Ruhmann et al., 2018). Severity of symptoms is linked to marital distress and satisfaction (Spasojevic et al., 2000). For example, in a sample of married Bosnian refugees, the more symptoms of PTSD one spouse had, the more likely that individual reported high levels of distress and low levels of satisfaction in their marriage (Spasojevic et al., 2000).

Another study, in contrast, found that a higher incidence of traumatic exposure in female partners was associated with high levels of relational satisfaction and perceived attachment behaviors in male partners (Ruhlmann et al., 2018). Scholars must continue to explore dual-trauma couples' self-reported resilience processes and examine the mediating role(s) that these may have on overall relational functioning.

Previous studies on normative couple relational satisfaction, quality, and stability have been linked to varying degrees of individual and partner functioning, such as physical and emotional intimacy, communication, and dyadic coping (Gottman, 1994; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Randall & Bodenmann, 2009). In dual-trauma couples, sexual and emotional intimacy, communication (e.g., problem solving, empathy, emotional expression), cohesion, relational roles, psychological triggers, coping mechanisms, partner support, and boundary management are affected by trauma symptoms in both partners (Banford-Witting & Busby, 2018; Blalock et al., 2011; Donnellan et al., 2014; Nelson Goff et al., 2014, 2006; Spasojevic et al., 2000). For instance, Nelson Goff et al. (2006, 2014) found that 75% of dual-trauma participants observed their partners responding to trauma-related triggers on a regular basis. Three themes (cohesion/connection, understanding, and communication) appear to reside on a continuum – from negative to positive – for couples. Theme placement on the continua are dependent upon multiple factors, such as time and place of conversations with partners regarding trauma experiences (e.g., how long after the traumatic experience, possible triggers) and respective comfort levels with discourse about traumatic experiences. In comparison, approximately 92% of dual-trauma participants shared negative experiences pertaining to communication with their current partners versus 30% of their single-trauma peers (Nelson Goff et al., 2014).

The above findings are crucial in offering insight into dual-trauma couples; however, they are limited. Generalizability is restricted due to small participant pools recruited through convenience, snowball, or cross-sectional methods. In addition, most samples consist of White, heterosexual couples associated with military-related trauma exposure (e.g., Donnellan et al.,

2014; Nelson Goff et al., 2014; Ruhlmann et al., 2018). Operationalized definitions of trauma, traumatic-stress, and dual-trauma couples used for inclusion and exclusion criteria have varied among scholars, too, which further limits scope and synthesis of literature. For example, dual-trauma couples have been used interchangeably with single-trauma couples (Creasey, 2014; Riggs, 2014; Whisman, 2014) or inclusion criteria has mandated that partners have synonymous trauma histories, e.g., both partners were sexually abused by a family member (Banford-Witting & Busby, 2018). Further, dyadic assessments have lacked validity and reliability with couples affected by traumatic stress, whereas most assessments for traumatic exposure have used PTSD as a sole criterion. Measurements have excluded partners who displayed trauma-related symptoms but fell short of a PTSD diagnosis. Consequently, findings are representative of a small subset of dual-trauma couples in which both partners have a diagnosis of PTSD and/or have experienced identical types of trauma.

To address these deficiencies in scholarship regarding dual-trauma couples, increased empirical contributions are needed regarding the influence of traumatic stress exposure on relationship dynamics and lived experiences of this population. Traumatic stress and resilience studies comprised of couples and families have historically focused on system perception, stability, and adaptability through quantitative and qualitative measures (Lambert et al., 2012; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; Patterson & Garwick, 1994). Similarly, scholarship on couple relationships has concentrated on relational satisfaction, quality, and stability and its impact on overall couple health (Gottman, 1994; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Randall & Bodenmann, 2009). These latent constructs have been widely studied due to their strong empirical correlations with effective individual, dyadic, and familial functioning. Qualitative themes and patterns have informed psychological treatment of trauma-related disorders. It is thereby reasonable to examine the relationship dynamics associated with these constructs within dual-trauma couples.

Innovation

Scholars have begun to establish specific relationship constructs associated with the dual-trauma couples; however, no study has examined (a) the comparison of influence between childhood trauma (e.g., sexual or physical abuse) on relational satisfaction, stability, and adaptability in a non-clinical sample of single-trauma and dual-trauma couples, or (b) ascertained what partners in dual-trauma couples describe as relational strengths and weaknesses, within (c) couples comprised of both synonymous and different types of interpersonal trauma exposure.

Normative couple functioning has been predominately conceptualized as couples with no traumatic exposure (Johnson, 2002; Ruhlmann et al., 2018). In fact, the majority of theoretical conceptualizations of normative relational functioning in couples do not consider traumatic stress exposure (Nelson Goff & Smith, 2005). Given high global and national statistics on traumatic stress exposure, it is more likely that scholarship and clinical treatment has been conducted with couples affected by trauma exposure. Therefore, scholarship and theoretical conceptualization on couple dynamics may not accurately depict the lived experiences of the general population.

Of the few theoretical systemic conceptualizations that consider traumatic stress exposure, conceptualizations are limited to general definitions of stress (e.g., McCubbin & Patterson, 1983) or single-trauma couples wherein only one partner has a history of trauma exposure (e.g., Secondary Traumatic Stress [STS], Couple Adaptation to Traumatic Stress [CATS]; Figely, 1995; Ludick & Figley, 2017; Nelson Goff & Smith, 2005). In addition, Nelson Goff and Smith's (2005) CATS and subsequent modifications (see Oseland et al., 2016) is the only systemic conceptual model created specifically to address trauma exposure in couples' functioning. There is no conceptualization of the influence of trauma exposure in dual-trauma couple functioning. While Nelson Goff and Smith's (2005) original and Oseland et al. (2016)'s modified CATS model provide valuable insight into bidirectional influence(s) of individual traits and vulnerabilities, trauma exposure, and couple functioning, both are limited due to its focused explanation of this phenomenon within single-trauma couples. Therefore, this study builds upon

the CATS in creating a systemic conceptual model of trauma exposure and couple functioning within dual-trauma couples (i.e., Couple Adaptation to Dual-Traumatic Stress [CADS]).

Mixed-method studies provide crucial objective and subjective insights into a population necessary for increased scholarship and better prevention / intervention efforts. Utilization of mixed methodology in the study of dual-trauma couples aids in answering exploratory and confirmatory hypotheses regarding the population. Given the gap in literature, it is reasonable to examine both descriptive and correlational hypotheses to establish foundational information. This foundation is necessary for future attainment of causal description and explanation of trauma exposure on dyadic relational functioning within dual-trauma couples.

Guiding Research Questions

The following research questions have been informed by literature described above and created to address the limitations of dual-traumatic stress scholarship and continue to expand the understanding of the lived experience of dual-trauma couples.

Study 1:

- 1) Does the role of childhood traumatic exposure have significantly different influence on single- and dual-trauma couples in
 - a. relational satisfaction?
 - b. relational stability?
 - c. relational adaptability?
- 2) After controlling for demographic variables (i.e., education, children), does the role of childhood traumatic exposure still have significantly different influence on single- and dual-trauma couples in
 - a. relational satisfaction?
 - b. relational stability?
 - c. relational adaptability?

Study 2:

- 1) What do dual-trauma couples believe to be their relational strengths and weaknesses?
 - a. What are the unique resiliency processes found in reported strengths that dual-traumas couples already possess?
 - b. What reported perceptions, behaviors, partner interactions, and experiences hinder resiliency processes in dual-trauma couples?

These studies will contribute to empirical evidence supporting theoretical conceptualization (i.e., CATS; CADS) about this population; these are crucial for the development of reliable assessments of relationship satisfaction, stability, and adaptability in dual-trauma couples. In addition, combined findings associated with dyadic coping (i.e., adaptability), relational strengths, and weaknesses will inform strength-based treatments for dual-trauma couples and future traumatic stress and resiliency scholarship. As a result, both studies will provide significant contributions to future empirically-based trauma-informed treatment for couples may aid in decreasing prolonged negative effects of trauma-related symptoms (e.g., familial, dyadic, financial stress) on partners, couple, and parent-child interpersonal functioning.

Article 1

The Reciprocal Influences of Childhood Trauma Exposure on Relational Satisfaction, Stability,
and Adaptability among Single- and Dual-trauma Couples

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Dissertation Article 1

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Synopsis

Introduction: While previous scholars have established strong correlations between childhood trauma on adult interpersonal functioning and couple dynamics (e.g., relational satisfaction, cohesion, adaptability), there are critical gaps in the examination and understanding(s) of both-partner traumatic exposure on couples' functioning.

Method: Analyses on a cross-sectional dataset ($n=4,308$) were conducted to examine and compare the relationship between childhood trauma (e.g., sexual or physical abuse) and relational satisfaction and stability, and perceived partner flexibility in a non-clinical sample of single-trauma couples (STC) and dual-trauma couples (DTC). Confirmatory factor analyses measurement models were constructed for relational latent constructs. Six actor-partner-interdependence models were fitted. Covariates of education and children were controlled.

Results: Actor-Partner effects indicated greater exposure to or frequency of childhood trauma exposure had significant adverse effects on relational satisfaction and stability among both STC and DTC. In addition, childhood trauma exposure had significant negative effects on perceived partner flexibility in DTC. However, childhood trauma exposure was significantly mitigated by problems with child-rearing in relational adaptability within STC. Comparable results were found within STC and DTC relational satisfaction and stability. Results illustrated significant gender differences in the effects of exposure to or frequency of childhood trauma exposure on relational satisfaction and stability, and perceived partner flexibility in STC and DTC. Female childhood trauma exposure had a greater impact on both actor and partner effects on perceived partner flexibility across STC and DTC. Further, problems in child rearing had a greater negative impact on DTC female relational satisfaction and perceptions of DTC female partner adaptability than DTC males.

Discussion: Findings provide evidence of significant influence childhood trauma exposure in DTC. The results from child-rearing indicate need to investigate the influence of childhood traumatic stress on co-parenting and daily hassles in DTC. Implications for future research are discussed.

Keywords: APIM, dual-trauma couples, relational satisfaction, relational stability, relational adaptability single-trauma couples, trauma, traumatic stress

The Reciprocal Influences of Childhood Trauma Exposure on Relational Satisfaction, Stability, and Adaptability among Single- and Dual-trauma Couples

Recognition, diagnosis, and treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have improved considerably over the past 20 years. However, trauma-focused modalities are predominately structured to treat individuals (Figley & Kiser, 2013; Nelson Goff & Smith, 2005; Johnson, 2002). Extant research to inform care for couples with exposure to trauma focuses primarily on the amelioration of PTSD in one partner, sometimes alongside secondary traumatic stress (STS) symptoms in the other partner (commonly referred to as “single-trauma couples” (STC; Nelson Goff & Smith, 2005, p. 154). Research to inform care for “dual-trauma couples” (DTC), wherein both partners meet diagnostic criteria for PTSD or have a history of exposure to traumatic stress, is especially deficient (Nelson Goff et al., 2014; Ruhlmann et al., 2018, p. 27). While previous scholars have established strong correlations between childhood trauma on adult interpersonal functioning and couple dynamics (e.g., relational satisfaction, cohesion, adaptability; Banford-Witting & Busby, 2018; Layne et al., 2014; Monson et al., 2010; Nelson Goff et al., 2006), there are critical gaps in the examination and understanding(s) of both-partner traumatic exposure on couples’ functioning.

The overall objective of this study was to examine and compare the reciprocal effects of partner trauma on relational satisfaction, stability, and adaptability in single- and dual- trauma couples. The investigation employed the Couple Adaptation to Dual-Traumatic Stress (CATDS) model (an adapted version of the Couple Adaptation to Traumatic Stress model [CATS]; Nelson Goff & Smith, 2005) to guide methodology and interpret results. This model posits reciprocal relationships between partner trauma history and relationship constructs. Based on previous literature and the CADS model, it was hypothesized that dual-partner trauma will negatively influence couple satisfaction, stability, and adaptability more than couples with single-partner trauma.

Conceptual Frameworks

The majority of theoretical conceptualizations of normative relational functioning in couples do not consider traumatic stress exposure (Nelson Goff & Smith, 2005). Of the few that are extant, systemic conceptualizations are limited to general definitions of stress (e.g., McCubbin & Patterson, 1983) or couples wherein only one partner has a history of trauma exposure (e.g., Secondary Traumatic Stress [STS], Couple Adaptation to Traumatic Stress [CATS]; Figely, 1995; Ludick & Figley, 2017; Nelson Goff & Smith, 2005.). In addition, Nelson Goff and Smith's CATS (2005; see Figure 1) is the only systemic conceptual model created specifically to address trauma exposure in couples' functioning. There is no conceptualization of the influence of trauma exposure in dual-trauma couple functioning. And while the CATS model provides valuable insight into bidirectional influence(s) of individual traits and vulnerabilities, trauma exposure, and couple functioning, it is limited due to its focused explanation of this phenomenon within single-trauma couples. For the purposes of this study, then, the CATS model was adapted to create a systemic conceptual model of trauma exposure and couple functioning within dual-trauma couples.

[insert Figure 1 here]

Original Model: Couple Adaptation to Traumatic Stress

The original CATS model utilized two concepts (predisposing factors and resources) from the Double ABC-X stress model (McCubbin & Patterson, 1982). According to the CATS model, individuals enter into a partnership with their own set of predisposing factors (e.g., prior trauma experiences, personality traits or characteristics), resources (e.g., financial, social capital, coping mechanisms), and trauma-related symptoms (e.g., anger outbursts, hypervigilance, inability to control thoughts, exaggerated startle response). Nelson Goff and Smith (2005) hypothesized that these individual components have a bi-directional impact on couple (e.g., support, power dynamics, satisfaction) and individual functioning. This bi-directional impact of

individual and couple dynamics can form a cyclical loop for adaptive and maladaptive interactions among STC.

[insert Figure 2 here]

Adapted Model: Couple Adaptation to Dual-Traumatic Stress (CADS)

The adapted model, Couple Adaptation to Dual-Traumatic Stress (CADS; see Figure 2), applies all of the original model's concepts, including predisposing factors and resources from the Double ABC-X stress model (McCubbin & Patterson, 1982), and individual level of functioning (CATS; Nelson Goff & Smith, 2005). In addition, the CADS model utilizes previous assumptions of the CATS model: (a) individual partner predisposing factors and resources have a reciprocal effect on the autonomy and interdependence (e.g., attachment, power dynamics, satisfaction) within the relationship, and (b) bi-directional effects can reinforce a cycle of dyadic adaptive and maladaptive interaction patterns.

Meaningful differences between CATS and CADS include slight adaptations to individual (i.e., dual histories of traumatic stress exposure) and couple functioning (i.e., dyadic coping) components and corresponding assumptions. Conceptualization of individual functioning for the CADS adjust to account for both partners with predisposing factors of varied traumatic exposure, that are presently exhibiting trauma-related symptoms (ranging from mild to severe). Therefore, the interaction patterns become unique to the couple, as it obligates consideration for effects of varied frequencies and severity of similar or different typologies of traumatic exposure on individual and couple functioning, specifically dyadic coping (Bodenmann, 1997; Bodenmann et al., 2019). Dyadic coping (i.e., how romantic partners cope with individual and mutual stress), assumes cyclical, bi-directional influence between individuals' coping processes (i.e., evaluation of stress, emotional and physiological responses, available resources, and mechanisms used to manage or ameliorate stress) and affects how couples collectively manage and resolve individual and mutual stress (Bodenmann, 1997, 2005; Bodenmann et. al., 2019). For example, a comment from Partner A to Partner B may inadvertently trigger a sudden onset of Partner B's trauma-

related defensive mechanisms (i.e., fight, flight, or freeze). As a result, Partner B may engage in hostile behavior and use aggressive language, abruptly leave the room, or become silent – feeling an overwhelming sense of paralysis. Any of Partner B’s responses listed above could trigger trauma-related defense mechanisms in Partner A. This could result in Partner A mirroring Partner B’s intensity, further escalating the argument, walking away from Partner B, or shutting down.

Individual and couple resources can affect mechanisms related to dual-traumatic stress adaptation. For example, both partners coping with trauma-related symptoms may find it difficult to seek support or help needed (i.e., resources) to ameliorate individual trauma-related symptoms and maladaptive dyadic interaction patterns. Further, due to diverse operational definitions of traumatic stress, the general public may not accurately conceptualize or name past and present experiences as “traumatic.” As a result, individuals and couples may seek out treatment and support focused on co-morbid symptoms (e.g., depression, anxiety, substance use), rather than the primary cause. While treatment for co-morbid symptoms could help individual and couple functioning (Meis et al., 2019), trauma-related individual symptoms and maladaptive dyadic interaction patterns may still exist. Thus, consideration of resources, such as appropriate treatment and knowledge, is imperative in the conceptualization of dual-traumatic stress adaptation.

Methods

Procedures

The sample ($n=4,308$) employed in this study was comprised of a subset of a larger sample of adult couples ($n=21,232$) who completed the Relationship Evaluation Questionnaire (RELATE) between 2001 and 2014. The questionnaire is a self-report instrument developed and administered by scholars at the RELATE Institute – which is affiliated with Brigham Young University (BYU) – who assessed individual and relational constructs that impact couple functioning (Busby et al., 2001). Multiple methods of recruitment were employed (e.g., print,

word-of-mouth, internet, classroom, workshops for intimate partners) for the original dataset. Completion of the 300+ question instrument took 40-60 minutes. Each couple individually completed questions were comprised of self- and partner- assessments regarding traits, areas of relational functioning, constellation and dynamics of families of origin, and included specified types of childhood and interpersonal trauma exposure.

Inclusion criteria for the study described here necessitated that each respondent met the following precedents: (a) in a committed partnership or marriage; (b) both partners completed the instrument, and (c) individual and/or partner history of childhood trauma exposure (e.g., sexual, physical, or domestic violence). Exclusion criteria eliminated any couples engaging in intimate partner violence, as the presence of intimate partner violence could skew results. The above criteria reduced the sample from $n=21,232$ to $n=4,308$ couples.

Sample

The current sample is comprised of single-trauma ($n=2,678$) and dual-trauma ($n=1,630$) couples. The sample is was restricted to heterosexual couples due to (a) low participation of same-sex couples ($n=55$), and (b) same-sex couples face higher likelihoods of traumatic stress exposure from the dominant culture (i.e., systemic discrimination) than heterosexual peers.

The majority of respondents identified as White (73% males; 71.6% females), heterosexual individuals in serious dating (27.3%), engaged or committed to marriage (47.7%), or married (25.0%) relationships. Over two-thirds (68.5%,) of participants reported current relationship length between 1 and 5 years ($M=4.22$; $SD=1.39$). Current legal status varied among partners: never married, not cohabitating (36.1%); cohabitated (29.7%); first marriage (20.3%); divorced (8.8%); remarried (5%); widowed (0.2%).

Ages ranged from 18 to 75 years old with average ages of 33.09 years ($SD=10.06$) for males and 31.10 years ($SD=9.25$) for females. Education ranged from less than high school to the completion of a graduate-level degree. Approximately 85.3% of females reported education beyond high school: graduate-level degree (26.0%), bachelor's (26.8%), or some college

education (32.5%). For males, 84.7% reported education beyond high school: graduate-level degree (23.3%), bachelor's (29.2%), or some college education (32.2%). Annual personal income ranged between \$0 and over \$300,000; most participants reported annual incomes between \$0 to \$79,999 (males 63.3%; females 72.3%). However, there were larger gender discrepancies in reported personal incomes between \$80,000 to >\$300,000, as the percentage of males (33.4%) earning an income in this range is nearly double that of females (18%).

Measures

Observed variables used were selected from questionnaire measures (see Table 1) according to conceptual assumptions of the proposed CADS model adapted from Nelson Goff and Smith's (2005) CATS model. Overall, four constructs were measured: childhood trauma exposure, relational satisfaction, relational stability, and perceived partner flexibility.

Childhood exposure to physical, sexual, and/or domestic violence was measured using questions adapted from the Conflict Tactics Scale (Strauss, 1979) and empirical studies examining childhood traumatic stress (Busby, 1996, 2000). Assessment of traumatic exposure typologies were limited to events that were family-perpetrated (e.g., by a parent, sibling, or other relative) trauma.

Measures assessing relationship satisfaction were developed based on Gottman's (1994) couple process model and other empirically supported predictors of relational quality. Relationship stability was assessed using questions adapted from Booth, Johnson, and Edward's (1983) measures of marital instability.

It is crucial to note that this dataset did not contain a specified measure for perceived partner flexibility. Thus, measures used aligned with individual and partner personality features found in dyadic coping and adaptation literature (Bodenmann, 2005; Randall & Bodenmann, 2009; Walsh, 2016).

[insert Table 1 here]

Data Analysis

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Actor Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) (Cook & Kenny, 2005) were used due to (a) CFA's focus on creation of conceptually-reflective latent constructs and (b) APIM's examination of reciprocal relational effects with varied datasets, including cross-sectional data. The CADS conceptual framework informed the creation of latent constructs (trauma exposure, relational satisfaction, stability, and flexibility) used in subsequent analyses. Examination and comparison of single- and dual- trauma interdependence of observed actor (female and male childhood trauma exposure) and partner effects (e.g., self-reported relational satisfaction, stability, flexibility) were conducted using APIM. Initial data analysis was computed in IBM SPSS Statistics version 23. Subsequent analyses were computed in Mplus version 8.1.

The secondary data set was constructed to answer research questions regarding both dyadic and individual partner effects. Strict use of only dyadic-level data was considered in the analytic approach. However, dyadic data could only be achieved by combining and averaging individual partner data. This method of analysis is limited as results can be skewed when one or both partners have wide discrepancies in responses. To eliminate possible inaccuracies, paired individual partner data were used to produce individual partner and couple findings.

Hypotheses

It was hypothesized that:

(a) actor and partner childhood trauma will significantly negatively influence both partners' reports of relationship satisfaction and stability, and perceived partner flexibility; and

(b) actor and partner childhood trauma exposure will significantly negatively influence both partners' reports of relationship satisfaction, stability, and flexibility more than single-partner couples.

Initial Analysis

Descriptive and bivariate statistics for all study variables are shown in Table 1. Paired individual data were used as individual ratings of outcomes. Due to inherent nonindependence of the data (i.e., couples) and that strength of mediation may differ by gender, Pearson partial correlations were conducted to test for complete distinguishability among all variables. Significant results indicated that distinguishability was met (see Table 2). Chi-square analyses were conducted on all demographic variables for significant group differences (see Tables 3 and 4). Bivariate correlations using Pearson 2-tailed structure were calculated to examine effect size, statistical power, correlations, covariance, and attend to any multi-collinearity issues (see Tables 5 and 6).

[insert Table 2 here]

Measurement Model Analyses

Latent constructs (childhood trauma exposure, relational satisfaction, stability, and flexibility) were created using CFA to reflect congruence with CADS conceptual framework and previous literature via Mplus version 8.1. Data were missing for no more than 5% of the sample with any individual item. Maximum likelihood was applied to all other missing data. Indicators were selected from observed scale items listed above. Models were specified and created using measurement equations and factor loadings (i.e., hypothesized relationships between variables) congruent with the proposed CADS conceptual assumptions. Chi-square (χ^2) and the root-mean-square-error of approximation (RMSEA) values were calculated to examine model fit. Each model was considered to have a good fit to the data when χ^2 values were close to zero and RMSEA values are between 0.05-0.08 (Schumacker & Lomax, 2012). Due to the large sample size (400+), χ^2 values are typically significant, therefore, other model fit indices (i.e., comparative fit index [CFI], Tucker-Lewis index [TLI], standardized-root-mean-residual [SRMR]) were calculated to cross-check proposed model fit. Acceptable values for CFI and TLI were between 0.90-0.99 and SRMR were below 0.08, which indicated the proposed measurement models were

a good fit. All constructs achieved excellent model fit. Visual diagrams of male and female latent constructs and corresponding model fit indices tables for all latent constructs are located below (see Figures 3 - 8). Given the positive results of the measurement models, we moved forward with the APIM models.

[insert Figures 3-8 here]

Actor-Partner Interdependence Model Analyses

This model delineated each partner's self-reported satisfaction, stability, flexibility, and trauma exposure to examine the bidirectional influence of individual trauma exposure on individual and partner's self-reported relational constructs. By using APIM models, scholars are able to analyze variables associated with Partner A (actor effects) and deduce correlational information about Partner B (partner effects) (e.g., individual scores of relationship quality are typically positively associated; Cook & Kenny, 2005).

Consistent with dyadic data nonindependence recommendations (Cook & Kenny, 2005), Pearson partial correlations were conducted in initial analyses above to confirm distinguishability, and endogenous latent variables were correlated. Execution of APIM on all variables included in both samples would confound results. Therefore, three models were created for single- and dual-trauma couple samples to assess for actor and partner effects of trauma exposure on (a) relational satisfaction, (b) relational stability, and (c) perceived partner flexibility.

Four control variables were included in the three models. Extant literature supports education and the presence of children as moderators in couple relational dynamics, such as relational satisfaction (Doss et al., 2009; Kurdeck, 1999; Moller et al., 2008). Observed male and female education variables were thereby incorporated into the three models. Since the RELATE questionnaire included an observed variable specifically related to number of children, another observed variable was included that asked respondents to indicate any relational struggles with raising children. The Likert responses included "does not apply". Therefore, this variable was

included as it differentiated between couples who have and those who did not have children.

Variances not explained by control variables were calculated as residual variables and represented in the visual depictions of each model.

Similar to the measurement models, RMSEA, χ^2 , CFI, TLI, and SRMR values were calculated and analyzed for each of the three models to demonstrate acceptable model fit (Kenny et al., 2006; Kenny & Lederman, 2010). Model indices results confirmed excellent fit for all three models shown below:

- (a) Childhood Trauma Exposure + Relational Satisfaction + Education (female and male, control) + Problems in Child Rearing (female and male, control); ($\chi^2 = 711.48$, $df = 184$, $p < 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.036; CFI = 0.974; TFI = 0.967; SRMR = 0.037).

[insert Figure 9, 12 here]

- (b) Childhood Trauma Exposure + Relational Stability + Education (female and male, control) + Problems in Child Rearing (female and male, control); ($\chi^2 = 267.70$, $df = 80$, $p < 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.033; CFI = 0.977; TFI = 0.966; SRMR = 0.028).

[insert Figure 11, 14 here]

- (c) Childhood Trauma Exposure + Perceived Partner Flexibility + Education (female and male, control) + Problems in Child Rearing (female and male, control); ($\chi^2 = 750.17$, $df = 250$, $p < 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.030; CFI = 0.974; TFI = 0.969; SRMR = 0.030).

[insert Figure 10, 13 here]

Results

Single-trauma Couples (STC)

Results below are separated to reflect each of the three APIM models conducted for childhood trauma exposure on (a) relational satisfaction, (b) relational stability, and (c) perceived partner flexibility within single-trauma couples.

Relational Satisfaction

There were significant actor and partner effects on relational constructs for STCs. Greater exposure to or frequency of childhood trauma exposure among females was significantly associated with lower actor-reported relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -0.142, p < .001$) and partner-reported relational satisfaction ($\beta = -0.078, p < .001$). Relational problems with rearing children negatively affected STC female participants' self-perceived relational satisfaction ($\beta = -0.243, p < .001$) more than childhood trauma exposure.

Similarly, exposure to childhood trauma exposure among males was significantly associated with lower actor-reported relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -0.105, p < .001$) and partner-perceived relational satisfaction ($\beta = -0.81, p < .001$). In addition, the presence and raising of children had a greater effect on STC male partners' perception of relational satisfaction ($\beta = -0.237, p < .001$) than childhood trauma exposure.

Male and female relational satisfaction were positively and significantly associated ($\beta = 0.729, p < .001$). Both male and female education had a significant inverse relationship with childhood trauma exposure, insofar as male and female partners with childhood exposure were more likely to have lower levels of education (male, $\beta = -0.078, p < .001$; female, $\beta = -0.069, p < .001$).

Relational Stability

Increased frequency and exposure to childhood trauma exposure within single-partner partners was significantly associated with lower levels of self-reported relational stability (male, $\beta = -0.112, p < .001$; female, $\beta = -0.134, p < .001$). In other words, couples in which one partner had history of trauma exposure were more likely to view their relationship as unstable or “in trouble.”

Female partners with childhood trauma history significantly affected their non-trauma-exposed partner's perception of relational stability ($\beta = -0.073, p < .018$). Likewise, male

participants with childhood trauma exposure significantly negatively impacted female partners' perception of relationship stability ($\beta = -0.184, p < .001$). While both results are significant, male childhood trauma exposure had a greater effect on their partner's perception of relational stability than their female peers.

Further, self-reported difficulties in raising children were negatively associated with self-reported relational stability in both males ($\beta = -0.198, p < .001$) and females ($\beta = -0.267, p < .001$). Lastly, STC male and female perceived relational stability was highly positively correlated ($\alpha = 0.583, p < .001$).

Perceived Partner Flexibility

There were no significant actor and partner effects for trauma exposure on perceived partner flexibility within single-trauma couples. In other words, Partner A's history of childhood trauma exposure did not have a significant impact on how adaptable Partner B perceives Partner A to be and vice versa. Although not statistically significant, female trauma exposure did have a greater impact on both actor ($\beta = -0.043, p < .195$) and partner ($\beta = -0.038, p < .261$) effects of perceived partner flexibility than male trauma exposure (actor, $\beta = -0.008, p < .820$; partner, $\beta = -0.019, p < .574$). In contrast, perceived partner flexibility, or how adaptable Partner A believes Partner B to be, was significantly negatively affected by couple difficulties in rearing children in both males ($\beta = -0.223, p < .001$) and females ($\beta = -0.299, p < .001$). Therefore, STC couples with high levels of disagreement about child rearing tend to perceive the other as "unadaptable" or "inflexible."

Significant positive correlations were found among STCs' perceived partner flexibility. Female participants' perception of partner flexibility was significantly associated with high levels of male participants' perception of perceived partner flexibility ($\alpha = .166, p < .000$). Thus, STC partners are more likely to mirror each other's beliefs about partner flexibility.

Dual-trauma Couples (DTC)

Results below are separated based on APIM models: childhood trauma exposure on DTC (a) relational satisfaction, (b) relational stability, and (c) perceived partner flexibility.

