

MAINTENANCE STRATEGIES IN DISTRESSED
RELATIONSHIPS: NEGOTIATING
BREAKING POINTS

By

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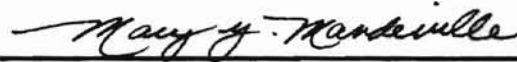
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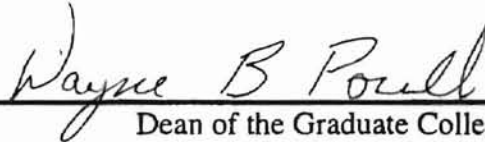
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

RELATIONAL TURNING POINTS

Individuals come together to form intimate relationships for a variety of reasons, including physical and emotional attraction, perceived similarities and differences, mutually unmet needs, relative status and values, and cultural/familial expectations (Brown, 1995). However, in an ever-accelerating, fast paced world, “change is perhaps the single most salient characteristic in most of our lives” (Brown, 1995, p. 5). As peoples’ lives change, their relationships with significant others change as well. These specific moments of change are known as relational turning points. “The turning point is a unit of analysis that potentially affords a rich understanding of relationship processes. Conceptualized as any event or occurrence that is associated with change in a relationship, the turning point is central to a process view of relationships. Turning points are the substance of change” (Baxter & Bullis, 1986, p. 470).

“BREAKING POINTS” AS RELATIONAL TURNING POINTS

Relational turning points may cause either positive or negative changes in a relationship. This paper focuses on turning points called breaking points. A breaking point is the specific moment in a distressed relationship at which one or the other person or both persons express a desire to de-escalate or end the relationship. A distressed relationship is characterized by a partner’s inability to adapt, accommodate and transform

tensions of relational life. It is the purpose of this paper to identify strategies generated by partners to sustain the relationship past a breaking point. This is important to communication scholars, since they are continuously examining the manner in which close relationships are maintained. There is a considerable amount of existing research on turning points in romantic relationships, but little of that research has focused on relational maintenance at the breaking point.

PATTERNS OF COMMUNICATION AT "BREAKING POINTS"

RELATIONSHIP TALK

Breaking points in relationships can often be identified by the pattern of communication between partners. Metacommunication, otherwise known as direct relationship talk, is a problem with intimate couples when their relationship becomes stressed. Studies in explicit metacommunication suggest that relationship talk is both infrequent (Wilmot, 1980) and unrelated to couple adjustment (Gottman, Markman, & Notarius, 1977). Topics are taboo or "off limits" when partners anticipate negative outcomes from its discussion (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985, p. 254). There are five reasons why people in relationships do not talk about topics that may threaten their relationship. The most frequent reason is 'Relationship Destruction'. Respondents feel that relationship talk would destroy the present relationship between the parties. For instance, if the partners had unequal commitment levels, the talk would force the parties to recognize this discrepancy, thereby destroying the relationship or scaring the other party away. Equity theory becomes relevant here. People stay in relationships as long as they are fair and

equal, and partners are most satisfied when they are rewarded on an equal basis (Stafford & Canary, 1991). The second reason is 'Individual Vulnerability'. Parties felt they would open themselves up and leave themselves vulnerable to get their feelings hurt. The third reason is 'Effectiveness of the Tacit Mode'. Parties feel that words are a weak substitute for what was 'just understood' in the relationship. The fourth reason is labeled 'Futility of Talk'. Partners recognize that the future of the relationship is uncertain and that there is nothing to conclude from talking about it. The fifth and last reason is labeled 'Closeness Cueing'. Respondents viewed relationship talk as something that occurs only in very close relationships (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985).

DIALECTICAL TENSIONS

Dialectical tensions occur in relationships when intimates become frustrated by their inability to communicate clearly and straightforwardly. Dialectics refers to the way people reason, analyze, and conceive social interaction (Montgomery, 1993). Intimate couples stubbornly insist that they should not have communication problems and sometimes fail to realize that intimate communication is a full time job that requires creativity and imagination. Uncertainty reduction theory applies to these conditions, because partners want to maintain, to develop, and to grow in their relationships by reducing uncertainty about one another. Events that increase uncertainty may constitute critical breaking points in relationships. Communication may also increase uncertainty if it calls into question knowledge that is already in place (Siegert & Stamp, 1994). Understanding partners' messages is critical to reducing uncertainty in intimate relationships. Partners must constantly adjust to the pulls and pushes of relational forces,

and often confuse matters further "by sending messages full of sarcasms, hyperboles, caricatures and exaggerations that befog or overdramatize" (Bach & Wyden, 1974, p. 149). Distressed couples communicate in ways that are incongruent with their expressed intentions. These awry messages create dialectical tension among couples when their relationship is threatened.