Relational Satisfaction

There were significant actor and partner effects for dual-trauma couples. Greater exposure to or frequency of childhood trauma exposure among DTC females were significantly predictive of lower perceived relational satisfaction ($\beta = -.120, p < .001$) and partner-perceived relational satisfaction ($\beta = -.128, p < .001$). Similarly, male partners with childhood trauma exposure had a significantly negative effect on actor ($\beta = -0.123, p < .001$) and partner relational satisfaction ($\beta = -0.161, p < .001$).

It is important to note that the effect sizes among male actor trauma exposure were greater than female actor trauma exposure among partner effects. This means that in DTC, male childhood trauma exposure has a greater negative effect on female partner overall relational satisfaction - over and beyond her own traumatic exposure.

Both female and male relational satisfaction had an inverse association with relational problems in child rearing [male ($\beta = -.128, p < .001$); female ($\beta = -0.213, p < .001$)]. While both findings are significant, problems with child rearing had a greater effect on DTC female relational satisfaction. High positive correlations were found between male and female relational satisfaction ($\alpha = 0.732, p < .001$). Low negative correlations were found between male education and male ($\alpha = -0.104, p < .001$) and female childhood trauma exposure ($\alpha = -0.100, p < .001$).

Relational Stability

History of childhood trauma exposure was significantly predictive of low-perceived relational stability actor effects (male, $\beta = -0.183, p < .001$; female, $\beta = -.144, p < .001$). In other words, DTC participants were more likely to view their relationships as unstable or “in trouble.”

In DTC female partner childhood trauma exposure significantly negatively affected male partner effects of relational stability ($\beta = -0.097, p < .001$). Similarly, male partners' childhood trauma exposure also had a significant negative relationship with female partner-reported relational stability ($\beta = -0.165, p < .001$). However, the partner effect sizes differed greatly, such that male childhood trauma exposure has a greater impact on females' sense of relational stability in DTC. Male and female perceived relationship stability was highly positively correlated ($\alpha = .604, p < .000$).

In addition, couple problems with rearing children had a significantly negative effect on both DTC males' ($\beta = -0.199, p < .000$) and females' ($\beta = -0.243, p < .000$) perceptions of relational stability. In comparison to childhood trauma exposure, problems with rearing children had a slightly greater effect on perceived relational stability for either partner.

Perceived Partner Flexibility

Significant partner effects for childhood trauma exposure were found for perceived partner flexibility within dual-trauma couples. In contrast, no actor effects were significant. This means that Partner B's history of childhood trauma exposure had a greater impact to how adaptable Partner A believed Partner B to be, than on Partner B's self-perception of flexibility.

Female childhood trauma exposure significantly negatively affected male perceived partner-flexibility ($\beta = -0.128, p < .001$). Similarly, male childhood trauma exposure negatively affected female perceived partner flexibility ($\beta = -0.093, p < .002$). Although both resulted in significant partner effects, female childhood trauma exposure had a greater effect and significance on partner effects than male childhood trauma exposure.

Couple problems with child rearing significantly decreased perceived partner flexibility in both DTC partners (male, $\beta = -0.196, p < .001$; female, $\beta = -0.279, p < .001$). However, problems in child rearing had a greater negative impact on perceptions of female perceived partner flexibility than males. Further, female childhood trauma exposure was significantly

correlated with actor and partner reported problems with child rearing (males, $\alpha = .131, p < .001$; females, $\alpha = .154, p < .001$). Moderate positive correlations were found among perceived partner flexibility, in which a high level of female perceived partner flexibility was significantly associated with a high level of male perceived partner flexibility ($\alpha = .211, p < .001$).

Discussion

Greater severity or frequency of childhood trauma exposure had significant adverse effects on relational satisfaction and stability among both STC and DTC. In addition, childhood trauma exposure had significant negative effects on perceived partner flexibility in DTC, thus mostly supporting our initial hypotheses. Study findings were consistent with previous scholarship on childhood trauma (i.e., child maltreatment) and adult interpersonal and couple functioning (e.g., relational satisfaction, cohesion, flexibility; Banford-Witting & Busby, 2018; Bornefeld-Ettmann et al., 2018; Campbell & Renshaw, 2013; Fowler et al., 2013; Hamilton et al., 2009; Makriyianis et al., 2019; Monk & Nelson Goff, 2014; Monson et al., 2010; Nelson Goff et al., 2006; Whisman, 2006). Antithetical to my first hypothesis, while actor or partner childhood trauma exposure negatively affected perceived partner flexibility in STC, it was not found to be significant. Rather, childhood trauma exposure was significantly mitigated by problems with child-rearing in perceived partner flexibility within STC. In other words, relational difficulties (e.g., discrepancies, arguments) in child rearing had a greater influence on Partner A's perception of Partner B's flexibility than Partner B's childhood trauma exposure. Comparable results were found within STC and DTC relational satisfaction and stability. Although actor or partner childhood trauma exposure had a significant negative effect on both STC and DTC relational satisfaction and stability, effect sizes illustrated that problems in child-rearing had a greater negative effect than childhood trauma exposure.

Compared to STC, DTC childhood trauma exposure incurred greater actor and partner effect sizes, which indicated higher influence on individual and relational functioning and

substantiated my second hypothesis. The comparative influence of trauma exposure on relational functioning between STC and DTC vary in the literature between conceptual (Nelson Goff & Smith, 2005; Oseland et al., 2016) and empirical support (Nelson Goff et al., 2015; Ruhlman et al. 2018). Empirical evidence has supported increased influence of trauma exposure on relational distress in STC than DTC (Nelson Goff et al., 2015; Ruhlman et al. 2018). However, samples indicative of these studies were small ($n < 50$) and were predominately comprised of military couples. This may indicate further investigation into comparative influence of traumatic exposure on relational dynamics based on typologies (e.g., human-caused vs. natural disasters) and/or on occurrence during the lifespan (e.g., early childhood vs. adult trauma exposure).

Results illustrated significant gender differences in the effects of greater frequency of or exposure to childhood trauma on relational satisfaction and stability, and perceived partner flexibility in STC and DTC. Some gender differences were consistent across STC and DTCs. For example, male childhood trauma exposure had a greater impact on both STC and DTC female partner-perceived relational satisfaction and stability consistent with previous research studies (see Lambert et al, 2012 for review; see also Hamilton et al., 2009; Maneta et al, 2015; Monk & Nelson Goff, 2014; Ruhlman et al., 2018). In addition, female childhood trauma exposure had a greater impact on both male and female actor and partner effects of perceived partner flexibility in STC and DTC. These results contribute to tangential literature on the relationship between childhood maltreatment and individual psychological inflexibility (Miron et al., 2016; Boykin et al., 2018). Previous studies support influential relationships between childhood maltreatment and correlates of psychological inflexibility (i.e., cognitive rigidity, self-criticism, shame; Hayes et al., 2006) such as a lack of or fear of self-compassion (Miron et al., 2016). Therefore, it is plausible that female partners with childhood trauma who exhibit high levels of psychological inflexibility display increased self-criticism and schema rigidity. These disclosures could influence their own sense of confidence in adaptation, but also their male partners' perception or confidence of their female partners' ability to adapt. However, without substantial empirical support, the

complexities are unknown. Therefore, future researchers may consider analyzing the influences of DTC childhood trauma exposure on dyadic psychological flexibility. In addition, continued qualitative inquiries (see Blalock Henry et al., 2011; Monk & Nelson Goff, 2015) that illuminate STC and DTC couple interactions comprised of individual and dyadic psychological inflexibility (e.g., power, control, self-criticism, schema rigidity) would aid in development and delivery of appropriate clinical interventions.

In contrast, there were some gender differences were associated with only DTC. For instance, male childhood trauma exposure had a greater negative effect on female partner's relational satisfaction over and beyond female partners' own childhood trauma exposure in DTC. However, problems in child rearing was shown to have an even greater negative influence on (a) female relational satisfaction and (b) perceptions of female perceived partner flexibility than male childhood trauma exposure. Based on these findings, it is plausible that macrosystemic influences (e.g., cultural norms, religion, roles, division of labor, and sociocultural beliefs about relationships and trauma exposure) may intersect or have a greater role in the reciprocal influences of childhood maltreatment on relational satisfaction, relational stability, and individual flexibility. Post hoc analyses, discussed briefly below, provide additional support for further examinations of macrosystemic influences.

It is important to note that original study aims did not include an examination of the influence of problems with child-rearing on STC and DTC. These findings represent post-hoc analyses and, as a result, the following plausible explanations are estimations that require further empirical exploration to definitively support or reject. There could be a few arguments as to why this could occur. Conversations related to child-rearing necessitate individual reflection on past childhood experiences and as a result may trigger distressing memories and emotions. Therefore, partner trauma-related symptoms may occur most frequently and severely during conversations related to child-rearing. These conversations imbedded with trauma-related symptoms may lead to highly-charged arguments or ineffective dyadic interaction patterns (see CATS and CADS

models) that could feel destabilizing. Further, since operationalized definitions of trauma are diverse, partners with childhood trauma exposure may not define their childhood experiences as “traumatic.” As a result, partners (both trauma-affected and non-trauma-affected) may not realize or attribute the current relational difficulties in child rearing to previous childhood trauma exposure.

Strengths and Limitations

There are strengths and limitations associated with this study. This study analyzed the largest (to date) non-clinical sample comprised of both STC and DTC. However, due to the cross-sectional design and convenience sampling, causal-inferencing is thereby not feasible. The current sample is taken from secondary data that were not created for the purposes of examining dual-trauma couples; rather, original content was intended was to provide professionals and couples increased insight into individual and relational functioning (Busby et al., 2001). Because the original intent of the questionnaire was to collect non-clinical data, measures assessing trauma-related symptoms or diagnoses (e.g., PTSD) were not included. Despite this limitation, exposure to three typologies of childhood maltreatment were still assessed. In addition, respondents self-selected into the study, thus results may not accurately reflect prevalence and extant descriptions of dual-trauma couple relational dynamics. Participation in this study necessitated access to internet-capable devices, too, thereby excluding participants without access to such devices. Although representative to national demographics, the sample was largely homogenous (i.e., White) and focused on binary, heterosexual couples. Consequently, results may not accurately reflect descriptions of diverse and marginalized populations, which tend toward higher likelihoods for traumatic exposure (see Alim et al., 2006; Roberts et al., 2011; Schneeberger et al., 2014).

Common with self-reported studies, there may be occurrences of response bias due to questionnaire length and self-reported data secondary to misunderstanding questions, lack of insight, poor memory, or social desirability. Measures used for latent variables were collected

from measures from the data set. Development of the measurement model was exploratory in nature and demonstrated the best possible association with present data. It is plausible that other measures may be better conduits for assessing relational stability and satisfaction, and individual flexibility in dual-trauma couples. Lastly, only three types of trauma exposure were assessed within this questionnaire, and queries were relegated to childhood interpersonal trauma (e.g., physical, sexual, and domestic violence). Therefore, it is plausible that the sample of single-trauma couples could have met criteria for dual-trauma couples if additional trauma exposure typologies were assessed. Neglecting assessment of a wide range of traumatic exposure limits accuracy and generalizability of overarching themes associated with all dual-trauma couples.

Conclusion

In the United States, over 82% of adults have reported exposure to at least one traumatic event (Benjet et al., 2015). While scholarship has increased in the analysis of effects of traumatic exposure on interpersonal functioning, focused examinations on dual-trauma couples are limited. Findings garnered from the above study will aid in the empirical discovery and dissemination of new insights into dual-trauma couples. However, future contributions must continue to advance conceptual and theoretical models of resilience and adaptation and create effective trauma-informed integrated treatment for couples affected by traumatic stress.

Article 2

Identification of Resiliency Processes in Dual-Trauma Couples through the Exploration of Self-
Reported Relational Strengths and Weaknesses

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Dissertation Article 2

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Synopsis

Introduction: The mechanisms for how romantic partners individually and collectively cope with a wide range of individual and mutual stressors (i.e., dyadic coping) has been shown to influence relational functioning (i.e., communication, satisfaction, intimacy). However, previous studies have predominately examined these mechanisms without sample measurements of traumatic exposure. As a result, empirical knowledge of the unique influence of dual-traumatic stress on couple dynamics, and resiliency processes are especially deficient.

Method: A data reductive thematic analysis was conducted on secondary data comprised of dual-trauma female partners' ($n=822$) and male partners' ($n=831$) perceived relational strengths and weaknesses to ascertain individual and dyadic resiliency processes.

Results: Eight dyadic processes that aided or hindered resiliency emerged from the data that provided insight into the perceptions, behaviors, dyadic interactions, and past experience that may foster or hinder effective resilience in DTC. Overall, DTC male and female participants' responses highlighted existing strengths in facilitating shared beliefs, and mutual collaboration, flexibility, and connectedness. participants' descriptions of perseverance, teamwork, willingness to adapt gave insight into attitudes related to how DTC work together, support and motivate each other during daily to distressing functioning. Many of the participant-reported relational weaknesses associated with barriers of communication and connectedness corroborated other empirical evidence of difficulties with physical intimacy, emotional expression, distress tolerance, and boundary issues within DTC.

Discussion: Results provide further detail into the role of bi-directional influence into cyclical couple interactions and contribute to exploration of role that daily hassles or pile up stressors have on DTC couples' daily functioning. Several areas for future research are discussed.

Keywords: couple resilience, dual-trauma couples, dyadic coping, resilience, resiliency processes, traumatic stress

Identification of Resiliency Processes Dual-Trauma Couples through the Exploration of Self-Reported Relational Strengths and Weaknesses

Couple relational dynamics and normative functioning have been predominately conceptualized as couples with no traumatic exposure (Johnson, 2002; Ruhlmann et al., 2018). Further, couples affected by traumatic stress are generally typified as primary and secondary trauma survivors (commonly referred to as “single-trauma couples” [STC]; Nelson Goff & Smith, 2005, p. 154). However, over 80% of adults in the United States have been exposed to at least one traumatic event (e.g., childhood abuse, sudden death, natural disaster), with global averages of lifetime exposure at approximately 3.2 events (Benjet et al., 2015; Gradus, 2016). Given high global and national statistics on traumatic stress exposure, it is more likely that scholarship and clinical treatment has been conducted with couples affected by primary trauma exposure. As a result, empirical knowledge of the unique influence of dual-traumatic stress on couple dynamics or “dual-trauma couples” (DTC), wherein both partners meet diagnostic criteria for PTSD or have a history of exposure to traumatic stress, is especially deficient (Nelson Goff et al., 2014; Ruhlmann et al., 2018, p. 27).

Existing research supports the mediating and moderating role of interpersonal relationships, specifically intimate partnerships, on the detrimental effects of a wide range of stressors on individuals (Allen et al., 2010; Falconier et al., 2015; Hilpert et al., 2018). Unlike social and familial support, intimate relationships are unique insofar as they can provide social (i.e., friendship, a sense of belonging, autonomy) and attachment (i.e., security, safety, interdependence) needs. In addition, intimate partners generally have more contact than other relationships (i.e., friendship, family) and therefore may have greater influence on day to day functioning. In contrast, these relationships can also serve a source of stress that contributes to already on-going stressors (Allen et al., 2010; Falconier et al., 2015; Hilpert et al., 2018). The mechanisms for how romantic partners individually and collectively cope with a wide range of individual and mutual stressors (i.e., dyadic coping; Bodenmann 1997, 2005) has been shown to

influence relational functioning (i.e., communication, satisfaction, intimacy; Bodenmann, 2019; Falcionier et al., 2015; Hilpert et al., 2018) However, previous studies have predominately examined these mechanisms without sample measurements of traumatic exposure, and therefore generally conceptualized to be without trauma exposure (Bodenmann, 2019; Falcionier et al., 2015). Those that have explored the lived experience of dual-trauma couples have generally used small (i.e., ~30 participants), homogenous (i.e., White, military-focused) samples comprised of shared trauma typologies (Banford-Witting & Busby, 2018; Blalock-Henry et al., 2011; Nelson et al., 2014; Ruhlman et al., 2018).

To address limitations in dual-trauma couple scholarship, I sought to explore and ascertain individual and dyadic resiliency processes of dual-trauma couples, through data comprised of each partners' perceived relational strengths and weaknesses from the Relationship Evaluation Questionnaire (RELATE; Busby et al., 2001). These data will contribute to existing conceptual and empirical knowledge of dual-trauma couples and provide behavioral health providers with greater insight for future development and implementation of specialized interventions for faster and more effective improvement of trauma-related symptoms in dual-trauma couples.

Methods

Procedures

Dyadic participants used for this sample ($n=1,630$ couples) were taken from a larger pool of adult couples ($N=21,232$) who finished a self-reported, online individual Relationship Evaluation (RELATE) survey between 2001 and 2014 discussed above. For this study, participating couples met the following inclusion criteria: (a) 18 years of age or older, (b) in a committed partnership or marriage, (c) individual and partner history of childhood trauma exposure (e.g., sexual, physical, or domestic violence), (d) no current self-reported intimate partner violence, and (e) both partners completed the survey. Couples with present intimate partner violence were excluded from this sample. Same-sex couples were excluded from the

sample due to low participation ($n=55$). Inclusion and exclusion criteria decreased the sample to 1,630 dual-trauma couples (i.e., $n=3,260$ individuals). Among the couple sample ($n=1,630$), about 50% of partners completed the short-answer open-ended survey questions. The resulting individual partner responses reviewed for this study were the following: female partners ($n=822$) and male partners ($n=831$).

Sample

The sample is comprised of White (male 69%; female 68.8%) heterosexual partners in committed (27.3%), engaged or committed to marriage (41.6%), or married (31.0%) relationships. Participant ages ranged from 18 years to 71 years old, with the average ages of 31.94 ($SD= 9.33$) years old for females and 34.06 ($SD= 10.03$) years old for males. Legal status was mixed among participants. Most participants reported never married (28.2%), followed by first marriage (23.3%), divorced (9.6%), remarried (6.9%), and widowed (0.3% females, 0.4% males).

Education varied among participants, ranging from less than a high school diploma to completion of graduate- or professional- level degree. The majority of participants reported receiving some college (35.5% females; 32.4% males), completion of bachelor's (36.0% females; 33.8% males) or graduate-level (24.8% females; 22.4% males) degree. About half of respondents reported individual annual income between \$20,000 - \$79,000 (45.6% females; 51.8% males). In contrast, large gender discrepancies were reported among lower (i.e., under \$20,000) and upper (i.e., \$80,000 to \$300,000+) annual income brackets. Approximately 36.8% of females reported yearly personal incomes of under \$20,000 in comparison to 16.1% of males. Similarly, close to one-third of male participants (22.7%) reported yearly individual income of \$80,000 to \$300,000+ in comparison to 9.0% of their female peers.

Couples used in this sample are comprised of partners with similar and differing types of childhood traumatic exposure, ranging in frequency and severity. The majority of couples

(84.0%) reported individual exposure to more than one type of childhood traumatic exposure (domestic violence, or physical or sexual abuse by a family member).

Measures

Two self-reported, open-ended survey questions were designed for partners to identify strengths and weaknesses in their current relationship. Survey questions were adapted from Gottman's (1994) couple process model and other empirically supported predictors of relational quality (Busby et al., 2001). The questions were as follows: (a) "Briefly describe the strengths you see in your current relationship with your partner," and (b) "Briefly describe the weaknesses you see in your current relationship with your partner." Each partner was given as much space to answer as they needed. Due to the use of secondary data, all responses were already de-identified and assigned unique numbers to maintain participant confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Individual partner responses were analyzed using Crabtree and Miller's (1999) six-stage thematic analysis methodology (see Table 7). This method is comprised of iterative, reflexive, and reductive processes to identify and sort seminal words or phrases into categories and themes until saturation is reached.

Partner responses were separated into four groups of analysis: (a) female-reported relational strengths, (b) male-reported relational strengths, (c) female-reported relational weaknesses, and (d) male-reported relational weaknesses. Following Crabtree and Miller's (1999) six-stage thematic stage methodology, initial analyses were comprised of stages one through three and focused on identification and preliminary sorting of emerging broad themes with corresponding coder initial reflections until saturation was met within each group. In stages four through six, we further refined and finalized broad themes into categories, themes, and related subthemes. Lastly, we analyzed finalized categories to identify and sort by salient dyadic processes that aid and hinder resiliency.

To ensure trustworthiness, the following steps were taken: (a) research process and data analysis were documented and disclosed, (b) implementation and disclosure of reflexive bracketing and memoing (see Appendix A) was advanced throughout analysis, (c) the author's advisor and an additional auditor was included in data analysis and interpretation to reduce bias. Instead qualitative software, the research team used Xcel spreadsheets to analyze responses and document each stage of analysis and coder interpretation. Inter-rater reliability and any inconsistencies were reached and resolved through consensus meetings.

Results

Eight salient dyadic processes that aid and hinder resiliency comprised DTC individually reported relational strengths and weaknesses (see Figure 15). Several categories, themes, and subthemes emerged that characterized diverse perceptions, personality attributes, dyadic interactions, and past life experiences participant-reported strengths and weaknesses (see Table 8). Due to large sample size and subsequent influx of qualitative data, the results were synthesized and presented via emerged dyadic processes.

Beliefs that Hindered Hope and Relational Security

Lack of Commonality. Some female respondents described tension in their relationship due to varied conflicting or discrepant religious beliefs, relational values, lifestyle and household expectations, and future goals. Incongruence with partners in goals related to career, marriage, and finances were highlighted. For example, one female participant reported, "We are not on the same page about marriage views." Female participants who characterized discrepancies in religious beliefs and practices as deficits, typically held specific religious doctrines that opposed relationships outside of the religion. One respondent illustrated this dilemma in her statement: "We have different religions, and my religion says I should not date, and should not marry outside of my faith." Discrepancies among devotion to religious teachings and practices between female participants and male partners within the same religion also appeared to cause tension.

Female respondents often described feelings of uncertainty and trepidation about their current relationship's future as a result of opposing or discrepant religious beliefs.

Misunderstanding Male participants described a high occurrence of misunderstandings and lack of commonality associated with relational strain. Mutual misunderstandings were typically conveyed as difficulty in understanding partner specific worldviews, values, and relational needs. For example, one male respondent illustrated partner misunderstandings due to diverse life experiences, "Sometimes it is hard for us to understand each other because we have had some very different life experiences." Lack of common interests and hobbies seemed to further the chasm between participants, leading participants and partners to seek out different people to spend time with or feeling criticism for differences. One male participant depicted similar preoccupation in his relationship when he reported, "Sometimes we focus on the ways we are different and don't just spend time enjoying each other." Curiosity was markedly absent from responses, rather participants' reports appeared to associate partner differences with confusion and helplessness.

Disconnection. For others, descriptions of partner misunderstandings seemed to go beyond innocuous misinterpretation. Rather, these male and female respondents portrayed their partners as persons who did not know, comprehend, or desire to know core elements of the participant. Perceptions of apathic relational commitment were linked to lack of efforts to stay engaged (i.e., communication, interested), disengagement in couple growth (i.e., academic or occupational work, interpersonal skills), and increased focus on individual needs and desires. These behaviors seemed to provide evidence to support participants' perceptions and further exacerbate feeling of disconnection. For example, one male participant reported, "I feel like my partner has less ambition to do things that would give them a more significant insight into who I am. I think we have some significant communication issues." Likewise, a female participant reported, "He seems very disengaged with the details of our life."

Assurance and Controlling. Male respondents characterized two salient partner behaviors associated with relational insecurity and instability as hinderances to their current relationship: (a) repeated requests for relational assurance, and (b) controlling or micromanaging. Repeated requests for assurance from female partners were portrayed as rigid, reactive, and enduring. For instance, one male respondent reported, “Constant need of assurance of continuing relationship.” These behaviors were frequently associated with pervasive feelings of frustration and helplessness linked to male participants’ inability to resolve their partners’ fears. Similarly, respondents depicted frustration and anger with controlling behaviors. Controlling female partner behavior was often conveyed as manipulative, suggesting that male participants may associated these behaviors with malice. This is illustrated by the following respondent’s statement, “I feel like I am always waiting on her which is a way of her controlling me. I don’t like to be controlled.”

Barriers to Collaboration and Flexibility

Disrespected, Devalued, and Criticized. Female participants described male partners’ use of disrespectful language and behavior as contributors to relational strife. Words like, “harsh”, “overbearing”, and “judgmental” were used to depict their male partners during discussions, portraying an atmosphere of rigid perfectionism. Dyadic interactions labeled as disrespect appeared typified by male partners’ lack of or refusal to (a) genuinely validate participants’ emotions, concerns, or effort, (b) make concerted efforts to understand participants’ perspectives, (c) display active listening skills, and (d) refrain from derogatory labeling. Identified disrespectful male partner interactions and language were generally linked to female respondents’ sense of contempt and subsequent unworthiness. For instance, one female participant reported, “He doesn’t try to see things from my perspective, laughs off my concerns.”

Feelings of respect and mattering (i.e., value and appreciation) seemed inextricably linked for female participants. As a result, participants’ perceptions of the amount of value or appreciation their partners had for them appeared highly influenced by couple interactions.

Repeated, or consistent experiences of male partner disrespect were generally linked to unappreciation and devalue among female respondents. Likewise, repeated disrespectful partner experiences often conveyed a sense of powerlessness despondency. For example, one respondent stated, “Lack of appreciation of what I offer to the relationship; no recognition of special occasions. Constant invalidation of my opinions.”

Lack of Ambition. A lack of ambition or motivation for individual growth was emphasized by male respondents as a hindrance. Phrasing such as “lazy”, “complains”, “lack of urgency,” and “negative outlook” were frequently associated with descriptions of female partners’ ambition to change. In addition, other male participants linked the sense of apathy with illustrations of unreliability and rigid resistance. Respondents’ statements often conveyed a sense of frustration and resentment, as illustrated by one respondent’s quote,

Also, wife has negative outlook on life in general. She has declared that she has stopped learning since she stopped working but this is almost like an ultimatum to accept me as I am because I am not about to change, too old and too tired. It’s this tired demeanor whereby she approaches most things like they are chores.

In contrast, a small subset of participants described their own motivations and actions as relational weaknesses. For these descriptions, participants often used the word “could” associated with actions that would presumably make their relationships more connected. however, a sense of apathy was linked to these statements. For example, one responded stated, “Relationship could be better for my wife if I spent more time with her.”

Financial Strain. Male and female respondents characterized financial strain and associated factors as relational weaknesses. Financial strain included descriptions of pressures to meet familial financial needs and achieve developmental asset-driven tasks, such as homeownership, and lack of consistent income. Most participants conveyed a sense of urgency and confinement attached to finances, using phrasing like “pressure”, “financially behind”, and “locked in”, like one female respondent who stated, “We are too young to get married. We are not

where we want to be financially. I don't think we are mature enough to be doing this." Factors such as financial mismanagement, discrepant spending habits, and difficulties communicating with partners about finances appeared to exacerbate strain in the relationship. Male partners' mismanagement skills were most cited by female participants and commonly attributed to opposing or apathetic worldviews. For instance, one female participant stated, "Sometimes he can be nonchalant towards life and is not very good in financial management." In contrast, many male participants reported repeated instances of their female partners' lack of collaboration in financial decisions. These statements typically conveyed a sense of disrespect and appeared to erode male participants' trust in their female partners.

Words like "fragile" and "fearful" were used to characterize of financial conversations between DTC partners. Discussions about finances ranged from frequent disagreements to infrequent conversations. Often these descriptions portrayed respondents and their partners at an impasse, unable progress or resolve issues. As an example, one female participant stated, "We disagree on some important issues, such as finances, and there is an ongoing power struggle." Lastly, some respondents associated work-related responsibilities and lengthy commutes as contributing factors to financial stress, which created barriers to couple quality time and associated emotional closeness. For these participants, barriers appeared to negatively impact frequency and/or quality of physical intimacy.

Household Stress and Co-Parenting. Male respondents frequently pointed to individual and/or partner difficulties in preventing or coping with stressors, such as realistic workload and boundary setting as deficits. These difficulties linked with instances of increased stress were often identified by male participants to contribute to increased tension and poor communication between partners. In contrast, female respondents portrayed discrepant expectations about household responsibilities (i.e., household upkeep and division of labor) as relational weaknesses. Imbalance between partners was frequently associated with upkeep and division of household

labor, which resulted in increased burden of overall household responsibilities for female participants. For instance, one female respondent reported,

Unalignment with their partners in child-rearing views and methods were cited as weaknesses. Respondents generally described discrepancies broadly (i.e., child-rearing or raising children), however some specific areas were highlighted including appropriate discipline, parental role-modeling, and parent-child interaction. Male participants used words like “controlling” and “protective” to illustrate female partners’ co-parenting views and practices, as described in one male respondent’s statement, “Over-controlling how we raise children.” Such phrasing portrayed what seemed to be a dictatorial environment. For these participants, incongruencies in child-rearing beliefs often led to arguments, that for many appeared to be left unresolved. One female respondent stated, “We disagree quite a bit in childrearing, and we haven’t gotten there yet.”

Depictions of opposing child-rearing views and difficulties in blended family dynamics were classified as relational strains by respondents. For respondents specifically those in a stepparent role, tensions were emphasized in relating to stepchildren and dealing with subsequent extended stepfamily. Female participants used words like “frustration”, “juggle”, and “stress” that depicted co-parenting difficulties as enduring burdens. Whereas female participants appeared to struggle more with their male partners’ ex-partners. For example, one female respondent wrote, “My complete lack of compassion for his ex-wife. The frustration of having to except the ex as a fixture because of his daughter.”

Overinvolved Family of Origin. Tensions between female participants’ and their male partners’ family of origin were highlighted as relational weaknesses. Few participants reported their family of origin as negatively impacting their relationships. The majority of female respondents conveyed relational strain due to their male partners’ family. Strain was associated with respondents’ illustrations of pressure, over-involvement, and lack of acceptance from male partners’ families, in addition to, instances of male partners’ inappropriate obligation or responsibility to resolve family issues. One participant described the impact of her partner’s

family in her response, “His family also causes a lot of problems for us because he is busy dealing with them, and by the time he gets to me he is exhausted.” Respondents linked these tensions to instigating what appeared to be on-going and unresolved arguments with their partners.