Partners describe dialectical tensions as 'feeling pulled', 'a conflict', or 'a really-in-the-soul-kind-of-hitting-the-heart-dilemma' (Goldsmith, 1990). Some of these oppositional forces include openness/closedness, autonomy/connection, and novelty/predictability (Baxter, 1990). Baxter found that openness/closedness was more intense in the initial phases of a relationship, while autonomy/connection and novelty/predictability are experienced more in later developmental stages. While disclosure is necessary for intimacy, it can create vulnerability. Successful relationships rely on the willingness of both parties to forsake individual autonomy; on the other hand, too much connection can destroy the relationship because the individual becomes lost in terms of their own identity. The third dialectical contradiction, predictability/novelty, means that just as relationships need predictability, they also need novelty (Baxter 1990). "Moments of emotional infusion, relational sightedness, interpersonal crisis and relationship milestones can be times of very quick transformations in the characteristics of the relationship without any accompanying changes in its basic identity" (Montgomery, 1993, p. 217). Other relational forces include affection/instrumentality, judgment/acceptance, expressiveness/protectiveness, ideal/real, public/private, and continuity/discontinuity (see Altman et al., 1981; Baxter, 1988; Bochner, 1984; Rawlins, 1992). In everyday felt dialectical tensions, couples can experience instantaneous switches

from one felt tension to another and discontinuous shifts from the influence of one oppositional force to another (Montgomery, 1993). As relationships constantly change, partners are constantly making adjustments to sustain or maintain the state of the relationship. "Partnerships must accommodate relationship unrest, inconsistency, contradiction, and tensions; not as negative, destructive elements, but as the very bases for relationship development and continuance" (Montgomery, 1993, p.221).

The changing nature of relationships requires adjustments in interaction patterns, especially in troubled relationships. Fisher (1987) makes this point when he distinguishes between consistency and continuity. "Consistency happens when partners 'resist change' and keep the same interaction patterns indefinitely" (Fisher, 1987, p. 347), "even as inevitable changes occur in their circumstances and surroundings" (Montgomery, 1993, p. 215). Ultimately, the relationship slowly disintegrates because both partners fail to adjust. "Continuity happens when partners adapt their interaction patterns to inevitable contextual changes in order to preserve the basic nature of the relationship" (Montgomery, 1993, p. 215). When relationships are troubled, however, neither partner's character reveals such singlemindedness. A direct confrontation is needed in which the initiator acts with sufficient clarity in communicating secret thoughts and feelings, so that the partner acknowledges the relationship is deeply troubled. If and only if both partners admit the seriousness of the problem can they negotiate (Vaughan, 1986).

ATTRIBUTIONS ABOUT "BREAKING POINTS"

Attribution theory centers on the perceived causes of behavior. It explicates the processes by which people come to understand their own behavior and that of others

(Littlejohn, 1996). During a particular relational breaking point, an individual may not be aware of all the forces that affect the relationship. For instance, communication in the relationship may decline because one partner has doubts, but unless that partner makes those doubts explicit, the other partner may not know why things are changing. With time, however, the partners may come to recognize these unknown forces and strive to make sense out of changes in their relationships (Lloyd & Cate, 1985). Grigg, Fletcher, and Fitness (1989) found that happy partners produce attributions that enhance relationship quality, whereas unhappy partners produce attributions that maintain their current levels of distress. "To be in a stable relationship is to be in one that is continually changing, adapting to, accommodating or transforming the tensions of relational life" (Montgomery, 1993, p. 215).

'Relationship thinking' is a central factor that influences the perceptions of personal relationship partners (Martin, 1991). Close relationships are full of interpretations, explanations, and evaluations as each partner attempts to understand significant relationship events. These attributions affect the development of interdependence and may eventually become causal conditions of the relationship itself (Kelley, 1983). According to Surra and Halperin (1983), significant changes, or turning points, in a relationship can be attributed to one of four categories. The first, *Dyadic*, involves reasons that are rooted in the interaction of the partners. These include redefinition of the level of involvement in the relationship, self-disclosure, conflict, interpersonal events with symbolic meaning, and recognition of change in the amount of interdependence. The second category is *Individual* attributions. These are reasons that originate in one partner's personal belief system, including timing or social-clock factors,

standards for a suitable partner, or relationship standards. *Social Network* reasons originate from interaction with third parties. This includes friends, family, other dating partners, or co-workers. The final category is *Circumstantial* reasons, which represent events over which both partners have little or no control. This includes events related to jobs, health, accidents, or any other factor that is external to the partners or the relationship (Lloyd & Cate, 1985).

A study conducted by Siegert & Stamp (1994) indicates three differences between the 'non-survivors' and the 'survivors' regarding the FIRST BIG FIGHT, a potential breaking point. First, non-survivors and survivors are distinguished by the attributions they make about a potential breaking point. Previous research has established that individuals make fewer dyadic and more individual attributions as a relationship declines (Lloyd & Cate, 1985). Non-survivors may need to attribute the downfall of the relationship to individual differences, while survivors, who are still in the relationship, would perceive a need to use dyadic attributions. Second, the first big fight can be cast both an uncertainty-reducing and an uncertainty-increasing event. For survivors, this potential breaking point renders mutual feelings of commitment. For non-survivors, it creates confusion about the state of the relationship. Conversation becomes tense and sporadic. Third, the big difference between the non-survivors and survivors was the way they perceived and handled conflict in their relationships. Survivors believed in a joint effort in problem-solving, some sacrifice from both parties, and the ability and/or willingness to adjust one's own ways of doing things in order to mesh with the partner's way of doing things. Non-survivors experienced lack of communication when problems

arose and the unwillingness on the part of their partners to discuss their problems openly with one another.

Responses to relational problems are important because such problems constitute an important conflict domain. Rusbult (1987) has identified four general responses that people might use in dealing with breaking points. The first response is *exit*: the couple separates formally, or individuals think or talk about leaving the relationship. The second approach is *voice*. This includes such actions as 'discussing problems' and 'suggesting solutions.' The third approach is *loyalty*: the partner decides to wait and hope that things will work out. Loyalty could also be shown in supporting the partner in the face of personal criticism. Finally, a person can use *neglect*—avoid the partner, refuse to discuss relational problems, and perhaps show hostility.

Adjustments in interaction patterns are critical at the breaking point and often a difficult task. Not all relationships will have a happy ending, however; Conville (1988) indicates four episodes a troubled couple will experience in the case in which the relationship was repaired and a transition was made to a higher level of intimacy. The episodes include *Anticipation* of a potential breaking point. Second, *Separation*, which marked an actual physical separation. Third, partners experience *Discovery*, both about themselves individually and about each other. The final episode marked the couples *Reconciliation*, or coming together again.

STRATEGIES FOR NEGOTIATING "BREAKING POINTS"

EVERYDAY TALK AND RELATIONAL MAINTENANCE

Duck (1994) indicates that the heart of maintaining a relationship lies in the everyday talk of relational partners. Although, this talk is often trivial and mundane, it presents a 'rhetorical vision'-an image of expectation for the future of the relationship. This rhetorical vision is accomplished by both style of performance and the mere occurrence of talk. Conversational devices, such as the use of playful banter, teasing, and positivity nurture romantic relationships. The mere occurrence of talk presents symbolic evidence that partners share an appreciation of the relationship. This evidence indicates two independent ways of looking at life and forms a connectedness between partners. In short, a multitude of everyday communicative interactive behaviors define and redefine the relationship.

A study conducted by Stafford and Canary (1991) revealed five relational maintenance strategies: positivity, openness, assurances, social networks, and sharing tasks. Positivity involves such behaviors as refraining from criticism and acting cheerful. Openness reflects the extent to which partners disclose their feelings about the relationship. Assurances show faithfulness and commitment to the relationship. Social networks involve support from family and friends. The fifth and last strategy, sharing tasks, refers to performing one's fair share of work in the relationship illustrating equity in operation.

Relational maintenance strategies synthesized from Dindia & Baxter (1987) and Tolhuizen (1989) are used by couples' to maintain/repair or to intensify dating relationships. Such strategies could be beneficial when used at the critical breaking point (see Table 1 for intensification and repair strategies).