Processes that Hindered Connectedness

Lack of Togetherness. Lack of togetherness was characterized as relational deficits by male respondents. Participants often described mutual difficulties in creating and prioritizing time with their partner in their daily schedule. Words like, “enough” suggested that DTC participants and their partners held a specific standard or desire for time together, most often depicted as mutually agreed upon, like one participant who reported, “Not enough time and energy invested into one another.” Work, family, and social commitments seemed to regularly usurp couple time. In addition, many participants conveyed couple time as monotonous, with couples predominately spending time together at home. Participants often conveyed a sense of frustration with the lack of enjoyable activities done together. Moreover, time spent together was often associated with descriptions of mutual inattention and preoccupation. For example, some participants identified mutual engagement with electronic devices as interfering with togetherness. One female participant stated, “Allowing electronics to dominate quality time with each other.”

While other participants reported lack of quality time within co-habitation, female respondents in non-cohabitating relationships seemed to associate lack of quality togetherness with physical distance. For example, one respondent wrote, “We don’t live together, so we don’t spend as much time together and we’d like to.” In some cases, participants seemed to attribute this lack of physical togetherness to increased and prolonged arguments. For instance, one participant stated, “Plus, with the physical distance between us, we get into a lot of stupid arguments that we wouldn’t get into if we were in the same city.”

Sexual Dissatisfaction. Many male and female participants reported current dissatisfaction and sexual intimacy with their partners. Dissatisfaction was often linked to what

appeared to be prudent and monotonous sexual practices, lack of sexual desire, loss of perceived passion, and decreased frequency of sexual intercourse. For example, one female participant reported, “Sex is more of a routine than an intimate act.” Most male participants who expressed dissatisfaction reported desire for increased frequency of sexual intercourse and female-partner initiation during sexual intimacy. For example, “I would like her to take more initiative when she wants something from me, whether it’s during a fight, a favor, or in the bedroom.”

Occurrences of lack of sexual interest and desire was equally reported for both female participants and their male partners, however very few linked root causes. Named root causes conveyed partner inconsideration or disregard: lack of listening or understanding, suggesting possible links between sexual and emotional intimacy. One respondent illustrated what seemed to be perceived inconsideration in her statement, “Lack desire for intimacy on my end and lack of understanding on his end.” Similarly, female participants emphasized perceptions of decreased or superficial emotional intimacy, commonly using used words like “deep” and “real” to convey intimacy they desire.

Respondents often discrepant desired frequency among partners that led to inconsistency or dissatisfaction was often portrayed as an impasse, suggesting that respondents and partners may not have the skills to reach a compromise or resolution. For other participants, decreased sexual intimacy was the result of medical conditions, post-partum, body image issues, and lack of togetherness due to busyness. Moreover, some respondents reported inability to communicate about sexual dissatisfaction with their partners, which conveyed pervasive irresolution and a sense of frustration and helplessness.

Past Traumatic Experiences. Male participants’ and female partners’ past traumatic experiences (e.g., childhood sexual abuse, sudden death) were reported to negatively affect couple connectedness. Respondents used words like “constant”, “frequently”, “pressure”, “battle”, and “unresolved” which illustrated an enduring and pervasive effect on daily functioning. The word “trust” was most often associated with male participants or female partners

who have a history of sexual abuse. In contrast, other traumatic experiences were often linked to diagnostic symptoms associated with grief, anxiety, depression, or posttraumatic stress disorder. One participant described feeling numb and disconnected due to grief, "I am still recovering from loss of son, wife, and family. I often just don't feel. Or feel like I need to feel more for her." In addition, a small subset ($n=15$) of male respondents indicated present personal struggles with alcohol use. These brief statements often conveyed partner disagreements and discrepancies in current alcohol use and appropriate amounts of alcohol. One female participant wrote, "He drinks more than I would like." Similarly, a male participant stated, "I need to drink less alcohol."

Respondents' descriptions of addiction focused exclusively on male partners' addiction struggles. Female participants associated their perceptions of partners' lack of self-control, anger, and problems with affection with partners' addiction. Reports depicted mutual awareness of the presence and interpersonal effects related to individual and partner histories of abuse, and current medical and mental health conditions. In contrast, respondents' statements that appeared to illustrate active addiction issues (e.g., alcohol, television, sexual) portrayed varied levels of awareness and agreement between partners.

Individual or Mutual Mistrust. Individual beliefs and behaviors, couple dynamics, and past interpersonal events that exacerbated feelings individual and partner feelings of uncertainty, skepticism, fear, and disrespect were characterized by respondents as barriers to trust.

Many participants conveyed a sense of frustration and exasperation associated with their female partners' lack of trust in the participant and their current relationship. In these instances, respondents attributed female partner's lack of trust to past events that are portrayed as unrelated to the present relationship. Descriptions often allude to a sense of confusion and injustice, like this participant's statement:

Sometimes she wants to give up because of her parents' divorce. This frustrates me because I know I can make her happy. She knows this too but is afraid of ending up

divorced later down the road. Sometimes this wears on me, and I become unfairly impatient.

Similarly, female respondents portrayed consequential relational strain due to male partners' current mistrust of respondents as unjust and anxiety-provoking. Relational strain due to male partners' mistrust was linked to lack or absence of emotional and sexual intimacy, increased partners' parental involvement, anxiousness, and repeated accusations of respondent infidelity

Participants with past experiences of previous partner betrayal explicitly associated with what appeared to be a pervasive lack of trust in intimate relationships. In these instances, lack of trust was frequently associated with a sense of dread or fear reported to negatively affect their current relationships. Further, respondents described highlighted unresolved painful issues that may be contributing to present feelings of mistrust. For example, one male respondent stated, "We have a troubled history." These descriptions conveyed a sense of powerlessness, pain, and uncertainty linked to partner betrayal, implying that respondents may feel uncertain or unable to rebuild trust with their partners.

Relational assumptions and behaviors resulting from previous significant relationships were characterized female participants' relationships as hindrances. Respondents described feelings of general insecurity and self-doubt, poor communication skills, conflict irresolution, and difficulties delineating between past and present relational patterns as linked to past relationships. Participants conveyed a mutual awareness of the negative effects of utilizing assumptions and interaction patterns attached to previous relationships in their current relationship. However, it seemed that participants and their partners felt stuck or helpless in changing or resolving these issues.

Participants conveyed dyadic mistrust as barriers to mutual connectedness. Words like, "abandonment", "betrayal" were associated with participants' descriptions of mutual mistrust. Respondents in relationships indicative of mutual partner distrust, expressed fear, inability to manage conflicts calmly and discuss vulnerable feelings. Interpersonal fears were also linked to

participant-reported controlling behavior and uncertainty. Often, female respondents characterized fear as the impetus for rigid boundaries, lack of commitment and dependence, and indecision. In addition, some female respondents reported high levels of independence appearing in their relationship; most citing mutual difficulties with “enough” interdependence. For instance, one female respondent stated, “We are both capable of being extremely independent and occasionally do not rely on the other enough.” Female participants’ descriptions of interpersonal conflict associated with independence, emphasized discrepant partner desires for independence. Further, female participants often characterized their male partners as insecure due to high needs of relational dependence.

Barriers to Open Communication and Effective Conflict Resolution

Difficulty Communicating Effectively. Participants identified a lack of or inability to engage in regular authentic conversations with their partners as dyadic limitations. Participant-reported barriers to open, honest conversations included lack of knowledge or training in effective communication skills, mutual inability to share vulnerable feelings, and avoidance of sensitive topics.

Male and female participants reported an overall inability to communicate their thoughts, especially vulnerable thoughts and feelings, clearly and accurately. For instance, one male participant wrote, “Communication on my part. Sometimes I feel like I can’t find the right words to say.” At times, respondents conveyed a sense of shame attached to difficulties communicating. For example, one female participant wrote, “We avoid discussing uncomfortable topics, even though we really should be able to discuss anything.” Different communication styles, often attributed to different upbringings, was highlighted as one contributor to difficulties in participant-partner communication. However, two other factors appeared to inflict greater negative influence on male partners’ expression of authentic, vulnerable emotions and thoughts (a) beliefs of unwanted, or (b) met with criticism or contempt by their female partners.

Feelings of disrespect, humiliation, and unimportance were associated with past participant-reported efforts to engage in authentic discussions with partners, similar to one respondent's response, "We cannot communicate on my feelings and state/behavior, thus making me feel rejected." Others described instances of when their female partners have labeled respondents' past comments as "critical" and "belittling," implying an environment of perfectionism and lack of empathy, as illustrated in the quote below:

My partner sometimes has trouble talking to me and sometimes feels "small" when engaging me in discussion; I probably hurt her feelings sometimes but don't realize it (she could let me know more often when this happens though).

Further, male participants conveyed irritation with their partners' lack of openness. Often associated was a respondent-perceived obligation to "pry out" vital information from their unwilling female partners to increase their understanding of partner needs, alleviate distressing situations, or help resolve underlying issues. One participant depicted this phenomenon, when he stated, "My partner not coming to me and letting me know what she is frustrated about, and me prying it out of her." In contrast, female participants often conveyed a sense of sadness, injustice, and powerlessness associated with reports of instances of their male partners' inability or unwillingness to share honest vulnerable thoughts and feelings with them. Female participants often connected their partners inability to share with partners' past traumatic experiences (e.g., childhood abuse). Perceived root causes to participants' and partners' inability of vulnerability unrelated to their relationship were frequently associated with a sense of frustration and confusion.

Disregard, Defensiveness and Disrespect. Disregard, defensiveness, and disrespect characterized the majority of participant-reported assumptions, language, and behavior during partner conflicts. Respondents described a mutual sense of impulsivity with harsh language during conflict, as frequent descriptions of sarcasm, name-calling, and other harsh language was portrayed as ineffective, yet inevitable. One male respondent illustrated said inevitability in their

statement, writing, “We are brutally hard on each other emotionally, and don’t know how to stop it.” Participants expressed individual and partner remorse for contempt and harsh criticism, however conveyed powerlessness at the inability to refrain from utilizing harsh language during arguments. In addition, participants described a mutual underlying assumption of malicious intent attached to individual concerns raised. For example, one respondent wrote,

We don’t do a good job at arguing, and both of us have a problem where the other’s words are misunderstood or mistaken for an attack. We sometimes have a hard time working together on a joint effort because of impatience and ego.

This assumption appeared to exacerbate participant and partner defensiveness and use of disrespectful language. Few expressed awareness that their assumptions may be inaccurate. Markedly absent from descriptions were any conversations with their partners to discuss underlying assumptions. Likewise consideration of individual and partner needs during conflict (e.g., verbal processing, ability to request breaks) were markedly absent from responses, portraying an atmosphere of egocentrism.

Mutual Inability to Regulate Emotions. Participants emphasized mutual partners’ inability to regulate emotions effectively during heated arguments as limitations to their relationships. Respondents characterized misunderstandings as a catalyst, and anger as an accelerant to arguments. Inability to speak calmly, understand or listen to either partners’ perspective was frequently linked to anger. For example, one female participant wrote, “We do not know how to fight fairly or handle conflict calmly.” Likewise, a male participant illustrated similar effects in his relationship, “My partner can become irrational during conflict. I can become emotional and closed-minded during conflict.”

“Fighting fair” was typically conveyed as disrespectful and devaluing language. Respondents reported regular occurrences of disrespectful and devaluing language during partner conflict. Past disrespectful language was frequently portrayed as a result of participant and partner anger. Female participants illustrated a mutual understanding that this type of language

was hurtful and unproductive, however conveyed a sense of powerlessness at its inevitability. While conflict appeared to serve as an ignitor of emotions for some, others associated conflict with emotional extinguishing. One respondent's statement associated conflict with shutting down, "Sometimes arguments cause us to shut down." Regardless, inability to regulate emotions appeared associated with conflict escalation and irresolution. Furthermore, participants portrayed an inability to regulate emotions as a barrier to listening, understanding diverse perspectives, and clarifying assumptions, which seemed to perpetuate arguments, leading to a pattern of irresolution.

Pervasive Conflict Irresolution. Participants portrayed arguments as a slippery slope. Small, day-to-day arguments frequently escalated to explosive, heated arguments. Moreover, heated arguments were associated with respondent-reported lasting effects that hindered couple dynamics for hours and at times, days after, illustrated in the following respondent's response, "We disagree about how to best handle conflict. Little things can lead to major arguments that leave both of us upset for hours or days after." Participants described topics, such as relational dynamics and sexual activity, as catalysts that often resulted in heated debates between partners. Like one male participant, who commented:

Sometimes there isn't enough compromise and we dig into our respective trenches on certain issues, [such as] sexual intimacy. I don't always listen as closely as I should during discussions, I sometimes let my anger get the best of me.

Lastly, depictions of frustration and exasperation associated with individual and partner inability to resolve conflicts, appeared to be an enduring burden that permeated present couple interactions and subsequent plans for the future. Grudges, avoidance, and disconnection were linked with irresolution. One participant depicted the pervasive effect of irresolution on his relationship in his statement, "Can't seem to resolve conflicts since we are still hurting from past arguments that just won't go away." In contrast, some participants conveyed the sense that some conflicts could be reconciled, however reconciliation was thwarted by what happened during the

argument. One respondent stated, “When we argue, it’s sometimes hard to come back from the argument.”

Beliefs that Promoted Relational Confidence and Security

Perseverance. Many DTC participants described persistence to remain together after enduring hardships as signals of relational value and security. Words like “together”, “love” and “able” portrayed a sense of pride, unity, and care. This unity seemed linked to partners’ ability to protect (and at times renew) love for each other as illustrated in the following male participant’s statement, “We have been through many things together and have grown with each other and closer to each other because of it.” Similarly, one female respondent stated, “Our perseverance to keep this relationship alive and all the love we have to offer.”

Male and female participants seemed to use past events of relational perseverance through hardships or difficult conversations as evidence that bolstered their belief in each other and commitment to their relationship. In addition, many respondents emphasized the frequency and severity of the external struggles, using words like “trials”, “life and death”, or “many rough patches.” For instance, one female participant stated, “We have handled numerous life and death situations in our first two years of marriage and have done a great job.” Similarly, a male respondent reported, “We are able to get through problems most young couples never could. My partner just started college and her parents recently got divorced. Throughout all of this she has stuck with me even when things seem hard.”

Dedicated and Committed. Female and male respondents characterized values, beliefs, and behaviors that illustrated and contributed to relational and familial investment and commitment as vital.

Desire to remain in their relationship was often conveyed through participants’ descriptions of their commitment to their family and common goals. Most participants depicted “commitment” as enduring, united utilitarian pledge that typically influenced most couple and familial decisions. Statements of partner and couple devotion to their union and/or family were

often used to illustrate commitment. For example, one male participant wrote, “We are committed to our marriage and are focused on making a good home and good life for one another and our children.” Likewise, a female participant linked a sense of family devotion to a priority of family-focused decisions: “Our love for each other and our children, our ability to put our family first.”

Shared Beliefs and Goals. Male and female participants seemed to associate relational stability and security to relationships with shared partner beliefs, values, and goals. These stated shared beliefs and values frequently conveyed a sense of mutual alignment and dedication between partners. Commonality between beliefs (worldview, spiritual, etc.) and corresponding values were highlighted by respondents. While not all participants required complete congruence in all beliefs, there were many participants whom characterized certain beliefs as “core” elements in life; suggesting that for these participants, specific worldviews or beliefs (e.g., religion and spirituality) were fundamental. For example, one female respondent wrote, “I also feel we have a lot of core things (values, spiritual beliefs, etc.)” Male respondents made similar descriptions statements, like one male respondent who stated, “We both have God as our foundation.”

Notably, shared relational goals and values were conveyed by female participants as vital to varying aspects of couple and family dynamics (i.e., family planning, career objectives, health and lifestyle) and often coincided with statements of individual and relational success. For instance, one female respondent reported, “We both want the success of our relationship and want to live together peacefully and be able to handle conflicts appropriately. We both have this same goal.” In addition, female respondents often mentioned commitment and future planning together, suggesting that the presence of future planning among couples may signify a strong commitment to the relationship among female participants. This may suggest that partner commitment to life-altering decisions, such as cohabitation or the purchase of a home, conveys a sense of relational security and stability for DTC female participants that is often associated with commitment.

Processes that Aided in Collaboration and Flexibility

Respected Partners. Mutual respect was frequently highlighted and emphasized by male participants as a relational asset. For DTC male participants, descriptions of mutual respect appeared inextricably linked to mattering, effective partner communication, vulnerability, and a sense of togetherness. Moreover, respect seemed to be comprised of two distinct aspects: (a) having respect for, and (b) showing respect to partners. Many male respondents associated mutual respect with partner equality and equity in the relationship. These respondents portrayed “respect” as a mutually explicit and agreed upon value that permeated all aspects their relationships. Likewise, some male participants described reaffirming mutual respect for each other through words and actions. Illustrated by one male respondent who stated, “The relationship is built around equality that is reaffirmed through discussion and intimacy.” Finally, many male DTC participants associated showing respect with consideration of individual ideas, wants, and needs, including honoring personal time and space.

Teamwork. Participants characterized the ability to work together, support, and motivate each other as assets to their relationships. Couple attributes and interactions often described as a “team” often associated with words like “togetherness”, “unity”, and “care” and linked to achieving individual and couple goals. Therefore, “team” or “teamwork” appeared to signify an approach which utilized individual and couple strengths and skillsets to achieve couple and family goals. As illustrated by one female participant, working as a team aided in financial and emotional provision and support, “Supporting one another, working together as a team, both people provide financially and emotionally.” Identification of the “goodness” of fit for couple teams appeared linked with a sense of ease, complementary skillsets, and level of support. Participants generally associated trust and dependence fundamental to relational teamwork. For example, one participant reported, “We approach our relationship as a team effort, we trust and depend on one another.”

Complementary individual personality traits and skillsets appeared associated with success and strength as a team. Male respondents tended to emphasize a strong belief in relational longevity when describing complementary personality traits between themselves and their partners. Mutual partner belief in complementary personality traits appeared to aid in facilitating effective teamwork, as illustrated by one male respondent who wrote, “We work really well together. Our strengths complement each other, and we have similar goals.” In addition, Respondents described seemingly individual contradictory traits and skills as a way to balance and strengthen the partnership and teamwork. A wide range of demeanors and skills were labeled “complementary” which suggests that complementary may be subjective to individual and couple interpretation. One female participant wrote, “[His] easygoing attitude offsets my tendencies to worry.”

Lastly, participants portrayed a mutual sense of support and encouragement for both individual and couple goals. Partner support appeared to intersect across various domains (e.g., occupational, recreational, health and wellness, spirituality), and were often linked to acknowledgement of, or celebration for various individual and couple achievements. Further, many male participants conveyed positive partner motivation as a direct influence for positive individual and couple growth. For example, one respondent wrote, “I think she’s my lifeline. She keeps me going. I know she makes me want to do bigger and better things.”

Willingness to Adapt. Participants emphasized a mutual attitude of “willingness” to address issues, seek out help, and make necessary changes for the betterment of the couple relationship as assets. While not explicitly stated, an attitude of willingness appeared to be inextricably linked to participants’ belief that current relational issues could be resolved. Partners who showed concerted efforts to improve or alter behaviors (e.g., communication, distress tolerance, and expressions of care) for the betterment of the relationship were characterized as relational assets.

Willingness was generally associated with a specific call to action and frequently associated with words like “fight”, “work”, and “overcome”. These words seemed to characterize the lengths the couple would go to revitalize and maintain their relationship. Further, respondents frequently linked willingness and work with descriptions of change, such as “improving”, “recognize”, and “learning.” Thus, “work” appeared to describe possible distressing tasks associated with overcoming or ameliorating ineffective relational dynamics or hardships. For example, one female participant stated, “We’re willing to go the distance to make it work. We compromise, we discuss things.”

Overall, it appeared that both male and female participants linked “work” generally to the creation of a long-lasting relationship. However, the majority of respondents appeared to use this term in with a sense of urgency related to future sustainability of the relationship. These descriptions frequently included the term “fight.” Participants depicted “fight” to imply willingness to participate in whatever distressing or burdensome tasks (i.e., the “work”) needed to keep the relationship together. For example, one female participant stated, “[We] are willing to fight for our family to stay and get closer together.”

Processes that Facilitated and Maintained Connectedness

Deep Sense of Love. Descriptions of a strong understanding and felt sense of love and adoration of love were prevalent among both participants reported relational strengths. Words like “adore”, “unceasingly”, “unconditional”, and “undeniable” were frequently used, as illustrated by one female participant, “Our love for each other is undeniable...he makes me feel complete.” Love was often linked to descriptors of strength, bond, and depth; indicating differentiation from platonic-type feelings and conveyed a felt sense of longevity and durability ascribed to their relationship., which. For example, one male participant stated, “That our love has endured everything and in many ways is stronger than it has been.” Words like, “we” and “our” conveyed participants’ confidence in their partners’ reciprocal shared feelings, as depicted by one male respondent who wrote, “I know we love each other very much. I know we want to be

together forever.” Likewise, “love” was frequently associated with feeling bonded, a word that participants seemed to ascribe to feeling understood, secure, and safe, as illustrated in the following male respondent’s quote, “We love each other very much and I’m willing to sacrifice lots of things for her. We have a very strong bond, in which I’ve never felt before with anyone else.” In addition, descriptions of gratitude of partners and of the relationship were often conveyed. Many participants attributed their relationship with their partner with increased satisfaction in life, as illustrated by one female participant’s response: “He makes my life significantly better.”

Friendship. Partners were frequently characterized as “friends or “best friends” by female and male respondents. Others who described their partner in like manner generally included associated relational attributes indicative of a strong friendship, such as mutual confidants, respect for autonomy and interdependence, and shared goals. Respondents also highlighted similar or shared personality attributes (e.g., humor, extroversion, personable) with their partners that appeared to bolster time spent together and create a sense of ease. Parallel physical and personality attributes, such as extroversion versus introversion, humor, and athleticism were also described. These shared attributes were frequently linked with shared hobbies (e.g., socializing) and sociocultural values (e.g., family-focused, financially solvent).

Experiences with partners illustrated enjoyable couple interactions comprised of playfulness and a sense of ease. Likewise, respondents highlighted consistent time spent with their partners. Togetherness often included participating in shared hobbies or interest, which seemed to foster increased connection and bond between partners. Words like “enjoy “, “love”, and “together” portrayed anticipatory delight among couples, conveying a sense that both partners genuinely enjoy and look forward to consistent time spent together participating in shared hobbies or interests. Respondents described actively participating with their partners in shared past interests and hobbies, and new experiences and activities.

Satisfying, Consistent Physical Intimacy. Male and female respondents described feeling sexually and intimately satisfied with their partners as assets to their relationships. Sexual satisfaction appeared associated with consistent displays of mutual affection, physical attraction, and sexual desire and intercourse. Tangible evidence of female partners' displays of affection and attraction appeared linked to male participants' confidence and security in their perceived partners' sexual satisfaction. In addition, descriptions of playfulness (i.e., fun, humor) and emotional closeness was often associated with physical attraction. For example, one female participant stated, "There is a lot of love, shared humor, playfulness, passion."

Respondents seemed to describe frequency of physical intimacy with their partner through words like "regular", "frequent", and "very." For example, one male participant stated, "We are regularly intimate." Specific or approximate numbers were markedly absent, suggesting that for respondents' consistency and regularity were vital components to sexual satisfaction. Further, respondents often associated a value (i.e., good or bad) to their experiences. For example, one female participant described instances of satisfying physical intimacy and contextual factors that may hinder it, "Our sex is great, usually, except when we argue."

Authenticity, Understanding, and Trust. Participants frequently emphasized feelings, beliefs, individual behaviors, and partner interactions that seemed to contribute dyadic mattering, acceptance, respect, and emotional safety in their relationships. Participants reported a sense of ease and acceptance with their partners, often associated with a non-judgmental stance, that aided in the ability to be themselves. For example, one female respondent reported, "We can be ourselves without feeling judged." That is to suggest that participants felt they did not have to change core elements of individuation to feel loved by their partners. In addition, respondents emphasized a mutual ability and respect to remain autonomous within their relationships. For example, one male participant stated, "We recognize we each have imperfections in different tastes, but we are respectful and supportive of one another and committed to the relationship." Similarly, a female respondent conveyed the ability to have diverse or contrasting opinions, "He

truly treats me as his other half and respects my opinion.” Partner behavior modification due to consideration for participant desires and needs were also portrayed indicators of understanding and respect.

The feeling of being understood by their partners relationship seemed to reinforce a sense of relational security and ease within male and female respondents. Understanding was often linked to mutual knowledge of participants’ and partners’ individual beliefs, feelings, past experiences, and crucial medical diagnoses. Likewise, couples comprised of mutual medical or mental health struggles appeared to reinforce mutual understanding and care. Respondents’ descriptions of provision of specific interpersonal skills, such as active listening, open communication, and compromise seemed to bolster participants’ sense of feeling understood by their partners. Notably, many male participants linked feeling understood and valued to female partners’ concern and care for their significant family members and friends.

Finally, respondents emphasized trust in their partners as a vital component of relational security and safety. For some participants, indications of mutual trust were linked with perceptions, relational events, and partner interactions that strengthen confidence and portrayed a sense of certainty in their partner’s present and future actions. For example, a male respondent reported, “Able to trust that the other won’t do anything too unpredictable; it’s a comfortable relationship.” Further, participants emphasized a mutual attitude of grace and provision of the benefit of the doubt associated with intentions connected to partner and participant actions. One female participant stated, “We trust that the other wants what is best for us and the relationship.”

Processes that Aided in Consistent Communication and Effective Conflict Resolution

Consistent, Open Communication Confide Without Fear. Consistent, open, and honest communication between partners was described by respondents as perceived relational strengths. Regular authentic communication seemed to foster the overall bond between participants and their partners. Likewise, consistent dyadic communication seemed to promote the ability for male respondents to articulate feelings more accurately, as well as, address

problematic areas in the relationship more quickly. For instance, one male respondent stated, “Every day we are growing a stronger bond by communicating and addressing the dynamics within our relationship.”

Respondents emphasized honesty and ease in connection with open, consistent communication with partners; implying that transparency may be associated with participants’ increased confidence in the security and stability of their relationship. For female participants, a sense of ease was associated with both (a) the practice and (b) outcome of conducting open and honest communication with their male partners. In other words, the ability for female participants to be transparent appeared inextricably linked to how male partners would react (e.g., understanding, relational loss, penalty). For instance, one participant reported, “We have an open and honest relationship. We can disclose anything without risk of losing respect or affection for one another. We love each other as is.”

Respectful During Conflict. Male respondents characterized effective conflict management and resolution with their partner as mutually respectful. This suggests that for some male participants a crucial component of conflict management are partners who are able to maintain respect during distressing conversations. For instance, one participant associated respect with what appeared to be consideration for each other’s needs in the pursuit of resolving conflicts. He stated,

When we disagree, we can work things out. We have a lot of respect for each other, and when we disagree, we always go back to the issue and resolve it, even if it takes a while to calm down first.

Distress Tolerance. Increased open communication was often associated with the participants’ and partners’ ability to initiate and manage conversations, ranging from diverse perspectives to sensitive topics. Conflict management skills, such as active listening, distress tolerance, compromise, and resolution were frequently mentioned. Participants who cited this as a strength often mentioned the ability to engage in distressing conversations in association with an

ability to keep calm and present throughout. Likewise, one female participant mentioned the absence of grudges or resentments: “We function very well together and can discuss things openly. We don’t hold grudges or stew about things.”

Often respondents used the term “discussion” when expressing frustrations with their partners, suggesting that these discussions are conversations that not appear to escalate into an argument. Participants conveyed these conversations as predictable discussions, with a sense of confidence of resolution. For example, one respondent noted,

We openly talk about most if not all topics. Neither one of us shies away from any discussion we feel we need to have. We may not always agree or have the same starting point on the subject, but we both feel talking about things gets the subject in the open.

Ability to Resolve Conflict Together. Few participants described individual and partner ability to resolve some relational issues. A sense of urgency and prompt conflict resolution were commonly attributed addressing relational issues as a preventative strategy for small issues escalating into larger issues. Further, participants of this subset tended to associate a sense of relational security during the process of resolution. For instance, one female respondent stated, “We are able to work through our issues without thinking our relationship is in jeopardy.

Discussion

The results of this study delineate processes found within DTC and provide insight into the perceptions, behaviors, dyadic interactions, and past experience that may foster or hinder effective resilience in DTC. Oftentimes trauma exposure can result in severance of interpersonal connection and attachment that exacerbates trauma-related symptoms and sense of hopelessness (Johnson, 2002; Monson et al., 2009). However, findings corroborated previously created systemic resiliency processes (Walsh, 1996, 2006) and literature that supports a balanced (inclusion of adaptive and maladaptive interactions) conceptualization of DTC relational dynamics (Blalock-Henry et al., 2011; Nelson Goff et al., 2014; Ruhlman et al., 2018; Whisman, 2014). In addition, results of this qualitative inquiry were consistent with extant scholarship on

traumatic stress and dyadic functioning (Ford et al., 2005; Hamilton et al., 2009; Herman, 1997; Monson et al., 2009; Nelson Goff et al., 2006, 2007; Ward & Wampler, 2010).

Exploration of DTC male and female participants' responses highlighted existing dyadic strengths that fostered dyadic resiliency processes: shared beliefs and goals, mutual collaboration and psychological flexibility, and dyadic connectedness. Shared beliefs and goals illustrated a sense of commonality and alignment that appeared to strengthen relational security and hope, and reduce feelings of uncertainty for DTC partners, similar to non-trauma related studies focused on correlates and predictors of secure attachment (i.e., Murray et al., 2000; Waters et al., 2020). Likewise, enduring themes of love and friendship illustrated DTC couples that appeared to stay connected through consistent quality togetherness indicative of a sense of playfulness, shared hobbies, satisfying physical intimacy, mutual appreciation, and overall enjoyment found in existing literature. In addition, mutual collaboration and psychological flexibility conveyed through participants' descriptions of perseverance, teamwork, willingness to adapt were indicative of partner resolve and support (i.e., Blalock-Henry et al., 2011; Donnellan et al., 2014; Nelson et al., 2014) as well as, Ward and Wampler's (2010) dyadic beliefs and behaviors associated with increased a sense of hope. These reports provided richness into salient DTC beliefs and attitudes associated with positive experiences of working with, supporting and motivating one another during daily to distressing functioning. Moreover, male participants' responses emphasized the role of mutual respect that appeared to permeate throughout all processes and barriers for dyadic resilience. In contrast, while mutual respect was mentioned among female participants' reported strengths, a sense of disrespect and devaluation was highlighted as barriers to a sense of emotional safety. Future research studies may explore the influence of trauma exposure on partner respect and dyadic emotional safety within DTC interpersonal dynamics.