According to Ayres (1983), those in breaking situations, when the other person is perceived as wanting the relationship to deteriorate, report the highest usage of balance strategies. Balance in the relationship concerns keeping the number of favors the same and keeping the emotional support levels constant. Assuming that one partner wants to keep a given relationship stable, whether the other partner in the relationship is perceived to want to keep the relationship stable, to want it to develop somewhat, or to want the relationship to deteriorate somewhat, should alter the way in which one goes about trying to accomplish his/her goal of keeping the relationship the way it is.

Finally, integrative communication is a positive maintenance strategy characterized by the expression of internal thoughts and feelings without placing blame on the partner (Anderson, Eloy, Guerrero, & Spitzberg, 1995). Integrative responses are valenced as positive or neutral (e.g., more affectively positive, more agreement, humor, validation, involvement, metacommunicative repair, and negotiation). Integrative talk applies to relational perception theory. "The expectations that form a relationship are the product of our perceptions of other people's behavior and of their feelings" (Littlejohn, 1996, p. 254). A person's behavior in a relationship is a direct result of his or her own perceptions of the other communicator. One's perception of a significant other is known as a perspective. A direct perspective is an actual observation and interpretation one makes about another person's behavior. A metaperspective is an assigned meaning to what one

imagines his or her partner is thinking or feeling (Littlejohn, 1996, p. 256). During a breaking point, partners will read into specific conversations and hyperbolize situations. Negative metaperspectives, such as mistrust or jealousy, can be accentuated resulting in a destructive, downward spiral. This regressive spiral begins when one partner does not understand the other and reciprocates negative behaviors. A negative response by one partner prompts the other partner to intensify his or her own behavior. Partners who behave sarcastically towards one another reciprocate negative feelings. This form of message exchange is relationally damaging to the couple and could possibly end the relationship. Since a healthy and satisfying relationship is greatly determined by perceptual accuracy, and metaperspectives may or may not be accurate; a relational maintenance strategy focuses on direct perspective only. Intimate partners can control the observations and interpretations their significant others make about them by using relational maintenance strategies.

In sum, there is a considerable amount of existing research on turning points and general maintenance of romantic relationships. However, because relationships are continually threatened by inevitable turn of events in our lives, research needs to address the issue of relational maintenance at the relational breaking point. During these points, communication becomes an important tool in reversing old thought and behavioral patterns. The present study focuses on the following research questions:

RQ 1: What types of maintenance strategies do individuals use to negotiate “breaking points” in distressed relationships?

RQ 2: What types of maintenance strategies lead to successful and/or unsuccessful outcomes?

CHAPTER II

METHOD

Subjects

The sample consisted of 187 respondents who referenced romantic relationships in which they currently were involved or had been involved in during the past. All individuals were taken from the student population of Oklahoma State University, the vast majority of whom are 18-25 years of age. Volunteers were solicited from the lower-division, Introduction to Speech Communication classes at Oklahoma State University. Students completed surveys concerning the successful and unsuccessful strategies they had used to negotiate breaking points in a past or present romantic relationship.

Research question 1 addressed the types of maintenance strategies that individuals used to negotiate “breaking points” in distressed relationships. Research question 2 addressed the types of maintenance strategies that led to successful and/or unsuccessful outcomes.

PROCEDURE

Students were surveyed in various classrooms on Oklahoma State University’s campus. Each survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete. The independent variable in this study is the type of maintenance strategy that individuals use to negotiate breaking points in distressed relationships. The dependent variable is the effect of the outcome of the maintenance strategy as successful or unsuccessful. There were two parts

to the survey, each of which asked a series of open-ended questions. Part A asked subjects to recall a relationship (current or past) in which they and their partner negotiated a breaking point successfully; that is, a time when the interaction between partners enabled the relationship to continue. Part B asked subjects to recall a relationship (current or past) in which they and their partner negotiated a breaking point unsuccessfully; that is, a time when the interaction between partners did not enable the relationship to continue (see Appendix A). Subjects could generate more than one behavioral and/or verbal strategy that was used at the breaking point. Respondents to whom both part A and part B were applicable proceeded to complete both sections.