Similar to Nelson Goff et al (2006, 2015), increased awareness of Partner A's history of trauma exposure seemed to promote Partner B's compassion, attunement, and support and

strengthen the bond between DTC male and female partners. Further, participants who described trauma disclosure often conveyed subsequent increased sense of understanding. Evidence of some trauma disclosure was mentioned and often times suggested, however, responses did not include substantial detail to differentiate the level of trauma disclosure associated with partner compassion, support, and attunement. Existing literature suggests that the outcome of trauma disclosure may be variable as it is contingent upon a variety of contextual factors (e.g., individual and dyadic emotional regulation, level of disclosure; Ford et al., 2005; MacIntosh et al., 2018; Monk & Nelson Goff, 2014; Nelson Goff et al., 2015). Although trauma disclosure is important, it appears that the desired dyadic outcome is an increased level of understanding (see Kuhn et al., 2018). Therefore, scholars may examine the role individual and partner language, behavior, and beliefs associated with understanding, such as increased curiosity, within DTC.

Many of the participant-reported relational weaknesses associated with barriers of communication and connectedness corroborated previous substantiated evidence of difficulties with physical intimacy, emotional expression, distress tolerance, and boundary issues within DTC (Blalock-Henry et al., 2011; Bornefeld-Ettmann et al., 2018; Ford et al., 2005; Hamilton et al., 2009; Herman, 1997; Nelson Goff et al., 2006, 2007, 2015). Further, themes associated with histories of childhood maltreatment and individual use of alcohol as coping mechanisms are consistent with extant traumatic stress literature (Brady & Back, 2012; Jung et al., 2020). However, my findings provide increased detail into DTC descriptions of cyclical couple interactions that appeared to perpetuate a sense of powerlessness and frustration in DTC participants. Over and beyond, descriptions of emotion dysregulation, rigid trauma-related beliefs, and a sense of hopelessness were conveyed throughout male and female reports. Lack of understanding or identification of specific externalized root causes associated with partner interactions appeared to foster assumptions of intradyadic or internalized root causes, thus reinforcing maladaptive beliefs about self or their partner. For example, some male DTC participants conveyed perceptions of malicious partner intent associated with descriptions of

female partners' controlling behaviors. It is plausible that malicious intent could have been involved, however it is unlikely. Given the history of familial-caused childhood trauma exposure, empirical evidence supports increased likelihood that controlling behaviors are mechanisms to alleviate fear and promote a sense of safety and security due to past attachment injuries (Bornefeld-Ettmann et al., 2018; Ford et al., 2005; Herman, 1997). Thus, the lack of knowledge to assess and identify these processes appropriately made lead to further exacerbation of conflict and disconnection in the relationship (Monson et al., 2010).

My findings also contribute to exploration of role that daily hassles or pile up stressors have on couples' daily functioning, specifically DTC. Male and female DTC participants reports illustrated increased daily hassles comprised of lack of quality time and physical intimacy, and tension due to co-parenting and household responsibilities. Similar to above descriptions, these daily hassles were conveyed to further exacerbate interpersonal conflict and a sense of disconnection in DTC similar to recent studies in non-trauma couples (i.e., Nguyen et al., 2020). Due to the short-answer responses and diverse perceptions and education of trauma, it is difficult to differentiate the amount of influence of trauma-related symptoms and daily hassles have on DTC daily functioning. It seems more likely that the two variables build upon each other, similar to conceptualizations and empirical evidence related to McCubbin and Patterson's (1983) Double ABC-X model. Therefore, increased qualitative inquiry is needed to provide an accurate understanding of how DTC participants perceive these constructs to influence their day to day interactions.

Strengths and Limitations

Extant studies exploring dual-trauma couples are comprised of small and military-focused samples, with partners of shared types of traumatic exposure. While this study adds robust knowledge on non-clinical, non-military focused DTC, demographics of participants were largely homogenous (i.e., White, binary gender, heterosexual); these may not accurately reflect diverse or marginalized populations. Rather than limiting the sample to DTC with shared

typologies, this sample allowed for partners with diverse trauma histories. However, due to the limited typologies of trauma assessed, results of this study may not be generalized to all typologies of trauma. Therefore, it is plausible that other strengths and weaknesses may be more salient in couples comprised of histories of non-human caused trauma exposure, such as natural disasters (e.g., hurricanes, tornados, mudslides). In addition, survey questions were given via the internet; therefore, this questionnaire was not accessible to couples or partners without access to computers or internet-capable devices, which may have included couples associated with poverty-related stress. Further, use of secondary qualitative data afforded robust qualitative responses from a non-clinical DTC sample. As a result of the secondary data sample, clarifying follow up questions for the purposes of this project were not feasible. Thus, it is plausible that participant interpretation of responses may differ from the author's interpretation.

Conclusion

Despite high global and national statistics on traumatic stress exposure, couple relational dynamics and normative functioning has been predominately conceptualized as couples with no traumatic exposure. As a result, clinical treatment for trauma-related symptoms and diagnoses are largely focused on individual modalities. This study explored the lived experiences of dual-trauma couples to delineate crucial resiliency processes comprised of attributed salient perceptions, behaviors, partner interactions, and past experiences. Further exploration needs to occur to substantiate and contribute to new insights into dual-trauma couples and advance conceptual and theoretical models of resilience and adaptation and create effective trauma-informed integrated treatment.

Global Implications of the Two Studies

Although each study was created autonomously, the findings of both inform each other. As a result, there are overarching themes that traverse both papers and provide crucial global implications for my program of research, clinical practice, and next steps.

Program of Research

It is evident that dual-traumatic exposure has influence on relational constructs (i.e., satisfaction, stability, adaptability) and couple interactions. Due to the infancy of dual-trauma literature, there are many gaps in exactly how to delineate the influence of trauma exposure from stress related to daily functioning (i.e., daily hassles), such as co-parenting and child-rearing. As reiterated in Study 2, it be more likely that the two types of stress (i.e., traumatic stress and daily hassles) build upon each other, resulting in a mounting pile-up of stressors.

These two studies are unique as both samples are comprised of participants with a history of childhood trauma exposure. Therefore, it is no surprise that problems with child-rearing were significant themes in both. It suggests that problems with child-rearing may be comprised of stress from both trauma-related and daily hassles. Further, it is plausible that difficulties in child-rearing are where trauma-related symptoms are most evident. Thus, Study 1's results may reflect a greater influence of trauma than originally conceptualized and calls into investigation the role of perception in dual-traumatic stress studies.

Similar to extant research, self-reported measures were utilized in both studies, and as a result, provide crucial insight in how individuals perceive themselves and others. Due to diverse and commonly generalized operationalized definitions of trauma, participants may not perceive their childhood as non-normative (i.e., traumatic), especially in instances of intergenerational trauma patterns. Therefore, participants may not attribute adaptive or maladaptive individual or dyadic coping mechanisms or relational dynamics to early trauma exposure. Likewise, other respondents who label those experiences as "traumatic" may not understand the pervasive and enduring effects. As a result, respondents may label trauma-related responses or symptoms

inaccurately, attributing these maladaptive coping mechanisms to beliefs about self, others, and/or the relationship as whole (e.g., controlling behavior in discussion of Study 2). In addition, the findings of Study 2 illustrated numerous interpersonal dynamics generally typified as trauma-related symptoms (i.e., hyper-arousal, inability to regulate emotions) and attachment injuries (e.g., anxious/preoccupied, avoidant/dismissive). However, very few directly attributed individual, partner, or dyadic interactions as influenced by childhood trauma exposure. Therefore, future research may explore the role of psychoeducation in dual-traumatic relational patterns and clinical treatment interventions.

Finally, Study 2 provided vital insight and corroborated previously identified literature that supports systemic resiliency processes (Walsh, 2006) and a balanced conceptualization of dual-trauma couples (Blalock-Henry et al., 2011; Nelson et al., 2014; Ruhlman et al., 2018; Whisman, 2014). These qualitative data shed light on specific processes that fostered and hindered DTC relational satisfaction, stability, and adaptability in DTC with childhood trauma exposure.

Implications for Clinical Practice

There are several implications for clinical practice. There is strong evidence that psychoeducation regarding the effects of trauma on interpersonal relationships may aid in validation and the promotion of externalizing methods to reduce shame and blame. Clinicians may thereby want to utilize a strengths-based approach, emphasizing already embedded resiliency processes that can serve to increase relational stability and safety while, at the same time, guiding the couple through corrective experiences. In addition, using dialectical methods may reduce trauma-related dichotomous beliefs about self and others that negatively affect relational functioning. Lastly, due to reported difficulties in communication and emotion regulation, it is strongly recommended to focus on development and implementation of effective communication and distress tolerance skills in dual-trauma partners.

Future Directions

Further examination of dual traumatic stress and couple functioning on a wide range of participant samples is strongly recommended. Future studies may include dyadic interviews with observational coding to provide additional insight into DTC partner dynamics. Researchers may explore the influence of psychoeducation and distress tolerance interventions on DTC individual and dyadic resiliency processes and overall daily functioning.

In moving toward integrated trauma treatment, scholars may want to operationalize standard definitions of trauma with additional modifiers to better reflect trauma typologies and facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration. Moreover, future studies are strongly encouraged to utilize mixed methodology to accurately reflect the lived experiences of dual-trauma couples. In addition, scholars may address previous limitations in my studies by including trauma exposure measurements that assess a range of typologies (e.g., Life Events Checklist; Weathers et al. 2013) that represent prevalence and influence of trauma typology, frequency, and severity on dual-trauma couples.

Conclusion

These studies advance the edge of knowledge in dual-traumatic stress and contribute to conceptual and theoretical models of resilience and adaptation. Moreover, they have challenged and inspired my growth and passion as a scholar, clinician, and future professor. I have worked clinically with individuals, couples, and families affected by traumatic stress. I have seen the tolls that trauma can take. Analyzing participants' data was like listening to the stories of past and present clients. I felt honored to bear witness to their experiences, inspired by their resilience, and determined to contribute in ways that are meaningful to their lives. Even if my contributions only help one couple to encounter less pain, fear, and frustration and foster a bit more peace and joy in their relationship, that one couple is worth it.

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Table 1*Description of Measures*

Measure	Items (<i>n</i>)	Range of Possible Responses	Scoring	Example of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Childhood Trauma Exposure	6	0 (<i>never</i>)- 4 (<i>very often</i>)	Higher scoring indicated higher frequency and severity	“Considering all of your experiences while growing up in your family, how would you rate the general level of violence in your home?”	.81 physical
				“How often was the person you selected in the previous question sexually abusive toward you?”	.95 sexual
					.95 domestic violence
Relational Satisfaction	6	1 (<i>very dissatisfied</i>)- 5 (<i>very satisfied</i>)	Higher scoring signified greater satisfaction	“In your relationship, how satisfied are you with the following?”	
				“How conflicts are resolved.”	.87 males .90 females
				“The love you experience.”	
Relational Stability	3	1 (<i>very often</i>)- 5 (<i>never</i>)	Higher scoring indicated greater stability	“How often have you thought your relationship (or marriage) might be in trouble?”	.81 males .82 females
Perceived Partner Flexibility	4	1 (<i>never</i>)- 5 (<i>very often</i>)	Higher scores signified higher levels of flexibility	How much do these words or phrases describe your partner? “Open-minded” “Flexible” “Easy-going” “Adaptable”	.71 males .76 females

Table 2*Indicators and Parceling Structure for Measurement Model*

Construct and Indicators		Standardized Factor Loadings	
		Female	Male
Childhood Trauma Exposure			
	How often was the person you selected in the previous question physically abusive toward you?	.82	.83
	How often was the person you selected in the previous question sexually abusive toward you?	.23	.14
	Considering all of your experiences while growing up in your family, how would you rate the general level of violence in your home?	.85	.84
Relational Satisfaction			
	In your relationship, how satisfied are you with the following?		
Parcel	How conflicts are resolved.	.85	.82
	The amount of relationship equality you experience.	.71	.71
	The quality of your communication.	.89	.86
Perceived Partner Flexibility			
	How much do these words or phrases describe your partner?		
	Open-minded	.68	.66
Parcel	Flexible	.83	.80
	Easy-Going	.69	.67
	Adaptable	.79	.76

Note. All loadings statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level.

Table 3
Summary of Chi-Square Analyses of STC and DTC Male Demographic Variables

Variable	Full		STC		DTC		X ₂	
	N	%	n	%	n	%	Value	p
Race							28.7	.000
Black	311	7.2	193	7.0	118	7.2		
Asian	233	5.4	124	4.5	109	6.6		
White	3,261	75.7	2,079	75.1	1,182	72.5		
Indigenous	17	.39	6	.22	11	.67		
Hispanic/Latino	225	5.9	116	4.3	109	6.6		
Bi-Racial	129	3.0	73	2.6	52	3.1		
Other	131	3.0	85	3.0	46	1.7		
Education							44.3	.000
Highschool/GED	287	7.0	156	5.8	136	8.3		
Some College	1,129	26.2	666	24.9	463	28.4		
Associate	255	5.9	144	5.4	111	6.8		
Bachelor	1590	36.9	1,032	38.5	558	34.2		
Graduate	776	18.0	663	24.8	113	4.2		
Annual Income							25.4	.005
Under 20,000	597	13.7	381	14.2	290	17.8		
20,000-39,999	654	15.2	277	10.3	310	19.0		
40,000- 59,999	705	16.4	413	15.4	310	19.0		
60,000-79,999	530	12.3	322	12.0	221	13.6		
80,000-99,999	366	8.5	244	9.1	166	10.2		
100,000-139,999	424	9.8	278	10.4	146	9.0		
140,000- 199,999	241	5.6	132	4.9	131	8.0		
200,000+	129	3.0	89	3.3	52	3.2		
Relationship Length							31.3	.000
0 – 11 mos	1,002	23.3	565	21.1	437	26.8		
1 – 2 yrs	1,457	33.8	950	35.5	507	31.1		
3 – 5 yrs	1,229	28.5	791	29.5	438	26.9		
6 – 10 yrs	373	8.7	232	8.7	141	8.7		

11 – 20 yrs	161	3.7	85	3.2	76	4.7		
20+ yrs	23	.53	11	.41	12	.73		
Legal Marital Status							28.3	.000
Single, never married	1,553	36.0	995	37.2	558	34.2		
Cohabiting	1,278	29.7	840	31.4	438	26.9		
Married, first	872	20.2	485	18.1	387	23.7		
Divorced	377	8.8	224	8.4	153	9.4		
Married, 2+	216	5.0	127	4.7	89	5.5		
Widowed	8	.19	4	.15	4	.25		

Table 4*Summary of Chi-Square Analyses of STC and DTC Female Demographic Variables*

Variable	Full		STC		DTC		X ₂	
	N	%	n	%	n	%	Value	p
Race							14.5	.024
Black	273	6.3	172	6.4	101	6.2		
Asian	304	7.1	182	6.8	122	7.5		
White	3,217	74.7	2,040	73.7	1,177	72.2		
Indigenous	17	.39	8	.29	9	.55		
Hispanic/Latino	211	4.9	116	4.3	95	5.8		
Bi-Racial	146	3.4	81	3.0	65	4.0		
Other	133	3.1	75	2.8	58	3.6		
Education							25.7	.001
Highschool/GED	299	6.9	248	9.3	51	3.1		
Some College	960	22.3	477	17.8	483	29.6		
Associate	260	6.0	159	5.9	101	6.2		
Bachelor	1,501	34.8	907	33.9	594	36.4		
Graduate	1,121	26.0	733	27.4	388	20.7		
Annual Income							16.4	.089
Under 20,000	1,217	28.2	622	23.2	595	36.5		
20,000-39,999	775	18.0	465	17.4	310	19.0		
40,000- 59,999	729	16.9	455	17.0	274	16.8		
60,000-79,999	469	10.9	287	10.7	182	11.2		
80,000-99,999	295	6.8	187	7.0	108	4.0		
100,000-139,999	262	6.1	176	6.6	86	5.3		
140,000-199,999	159	3.7	108	4.0	51	3.1		
200,000+	46	1.1	36	1.3	10	.61		
Relationship Length							38.9	.000
0 - 11 mos	1,001	23.2	559	20.9	442	27.1		
1 - 2 yrs	1,194	27.7	964	36.0	230	14.1		
3 - 5 yrs	1,296	30.1	784	29.3	512	31.4		
6 - 10 yrs	380	8.8	239	8.9	141	8.7		

11 - 20 yrs	154	3.6	81	3.0	73	4.5		
20+ yrs	20	.46	9	.34	11	.67		
<hr/>								
Legal Marital Status							22.0	.001
Single, never married	1,534	35.6	981	36.6	553	33.9		
Cohabiting	1,364	31.7	885	33.0	479	29.4		
Married, first	877	20.4	503	18.8	374	22.9		
Divorced	313	7.3	187	7.0	126	7.7		
Married, 2+	202	4.7	110	4.1	92	5.6		
Widowed	12	.28	7	.26	5	.31		
<hr/>								

Table 5*Summary of Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations for STC Study Variables n = 2,678 (Missing Variables Deleted Pairwise)*

Measure	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Male Education	6.66	2.65	-	.34**	.03	-.02	-.06**	-.03	-.05*	-.02	-.02	-.04*	-.05**	.00	-.04*	.00	-.02	-.05*
Female Education	6.90	1.79		-	.00	-.03	-.03	-.04	-.02	-.06**	-.02	-.06**	-.02	.00	.02	.02	-.03	-.05**
Male Co-Parent Issues	1.63	.98			-	.56**	.03	.06*	.04*	.04*	.02	.06**	.26**	.29**	.21**	.23**	.22**	.24**
Female Co-Parent Issues	1.62	1.00				-	.01	.03	.01	.04*	.00	.06**	.24**	.33**	.16**	.28**	.17**	.27**
Male Physical Abuse	.91	.94					-	.42**	.75**	.46**	.12**	.11**	-.06*	-.01	-.05	-.03	.02	.00
Female Physical Abuse	.92	1.00						-	.43**	.73**	-.06*	.23**	-.04	-.05	.00	.00	.07**	.08**
Male Domestic Violence	.63	.86							-	.54**	.09**	.13**	-.04*	.00	-.01	-.02	.01	-.03
Female Domestic Violence	.64	.95								-	.06**	.17**	-.04*	.08**	-.01	-.02	.09**	.12**
Male Sexual Abuse	.04	.28									-	-.05*	-.02	.01	.00	.02	.03	.02
Female Sexual Abuse	.19	.60										-	-.02	.06**	.00	.07**	.04*	.05*
Male Relational Satisfaction	3.46	.87											-	.58**	.42**	.33**	.45**	.44**
Female Relational Satisfaction	3.43	.82												-	.33**	.47**	.48**	.56**

Male Perceived Partner Flexibility	3.38	.74	-	.18**	-	-
Female Perceived Partner Flexibility	3.54	.76	-	-	.28**	.34**
Male Relational Stability	1.56	.77	-	-	-	.71**
Female Relational Stability	1.59	.79	-	-	-	-

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 6*Summary of Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations for DTC Study Variables n = 1,630 (Missing Variables Deleted Pairwise)*

Measure	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	5	16
Male Education	6.38	3.86	-	.27**	.00	.00	.56*	-.03	-.7**	-.07**	.00	-.04	.02	.02	-.01	.04	-.04	-.04
Female Education	6.66	1.87		-	.02	-.06*	.06*	.07**	-.05*	.08**	-.04	-.05*	.033	-.01	.01	.04	-.03	-.03
Male Co-Parent Issues	1.77	1.05			-	.58**	.03	.06*	.06*	.12**	.09**	.13**	.11**	.25**	.19**	.22**	.21**	.18
Female Co-Parent Issues	1.81	1.13				-	.03	.09**	.05	.14**	.05*	.09**	.11**	.34**	.16**	.27**	.14**	.22**
Male Physical Abuse	1.34	.96					-	.05	.58**	.00	.14**	.01	.01	.09**	.09**	.07**	.12**	.11**
Female Physical Abuse	1.36	.97						-	.05	.60**	-.12	.21**	-.04	.10**	-.04	-.03	.10**	.14**
Male Domestic Violence	1.36	.89							-	.04	.07**	.02	.03	.12**	.07**	.11**	.14**	.15**
Female Domestic Violence	1.51	.93								-	-.01	.19**	-.04	.13**	.10**	-.06*	.12**	.16**
Male Sexual Abuse	.10	.43									-	.08**	.00	.01	.01	.04	.04	.03
Female Sexual Abuse	.28	.73										-	-.02	-.05	-.03	-.02	.01	.06**
Male Relational Satisfaction	3.37	.88											-	.16**	.07**	.11**	.09**	.08**
Female Relational Satisfaction	3.29	.87												-	.34**	.53**	.46**	.57**
Male Perceived Partner Flexibility	3.31	.72													-	.23**	.29**	.27**
Female Perceived	3.42	.77														-	.28**	.34**

Partner Flexibility				
Male Relational Stability	1.71	.83	-	.70**
Female Relational Stability	1.77	.85		-

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 7*Crabtree and Miller (1999) Thematic Analysis Stages*

Stage	Activity
Stage 1	Skimmed all participant responses. Initial reflections and emerging broad themes and via group were highlighted and discussed.
Stage 2	Independent review of all participant responses via group. Documented summary of data-driven broad themes, noting any additional discoveries during review.
Stage 3	Listed and began sorting salient themes; clustering any similar or related themes together to form initial categories and themes for each group.
Stage 4	Reviewed all participant responses. Began marking appropriate participant text with corresponding initial categories. Additional discoveries during review were added to initial list of categories and themes.
Stage 5	Categories and themes were identified and refined (i.e., category and theme description; similar or related themes grouped together) via group.
Stage 6	Salient categories were solidified, corresponding descriptive themes and subthemes were further refined to most accurately represent the data.

Table 8*Qualitative Findings of Categories and Themes and Example Quotes*

Group	Categories	Themes	Example Quotations
I. Female Reported Relational Strengths	A. Shared Goals	1. Shared goals and values	106189- <i>"Things that are important to one are also important to the other."</i> 119815- <i>"We share many similar values -- family, career, health, committed relationship."</i> 110801- <i>"We enjoy the same things and have the same moral values."</i> 124777- <i>"We have similar goals and outlooks for the future and share values and morals."</i> 122375- <i>"We both want the success of our relationship and want to live together peacefully and be able to handle conflicts appropriately. We both have this same goal."</i> 124453- <i>"We have the same goals and values. We both want to see each other succeed."</i> 100095- <i>"Same attitudes and values towards family and divorce, similar social background (including education) and life experiences."</i>
		2. Similar Beliefs	121320- <i>"I also feel we have a lot of core things in common (values, spiritual beliefs, etc.)."</i> 104947- <i>"Share common beliefs and aspirations."</i> 112216- <i>"Same common core principles."</i> 110790- <i>"We share many similar beliefs (i.e., Christianity, family values) and likes (e.g., travel, love for fun)."</i> 105154- <i>"We are both dedicated and agree on the biggest things in life, meaning we both fully rely on God and what He wants to do with us."</i> 113190- <i>"We see almost eye to eye on politics, social issues, religion, child-rearing, and other things. We can usually compromise on the things we don't agree exactly on."</i>
B. Perseverance		1. We have persevered hardships together.	102087- <i>"We haven't given up despite many rough patches"</i> 115472- <i>"Have experienced a great deal of external struggles and still love and enjoy one another."</i> 136897- <i>"We've come a long way together."</i> 128977- <i>"Our ability to be persistent and hopeful even through trials with his health."</i> 113242- <i>"We also stand by each other in hard times."</i> 108006- <i>"We have handled numerous life and death situations in our first two years of marriage and have done a great job."</i> 120002- <i>"Our perseverance to keep this relationship alive and all the love we have to offer."</i>
C. Teamwork		1. We are a good team.	118296- <i>"We are a team and complement each other with our differences. [Partner] respects me and the kids and works hard to provide for us."</i> 121834- <i>"We're a good team. We work well together and support each other in many ways."</i> 130324- <i>"We approach our relationship as a team effort, we trust and depend on one another."</i>

		132615- <i>"Supporting one another, working together as a team, both people provide financially and emotionally."</i>
		117936- <i>"I think we work well as a team; we complement each other well and we love each other passionately."</i>
	2. We complement each other	130728- <i>"He is steady, and he balances me out when he sees my flaws coming up."</i> 123269- <i>"Our personal strengths complement each other well."</i> 102613- <i>"My partner helps me to be a stronger person. His strengths are my weaknesses."</i> 120695- <i>"He is good at fixing things that confuse me."</i> 132436- <i>"Easy going attitude offsets my tendencies to worry."</i> 121362- <i>"We are meant for each other...He brings me down to earth and I help him fly."</i>
	3. We encourage and support each other	113242- <i>"We are supportive of each other and celebrate our successes together."</i> 132701- <i>"My partner uplifts and encourages me physically, emotional, mentality, and spirituality."</i> 105451- <i>"We're each other's biggest supporters."</i> 111493- <i>"[We] support the other person's interests without necessarily sharing them [or] getting involved"</i> 118212- <i>"Encourages my growth and activities on my own."</i>
D. An Attitude of Willingness	1. We are willing to seek help and make changes for our relationship	105984- <i>"A willingness to address issues in the relationship. Solve problems together."</i> 123371- <i>"We are always willing work out our problems and learn to communicate better."</i> 124554- <i>"Willing to attend counseling in order to improve weakness."</i> 110790- <i>"We also both really value our relationship and each other second and are willing to seek help or read books if our relationship starts to unravel."</i> 111709- <i>"Both willing to consider trying new things and changing habits"</i> 139234- <i>"We are both very understanding, willing to make changes, and learn and grow together."</i>
	2. My partner has and continues to make changes to improve our relationship	130416- <i>"I feel [Partner] has made great efforts to improve his communication with me."</i> 101883- <i>"He is able to step back and look at most situations objectively, which makes a lot of things better in our relationship. He has taken a lot of things and changed to better fit my needs, like becoming more affectionate."</i> 121815- <i>"He is showing me through his actions he is changing for the better for himself and for us. He is willing to compromise and meet my needs more."</i>
	3. We are willing and committed to creating a lasting relationship.	115145- <i>"Willingness to stay together and to overcome these challenges."</i> 129463- <i>"[We] are willing to fight for our family to stay & get closer together"</i> 117288- <i>"Completely committed to making it work. Working on our challenges and supporting each other."</i> 116159- <i>"We both don't want to end it and are willing to work on our relationship."</i> 103845- <i>"Both willing to put in the work needed to have a happy, successful relationship."</i>

		123039- <i>"We're willing to go the distance to make it work. We compromise, we discuss things."</i>
E. Love	1. Deep sense a love	119418- <i>"We love and adore one another."</i> 138705- <i>"We love each other deeply and express it often."</i> 106541- <i>"Our love for each other is undeniable...he makes me feel complete."</i> 105568- <i>"We love each other unceasingly."</i> 105451- <i>"We truly love each other."</i> 103101- <i>"The unconditional love for each other and kindness towards each other."</i>
	2. Life is better together	139322- <i>"He makes my life significantly better."</i> <i>"Our relationship is an answer to both of our prayers."</i> 128616- <i>"We have built a wonderful life together."</i> 120627- <i>"We never have a dull moment when we are together and each day, I fall more in love with him."</i> 120064- <i>"We are each other's best friend and cannot imagine being without each other."</i> 121364- <i>"We make each other better."</i>
F. Friendship	1. He is my best friend	141972- <i>"We are best friends, constantly growing and learning together."</i> 105451- <i>"He's my best friend and I can share anything with him, and him me."</i> 111895- <i>"We are like best friends and can talk about anything"</i> 106189- <i>"My husband is my best friend and a wonderful father. He's a great companion and lover. We appreciate each other and the good we have together."</i> 111677- <i>"We are best friends, but also have separate lives so [we] are not 100% reliant on one another all the time."</i> 101915- <i>"He is my best friend. He gets me. We enjoy being together."</i> 104120- <i>"We are very kind to one another, and we accept one another. We are true friends."</i>
	2. Desired Togetherness	111688- <i>"We share the ability to share joy when doing things we love, together such as travel. When we go away, go to the movies or simply take a walk (when in the right mood) we act and feel as if we are in our first months dating."</i> 105285- <i>"We genuinely enjoy each other's company."</i> 118410- <i>"He wants to spend a lot of time with me and do things with me."</i> 133462- <i>"We also spend a lot of time together, whether it's doing various recreational activities or just everyday life. I like how we work together."</i>
	3. Playfulness	111175- <i>"We are friends, we have a lot of fun together, we have a great sex life, [and] we are deeply in love with each other."</i> 130846- <i>"[We] have fun together and make each other laugh."</i> 102367- <i>"Tease each other and have fun together."</i> 137158- <i>"We laugh a lot together and have fun with each other."</i> 119566- <i>"We enjoy each other's company and have fantastic times together when we are both in a positive frame of mind."</i> 108846- <i>"We have known each other a long time, often have fun and are comfortable with each other."</i>
	2. Shared interests and hobbies	134495- <i>"Enjoy many of same hobbies and appreciate each other's interests..."</i>

		<p>123836- "We both enjoy experiencing new things and being social. We are both athletic. We are both financially responsible and want a family."</p> <p>130633- "We are both homebodies. We both share similar tastes in decor. We agree on how to raise our own children. We share a similar future life idea together."</p> <p>113239- "Many things/activities in common, like love of God/church and various recreational/travel activities, animals, gardening just to name a few..."</p> <p>103018- "We love to laugh, enjoy nature, enjoy personal growth, love to experience new things together, share many hobbies, [and] like to be healthy in body, mind and emotions."</p>
G. Committed and Dedicated	1. Commitment to our family.	<p>128977- "...Our love for each other and our children, our ability to put our family first."</p> <p>124295- "We both want our children to always have a mother and father in their lives to give them consistency."</p> <p>119812- "The commitment to raise our boys together"</p> <p>112192- "Commitment to raise our son in a happy home"</p> <p>104449- "We both are very devoted to our children."</p> <p>131590- "Dedication to our union and our family."</p>
	2. We are committed to individual and couple growth	<p>127351- "We have both fought for our relationship, we are both willing to work on ourselves and our relationship"</p> <p>136294- "Invested in making our relationship better, understanding each other better, and improving communication."</p> <p>111471- "We are both eager to grow as individuals and as a couple and to work toward an even more fulfilling relationship together and life."</p> <p>112135- "...and are committed to continuing our growth as a couple."</p> <p>122857- "We are devoted to each other and have made a promise to work together to engage in a successful marriage."</p>
	3. We plan the future together.	<p>129962- "Committed to relationship even though we are currently long distance. Have future plans to move in together which we are both looking forward to."</p> <p>111493- "Planning for a future together."</p> <p>133759- "We see a future with each other."</p> <p>137141- "A desire/commitment to build a future together."</p> <p>114857- "He is the man I want to grow old with...Our saying is... 'Always and a day!'"</p> <p>140495- "We love each other, we are growing together, we have bought a place together, we got married, we can discuss our future"</p>
H. Physical Intimacy	1. We are attracted to each other	<p>124099- "We are very physically attracted to each other."</p> <p>129259- "We have good chemistry."</p> <p>104458- "Emotionally close, sexually attracted, fun and spontaneous"</p> <p>123836- "There is a lot of love, shared humor, playfulness, passion."</p> <p>102719- "We are both attracted to each other on various levels."</p>
	2. We have a satisfying sex life	<p>137502- "Active sex life."</p> <p>112135- "We have a great intimate relationship,</p> <p>115472- "Physical side still present after all this time..."</p> <p>130793- "We are very sexually intimate with each other."</p> <p>115629- "We are very compatible physically."</p>

		<i>139322- "Our sex is great. Usually (except when we argue)."</i>
I. Emotional Safety	1. Authenticity	<i>115297- "My partner is accepting of who I am." 105285- "I feel a sense of ease with my partner that I only feel with those whom I've known for many, many years." 136467- "We can be ourselves without feeling judged." 100760- "We both feel free to be ourselves." 122323- "Being our true selves with one another." 114927- "...a deep love and acceptance of each other just the way we are." 118755- "We both love and accept each other for who we are. I know the real him and he knows the real me."</i>
	2. Mutual Understanding	<i>124777- "We have great open communication between us and really take the time to try and understand each other." 130728- "He knows how to listen to me and understands that sometimes I just need to talk and be heard." 106280- "We are very understanding to each other, and both adapt to each other's wants and needs." 115629- "My partner is so in tune with me that he often reads my mind." 100564- "Understand each other's need for space." 119653- "Understand how to handle difficult issues with the other person."</i>
	3. Mutual Respect	<i>123597- "We love and respect each other as individuals." 104181- "We have a respect for each other's own personal life and the experiences we have both been through." 127123— "We show each other love and respect as individuals and as partners." 130728- "He truly treats me as his other half and respects my opinion."</i>
	4. Mutual Trust	<i>123795- "I don't have to doubt if he loves and wants to be with me. I feel secure." 126323- "Negativity about staying together is never a problem. There is no second guessing" 137442- "He trusts me with all of his heart. He gives me his all and is devoted to our relationship." 103838- "I feel very secure when I am with him. I know that he would do anything he could do for me." 138705- "We trust that the other wants what is best for us and the relationship." 119403- "I trust that [Partner] wants wonderful things for us and he is a committed partner." 140144- "We trust and love each other. I trust that [Partner] wants wonderful things for us and he is a committed partner."</i>
J. Communication	1. Able to confide without fear.	<i>113197- "We have an open and honest relationship. We can disclose anything without risk of losing respect or affection for one another. We love each other as is." 133759- "I am comfortable enough to share everything and be myself with him." 105266- "Communication has increased greatly over the past months. We're able to confide in each other feelings that before were scared to be mentioned..." 118376- "Willingness to take emotional risks...willingness to be vulnerable." 132954- "Our open communication and 100% truthfulness in our relationship." 111474- "Comfortable talking and communicating about anything."</i>

		2. We share what is bothering us	<p>113018- <i>"When we have doubts or questions, we have no trouble sitting down and openly talking about them."</i></p> <p>105568- <i>"We communicate very well and always let each other know when something is wrong."</i></p> <p>115629- <i>"We are both very communicative. We talk about issues when they come up."</i></p> <p>111677- <i>"We communicate extremely well with one another about things that are bothering us."</i></p> <p>104449- <i>"We function very well together and can discuss things openly. We don't hold grudges or stew about things."</i></p>
	K. Conflict Management and Resolution	1. We discuss difficult, activating issues	<p>104181- <i>"Although we might have some heated discussions, we always talk things out and figure out what happened."</i></p> <p>137442- <i>"He has an open mind and always communicates efficiently. He fights hard to not argue and to talk instead."</i></p> <p>114857- <i>"We never really "blow" in an argument. We talk it out and listen."</i></p> <p>111064- <i>"Calm, able to articulate when he is upset."</i></p> <p>141188- <i>"We talk out any issues. Rarely argue, and when we do, we try to fight fair."</i></p>
		2. We are able to resolve many issues	<p>140280- <i>"We usually resolve a conflict soon after the event. We say, 'I'm sorry' well and forgive each other readily."</i></p> <p>141927- <i>"Ability to address issues quickly."</i></p> <p>128934- <i>"Quick to resolve small issues."</i></p> <p>112433- <i>"We are able to work through our issues without thinking our relationship is in jeopardy."</i></p> <p>119418- <i>"We work through things before they become bigger issues."</i></p> <p>133404- <i>"We can work through any situation and come to an amicable agreement."</i></p>
II. Female Reported Relational Weaknesses	A. Lack of Commonality	1. We have different beliefs and values	<p>116768 - <i>"We differ in religious beliefs and I'm not sure how this will affect us in the future."</i></p> <p>136429 - <i>"We have different religions, and my religion says I should not date, and should not marry outside of my faith."</i></p> <p>119559 - <i>"Very different value systems and degree of spiritual commitment."</i></p> <p>106280 - <i>"We have different beliefs and we are both unwilling to completely change our lifestyle for one another."</i></p> <p>124878 - <i>"I feel that I am more spiritual than him and that sometimes, he goes to church just because I want my husband to be a very strong Christian."</i></p>
		2. We have different goals	<p>119559 - <i>"Different expectations about finances and careers. Different beliefs about marriage and having children."</i></p> <p>131109 - <i>"Religious upbringing of kids, ...where will we live...different identities vis-a-vis risk and rules."</i></p> <p>111682 - <i>"We have different lifestyle needs sometimes."</i></p> <p>118212 - <i>"Differences in the ways we plan and manage future events."</i></p> <p>136635 - <i>"We are not on the same page about marriage views."</i></p> <p>103018 - <i>"I want to have kids sooner than him."</i></p>
		3. We come from very different upbringings.	<p>135429 - <i>"We are 15 years apart in age, He is young sometimes and acts his age which is ok, but sometimes it annoys me, other times it is endearing."</i></p> <p>102080 - <i>"Different life experience. "</i></p>

		<p>142011 - "Some cultural norms from the Caribbean have also had an effect on how we relate as a couple and cause quite a bit of our tension."</p> <p>105524 - "We are still getting to know each other and how to blend our styles and personalities and we have a difference in life experiences."</p> <p>140280 - "Conflict over differences in growing up experiences and whether the other person "gets", appreciates or validates the other's past and present experiences."</p> <p>113391 - "We come from such different upbringings; it is hard to see things in the same light sometimes. We approach many things very differently and both can be pretty adamant about the way we do things."</p> <p>131109 - "Struggle to appreciate or embrace our differences"</p>
B. Disconnection	1. We've grown apart	<p>115630 - "We have drifted apart."</p> <p>101695 - "We let our relationship get to a point where we have not been communicating."</p> <p>112608 - "We've grown apart, are more interested in ourselves than each other."</p> <p>102274 - "I feel like the distance between us is a problem and that our lives are in two different places."</p> <p>140340 - "There is really no real connection anymore."</p> <p>112593 - "I feel like we used to be friends too."</p>
	2. I don't think he's invested	<p>117790 - "I do not feel as though he will be present for a majority of the life we are supposed to share."</p> <p>139452 - "He seems very disengaged with the details of our life."</p> <p>101883 - "Sometimes I also think that he doesn't make as much of an effort to communicate with me throughout the day as he could, since he's only going to school and I'm working and going to school and tend to do better at that than him."</p> <p>104449 - "We don't gel at a very deep level. I'm not sure my spouse knows how to do that with people, nor wants to."</p> <p>118145 - "Lack of a desire to improve the relationship."</p>
C. Disrespected, Devalued, and Criticized	1. I don't feel respected	<p>130186 - "He doesn't respect how I feel."</p> <p>110060 - "I feel he doesn't respect how hard I work as a stay at home mom."</p> <p>120997 - "He doesn't try to see things from my perspective, laughs off my concerns."</p> <p>111493 - "I feel he doesn't listen, and that makes me feel I don't matter or angry, because I do matter and he's not treating me as though I do."</p> <p>116159 - "Don't trust him with my emotions. Don't feel heard or respected at times."</p> <p>103132 - "When I discuss issues, he often interprets as nagging. I also like to discuss issues in a calm and respectful way, as soon as I discuss something, he gets very overwhelmed and angry, and start raising his voice. And it in turn makes me overwhelmed and I feel disrespected when he talks to me in that manner."</p>
	2. I don't feel valued	<p>105984 - "I don't feel that our arguments resolve well (I don't feel heard in them, but don't want them to continue)."</p> <p>114494 - "Lack of appreciation of what I offer to the relationship; no recognition of special occasions. Constant invalidation of my opinions."</p> <p>128616 - "My partner does not value me and tends to think poorly of me."</p> <p>112860 - "Him really listening and hearing me."</p>

		103491 – <i>“Him understanding some of my past issues and how it relates to our relationship.”</i>
		102479 – <i>“Not always available to talk to when I need someone to listen.”</i>
	3. We are often critical and harsh with one another	102274 – <i>“I worry that [Partner] doesn’t see me for who I am, just who he wants me to be and what I can do is never enough for him.”</i>
		119403 – <i>“He can be overbearing in his expectations of me in my relationship with him and his son.”</i>
		117790 – <i>“I feel as though he judges me uncharitably.”</i>
		137434 – <i>“We are hard on one another. High expectations.”</i>
		117665 – <i>“I can become quite critical of my partner.”</i>
		126281 – <i>“We are too critical and mean to each other.”</i>
		115472 – <i>“Judgments need to end (constructive criticism welcome); Rebuild mutual respect.”</i>
D. Disunity in Household and Co-Parenting Expectations	1. We have different household expectations.	113489 - <i>“Different expectations about the cleanliness of our home;</i> 137442 - <i>“He can be messy and lazy at times.”</i> 106597 - <i>“Sharing household responsibilities.”</i> 138705 - <i>“I would like the household duties to be evenly divided.”</i> 111677 – <i>“I need to help out more around the house and be more understanding when he has to work late.”</i>
	2. We disagree on child-rearing views and methods.	114932 - <i>“We disagree on how best to raise our children.”</i> 104080 - <i>“We disagree quite a bit in childrearing, and we haven’t gotten there yet.”</i> 121146 - <i>“We often struggle when it comes to how we interact with our children.”</i> 104328 - <i>“Finding common ground on child-rearing issues.”</i> 126281 – <i>“We can’t decide how to best discipline our kids.”</i> 123230 – <i>“challenges of raise kids and not doing enough together as a result”</i>
	3. Co-Parenting Stressors Related to Stepfamily	133176 - <i>“Both been married before, stress of divorce, [and] partner has child with another woman.”</i> 138564 - <i>“Past baggage, stress of juggling ex-spouses and 4 kids.”</i> 113197 - <i>“My complete lack of compassion for his ex-wife. The frustration of having to accept the ex as a fixture because of his daughter.”</i>
E. Overinvolved Family of Origin	1. Overbearing families	101151 - <i>“Some pressures from in-laws.”</i> 136843 - <i>“Overbearing families.”</i> 123789 - <i>“We get a lot of strain from my parents. I debate over my loyalty to him and to them- just a lot of stress.”</i> 108962 - <i>“Disapproval of my parents.”</i> 114597 - <i>“His parents are too involved; I feel like I am walking on eggshells.”</i> 130416 - <i>“His family may not fully accept me and although he said he won’t base his final decision on what they think, I know it still holds weight with him.”</i> 130982 - <i>“His family also causes a lot of problems for us because he is busy dealing with them and by the time, he gets to me he is exhausted.”</i> 124007 - <i>“His family is a large part of why we argue, so learning how to cope with them is important to me.”</i>
F. Financial Strain	1. We have financial hardship	101151 – <i>“We don’t have enough money; our jobs are stressful.”</i>

		129259 – “We are too young to get married. We are not where we want to be financially. I don’t think we are mature enough to be doing this.”
		106848 – “We are struggling with financial pressures as that relates to having children.”
		118611 – “Financial strain due to his debt.”
		114857 – “He could have issues with his job/finances...It doesn’t bother me (unless we are buying brakes for his college student or a car for his 16 year old and both of the parents are broke from trying to save the marriage by buying the wife anything to keep her happy...Oh, and bailing him out of that fiasco, to get the [Ex-Partner] off is back...”
		130793 – “I am frustrated with the fact that he hasn’t had a stable job in 6 months.”
	2. We struggle to manage our money	123795 - “Not very good in financial management.”
		103018 - “I struggle with financial stability.”
		136467 - “Money management. We both like to spend.”
		123148 - “I think we need to manage our time better and our income.”
	3. We struggle to communicate about finances	109315 – “We disagree on some important issues, such as finances, and there is an ongoing power struggle.”
		130416 – “I feel he tends to be a little fearful of financial issues.”
		111123 – “Financial issues need addressing more.”
		106857 – “We don’t know how to talk about finances and disagree as far as how we should spend our money.”
		123308 – “Also, finances and the quantity of intimacy can sometimes be a fragile topic.”
		123836 – “Working out issues regarding shared vision/expectations for where we will live and how finances will be handled.”
G. Lack of Quality Togetherness	1. Lack of time together	138705 - “I would like to spend more time talking together.”
		116834 - “Not enough time spent physically together.”
		130699 - “Not enough time and energy invested into one another.”
		113355 - “We sometimes don’t get to spend as much time together as we would like.”
		105414 - “Time together growing as a couple.”
	2. Stress and fatigue affects our time together.	114304 - “I think at times we have been overwhelmed and forgot to focus on ourselves to date and have quality time.”
		110059 - “We sometimes do not have enough time or energy for down time with each other and on our own.”
		104120 - “We have been guilty of not making time for each other.”
		141927 - “Allowing fatigue to put relationship on ‘back burner.’”
	3. Work commitments hinder our quality time.	140280 - “We both have stressful careers and sometimes it’s hard for the other the appreciated the other’s experiences at work given each person’s own stresses. I think [Partner] needs to feel more validated from me, but I am not sure how to do that.”
		136246 - “I feel that sometimes it’s hard to have both of our needs fully met in terms of the amount of time we spend together because of our work commitments.”
		126508 - “We are both working so hard, sometimes I would like us to take more time to be together.”

		104449 - <i>"His work is very consuming for him, although he does try to balance it with home."</i>
	4. Our time together isn't always enjoyable or refreshing.	113407 - <i>"There isn't a lot of time spent doing enjoyable things together."</i> 106541 - <i>"Not having much time alone, not doing very many activities together."</i> 139764 - <i>"Sometimes disagree on what we want to do with our free time or together time."</i> 141927 - <i>"Allowing electronics to dominate quality time with each other."</i> 114932 - <i>"We are distracted by electronic devices."</i>
	5. We don't live together, which hinders our time together.	130416 - <i>"The weaknesses would include time away from each other since he mostly only spends one day a week with me, with some exceptions."</i> 116286 - <i>"We are in a long-distance relationship and don't see one another as frequently as we would like."</i> 140938 - <i>"We don't live together so we don't spend as much time together and we'd like to."</i> 104756 - <i>"Plus, with the physical distance between us, we get into a lot of stupid arguments that we wouldn't get into if we were in the same city."</i>
H. Dissatisfying Physical Intimacy	1. Dissatisfying, mundane sex life.	132701 - <i>"We are still trying to obtain sexual satisfaction for me (woman)."</i> 138091 - <i>"Dissatisfying sex life."</i> 132207 - <i>"Our sex life is boring."</i> 134927 - <i>Sex is more of a routine than an intimate act.</i> 104586 - <i>"No romance, adventure, conversation, and surprises."</i> 100481 - <i>"There's a spark missing, a sense of excitement, mystery and passion lacking."</i> 112593 - <i>romance, fun.</i> 122492 - <i>"Lack of passion/excitement sometimes."</i>
	2. We don't have enough physical intimacy	140938 - <i>"We don't have sex as much as we would like to."</i> 121307 - <i>"We need to engage in sexual activity more often."</i> 123278 - <i>"Sexual intercourse doesn't happen enough."</i> 119418 - <i>"I wish we were intimate more often."</i> 130982 - <i>"We are not as intimate as we should be, and I worry a lot which makes it hard to just relax and enjoy our time together."</i> 115630 - <i>"We have drifted apart sexually and neither one of us brings this up."</i>
	3. We lack emotional closeness and affection.	104947 - <i>"Lacking intimacy and sex."</i> 107852 - <i>"Lack of deep intimacy."</i> 118145 - <i>"Lack of real intimacy."</i> 101543 - <i>"Showing affection to each other could be a lot better."</i> 106664 - <i>"[He is] not affectionate unless in bed."</i> 113018 - <i>"I am not as affectionate at he is, which I think makes a bit hard sometimes for him to grasp my true feelings."</i>
	4. We have different levels of sexual desire and physical frequency.	104449 - <i>"I am not as affirming or physically intimate with him as he needs."</i> 104476 - <i>"Differing needs for frequency of sex."</i> 122093 - <i>"Mis-match with sexual desire."</i> 136635 - <i>"Different opinion on frequency of sex/affection."</i>

		117790 - <i>"I feel as though the more effort I put into our sex life, the more he retreats from our sex life."</i>
5. External factors affect our sex life.		142011 - <i>"Since we had our second child, we have had a disconnect which I believe started with me. Not sure if it is physical or mental, but my sexual desire is non-existent."</i> 121964 - <i>"I also have a problem that interrupts our sex life which I fear is a big problem and I'm concerned about it."</i> 131718 - <i>"We become so busy in life that we have let the sexual side of our relationship slide. We still have a very strong bond but need to bring back our sex life."</i> 140243 - <i>"My partner and I do not have the physically intimate relationship that I would like to have, partly due to him being injured at work."</i>
I. Medical and Mental Illness, Histories of Abuse, and Addiction	1. Medical and mental health conditions and past trauma exposure affect our relationship	136235 - <i>"Sexual intimacy due to recent memories of [childhood sexual abuse] CSA and emotional closeness, mostly due to CSA and other traumas."</i> 115249 - <i>"Emotional and physical abuse history."</i> 131196 - <i>"Triggering issues- I get frightened, [Partner] gets mad."</i> 129424 - <i>"Severe anxiety."</i> 118611 - <i>"Both prone to depression."</i> 136442 - <i>"When one of us is hurt (i.e., back pain in him/anxiety in me), we have awkward conversation."</i> 112860 - <i>"My fatigue/health - physical, mental and emotional."</i> 108006 - <i>"Having a fun, normal, easier marriage (especially because of the medical drain on our marriage)."</i>
	2. Partners' active addiction	112444 - <i>"He drinks more than I would like."</i> 111205 - <i>"Differences about getting really drunk."</i> 108962 - <i>"His alcohol use."</i> 132207 - <i>"When he drinks, he gets angry."</i> 104326 - <i>"He drinks, I don't. Sometimes is an issue."</i> 114529 - <i>"He is a sex addict that has not worked through his family of origin issues or addiction issues."</i> 115290 - <i>"Working on his addiction to TV and working with the medical staff to understand his short-term memory loss."</i> 126786 - <i>"His addictive behaviors and problem with affection."</i>
J. Skepticism and Mistrust	1. Previous relational patterns show up in our present relationship	135307 - <i>"Poor communication and emotional stability partly caused by previous baggage."</i> 121964 - <i>"I have some issues from my past that sometimes I see come through in our relationship now."</i> 130475 - <i>"Bad habits from past relationships, self-doubt."</i> 132784 - <i>"Both hurt in past relationships and using that baggage in current relationship."</i> 129398 - <i>"The inability to deal with loose ends in past relationships that has hinder our progress in being under one roof. However, in time we make it happen."</i> 112273 - <i>"We argue a lot about our pasts."</i>

2. Partner betrayal	<p>121915 – “I can’t fully trust him after all the damage he has done. He has major issues with being honest and not lying.”</p> <p>122133 – “The trust between us has been broken many times.”</p> <p>127351 – “We have infidelity/trust issues!”</p> <p>133452 – “Ability to see the damage he causes and take responsibility for his actions.”</p> <p>131674 – “Inability to forgive and move beyond past hurts.”</p>
3. I do not trust my partner due to his past.	<p>101056 – “I find it difficult to accept certain aspects of his past.”</p> <p>111262 – “Prior affairs with his wife.”</p> <p>106356 – “Fear of commitment and lack of sharing based on the past (in our relationship and others).”</p> <p>111552 – “From past experiences, I struggle to fully trust my partner. Sometimes we each feel disrespected.”</p>
4. He doesn’t trust me.	<p>102613 – “I feel my partner cannot fully trust me with his heart. He holds back a lot of his emotions from me. I feel that the lack of intimacy on his part towards me has put a strain on my self-confidence.”</p> <p>130577 – “No sexual intimacy, he lacks trust in me.”</p> <p>114597 – “He doesn’t trust me, his parents are too involved, I feel like I am walking on eggshells.”</p> <p>127697 – “Him thinking I’m cheating, and us not thoroughly talking things out.”</p> <p>105154 – “My partner struggles a lot with trust, more than a person should, he is very worrisome.”</p>
5. We struggle to trust each other	<p>138654 – “We do not know how to fight fairly or handle conflict calmly. We both fear abandonment and neither of us ever really feels safe and secure within our relationship.”</p> <p>111181 – “We are both risk averse and fearful and have been idealistic (and unrealistic) about relationships.”</p> <p>105285 – “We’ve both felt betrayed”</p> <p>122714 – “Jealousy; trusting each other fully.”</p> <p>128003 – “I have lost trust in him and feel he is losing respect for me. Sometimes he speaks to strangers better than he does me.”</p> <p>124295 – “We don’t trust each other. We can’t talk about our relationship and we both manage to always push each other away.”</p> <p>142209 – “Sometimes trust is an issue due to my partner’s and I’s previous relationships.”</p>
6. My fears cause issues in our relationship.	<p>124230 – “Me being too controlling and not trusting.”</p> <p>138497 – “My hesitancy in completely opening my ‘space.’ My fear of losing myself in the relationship erects unnecessary boundaries and defenses.”</p> <p>115629 – “I am wishy washy and am terrified of marriage and living together forever. The word ‘forever’ scares me to death. This is causing a tremendous wall between us.”</p> <p>106189 – “I’m the biggest weakness. I fear having my parent’s relationship.”</p> <p>133033 – “I am emotionally scarred and fear dependence”</p>
7. We are too independent.	<p>104476 - “Long history of singledom and independence for each of us, leading to operating as individuals and not as a couple/unit.”</p> <p>136635 - “Interdependence is missing.”</p>

		<p>124668 - <i>"We are both capable of being extremely independent and occasionally do not rely on the other enough."</i></p> <p>118816 - <i>"We struggle with depending on each other at times."</i></p> <p>133033 - <i>"I am emotionally scarred and fear dependence."</i></p> <p>102479 - <i>"Struggles with allowing me to help him out."</i></p> <p>102363 - <i>"Both are maybe too independent/self-sufficient."</i></p>
	8. We have differing levels of interdependence	<p>103774 - <i>"Respecting each other's time, commitments and interests."</i></p> <p>132444 - <i>"Our disagreement over the amount of togetherness that we should have."</i></p> <p>120108 - <i>"I need a fair amount of independence and alone time, whereas he doesn't."</i></p> <p>108448 - <i>"He seems insecure, and is very attached, scared to be without me."</i></p>
K. Lack of Effective Communication Skills	1. Overall general communication needs work.	<p>140243 - <i>"I would like us to communicate more effectively."</i></p> <p>104453 - <i>"Newlyweds, we are trying to learn to communicate better."</i></p> <p>121307 - <i>"We need to learn to nurture each other more, learn to communicate better."</i></p> <p>124007 - <i>"We need to learn how to effectively communicate."</i></p>
	2. We communicate differently	<p>108962 - <i>"Different communication styles."</i></p> <p>106572 - <i>"Different outlook on handling problems."</i></p> <p>113242 - <i>"We communicate in different ways, and view communication in a relationship differently."</i></p> <p>138947 - <i>"We communicate differently."</i></p> <p>114932 - <i>"We don't communicate much."</i></p> <p>105266 - <i>"When apart, we rarely communicate other than a text message a day. I often wonder why."</i></p>
	3. We avoid talking about sensitive topics.	<p>113242 - <i>"We avoid discussing uncomfortable topics, even though we really should be able to discuss anything."</i></p> <p>105451 - <i>"We need to communicate things more openly and as soon as there is an issue, instead of letting it bother us before bringing it up."</i></p> <p>103624 - <i>"Lack of interaction, lack of serious talk, lack of where we are going and whether we really know each other."</i></p> <p>122281 - <i>"Trouble talking over problems or to complain about something."</i></p> <p>138091 - <i>"Difficulty discussing hard issues - sex and money."</i></p> <p>126323 - <i>"Sometimes it is hard to talk about deep emotions."</i></p> <p>139234 - <i>"I do not always share when something upsets me, I hold it in, for fear that he will get mad. I think if I talked sooner and more often, he would not shut down and not want to talk about our problems."</i></p> <p>124295 - <i>"We can't talk about our relationship and we both manage to always push each other away."</i></p>
	4. He doesn't share his feelings with me	<p>121964 - <i>"Sometimes I feel my husband doesn't feel comfortable sharing his feelings with me or personal things."</i></p> <p>140243 - <i>"I feel that he has been hurt during his previous marriage and childhood and it has made him afraid to open up with me sometimes."</i></p> <p>124878 - <i>"He can be very jealous and does not like to share all of what he thinks and feels with me."</i></p>

		<p>106857 - "I feel a huge weakness is that Ryan doesn't feel he can tell me what he needs to tell me. I think I can be overwhelming, and he likes to keep everything to himself."</p> <p>102719 - "Sometimes my partner has trouble sharing his deep concerns with me, which lead to periods of silence or withdrawal which can be difficult to deal with."</p> <p>134354 - "Will only talk with his family about some of his struggles instead of me."</p>
L. Assumptions of Malice Intent	1. We assume the worst about each other during conflict	<p>133404 - "We make a lot of assumptions about each other and that tends to hurt each other's feelings."</p> <p>113476 - "When we get angry, we feel hurt and lose our sense of perspective - we both tend to do this."</p> <p>101883 - "Our communication and arguments used to be very positive and constructive. It has gotten more tense, and at times he is very defensive anytime I try to say anything that could use improvement, even if it wasn't something that is his fault at all."</p> <p>112490 - "When he is mad/stressed out, he wants to hurt me emotionally."</p> <p>104530 - "Always claims to be a victim and gives up easily when things don't go his way."</p> <p>103849 - "Blames too much on himself which sometimes makes it difficult to discuss a problem in the relationship."</p>
	2. I assume my partner wants to hurt me	<p>104476 - "Opposite styles regarding decision-making/processing emotion."</p> <p>120627 - "He can't handle my way about going about an argument. When I'm upset, I like to take time and calm down before resolving the issue, and he doesn't like that."</p> <p>104756 - "We communicate differently. I fight it out, he shuts down and sweeps it under the rug."</p> <p>136074 - "Sometimes when we have a disagreement, he ignores me or doesn't want to work it out right away."</p> <p>132207 - "When we fight, he doesn't like to talk it out, he likes to ignore me."</p>
M. Mutual Inability to Regulate Emotions	1. We have difficulty remaining calm during conflict	<p>138654 - "We do not know how to fight fairly or handle conflict calmly."</p> <p>118816 - "We are at times easily angered and will say things we regret later."</p> <p>106175 - "We both have bad tempers and say things we don't mean sometimes when we are mad."</p> <p>105451 - "I get too emotional when we disagree."</p> <p>113419 - "My inability to communicate calmly when I am extremely upset."</p> <p>118755 - "We both have short fuses and bad tempers which makes communication sometimes difficult."</p> <p>103838 - "Our communication is not good in our conflicts; he always blows what I say in a conflict out of proportion."</p>
N. Pervasive Conflict Irresolution	1. Small issues quickly become heated arguments	<p>122581 - "We fight sometimes over silly things."</p> <p>133462 - "Sometimes I think we try too hard not to hurt the other person's feelings, and when we do get upset it seems like it was a big deal even if it is quite small. Things could easily get blown out of proportion."</p> <p>130186 - "We lost the compatibility we once had, even the smallest things start fights between us."</p>