A content analysis was performed on the relational maintenance strategies reported by subjects. After analyzing the reported strategies, subjects' statements were recorded. Any recurring statements became themes. Four coders looked at the themes individually to find similarities. This researcher utilized the coders' findings of similar themes. Similar themes were then grouped together into categories. Naming categories proved to be a challenging task. A category was carefully observed before assigning a name. Possible names of strategies were noted and left to ponder. Categories were put away for several days and then looked at again. This sequence of events occurred several times over the course of two weeks. Finally, an overall name was assigned to each category. The derived categories are entirely dependent upon the subjects' responses.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Research question 1 addressed the maintenance strategies used by individuals to negotiate breaking points in distressed relationships. Research question 2 addressed the types of maintenance strategies that led to successful and/or unsuccessful outcomes. A content analysis was performed on the relational maintenance strategies reported by subjects. Twenty-two successful strategies and twenty-eight unsuccessful strategies emerged from the analysis (see Tables 2 & 3 for descriptions, examples, and frequencies of relational maintenance strategies). The successful strategies that individuals use to negotiate breaking points are presented first. They are followed by unsuccessful strategies.

SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES

Trial Separation (70). Taking breaks or having cooling-off periods are essential for relationship development and continuance. A break from the relationship is a time for re-evaluation and identity adjustment (e.g., “time away makes you appreciate your partner”; “time alone makes you realize what you had and who you are without the other person”). Separations are characterized by pulling away, giving space to partner, or a time-out (e.g., “a time-out acquires realization of your feelings for partner”; “breaks give you time to resolve your own personal problems to prevent destruction to relationship”). Overtime, separation encourages better appreciation of the relationship (e.g., “doing your own thing for awhile away from partner makes you miss and appreciate them more”).

Warning (5). A warning is a threat to change a specific behavior of a partner. Often, a warning is given as an ultimatum (e.g., “either you stop talking to your ex-girlfriend or its over”; “if you do not give me space in this relationship, than I’m breaking it off”). Warnings serve as signs that this certain behavior needs to change now or the relationship may be terminated.

Direct Talk (59). Direct talk refers to open communication in the relationship. When partners have a problem in the relationship, they directly discuss that specific problem (e.g., “we sat down and had a discussion of our opposing views on religion”; “since our relationship was long-distance, we decided to make sacrifices to see one another on weekends”). Maintaining contact or ‘talk’ in the relationship is critical to its success (e.g., “we talked on the phone daily and I sent letters”; “she started calling me more to show how much she cares”). When partners feel uncertain about the relationship, a direct confrontation is needed (e.g., “we were growing apart so I confronted my partner to see what was causing this”; “suspected my partner of cheating, so I confronted him”).

Express Unhappiness (10). Partners should express their unhappiness in relationships to avoid any false attributions or assumptions (e.g., “told my partner I was unhappy and lonely, so he promised me he would move back during the summer”). One should express their needs when expressing unhappiness (e.g., “told him I needed just as much time as his career did”; “told him I needed to be complimented more and feel wanted in the relationship”). Although, when expressing unhappiness, partner’s should be discrete in expression (e.g., “don’t express everything”). Sometimes, too much expression of anger or “nagging” is damaging to the relationship. The same conversation

that is communicated over and over again is destructive to the relationship. Couples' should overlook some tense moments (e.g., "don't make it out to be more than it is").

Promise (1). A promise is a partner's 'word' to fulfill a desired action. Promises insure trust in relationships. As promises are kept in relationships, then trust between partners will escalate (e.g., "he promised to move back in the summer to start wedding plans"; "she promised to cut down on her drinking").

Focus on friendship (4). Focusing on the friendship you have with your intimate partner will decrease levels of expectancy. Often times, as intimate relationships escalate, partners will expect the same behavioral patterns exhibited by their partner in the initial phases of that relationship (e.g., "expected my partner to call me"). Levels of expectancy differ greatly between intimate relationships and casual friendships. In everyday casual friendships, one does not display this high level of expectancy. Overtime, as one experiences a friendship, one will continue to focus on his or her own behavior and not so much on his or her friend's behavior. The level of expectancy is critical to a relationship's success. As an intimate relationship is a friendship, it is important to avoid keeping score (e.g., "just picked up the phone and called whenever I felt like talking to my partner"; "remembered that my significant other was also my friend and treated him as I would my best girlfriend"). One of the best ways to preserve any relationship is to have a bad memory (e.g., "forget about who called who last, and just call"; "act, don't react"). Holding grudges and keeping tabs on who made the last mistake, who called last, who said what, when, and how only leads a couple into trouble.

Apology (7). Apologies are beneficial to relationships as partners' not only accept responsibility for their actions, but also can forgive one another for inappropriate behaviors (e.g., "he said he was sorry"; "she apologized for her drunken behavior").