			<p>120002 - <i>"We tend to argue about anything we feel like arguing about, and when we get mad, we get really mad."</i></p> <p>110060 - <i>"We rarely fight, but when we do, it can get pretty intense."</i></p> <p>121146 - <i>"We also hold things in until we then blow up."</i></p>
		2. We have difficulty resolving arguments.	<p>101110 - <i>"We sometimes can't resolve an argument, so we just let it go."</i></p> <p>119403 - <i>"We are weak in communicating and finding compromising solutions to our disagreements."</i></p> <p>127278 - <i>"Poor conflict resolution skills"</i></p> <p>119418 - <i>"When things get heated (rarely), I feel like we don't resolve the issue completely."</i></p> <p>136831 - <i>"Sometimes we don't always communicate well, and occasionally we hold grudges."</i></p> <p>126016 - <i>"Issues are sometimes unresolved because we are tired of fighting."</i></p> <p>138091 - <i>"Difficulty in resolving conflicts."</i></p> <p>101358 - <i>"Staying connected during disagreement to resolve conflict."</i></p>
		3. We have a hard time connecting after conflict.	<p>121870 - <i>"When we argue it's hard to come back from the argument."</i></p> <p>117729 - <i>"When arguing we are getting too upset or defensive and it's hard to reconcile."</i></p> <p>136294 - <i>"Conflicts - too many of them, too frequently, too disruptive, sometimes hard to resolve and almost always distancing and time-consuming."</i></p>
III. Male Reported Relational Strengths	A. Dedicated and Committed	1. We committed and dedicated to our family	<p>139234 - <i>"We have a strong commitment to each other and our families."</i></p> <p>107212 - <i>"We are committed to our marriage and are focused on making a good home and good life for one another and our children."</i></p> <p>131152 - <i>"We love being parents. We want to keep our very large family together. Even though our lives seem overwhelming at times it's our life and we love what we could have."</i></p> <p>118376 - <i>"We are committed to each other, loving, mature, and work through our disagreements, supportive of each other."</i></p> <p>126946 - <i>"We have similar values that carry us through our relationship."</i></p>
		2. Our shared beliefs and values reinforce our commitment to each other	<p>124295 - <i>"We both want our children to always have a mother and father in their lives to give them consistency."</i></p> <p>141353 - <i>"We both understand more than ever that Jesus has to be the center of our relationship, in order to continue on this long journey."</i></p> <p>116159 - <i>"We both have God as our foundation."</i></p> <p>126946 - <i>"We have similar values that carry us through our relationship."</i></p>
	B. Perseverance	1. We have persevered together	<p>131328 - <i>"We love each other and have overcome a lot together."</i></p> <p>141353 - <i>"We have been through lots of storm together, but we never give up."</i></p> <p>136372 - <i>"We truly love each other and have made it through some tough times. We are able to forgive and move forward."</i></p> <p>111920 - <i>"We are able to get through problems most young couples never could. My partner just started college and her parents recently got divorced. Throughout all of this she has stuck with me even when things seem hard."</i></p>

		129124 - <i>"Our relationship has come out stronger after each major issue we have had."</i> 115472 - <i>"Our relationship has survived a variety of challenge that would have driven other people apart, indicating that we have a strong and resilient connection."</i> 125025 - <i>"We have been through many things together and have grown with each other and closer to each other because of it."</i>
C. Respected Partners	1. We are equals.	122895 - <i>"The relationship is built around equality that is reaffirmed through discussion and intimacy."</i> 118791 - <i>"We treat each other as equals and deeply respect one another."</i> 127134 - <i>"We respect each other and value each other immensely."</i> 139078 - <i>"Respect for one another, a view of the relationship as equal partners..."</i> 138797 - <i>"We love and respect each other. I find this is the foundation to resolve issues."</i>
	2. We honor and consider each other's individual needs and differences	108448 - <i>"We respect each other's ideas."</i> 113190 - <i>"We are considerate of each other and their wants."</i> 113242 - <i>"We love our time together but also respect and appreciate our need to be individuals."</i> 102943 - <i>"We show a fair amount of respect for each other's personal time & space."</i>
D. Teamwork	1. We are a team.	129028 - <i>"We genuinely care about each other and work well together as a team."</i> 124668 - <i>"We are united in our actions and supportive of each other's efforts."</i> 117467 - <i>"We are a good team."</i> 137442 - <i>"We work as a team making plans for the future."</i> 120147 - <i>"We work together to achieve our goals."</i>
	2. We complement each other.	115472 - <i>"We complement each other, supporting each other in "weak" areas."</i> 106703 - <i>"We see each other clearly, communicate readily, and complement each other so, so well."</i> 102926 - <i>"We have complimentary personalities."</i> 117288 - <i>"My partner makes me happy and counterbalances the too-seriousness that I sometimes bring to the table."</i> 101883 - <i>"We work really well together. Our strengths complement each other, and we have similar goals."</i>
	3. We motivate and support each other.	109959 - <i>"I think she is my lifeline. She keeps me going I know she makes me want to do bigger and better things."</i> 103832 - <i>"I love the motivation that my partner has both on a personal level and professional level."</i> 138497 - <i>"[Partner] motivates me to be the best that I can be."</i> 129778 - <i>"We motivate each other to always become better."</i> 127978 - <i>"We help each other be better people."</i> 100564 - <i>"Supporting each other in personal aspirations"</i> 124573 - <i>"She is always willing to go the extra yard to help me out."</i>
E. Willingness to Adapt	1. We are willing to do what it takes to keep our relationship strong.	106282 - <i>"We both are willing to make the effort it takes to make a good marriage!"</i> 112232 - <i>"Overall combined sense of wanting to work together to improve each other as a collective."</i> 118376 - <i>"We are willing to take risks in our relationship."</i>

		<p>105051 - "A willingness to forgive and work at things." 123902 - "Willingness to repair our relationship." 137141 - "...her willingness to work at the marriage." 103832 - "We aspire to become a stronger couple and are willing to try new tactics to accomplish this strength." 137426 - "She never stops trying to improve."</p>
	2. We are willing and open to work on our relational issues	<p>103806 - "We are trying to work on things and see the other side." 111709 - "Willingness to work problems out, keen on new ways of dealing with challenges." 135459 - "We recognize our problems and are working on them." 137426 - "We are improving our finances." 126736 - "Willingness to change and try figuring things out with me." 128977 - "We keep moving on each day learning from our mistakes."</p>
F. Deep, Anchoring Love	1. Our love is enduring.	<p>105864 - "Despite the weaknesses there is love." 111466 - "That our love has endured everything and in many ways is stronger than it has been." 126508 - "There is a strong feeling of love that has been consistent from the beginning." 111830 - "The love that we have for each other is what's keeping tight together." 102943 - "I find that in spite of the highs and lows, overall, I find myself loving her more and more the longer I have the pleasure of getting to know her."</p>
	2. Our love bonds us	<p>110689 - "We have a deep love that anchors us regardless of whatever else is going on in our lives." 130186 - "Share a very close bond and genuinely love each other." 118453 - "We share a deep kinship and bond." 126967 - "We love each other very much and I'm willing to sacrifice lots of things for her. We have a very strong bond in which I've never felt before with anyone else." 112359 - "We are soulmates."</p>
	3. I am confident in her love for me	<p>103832 - "My partner loves me as equally as I love her." 137426 - "I love my wife with all my heart...She loves me. I don't want anyone else." 128850 - "I know we love each other very much. I know we want to be together forever." 141934 - "We love each other very much."</p>
G. Friendship	1. We are best friends	<p>105414 - "Great loving friends." 123795 - "She is my best friend and we are madly in love." 139078 - "Solid friendship established before dating." 116768 - "We are good friends." 139833 - "We are best friends, and great at sex." 113197 - "A strong partnership. Great friends who are in love and love being in each other's company."</p>
	2. We can relate to each other	<p>111123 - "Shared humor, equal intellect..." 136326 - "We are both intelligent, hardworking people." 111123 - "Matching ideas for our future" 111552 - "We can relate to one another."</p>

		<i>112234 - "Our family experiences were similar."</i>
	3. We have fun together	<i>117467 - "We enjoy hanging out with each other." 122190 - "We both have a vibrant sense of humor." 132207 - "We can laugh and have fun and at the same time act as a team to support each other when need be." 113542 - "We are able to relax and have fun together." 112685 - "We get along very well and make each other laugh." 110322 - "We can talk, and we get along, and I love being with her."</i>
	4. We share interests and hobbies	<i>104235 - "We also enjoy many of the same things as hobbies. We have been able to maintain old friendships well and make new ones together." 103832 - "My partner and I love to take part in activities together. We are very involved in each other's lives both at work and at home." 117288 - "We share many of the same interests." 111123 - "Our interest in each other, our shared activities and adventures"</i>
H. Consistent, Satisfying Physical Intimacy	1. We have a satisfying sex life.	<i>136326 - "We have a satisfying sex life." 102377 - "Our sex life is good." 111175 - "We have a strong desire for being intimate." 121834 - "We are regularly intimate." 114494 - "Physical and sexual closeness." 136179 - "Frequently sexual."</i>
	2. We are attracted to each other.	<i>115629 - "We are deeply attracted to one another." 136372 - "We are both very physically attracted to each other." 137426 - "I'm very attracted to my wife."</i>
	3. We are affectionate	<i>103832 - "We seem to find creative ways to make one another very happy and that I love." 103151 - "We are very close and affectionate." 139078 - "High affection." 102943 - "We love each other a lot and show it several times a day, every day, to each other." 111552 - "We're very affectionate."</i>
I. Acceptance, Understanding, and Trust	1. We are comfortable to be ourselves	<i>113542 - "I am able to be myself without worrying that she will run for the hills, (At least not without talking to me about it first)." 109993 - "We are completely comfortable with each other and love one another unconditionally." 111552 - "We're both confident and comfortable with who we are." 111123 - "Our acceptance of who each other is." 132207 - "We can be with one another and that is enough to make each other smile."</i>
	2. We respect each other's autonomy	<i>141028 - "We have enough in common to enjoy each other while still being our own individual selves." 134684 - "We are honest with each other and accept our differences." 115390 - "We recognize we each have imperfections and different tastes, but we are respectful and supportive of one another and committed to the relationship."</i>

	3. We care about each other	101883 - <i>"We care for each other and share our feelings."</i> 123795 - <i>"Strong emotional and spiritual connection."</i> 139078 - <i>"Emotional availability and responsiveness."</i> 129028 - <i>"We genuinely care about each other"</i>
	4. We care about each other's friends and family	137442 - <i>"We care about each other's families and friends and want the best for ourselves."</i> 115249 - <i>"A genuine concern for each other and our family members."</i> 115290 - <i>"My wife is very loving to me and the kids."</i> 106381 - <i>"She is a strong-willed person, good hearted person in general, [and] cares about her family."</i>
	5. We understand each other	108448 - <i>"We understand what each other want."</i> 127978 - <i>"We understand each other's feelings."</i> 140572 - <i>"We listen to each other and support each other in many ways."</i> 106703 - <i>"We see each other clearly."</i> 106282 - <i>"We both have PTSD and know that each have been through a lot."</i> 132444 - <i>"She's loving, kind and understanding. Although I can be difficult to deal with at times, she still loves me."</i>
	6. We trust each other	106631 - <i>"We dream about our future together; we have faith in our ability to have a happy relationship."</i> 125689 - <i>"She will always be here for me."</i> 119030 - <i>"Able to trust that the other won't do anything too unpredictable, it's a comfortable relationship."</i> 111920 - <i>"We love each other very much and I know I can rely on her for anything."</i> 104954 - <i>"The strengths I see with my partner is her dedication, loyalty, love, forgiving heart, strong communication skills, resilience, and how well in tuned her emotions are with me."</i> 107852 - <i>"She is my rock and supports me 100%."</i>
J. Regular, Honest Communication	1. We are open and honest with each other.	127978 - <i>"We can talk really openly together. We understand each other's feelings, we help each other be better people."</i> 102926 - <i>"We are comfortable being very honest with each other."</i> 117729 - <i>"Ability to confide in one another."</i> 113419 - <i>"Our communication is very open and honest and clear."</i>
	2. Our communication strengthens our bond.	105077 - <i>"The regular communication makes me feel that we are very close."</i> 111903 - <i>"Every day we are growing a stronger bond by communicating and addressing the dynamics within our relationship."</i> 113239 - <i>"We discuss everything about our lives and are very close. We are open for growth."</i> 102943 - <i>"We talk through our problems until we rekindle our joy of being together."</i>
	3. We work on our communication skills.	130416 - <i>"Communication is improving. I am working on being more emotionally exposed and asking her how she feels."</i> 126618 - <i>"We communicate. Sometimes not in the best of ways but communicate nonetheless."</i> 137426 - <i>"We communicate better and better as our marriage progresses."</i> 111830 - <i>"We've managed to make our relationship work after many arguments"</i>

		<i>114494 - "Ability to articulate feelings and communicate them to each other."</i>
K. Respectful During Conflict	1. We can have respectful, hard conversations.	<i>102926 - "When we disagree, we can work things out. We have a lot of respect for each other, and when we disagree, we always go back to the issue and resolve it even if it takes a while to calm down first." 126946 - "We can talk things out and work through all kinds of problems." 109881 - "We can talk over our differences and come to a compromise over the issue." 118376 - "We talk openly about all issues, whether comfortable or uncomfortable. Preventative discussions about possible conflict in the future." 122402 - "We openly talk about most if not all topics. Neither one of us shies away from a discussion we feel we need to have. We may not always agree or have the same starting point on a subject but we both feel talking about things gets the subject in the open." 111552 - "We try to talk about things, we rarely hide anything or avoid conflict."</i>
L. Distress Tolerance and Discussions	1. We can keep calm and discuss	<i>113419 - "We rarely allow conflicts to linger and we resolve them by making compromises." 110059 - "After a conflict (internally or externally charged), we work things out well; we problem solve well." 137442 - "Getting along is not a problem; disagreements usually never last and we always work it out." 140280 - "We have good communication and are usually able to resolve an issue when we sit down and talk through it." 123789 - "We listen to each other. We always discuss matters and try not to blow things out of proportion."</i>
IV. Male Reported Relational Weaknesses	A. Repeated Assurance	<i>104599 - "Constant need of assurance of continuing relationship." 137442 - "Sometimes I feel like my partner is too sensitive and worried about our future." 122201 - "She quickly loses of faith in our relationship if things go wrong." 102367 - "She worries sometimes that I'll leave." 136179 - "Partner is psychologically inflexible and very anxious."</i>
	B. Micromanaging	<i>112314 - "Sometimes "sweats the small stuff", and sometimes tries to exert control over me and my interests." 129398 - "I feel like I am always waiting on her which is a way of her controlling me. I don't like to be controlled." 122894 - "[It's] hard for her to focus on some things and worries about the future too much and tries to plan to much and micromanages my life." 105553 - "My partners at times can be controlling and is reluctant to forgive me, trust me and show emotion towards me." 100564 - "Each person wanting to control the relationship." 124230 - "My partner doesn't trust me and can be controlling at times."</i>
	C. Lack of Ambition	<i>140144 - "I feel she lacks ambition at times." 102559 - "Different levels of motivation or sense of urgency, less or more self-sufficient." 111975 - "She doesn't finish things she starts." 101110 - "Close mindedness."</i>

		<p>130000 - <i>"Sometimes she is lazy, complains a little more than I would like to hear. I think she can use a boost of self-confidence; it would be good for her."</i></p> <p>128616 - <i>"Also wife has negative outlook on life in general. She has declared that she has stopped learning since she stopped working but this is almost like an ultimatum to accept me as I am because I am not about to change, too old and too tired. It's this tired demeanor whereby she approaches most things like they are chores."</i></p>
	2. I lack ambition	<p>104954 - <i>"The weaknesses I see in the relationship with my partner are my listening skills that may lead to misunderstandings we have when we are communicating each other's feelings, the lack of concern I have for getting married, and how much effort I put into the relationship."</i></p> <p>112196 - <i>"Relationship could be better for my wife if I spent more time with her."</i></p>
D. Financial Strain	1. We are financially stressed	<p>130010 - <i>"Her being a student creates money issues."</i></p> <p>126508 - <i>"We would both like to be able to travel. We are locked in financially."</i></p> <p>104629 - <i>"Financial security and the ability to buy a home and raise a family are going to be challenges for us."</i></p> <p>123202 - <i>"Financial stress due to my employment situation."</i></p> <p>119559 - <i>"Financially my partner brings home too little and it's barely able to provide for herself."</i></p> <p>123308 - <i>"Financial stress which leads to lack of intimacy which causes sexual frustration."</i></p>
	2. I feel pressure to make a certain amount.	<p>123039 - <i>"We can't always have steady high paying work."</i></p> <p>111123 - <i>"My lack of current income."</i></p> <p>136326 - <i>"We haven't been officially dating for very long. We have a baby on the way and are not prepared for it. (Financially, being married, etc.)"</i></p> <p>119607 - <i>"Financially being behind and having to work to retirement."</i></p>
	3. We struggle to manage and trust each other finances	<p>122714 - <i>"Managing our finances wisely."</i></p> <p>130324 - <i>"Neither one of us is a good financial planner."</i></p> <p>103101 - <i>"Money handling."</i></p> <p>105568 - <i>"Sometimes we don't see eye to eye on issues. My wife will play the "it's easier to ask for forgiveness" card when it comes to finances."</i></p> <p>100481 - <i>"We might not be on the same page as far as finances are concerned."</i></p> <p>104453 - <i>"Cannot discuss money/finances."</i></p> <p>140144 - <i>"[She] can be irresponsible with money or obligations."</i></p> <p>109881 - <i>"Honesty with finances."</i></p>
E. Difficulties Managing Stress and Co-Parenting	1. We struggle to deal effectively with stress	<p>129304 - <i>"How we each deal with stress."</i></p> <p>137863 - <i>"Constantly being tired-drained."</i></p> <p>111104 - <i>"We are both easily emotionally upset."</i></p> <p>122093 - <i>"I need to try harder to accept help when it's offered."</i></p> <p>105272 - <i>"She can get put too much on her plate at one time."</i></p> <p>139764 - <i>"Finding ways to help her deal with stress."</i></p>
	2. Stress impacts communication and intimacy	<p>107212 - <i>"Sometimes life becomes too much and our communication breaks down."</i></p> <p>134495 - <i>"Sometimes life gets too hectic and we don't have the communication and intimacy time I think we need."</i></p>

		<p>136581 - "We get frustrated with one another when we are stressed out." 123452 - "Lack of intimacy, outside stresses." 136581 - "We get frustrated with one another when we are stressed out. We fight too hard." 130324 - "We spend a few days apart most weeks due to my travel schedule which leads to loss of intimacy."</p>
	3. We have different views on child-rearing	
	4. Difficulty co-parenting	<p>121912 - "Over-controlling how we raise children." 113093 - "She can be too motherly and protective of her children." 130211 - "I have a difficult time relating to her daughter." 124662 - "Relationship with daughter and dealing with daughter's father's family." 127134 - "The adjustment of blending with her children as a family."</p>
F. Lack of Togetherness	1. We struggle to create time for each other.	<p>121912 - "Not making time to spend as a couple." 102257 - "Amount of time we have to spend together." 123278 - "Don't spend enough time together." 140572 - "We do not spend enough time together as a couple." 119812 - "Finding time for one another." 133903 - "We don't frequently find enough time to disengage from our busy lives and really emotionally connect with each other." 122621 - "Lack of relaxing time together." 132701 - "We could spend more time doing things outside the house." 127697 - "We do not get to spend that much time together, so we tend to argue a lot."</p>
	2. We struggle to balance family responsibilities and quality time together.	<p>137426 - "We can improve our together time. Need more one on one time. Kids are 1st priority and not each other." 133462 - "There is an important balance between family and other responsibilities such as school." 133462 - "Sometimes it is hard for me to show attention to my wife [that] she deserves." 119607 - "Time commitments of children" 112773 - "The amount of things we have packed into our life makes having down time together a challenge." 119607 - "Time commitments of work, lack of enough time left in life." 114071 - "Incorporating our lives outside the relationship into the relationship." 101151 - "We both have busy work schedules and this can sometimes be a problem." 129900 - "How busy and distracted we are from each other at times."</p>
G. Sexual Dissatisfaction	1. Sex has become prescriptive.	<p>23795 - "Sex life could use some improvement." 132701 - "Our sex life could be better." 136179 - "Partner is not sexually adventurous." 105288 - "I would like her to take more initiative when she wants something from me, whether it's during a fight, a favor, or in the bedroom." 101110 - "Not enough experimental sexual activities." 109801 - "She isn't as passionate as she used to be." 104179 - "Lack of sexual desire from her."</p>

		<i>130837 - "We don't have a whole lot of passion."</i>
	2. We have discrepant affection and sexual needs and desires.	<i>130324 - "I want more sexual time than she does, and I want more overall physical attention from her than she does from me." 120108 - "We both have a different sexual drive. Mine much higher than hers. I know this can become overwhelming and stressful for her." 127873 - "I'm not sexually active enough." 132619 - "Slight imbalance in demonstrations of affection, physical intimacy." 123049 - "At times there is a lack of intimacy." 130665 - "Sometimes there are long periods without intimacy." 119607 - "My desire for more close emotional attachment and intimacy."</i>
	3. External factors impact sexual intimacy	<i>123202 - "I am sometimes too tired for sex." 121964 - "We don't have physical intimacy often for a few reasons. A combination of personal health issues and just being tired from our long workdays including the 1hour commute seems to make it difficult." 131203 - "We have a hard time being a couple when we are parenting. Intimacy drops substantially around her kids." 115249 - "She withholds sex to punish me and because she doesn't feel close to me. I get fearful about her leaving and really want to be intimate." 106631 - "I sometimes have trouble with intimacy, didn't grow up in an openly affectionate home."</i>
	4. Our body issues hinder confidence during physical intimacy	<i>103832 - "My partner has some physical self-confident issues and we need to work on these as a couple." 136824 - "Lack of sex life, a lot of negative self-reflection in both cases." 139078 - "We both have body image issues sometimes affecting our sex life."</i>
H. Past Traumatic Experiences	1. Traumatic experiences and medical illnesses impact our relationship	<i>112860 - "Constant battle with her depression and illnesses." 106282 - "My wife has been abused badly by men in her life and it is difficult for her to trust completely." 106664 - "Unresolved past sexual relationships and my past sexual abuse." 102926 - "It is frequently difficult to be physically intimate because of my fear of being seen as putting a lot of pressure on her, and because of her difficulties with a history of sexual abuse." 106572 - "I am still recovering from loss of son, wife, & family. I often just don't feel. Or feel like I need to feel more for her." 131196 - "Sometimes she doesn't listen, and her anxiety blocks her from being present or listening."</i>
I. Alcohol Use	1. I struggle with alcohol use.	<i>141915 - "Occasional issue with alcohol." 136635 - "Disagree with alcohol drinking." 131872 - "Substance abuse." 106597 - "I need to drink less alcohol."</i>
J. Individual or Mutual Mistrust	1. Previous significant relationships hinder our present relationship.	<i>122584 - "Difficulty letting past issues go (e.g., my past marriage, my having kids w/ my ex-wife, my alcohol abuse)." 126206 - "Working through poor boundaries I set with my ex and her fiancé." 125777 - "I tend to bring up the past, and dwell on things in her past." 124241 - "Past relationships hindering current one."</i>

2. We don't trust each other.	<p>131377 - <i>"Insecurities in ourselves affects our relationship in a negative way."</i></p> <p>111474 - <i>"I think we both worry at times about what the other is thinking, and whether the other person likes us enough or not."</i></p> <p>124295 - <i>"We don't trust each other."</i></p> <p>139505 - <i>"Trust & fear of the future. My partner does not trust me, and this effects how I feel about her. We both are scared how a marriage would look like and how long it would last."</i></p>
3. Based on previous experiences, she struggles to trust me.	<p>109159 - <i>"My moving forward after a nasty divorce and emotional heartache and her willingness to fully trust me."</i></p> <p>131443 - <i>"I feel she doesn't trust me as much as she should."</i></p> <p>101056 - <i>"Understanding of my past life, accepting me as I am."</i></p> <p>111920 - <i>"Sometimes she wants to give up because of her parents' divorce. This frustrates me because I know I can make her happy. She knows this too but is afraid of ending up divorced later down the road. Sometimes this wears on me and I become unfairly impatient."</i></p> <p>123246 - <i>"We are rarely at peace. There always seems to be a problem. There is a lack of trust from my partner. She constantly is looking for something bad and is suspicious of most intentions. This prevents any intimacy from developing."</i></p> <p>101695 - <i>"I have destroyed our trust. Our life, the look she gives me now. I am truly sorry."</i></p>
4. Based on my previous relationships, I struggle to trust her.	<p>115249 - <i>"Having gone through a divorce I truly fear her leaving."</i></p> <p>102943 - <i>"I sometimes get fearful/jealous when she is alone without work for an extended period or is out with/around other men (I've been cheated on before & she admitted to cheating on someone else before me) that she may be tempted to/act on be unfaithful."</i></p> <p>110702 - <i>"My ability to include her in decisions."</i></p>
5. I struggle to trust her due to her actions.	<p>103820 - <i>"Fear of things going back to the way they were."</i></p> <p>107830 - <i>"Trust is the main deficiency. I never know what to believe anymore. I'm wearing down."</i></p> <p>138947 - <i>"I'm having a very difficult time trusting wife due to her actions."</i></p> <p>105051 - <i>"A lack of trust on my side from time to time and a lack of maturity on hers from time to time."</i></p>
6. We have unresolved problems	<p>112135 - <i>"Dwelling in past issues."</i></p> <p>141915 - <i>"Unresolved relationship issues."</i></p> <p>136326 - <i>"We have a troubled history."</i></p> <p>112860 - <i>"Delay in starting a family."</i></p> <p>123371 - <i>"Insecurity stemming from past hurt."</i></p>
K. Misunderstanding and Disconnection	<p>1. We struggle to understand each other.</p> <p>111552 - <i>"Sometimes we don't understand one another."</i></p> <p>111903 - <i>"Not fully understanding each other."</i></p> <p>119519 - <i>"Understanding of each other's value system."</i></p> <p>101543 - <i>"Being able to understand each other on a deep level and figure out what each other really wants at the right times."</i></p> <p>135307 - <i>"I feel like my partner has a hard time understanding me, and my perspective."</i></p>

	<i>138596 - "Sometimes it is hard for us to understand each other because we have had some very different life experiences."</i>
2. It can be difficult to understand each other due to our differences.	<i>104235 -- We process differently, while this hasn't been a problem, yet it could in the future."</i> <i>110801 - "Different approaches to thinking and acting in certain situations that causes us to not understand each other's actions."</i> <i>121287 - "Sometimes we focus on the ways we are different and don't just spend time enjoying each other."</i> <i>115472 - "Although in some areas, our personalities are complementary, in others our deficiencies are amplified."</i> <i>118158 - "Because of our different perspectives on some things, we sometimes have to work to understand each other."</i>
3. Lack of commonality	<i>122621 - "Lack of interests in common."</i> <i>104775 - "That we tend to like very different things but want often want to do those things together."</i> <i>102257 - "Lack of common hobbies, pastimes."</i> <i>131366 - "I have hobbies she may not approve of. Sometimes I am irresponsible/stupid."</i> <i>133759 - "Disagreements in values, religion and gender roles."</i> <i>118212 - "Very different perspectives and needs on relationships with others."</i> <i>136326 - "Our ideas on religion."</i>
4. Our different upbringing/backgrounds can cause tension	<i>127351 - "Our backgrounds and how we were raised are so very different that I think that we struggle connecting and valuing the same things."</i> <i>102719 - "Different family backgrounds can cause tension in relationship, not learning Spanish fast enough."</i> <i>102943 - "We were brought up differently around religion and alcoholism (we grew up around other faiths and our parents take opposite stands on alcohol use)."</i> <i>129190 - "My lack of communication and showing of love, all due to how I was raised."</i> <i>138797 - "My intimacy issues from my adoption has made the relationship less blissful."</i> <i>133404 - "Attachment to current family relationships."</i> <i>128382 - "Family issues will affect our relationship."</i>
5. We aren't emotionally connected	<i>131152 - "We always seem to just miss each other like were both right there so close and still were miles apart. Communication. Parenting philosophies. Money management."</i> <i>119030 - "I feel alone a lot, like there's not much connection. We don't value or want the same things."</i> <i>127094 - "I think we are on different levels in the relationship."</i> <i>105111 - "We are also growing apart from one another."</i> <i>113190 - "We do not have meaningful conversations."</i> <i>103832 - "My partner and I have room to become more emotionally involved with one another. Emotionally if we discuss both our intrapersonal challenges, and our</i>

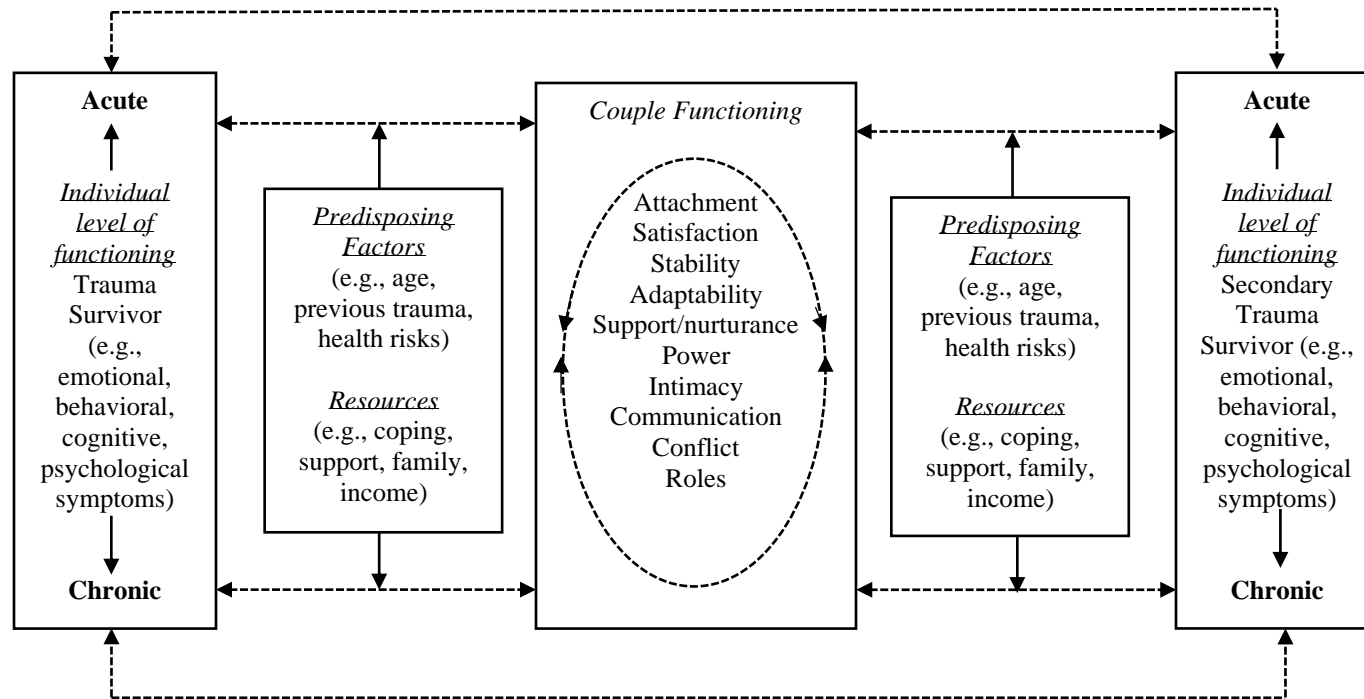
		<i>challenges/concerns we have with one another we will grow as a couple and will better understand one another."</i>
	5. I don't think she is invested.	<p>104453 - "Partner won't commit to marriage." 104449 - "She does not and never has admired/adored me; I feel she could take or leave the relationship." 137368 - "Sometimes my partner makes decisions based on how she feels and forgets to consider me and how I might feel." 121912 - "Doesn't make effort or show love or effort or be close with my family." 135307 - "I feel like my partner has less ambition to do things that would give them a more significant insight into who I am. I think we have some significant communication issues." 121912 - "Lack of embracing what is important to me."</p>
L. Difficulty Communicating Effectively	1. I have difficulty expressing my thoughts and feelings effectively	<p>121311 - "I sometimes get upset and can't figure out what is wrong and can't help me with it." 118611 - "We communicate in different ways, and I struggle trying to get my points across to her, but it's not a lost cause." 122190 - "I have trouble communicating effectively my thoughts and feelings." 137442 - "Communication on my part sometimes I feel like I can't find the right words to say."</p>
	2. We struggle to have open, honest conversations	<p>123049 - "We have different communication styles." 118611 - "We communicate in different ways." 117729 - "Communication in the sense of telling the other one how he or she is feeling could be better." 106268 - "Expressing feelings to one another." 130186 - "We sometimes have trouble communicating." 119812 - "Our inability to discuss personal and relationship problems."</p>
	3. I don't feel safe to share my feelings or thoughts	<p>137158 - "[Partner] often thinks I'm not as invested or loving, and I don't always do a good job of vulnerably expressing myself." 133426 - "Inability to express my deepest feelings." 111067 - "I cannot express my feelings or communicate disagreements." 122093 - "I don't always express what I want/need, my partner somewhat regularly doesn't seem eager to please me if it's not something she already thought of/wanted to do." 130392 - "We cannot communicate on my feelings and state/behavior, thus making me feel rejected." 105480 - "Her anger and name calling and yelling." 118214 - "At times I feel belittled by how I am treated, and I get upset and argue my point until she gives up which makes me very frustrated." 121912 - "Always threatening to call me family and complain." 106416 - "She is always looking for my faults."</p>
	4. She doesn't share her feelings or thoughts with me	<p>109801 - "She's not as open to me as she used to be." 136300 - "My partner has never been able to communicate about anything deeper than the weather."</p>

		<p>117288 - "My partner sometimes has trouble talking to me and sometimes feels "small" when engaging me in discussion; I probably hurt her feelings sometimes but don't realize it (she could let me know more often when this happens though)."</p> <p>109048 - "Difficulty articulating her thoughts. Feelings and viewpoints, but I'm not sure why."</p> <p>142209 - "My partner coming to me and letting me know what she is frustrated about and me prying it out of her."</p> <p>129124 - "She holds back when I know somethings wrong when I ask her."</p> <p>141237 - "Sometimes does not talk/share intimate details about her daily activities"</p>
M. Disregard, Defensiveness and Disrespect	<p>1. We struggle to speak respectfully to each other during arguments</p>	<p>131220 - "Lately we don't speak or listen respectfully. The method we choose to communicate is poor, before we actually talk about the issues."</p> <p>123049 - "Sometimes we say hurtful things to one another when we fight."</p> <p>107803 - "When we argue we put each other down."</p> <p>111552 - "Sometimes when we have conflicts we don't interact very well."</p> <p>131203 - "Errors in communication have created unnecessary problems. Sarcasm or judgmental reactions make difficult situations hurtful."</p> <p>105154 - "We have trouble communicating in a productive way."</p> <p>126030 - "We are brutally hard on each other emotionally, and don't know how to stop it."</p> <p>104672 - "Both of us can be emotionally volatile."</p>
	<p>2. We assume the worst about each other.</p>	<p>106498 - "Difficulty in discussing problems with the relationship and each other without feeling isolated/attacked."</p> <p>115249 - "My wife has a low self-esteem so any problem I want to discuss she takes as a personal [attack]."</p> <p>123148 - "Sometime taking things a little too personal."</p> <p>109429 - "Sometimes we are both sensitive to perceived slights."</p> <p>131220 - "We assume an intent to hurt and are not prepared for our assumptions to be challenged or completely wrong."</p> <p>104672 - "Communication during an argument. I feel she unfairly distrusts me."</p> <p>105077 - "At times I think things I say are misinterpreted by her, leading to tension and sometimes arguments."</p> <p>135450 - "My communication drops and sometimes she feels I'm pushing her away when I need to decompress."</p> <p>113542 - "We don't do a good job at arguing, and both of us have a problem where the other's words are misunderstood or mistaken for an attack. We sometimes have a hard time working together on a joint effort because of impatience and ego."</p>
N. Inability to Regulate Emotions	<p>1. I struggle to remain calm during conflict.</p>	<p>112314 - "I need to remain more calm during arguments."</p> <p>131443 - "I think my anger is also one of the weaknesses."</p> <p>126618 - "Dealing with arguments. I need to approach it in a more calm manner."</p> <p>122857 - "Keeping composure in arguments."</p> <p>105111 - "I don't communicate well, and I can get 'overwhelmed' very easily in arguments."</p> <p>111882 - "I am learning to better deal with misplaced anger."</p>

	2. My partner struggles to remain calm during conflict.	<p>115249 - <i>"When angry my wife withdraws and then I pursue & try to solve the problem "now". I get angry, she gets fearful."</i></p> <p>113476 - <i>"My partner can become irrational during conflict. I can become emotional and closed-minded during conflict."</i></p> <p>135717 - <i>"Her temper does not allow her to see straight when it comes to the future or any pressing matter."</i></p> <p>130186 - <i>"Also, if an issue does arise, my partner treats it like the worst thing in the world."</i></p>
	3. Our arguments can lead us to shut down	<p>141196 - <i>"Sometimes arguments cause us to shut down."</i></p> <p>117729 - <i>"We could improve our coping mechanisms for arguments."</i></p> <p>102367 - <i>"We're not as skilled at conflict management as we need to be. We both "need our space and so that will be challenging."</i></p> <p>112685 - <i>"When having a crucial conversation, she tends to shut down."</i></p> <p>121378 - <i>"We both struggle with patience. Our individual responses to situations differ greatly sometimes."</i></p>
	4. We can't talk about certain issues without getting heated.	<p>122584 - <i>"Difficulty discussing our most challenging issues without getting overly angry and hurt."</i></p> <p>124295 - <i>"We can't talk about our relationship and we both manage to always push each other away."</i></p> <p>121964 - <i>"The 1% of the time when we argue, it gets intense and it can be a drain."</i></p> <p>122093 - <i>"Sometimes there isn't enough compromise and we dig into our respective trenches on certain issues, [such as] sexual intimacy. I don't always listen as closely as I should during discussions, I sometimes let my anger get the best of me."</i></p> <p>121392 - <i>"Arguments, we have had several since our pregnancy inception."</i></p>
	5. We struggle to listen and understand the other person's perspective during arguments.	<p>131866 - <i>"Have trouble when it comes to arguing, seeing each other's point of view."</i></p> <p>142200 - <i>"When we disagree on an issue and have conflict we tend to try and argue our point instead of listening to each other. We try to debate our point and prove the other wrong."</i></p> <p>104672 - <i>"[During conflict] She likes to talk but has hard time listening to me (to feel understood)."</i></p> <p>132207 - <i>"Sometimes we have a hard time communicating and keeping an open mind when talking about problems."</i></p> <p>140280 - <i>"Sometimes we talk past each other and often we will experience friction because both of us like to be right all the time."</i></p>
O. Pervasive Conflict Iresolution	1. We argue over day-to-day, mundane, or "small" issues.	<p>131220 - <i>"The issues themselves are mundane but categorizations and characterizations blur the intent of the other."</i></p> <p>114494 - <i>"Frequent conflicts over day-to-day matters."</i></p> <p>109801 - <i>"We argue for no good reason."</i></p> <p>111968 - <i>"Sometimes we bump heads over small stuff."</i></p>
	2. Small issues quickly become large arguments	<p>110689 - <i>"We sometimes have difficulty in communication styles that can cause a trivial problem to sometimes be misconstrued as a larger issue."</i></p> <p>139322 - <i>"We disagree about how to best handle conflict. Little things can lead to major arguments that leave both of us upset for hours or days after."</i></p>

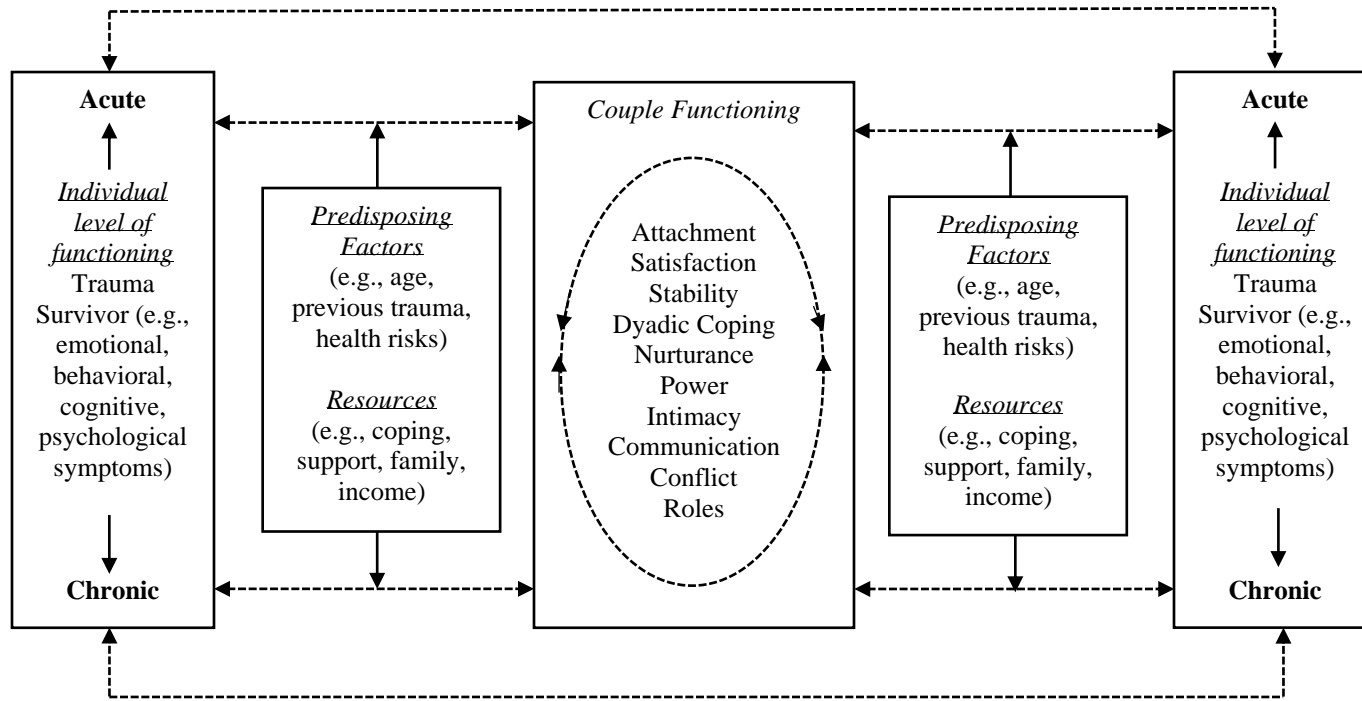
	<p>103774 - <i>“Communication skills, we let arguments get out of control, we have discussions about the hard issues, but we fight about the “medium” issues.”</i></p> <p>102925 - <i>“Discussions about differing points of view can or disagreements can quickly feel like arguments or problems.”</i></p> <p>121460 - <i>“When conflicts erupt, we have trouble working through them without them before they boil over.”</i></p>
<p>3. Our arguments remain unresolved.</p>	<p>104849 - <i>“We disagree over how to live with each other and resolve conflicts.”</i></p> <p>115249 - <i>“Poor conflict resolution -- nothing ever gets settled.”</i></p> <p>129124 - <i>“We have stressors that can’t be fixed overnight and that is putting some serious strain on our relationship sometimes.”</i></p> <p>128616 - <i>“Can’t seem to resolve conflicts since we are still hurting from past arguments that just won’t go away.”</i></p>

Figure 1
Couple Adaptation to Traumatic Stress (CATS)



Note. From “Systemic Traumatic Stress: The Couple Adaptation to Traumatic Stress Model,” Nelson Goff, B., and Smith, D, 2005, *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 31, 145-157. doi:10.1111/j.1752-0606.2005.tb01552.x

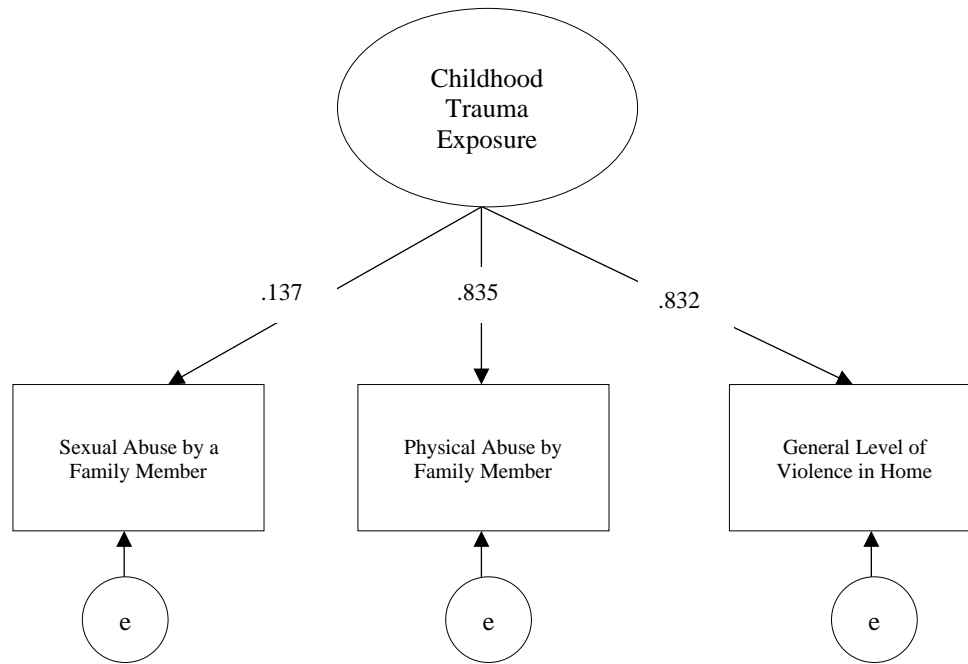
Figure 2
Couple Adaptation to Dual-traumatic Stress (CADS)



Note. Adapted from “Systemic Traumatic Stress: The Couple Adaptation to Traumatic Stress Model,” Nelson Goff, B., and Smith, D, 2005, *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 31, 145-157. doi:10.1111/j.1752-0606.2005.tb01552.x

Figure 3

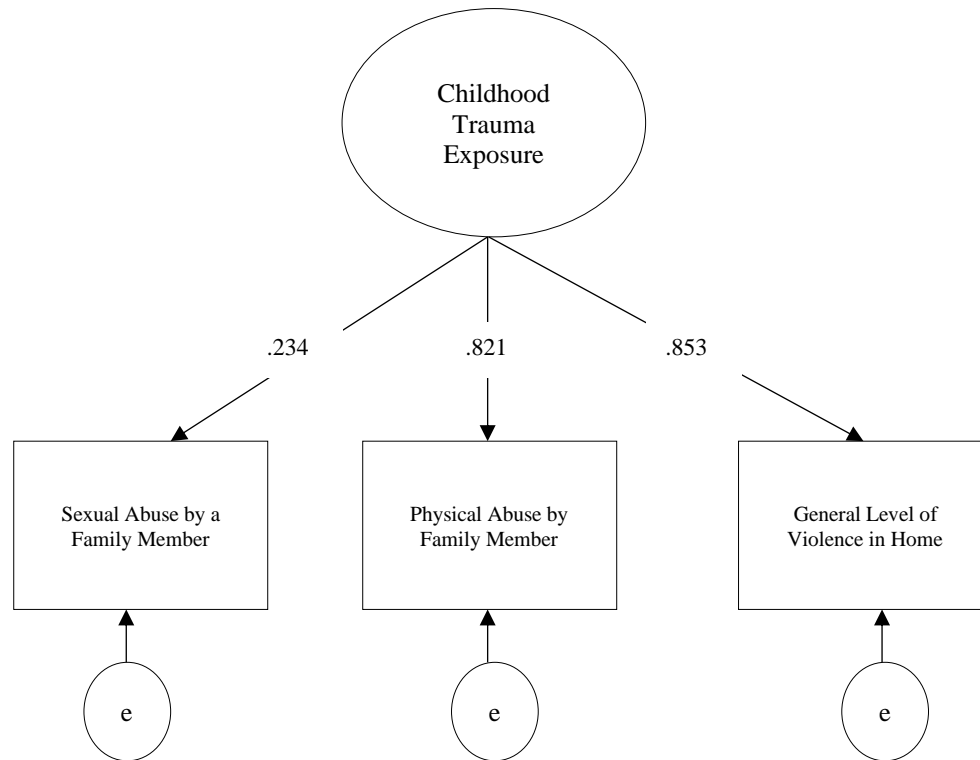
Confirmatory Factor Analysis Measurement Model: Male Childhood Trauma Exposure



Note. All modeled path coefficients are significant ($p < .05$).

Figure 4

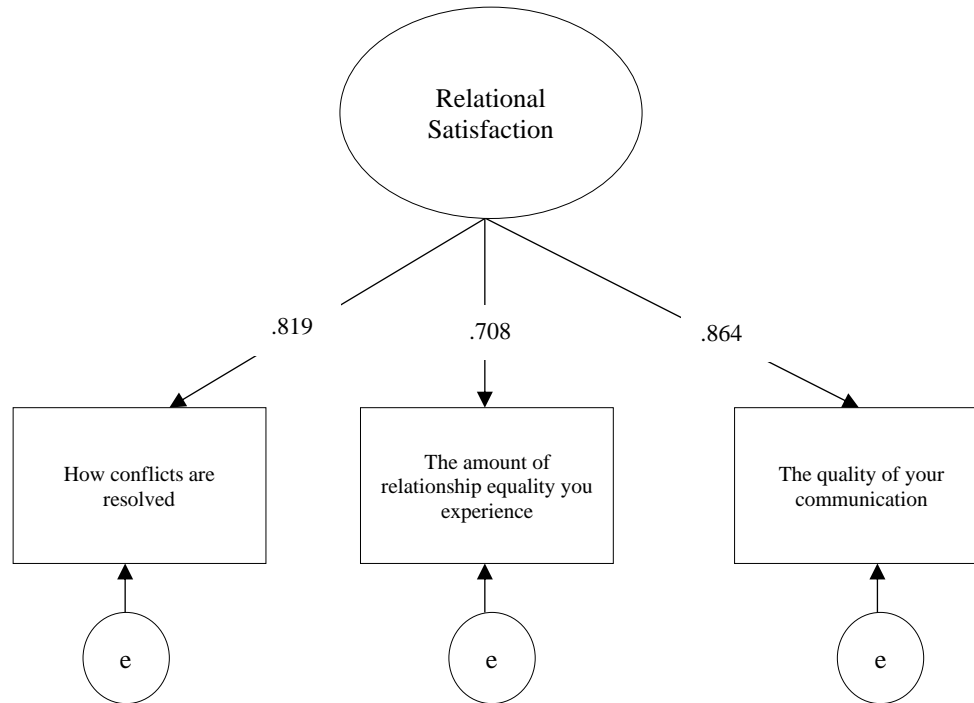
Confirmatory Factor Analysis Measurement Model: Female Childhood Trauma Exposure



Note. All modeled path coefficients are significant ($p < .05$).

Figure 5

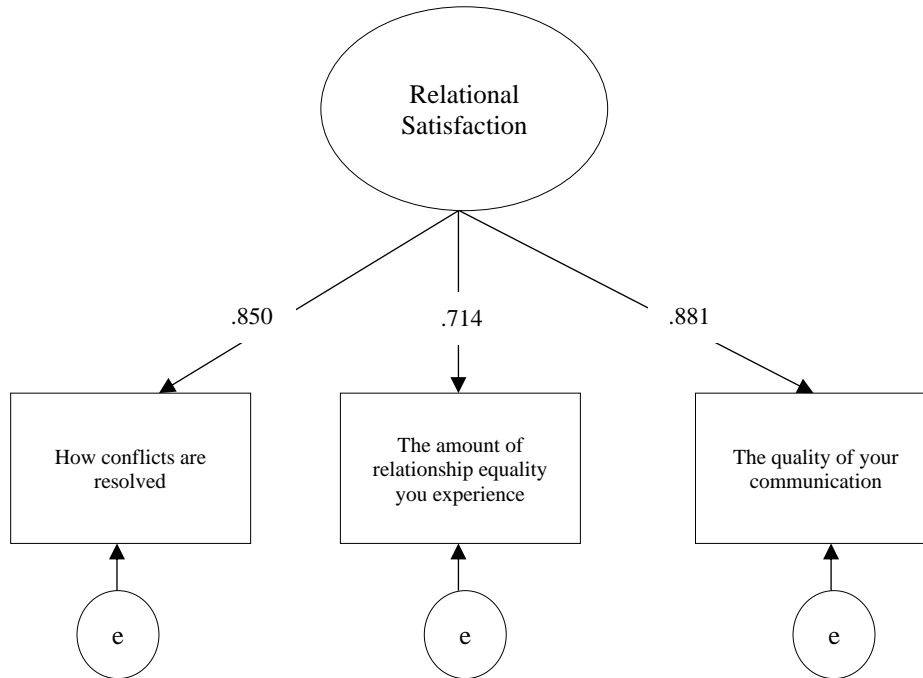
Confirmatory Factor Analysis Measurement Model: Male Relational Satisfaction



Note. All modeled path coefficients are significant ($p < .05$).

Figure 6

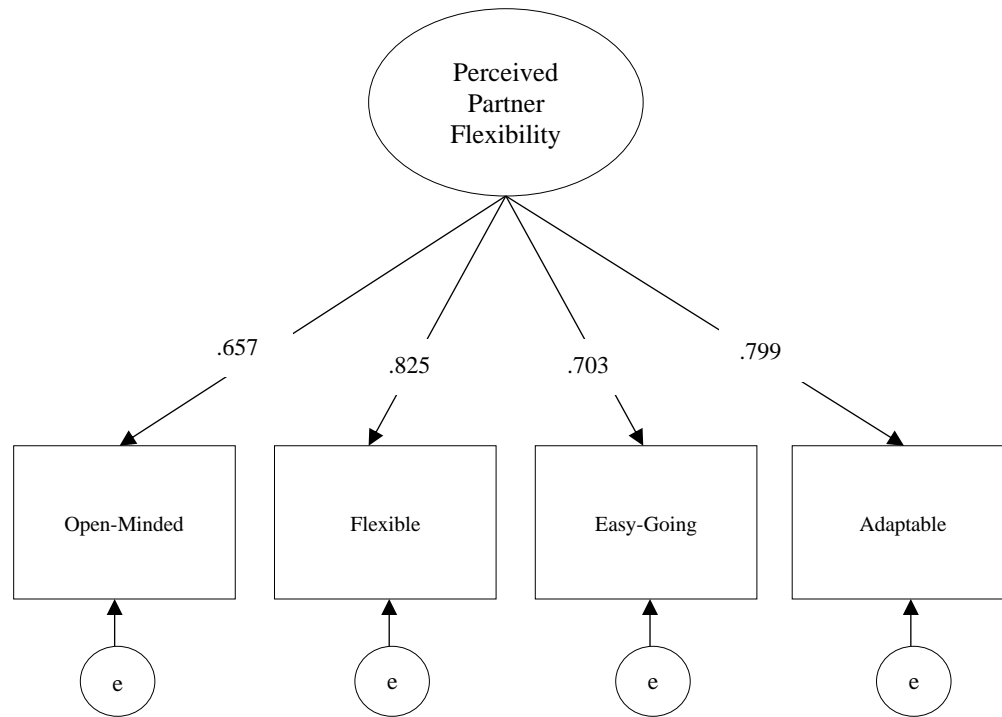
Confirmatory Factor Analysis Measurement Model: Female Relational Satisfaction



Note. All modeled path coefficients are significant ($p < .05$).

Figure 7

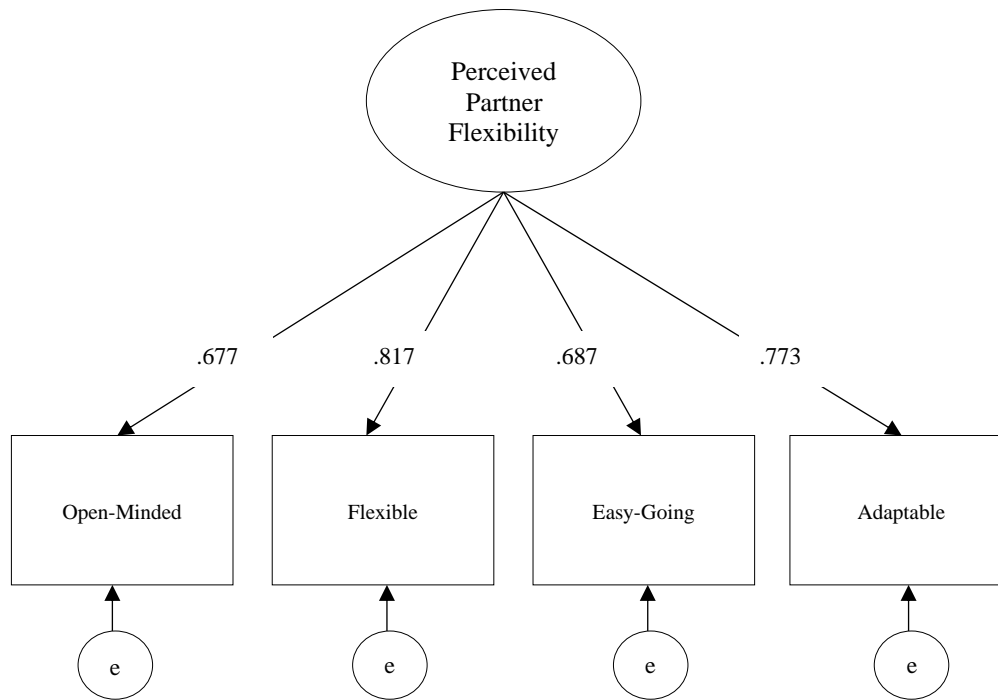
Confirmatory Factor Analysis Measurement Model: Male Perceived Partner Flexibility



Note. All modeled path coefficients are significant ($p < .05$).

Figure 8

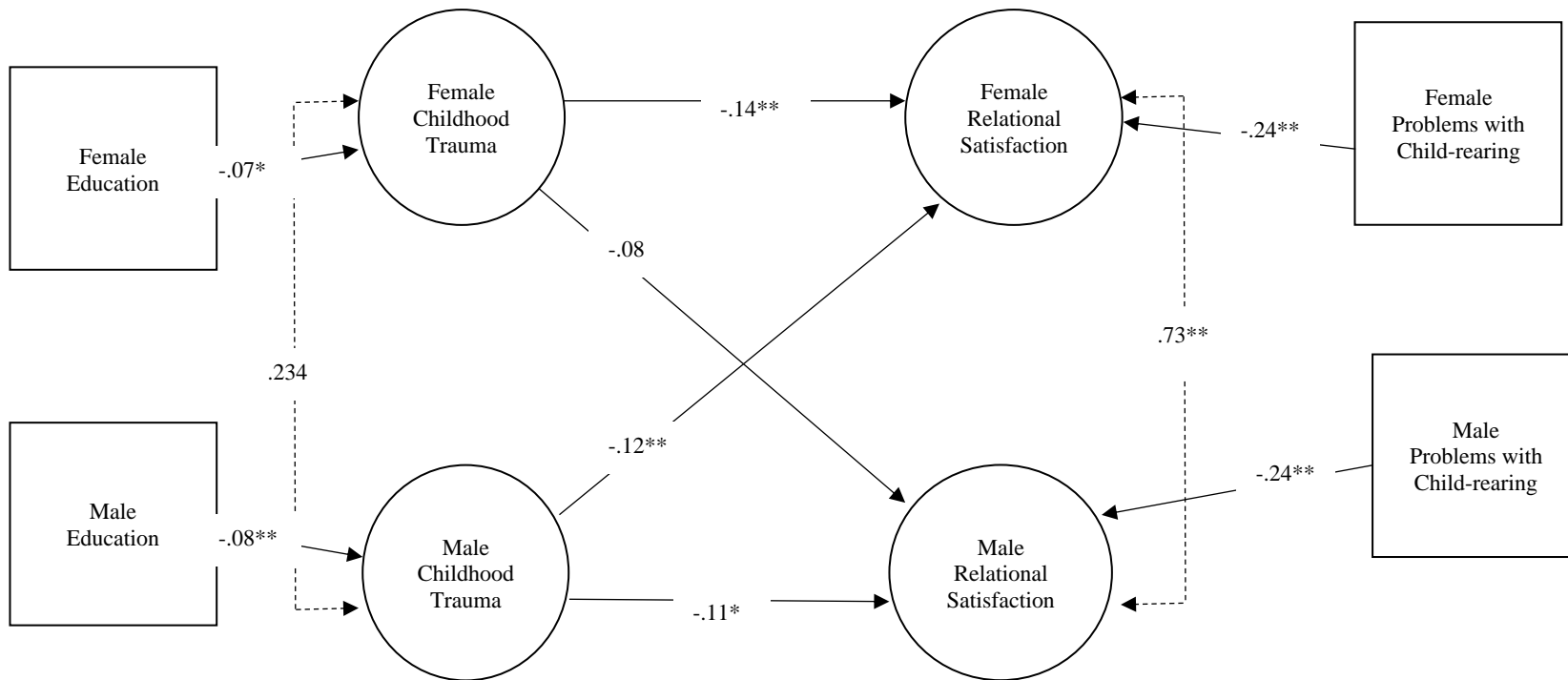
Confirmatory Factor Analysis Measurement Model: Female Perceived Partner Flexibility



Note. All modeled path coefficients are significant ($p < .05$).