Forgiveness (3). Forgiveness is a powerful tool in romantic relationships. Partnerships need to either be a 'win-win' situation or a 'lose-lose' situation. 'Win-lose' will not work because you may win the fight, but you will lose the war. Forgiveness goes a long way in strengthening a relationship (e.g., "to forgive is the best gift you can give yourself").

Persistence/Intensification (35). Persistence can communicate the importance of the relationship to a partner (e.g., "he wouldn't let go"; "she wouldn't give up on our relationship and was willing to do anything to save it"; "he continued to keep asking me out"). Intensification by a partner refers to everyday 'talk', initiating daily phone calls to inquire 'how the partner is doing', writing letters, giving gifts (e.g., "sent her candy and flowers"; "sent him cute little cards on a weekly basis"), surprising partner with something new out of the routine (e.g., "we went to a 'Bed and Breakfast' for the weekend"), and complimenting the partner.

Reassurance (7). Reassurance by a partner is showing faithfulness and commitment to the relationship in times of distress. Reassurances give an image of expectation for the future of the relationship (e.g., "told him I loved him and how important he was to me"; "we will work this out no matter what").

Seek Counseling (4). Counseling enhances partners' communication skills (e.g., "we went to counseling"). Often, partners are blind to any communication problems

because they are so involved in their relationship. Counseling provides an external source to look within the relationship and depict destructive behaviors.

Behavioral Change (35). Behavioral change refers to a recognized destructive behavioral pattern that has been adjusted and changed. Partners will see that a specific behavior brings about a negative response and will attempt to change this behavior (e.g., a partner's nagging behavior has driven their significant other away, to recognize and reduce nagging behavior would be a behavioral adjustment). Changed behaviors often occur over time in relationships as partners' learn to adjust their behavior to reduce conflict (e.g., a partner's drinking problem has led to an abusive relationship, to cease drinking all together would be a changed behavior).

Sharing Tasks/Equity (7). Performing one's fair share of work in the relationship illustrates equity in operation (e.g., "we worked together and both made sacrifices"; "we took turns driving to see one another on the weekends"). People will stay in relationships as long as they are fair and equal.

Focus On The Present (2). Individuals' must focus on the present (e.g., "try not to look so far ahead in future"; "try to enjoy each other now"). Partners' must make it a habit to not dwell on the past (e.g., "when arguing, deal with the issue at hand and don't bring up past quarrels").

Feign Disinterest (4). This strategy focuses on when a partner avoids showing any interest in a significant other, in hopes of making that significant other miss them and/or the relationship. The strategy is to show no interest or to avoid a partner at all costs (e.g., "agreed to the break-up because I knew she expected me to stop her, then she starts thinking"; "avoided seeing my partner at all costs"). Time alone makes the partner realize

what they had and are now missing by not being involved in the relationship. Feign disinterest correlates with the principle of least interest. This principle says that the person who shows the least interest in a relationship has the most power in that relationship.

Independence (5). Staying independent is characterized by maintaining outside friendships and having a life outside of the relationship. As relationships escalate, partners' identities' become one (e.g., "we" as opposed to "I"). Since couples' can lose themselves in terms of their own identity, it is important to still maintain the "I" and stay independent in the relationship. It is important to give space to your partner to prevent them from feeling smothered by the relationship (e.g., "told my partner I need more space, not as much togetherness").

Positivity (5). This strategy involves such behaviors as refraining from criticism and having an up-beat attitude by acting cheerful in the relationship (e.g., "a smile can go a long way"). As relationships develop overtime, partners' sometimes will take for granted that their significant other will always be there. Positivity and appreciation declines as partners' do not continue to put on a happy face when they see their partner.

Prayer (1). An external source such as praying for guidance in a relationship is very beneficial. Partners who need guidance in their relationships, might consider getting answers through the power of prayer (e.g., "lots of prayer" "prayer is awesome").

Avoid Assumption (3). Partners' should avoid making assumptions in relationships (e.g., "why suspect your partner of cheating if he or she has no past history of that"; "don't make something out to be more than it really is"). Too much speculation only leads a couple into trouble (e.g., "thinking too much and analyzing or reading into things only causes problems"). Also, making inferences based on past behavior can be a

problem (e.g., “assumed my partner was interested in others based on his behavior the first year that we dated even though there have been no signs of this the last two years”).

Dishonesty (1). Sometimes, lying or just not telling your partner the full story will save the relationship (e.g., “lied to my partner to avoid breaking up”; “knew my partner would not agree with some things I’ve done in the past, so I chose not to disclose all information to save impression”).

Honesty (7). Honesty is always the best policy. Being truthful about personal feelings is only fair to a partner (e.g., “knew if we didn’t slow things down that my partner would end up getting hurt”). Being honest with your partner shows respect for the relationship (e.g., “told my partner if we were to save this relationship, then I needed some time alone to deal with some personal issues”).

Accepting Differences (5). This strategy involves recognizing behavior patterns and accepting them. Interpreting your partner’s behavior in a situation based on a past similar experience allows you to make adjustments in your own behavior (e.g., “my partner, who was in graduate school, would act very cranky and distant towards me before any big test...this caused us to get in huge fights...overtime, I recognized this behavior and just gave him his space when I knew a big test was coming up”). Being able to recognize when your partner is in a stressful situation and accepting differences (e.g., “accepting that people take different perspectives on things”; “recognizing that people do things and behave differently because of their family cultures”; “knowing that no two people see or think alike”; “rather than trying to change your partner, just focus on your own behavior”).

The unsuccessful strategies that couples' use to negotiate breaking points are as follows:

UNSUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES

Seek Advice (3). Advice sought after by partner's in distress needs to come from an unbiased source. If close family and friends have seen a partner hurt in past situations, then advice to that partner will often be discouraging in terms of the relationship (e.g., "my mother had seen me hurt over and over time and again in this relationship"; "my friends didn't like him anyway and missed me going out with them for girls night out").

Direct Talk (48). Direct talk refers to open communication in the relationship. When partners have a problem in the relationship, they directly discuss that specific problem (e.g., "we rarely get to see each other, this isn't working"; "tired of you trying to run my life and demanding all of my time"). Maintaining contact or 'talk' in the relationship is critical. When partners feel uncertain about the relationship, a direct confrontation is needed. Direct confrontations can put partners' on the defense resulting in anger.

Delay (9). Late intensification seems to be a failed strategy when negotiating a breaking point. A partner will realize that he or she does want the relationship and will come around too late. This everyday phone calling, sending letters, and giving gifts does not work past a certain point (e.g., "flattery will not get me back"). Giving too much space to your partner in times of distress gives them a chance to start getting over the relationship (e.g., "really wanted to get back together, but by the time my partner came back around, I had other interests"). Some couples' decide on counseling too late (e.g.,

“our problems should have been addressed long ago and now there is too much water under the bridge”).

Neglect (22). This strategy refers to low maintenance, lack of attention, lack of effort, and no sacrifice in a relationship. Low maintenance in a relationship is a decrease in continuance to keep the relationship at an expected level (e.g., “he stopped calling as much”). The lack of attention given to a partner refers to a decrease in compliments and actively doing things together as a couple (e.g., “he never tells me I look nice”; “as if he even notices me”; “never wants to go out and do things”). The lack of effort given by a partner refers to a decline or cease in reciprocation. No sacrifice by a partner refers to an unwillingness to work at the relationship (e.g., “he was always too busy with school”; “unwilling to work at long-distance relationship”).

Withdrawal (86). Taking breaks or having cooling-off periods are critical at the breaking point if all communication ceases. Often times, partners will pull away, withdraw, or just take a time-out from the relationship. A break from the relationship is a time for re-evaluation and identity adjustment. This break may not be negotiable if partners break contact completely. The old saying rings true: ‘out of sight, out of mind’.

Verbal and Behavioral Obsessions (8). These strategies are characterized by nagging, pouncing, and obsessive behavior. Consistent metacommunication, or direct relational ‘talk’, is destructive to couples’. Nagging refers to having the same conversation over and over again. Pouncing behavior is when a partner constantly blames their significant other by saying the word ‘you’ (e.g., “you never do the dishes”; “you always ignore me in conversation with others”; “you never take out the trash”). Pouncing is very destructive because it puts a partner on the defense. Obsessive behavior refers to

stalking partners and showing up unannounced (e.g., “he called and stalked me for two years”; “my partner would just show up unexpected”).