Figure 9

Actor-Partner-Interdependence Model: STC Childhood Trauma and Relational Satisfaction

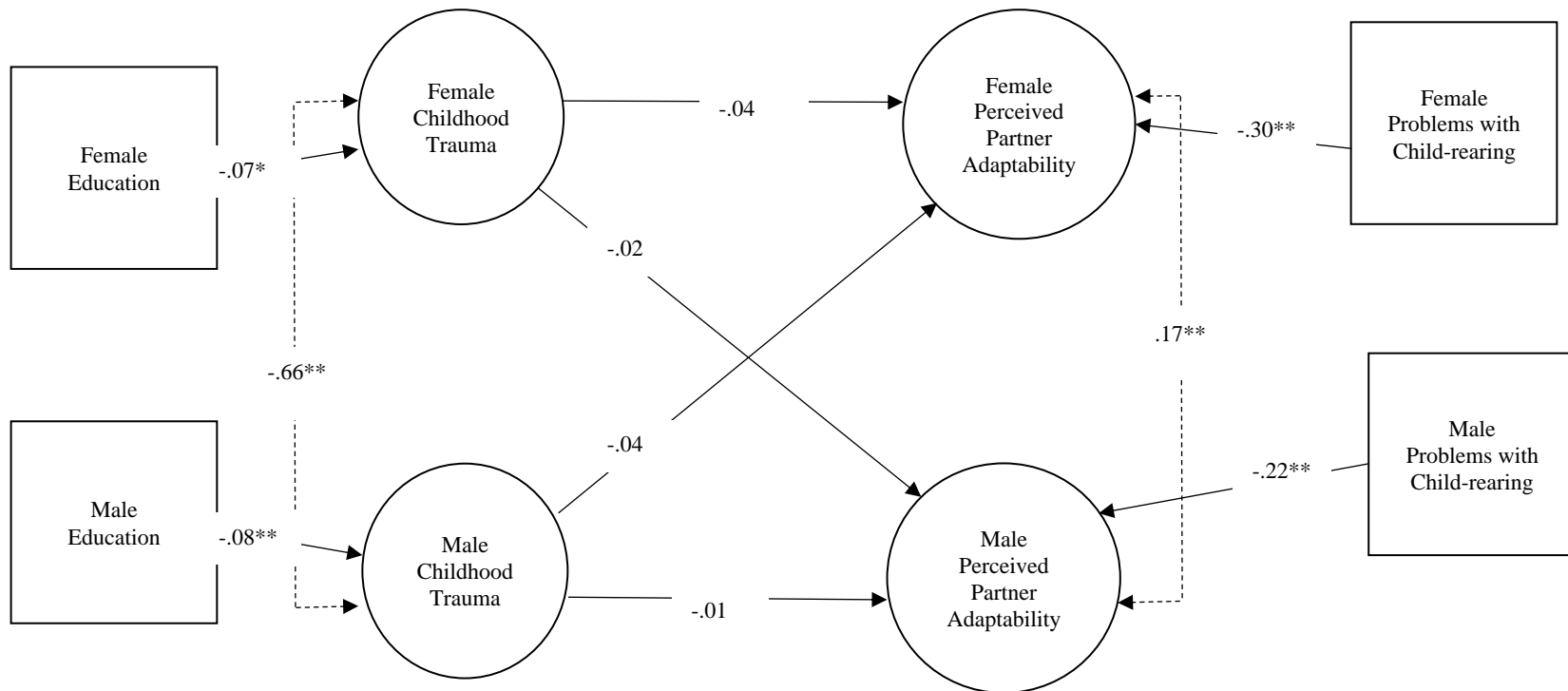


Note. This actor-partner-interdependence model shows the influence of childhood trauma exposure on relational satisfaction in STC, controlling for education and difficulties in child-rearing. Coefficients presented are standardized linear regression coefficients.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Figure 10

Actor-Partner-Interdependence Model: STC Childhood Trauma and Perceived Partner Flexibility

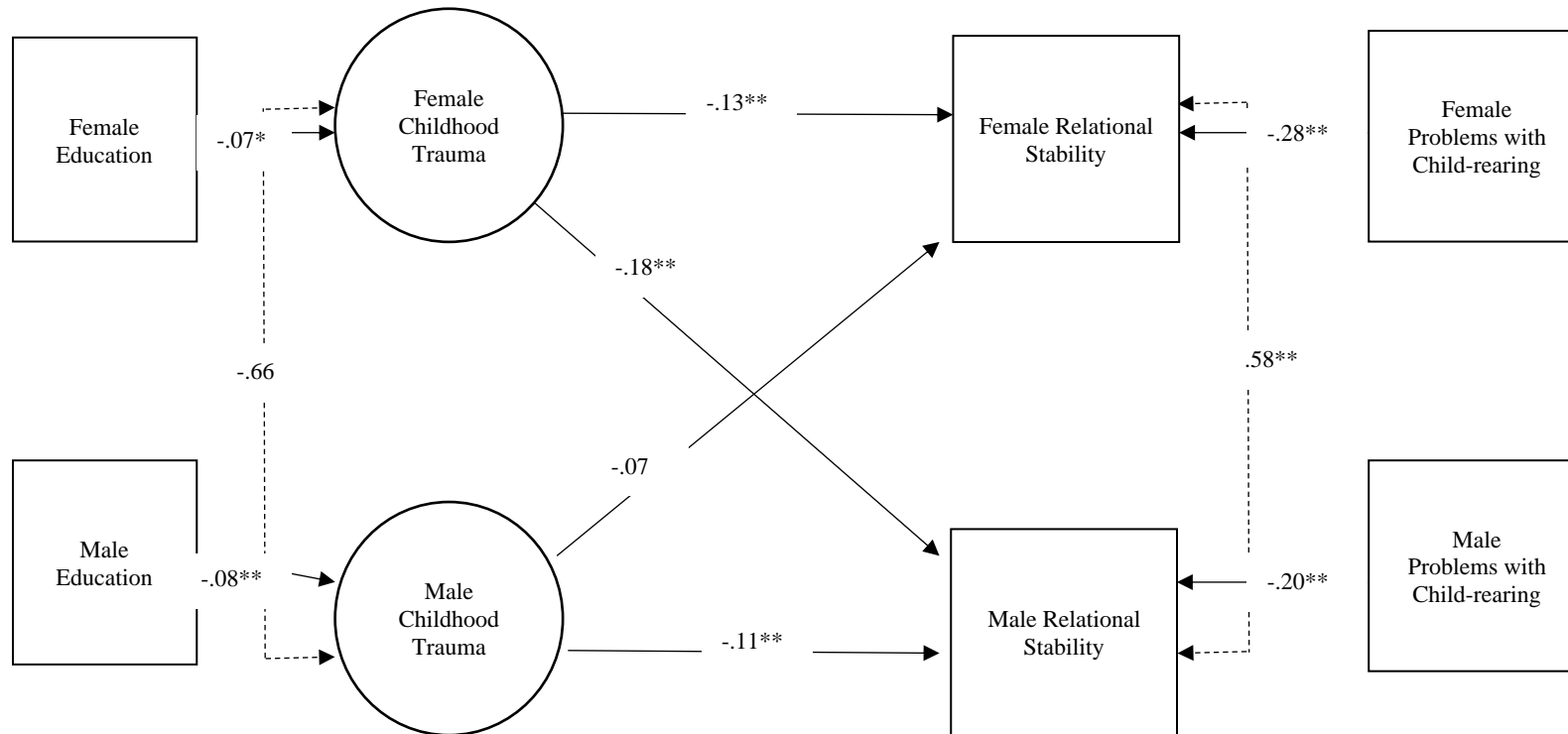


Note. This actor-partner-interdependence model shows the influence of childhood trauma exposure on relational adaptability in STC, controlling for education and difficulties in child-rearing. Coefficients presented are standardized linear regression coefficients.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Figure 11

Actor-Partner-Interdependence Model: STC Childhood Trauma and Relational Stability

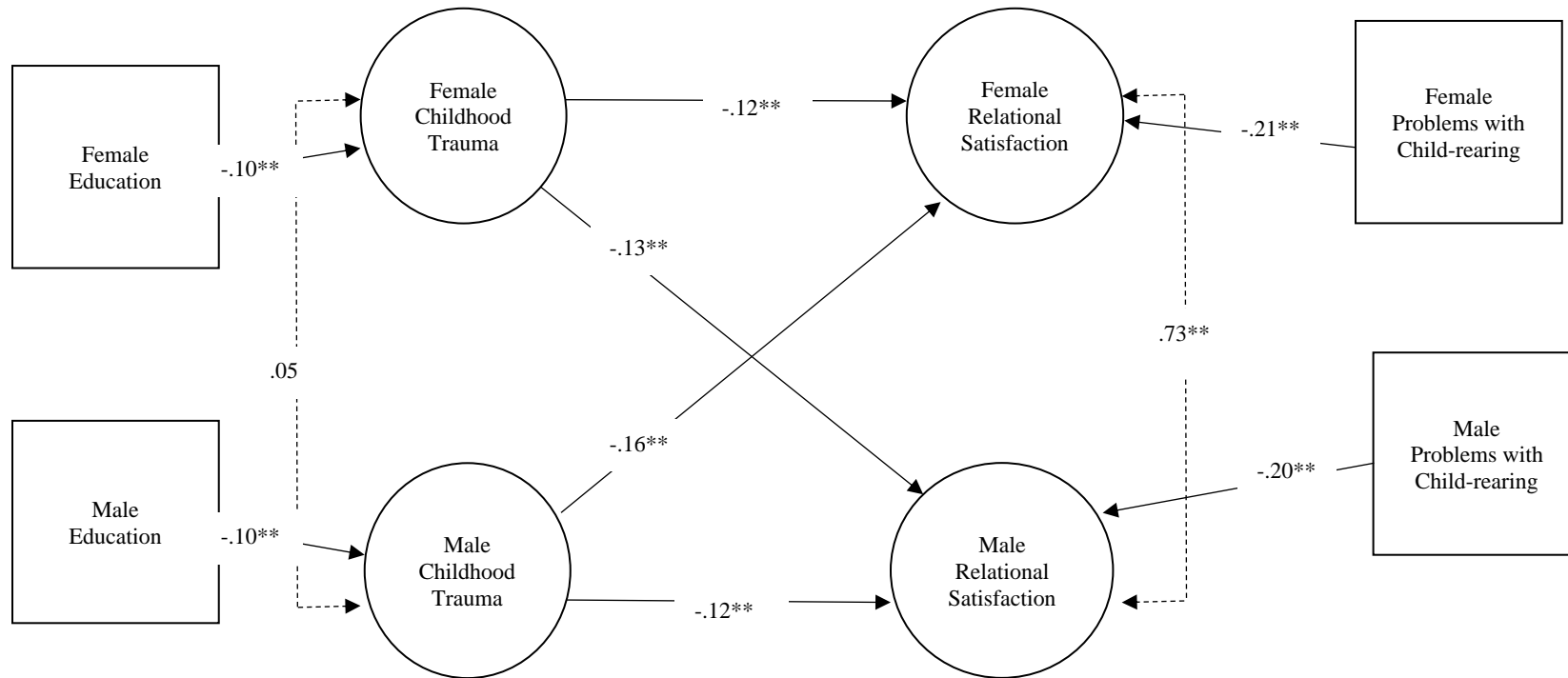


Note. This actor-partner-interdependence model shows the influence of childhood trauma exposure on relational stability in STC, controlling for education and difficulties in child-rearing. Coefficients presented are standardized linear regression coefficients.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Figure 12

Actor-Partner-Interdependence Model: DTC Childhood Trauma and Relational Satisfaction

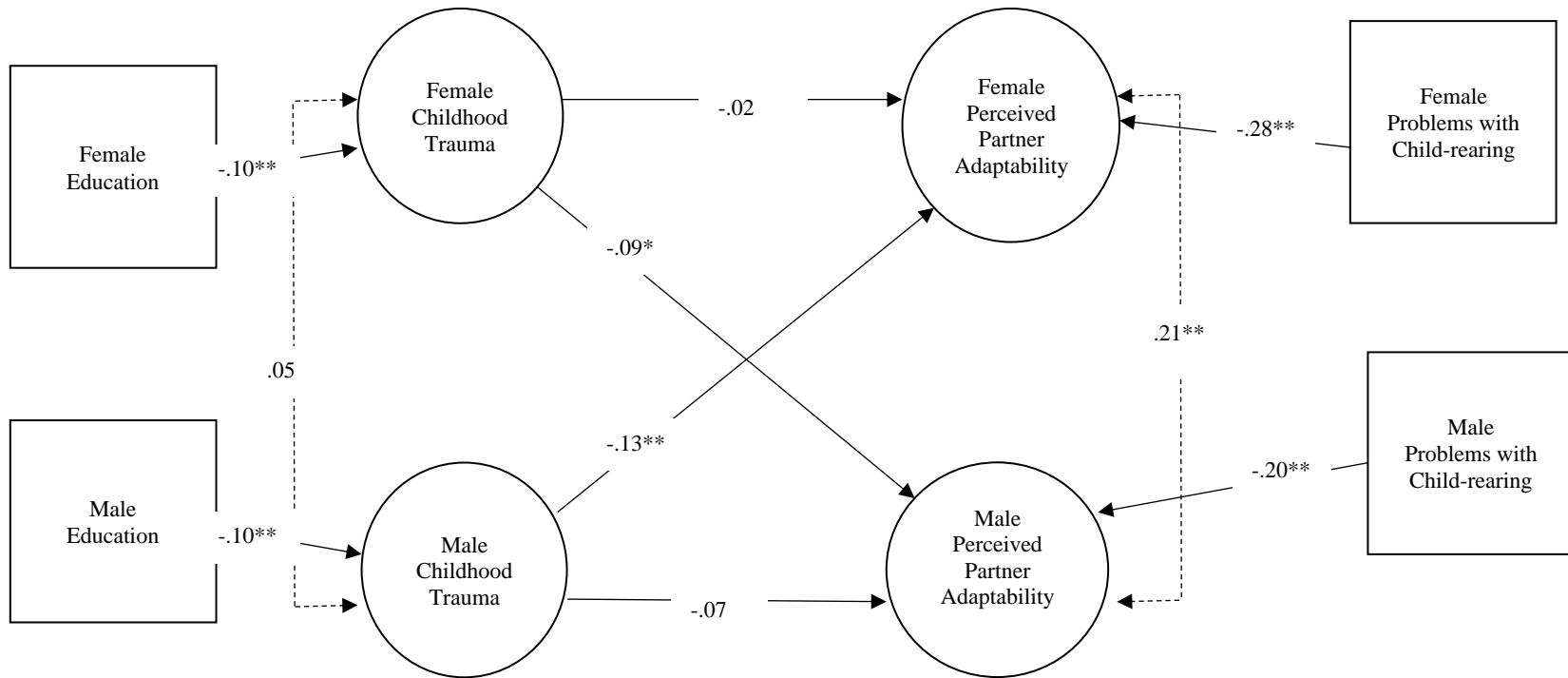


Note. This actor-partner-interdependence model shows the influence of childhood trauma exposure on relational satisfaction in DTC, controlling for education and difficulties in child-rearing. Coefficients presented are standardized linear regression coefficients.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Figure 13

Actor-Partner-Interdependence Model: DTC Childhood Trauma and Perceived Partner Flexibility

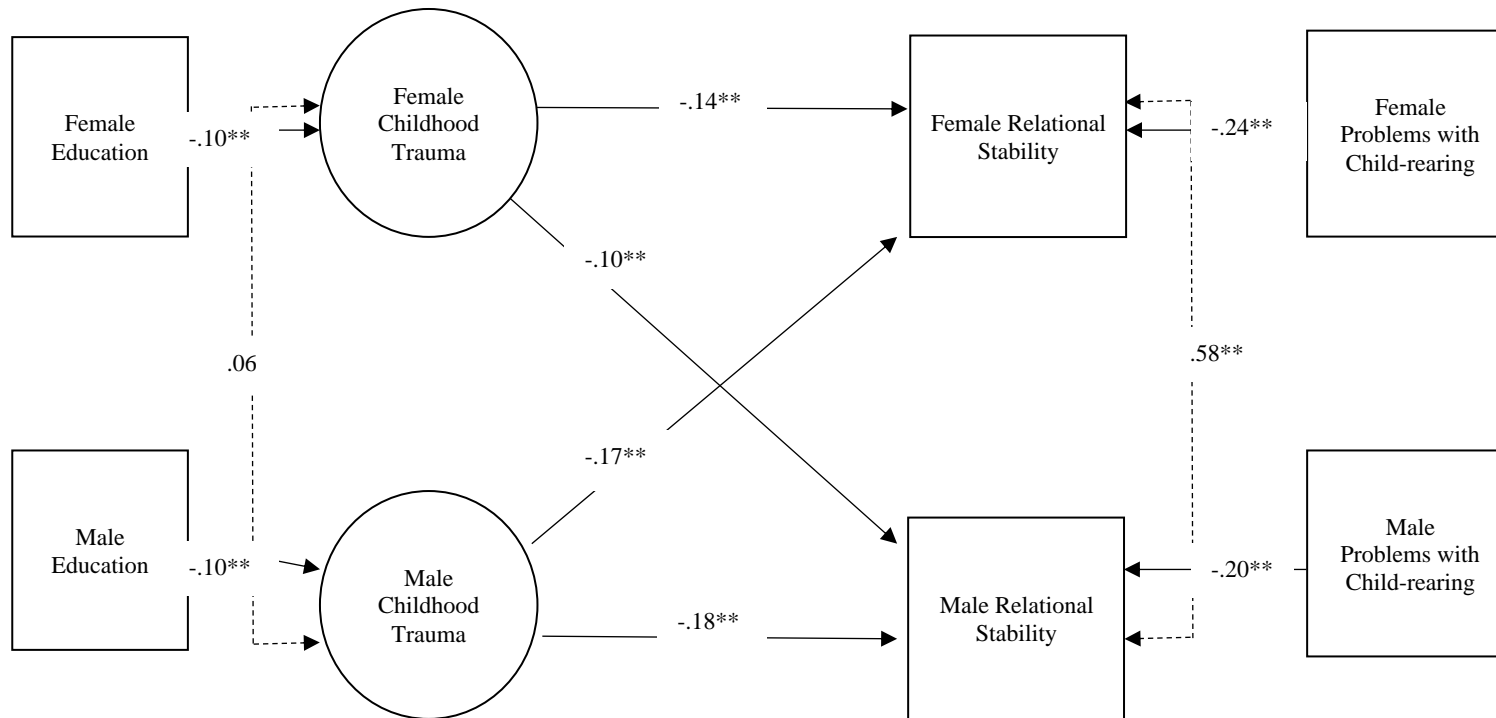


Note. This actor-partner-interdependence model shows the influence of childhood trauma exposure on relational adaptability in DTC, controlling for education and difficulties in child-rearing. Coefficients presented are standardized linear regression coefficients.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Figure 14

Actor-Partner-Interdependence Model: DTC Childhood Trauma and Relational Stability



Note. This actor-partner-interdependence model shows the influence of childhood trauma exposure on relational stability in DTC, controlling for education and difficulties in child-rearing. Coefficients presented are standardized linear regression coefficients.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Figure 15

Organizational Framework of Resiliency Processes for DTC-Reported Categories



Appendix A

Study 2: Reflexive Memoing and Bracketing

8/19/19 Meeting with Tai Mendenhall: Discussed plans for trustworthiness and bracketing prior to all data analyzing. Discussed and agreed on stage one analyses of broad themes for all groups (female reported strengths, weaknesses, male reported strengths and weaknesses)

9/01/19: Individual Data Analysis Stage One

Bracketing: Clinical approach and personality values: feminist, values compassions, humanistic, attachment trauma-informed, in a heterosexual marriage, cis-gendered

Thoughts:

- **Female Reported Relational Strengths**
 - Communication, common values, and love were throughout
 - I saw the word “ability” and “we both” suggesting resources and teamwork. This feeling that you have the capacity and the wherewithal to come together as a unit. I also saw laughter – I wonder if this is a common skill to cope with among these couples? Reminds me of the couples that I see clinically.
- **Female Reported Relational Strengths**
 - Communication, shared values, understanding, caring were throughout. Mention of financial stability came up multiple times which was interesting to me. Also, similarly mention of “we” or “we both” which makes me think of teamwork.
- **Female Reported Relational Weakness**
 - Communication – difficulty sharing; lack of discourse; emotional intimacy
 - Conflict Resolution – high anger; doesn’t feel listened to or respected; avoidance
 - Alcohol, impulsive behaviors – finances
 - Spoke a lot about past relationships and the impact onto current
 - Fear/Anxiousness
 - Finances
 - Sexual desire
- **Male Reported Relational Weakness**
 - Communication – difficulty; feeling unheard and disrespected
 - Conflict Resolution – different styles; anger; avoidance
 - Finances
 - Physical intimacy/ Sexual desire/drive
 - Understanding – current and past
 - Perceiving partner to unfairly not trust them
- **Questions that I have – What makes communication strong for some couples versus weak for others?**

09.09.2019: Individual Data Analysis Stage One

Bracketing: Clinical approach and personality values: feminist, values compassions, humanistic, attachment trauma-informed, in a heterosexual marriage, cis-gendered

Thoughts:

- Clinical work - love=respectful language which may aid in effective communication skills// the thinking clearly is interesting. I wonder if they mean during conflict resolution?

- *Improved suggests that it wasn't there before? Did something happen? Soothe each other-- deescalate or compassionate presence? How does that connect to trauma?*
- *(Loves me unconditionally + wants to be with me) often makes me think of anxious attachment...*

Questions such as:

- Is there an underlying insecurity?*
- trained to see negative/symptomology*
- Is this how you would do relationships?*
- And everyone is consensual and no one is getting hurt, is that bad?*

9/19/19: Consensus Meeting with Tai Mendenhall: Stage One. Discussed interpretations and overview of themes. Discussed interpretation questions and bracketing questions to ensure accurate representation of data. Agreed on stage one broad themes. Moved forward with stage two analyses of broad themes for all groups (female reported strengths, weaknesses, male reported strengths and weaknesses)

09.24.19 Individual Data Analysis Stage Two

Bracketing: *Clinical approach and personality values: feminist, compassionate, humanistic, trauma-informed, in a heterosexual marriage, cis-gendered*

Self of the Therapist –*what about my past? How does my professional and personal experience impact the interpretation? Asking myself questions throughout and taking breaks to remain focused. Being mindful of my own self-care.*

Thoughts:

- *Determination - determined to keep the relationship, to work on the relationship?*
- *“When we do talk respectfully to each other we learn a lot.”*
- *When we* depicts reflection and possibly a desire/working on*

9/30/19: Consensus meeting with Tai Mendenhall: Stage Two. Discussed overview of summaries and themes; added additional themes, and discussed interpretation and bracketing questions to ensure accurate representation of data. Agreed on stage two broad themes. Moved forward with stage three analyses of broad themes for all groups (female reported strengths, weaknesses, male reported strengths and weaknesses). Started creating lists of clustered similar themes and associated words.

10/06/19: Individual Data Analysis: Stage Three

As per consensus meeting -- Did searches of broad themes found in stage two to get a sense of exactly how often these themes are coming up in the data.

Thoughts:

- *“Communication has increased greatly over the past months. We're able to confide in each other feelings that before were scared to be mentioned...”*
- *I wonder how they got there? What feelings were scary? This made me smile to read.*
- *“Neither of us has substance abuse issues; We love each other; We are strong because we both grew up loved.” The mention of substance abuse issues makes me think that this has been an occurrence in this participant's life somehow. Could there be co-dependency?*
- *“Once a passionate relationship between passionate people, but has lost that intensity completely” -- How was the intensity or passion lost?*

10/21/19: Consensus meeting with Tai Mendenhall: Stage Three. Discussed overview of themes, added additional themes, and discussed interpretation and bracketing questions to ensure accurate representation of data. Agreed on stage three clustered enduring themes and associated words. Moved forward with stage four analyses of broad themes for all groups (female reported strengths, weaknesses, male reported strengths and weaknesses).

10/30/19: Individual Data Analysis: Stage Four

Thoughts:

- *Looking at the important how a partner feels (emotions, cognitions, physical sensations) appears to foster security and safety. “He is strong, dependable, caring, and loving. I feel very secure when I am with him. I know that he would do anything he could do for me.”*
- *Willingness is a risk. I highly value willingness in people. I wonder how that has created bias in perceived “unwillingness.” I wonder how these partners show “willingness” to others? What aspects are associated with that?*

11.19.19 Individual Data Analysis: Stage Four

Thoughts:

- *“Our love anchors us” vs. “Our love bonds us.”*
- *Respect is what makes conflict management and resolution successful*
- *Perseverance** instead of resilience*
- *I feel safe with this person — comfortable with this person. “I can be myself” you aren’t yourself unless you are in a safe place meaning that the person is safe.*
- *Comfort associated with trust*
- ***Safety and trust*

12/4/19: Consensus meeting with Tai Mendenhall: Stage Four Discussed overview of clustered themes, initial codes, and associated texts. Discussed interpretation and bracketing questions to ensure accurate representation of data. Agreed on stage four themes and discussed moving on to stage five analyses. Creating categories, themes, and associated quotes.

12.14.19 Individual Data Analysis: Stage Five

Thoughts:

1. *Working on male perspectives for relational strengths. I wonder if this will remind me of my current clients or friends or my own couple relationship.*
2. *I think about Aaron and Sophia – and the resiliency processes they have built with the recent death of Chuck.*
3. *I just went through and pulled out salient quotes. I am pretty confident we will have some new categories. HUMOR is such a huge thing – having fun together and making each other laugh was prominent. This makes a lot of sense to me even as I think about sociocultural ways that men may connect together as friends.*
4. *So often, responses discussed the ability to overcome so much*

12.15.19 Memoing with Dan Braughton: Discussed overall themes and asked for thoughts. I thought it would be helpful to hear his thoughts coming from heterosexual male perspective since that’s what half of my sample is comprised of.

Thoughts:

- *Humor/fun*
- *There is a playfulness, lightness*
- *—makes Dan think of “joy” fun, humor, laughter*

- *It makes me think of lightness. In the midst of the hard times, there is a lightness or playfulness that sparks joy— I wonder how relates to childhood trauma?*
- *We get to have this safe place to be playful together. We get to experience this.*
- *Willingness == it implies investment/dedication*
- *Knowing that your partner is invested is connected to respect and safety*
- *Willingness to work on problems*
- *You can't be invested in the relationship unless you are willing to actively work on the relational issues*
- *She is category — refers to the overall themes that make up the relational strengths*
- *We have a deep friendship — what does it mean for men to have a deep best friend?*
- *Relatable— we have similarities*
- *Likeness/Safety component— I can be myself and I am safe and they like who I am*

12.17.19: Consensus Meeting with Tai Mendenhall: Stage Five

Discussed overview of initial clustered categories, themes, subthemes and associated texts.

Discussed interpretation and bracketing questions to ensure accurate representation of data.

Discussed bringing on third auditor to ensure accurate representation of data. Agreed to move on to stage 6 analyses.

Thoughts:

- *Conflict with friends vs. partners*
- *Discussed themes with “She is” category. Discussed interpretations related to Gottman’s love map and house and relationship growth and stability overtime, the adoration system. In addition, discussed the intersection of adoration systems in recovering in trauma, the value of humor in the face of trauma*

12/30/19: Thoughts/Bracketing:

- *Stubbornness could be linked to lack of openness to try new things or to understand/empathize with other perspectives.*
- *Maybe stubbornness is linked to lack of investment or lack of buy-in?*
- *There seems to be a difference and link with management of stress and management of conflict in couples.*
- *I have so much compassion for these couples. There are themes that came up that I could see in my own marriage or things that Dan and I have worked through. There are others that I have seen clinical or personally via friends and family. I keep going back to thinking that people are just trying to do the best that they can with what they have.*
- *Safe to share feelings appears linked to investment. If partners perceive the other is not invested or committed, it seems that they are reluctant to express their thoughts or feelings.*
 - *It wouldn't surprise me if this (Safe to share feelings) is also linked to disrespect or punishment during conflict. – Literally the next quote embodied this. Well, that's good. At least my clinical and research info/gut is in line with the data is saying.*

1/21/20: Meeting with Vaida Kazlauskaitė: Discussed bringing on to be third auditor. Provided documentation and material for coding methodology, interrater reliability, and consensus meetings. Discussed and agreed on participation. Provide all excel spreadsheets of non-identified data for review.

1/28/20: Consensus meeting with Tai Mendenhall: Discussed overview of refined categories, themes, subthemes and associated texts. Discussed interpretation and bracketing questions to ensure accurate representation of data. Agreed on stage five/six and discussed resiliency processes associated with overall themes.

2/05/20: Consensus meeting with Vaida Kazlauskaitė: Discussed themes, interpretations, and nuances for stage three and four. Discussed and came to consensus for minor verbiage.

3/1/20: Consensus meeting with Vaida Kazlauskaitė: Discussed overview of clustered themes, initial codes, and associated texts for stage four and five. Discussed interpretation and bracketing questions to ensure accurate representation of data. Agreed on stage five.

3/11/20: Consensus meeting with Vaida Kazlauskaitė: Discussed overview of clustered themes, initial codes, and associated texts. Discussed interpretation and bracketing questions to ensure accurate representation of data. Discussed and came to consensus for minor verbiage and a few quotes that were misplaced. Agreed on stage six and discussed resiliency processes associated with overall themes.