Intensification (8). Intensification by a partner refers to everyday ‘talk’, initiating daily phone calls to inquire ‘how the partner is doing’, writing letters, giving gifts (e.g., “sent him a bouquet of balloons congratulating him for his new job”), and surprising partner with something new out of the routine. Although intensification is a good strategy, it does not work when the partner already has his or her mind made up that the relationship is over, and when the intensification behavior is so much of a drastic change that it seems unbelievable (e.g., “could see right through his flattery”).

Overdependence (11). Overdependence in a relationship is characterized by losing independency, not giving space to partner, and expressing insecurities. As relationships escalate, partners’ identities become one (e.g., “we” as opposed to “I”). Individuals’ become too dependent on the relationship both losing themselves in terms of their own identity and losing focus of their own individual life. It is critical that couples’ maintain the “I” and stay independent in the relationship. Staying independent is characterized by maintaining outside friendships and having a life outside of the relationship. Too much togetherness is an indicator that partners’ are not giving enough space to their significant other. Partner’s begin to feel smothered if they do not have time for themselves away from the relationship. Insecurity is a sign of being overdependent in a relationship. Characteristics of insecurities are jealousy and trying to control your partner’s life (e.g., “demanded to know where I was going”; “demanded to know what time I would be back”).

Express Unhappiness (9). Expression of unhappiness is a discussion of unhappy feelings about a specific situation. Often partners are not direct when expressing their unhappy feelings (e.g., “dropped many hints about how stale the relationship was”). If one is not direct with his or her partner and the partner never gets the hint, then resentment will push the relationship into a downward, destructive spiral. Sometimes, too much expression of anger or “nagging” is damaging to the relationship. Partners are not discrete and will express all that is on their mind (e.g., “my partner nags me about everything”). Couples do not overlook tense moments and will repeatedly have the same conversation over and over again (e.g., “all we do is talk, talk, talk, about the same thing”).

Uncertainty/Skepticism (4). Uncertainty/Skepticism refers to the expression of doubt and low assurances in the relationship. Negative verbal expression towards a long-distance relationship (e.g., “don’t know if this will work”) or negativity about a partner (e.g., “you can’t change”). Such responses are destructive to couples.

Lack of Reliability (25). Lack of reliability refers to no trust replenishment and unkept promises. Promises that are broken (e.g., “he promised to never cheat on me again, and then it happened again”) will distance couples’ more and more as time passes. When a partner gives his or her ‘word’ and that ‘word’ is broken, then that partner is not trustworthy or reliable. Lack of trust from past experience, dishonesty among partners’, and repeated bad behaviors in the relationship cannot be replenished over time.

No Behavioral Change (20). No behavioral change refers to both recognized and unrecognized destructive behavioral patterns that are not adjusted to or changed. Partners may see that a specific behavior brings about a negative response and will not succeed in

changing this behavior (e.g., “she wanted to spend more time together than I did, we could not agree on a happy medium”). A behavior that is not changed overtime in a relationship will increase conflict between partners’ (e.g., “she simply tried but could not change”; “couldn’t get over the fact that he agrees with and has dated interracially before”).

Resignation (18). Resignation refers to the lack of persistence to keep a relationship (e.g., “just gave up and was not patient to wait on partner”), acceptance of termination (e.g., “decided to just let go”), and apathy (e.g., “just wasn’t interested enough to keep it going”). Resignation occurs when a partner comes to the realization that “this relationship will not work.”

Warning (11). A warning is a threat or demand to change a specific behavior of a partner. Often, a warning is given as an ultimatum (e.g., “come see me or it’s over”; “if you do drugs, then it’s over”; “if you move, then it’s over”; “this fighting must stop or it’s over”). Warnings are seen as a demanding behavior (e.g., “wanted too much from me”; “demanded her way”).

Lack of Appreciation (5). Lack of appreciation is a problem among couples dating for a long period of time. As relationships develop, partners sometimes will take for granted that their significant other will always be there and appreciation declines. Often, one partner does not take this issue seriously (e.g., “explained feelings of not being a priority and feeling appreciated, he took me as overreacting”). It is not until after a termination that partners will realize their actions and feelings of unappreciation in the relationship.

Lack of Understanding (4). Lack of understanding in one's communicative pattern will break a relationship. A lack of understanding among couples' occurs inevitably (e.g., "until you walk a mile in another person's shoes; there will always be a lack of understanding"). However, a partner's failure to attempt to try to understand or to sympathize with a significant other's situation is often not perceived as excusable.

Failed Apology (2). Although apologies can be beneficial to relationships, sometimes they are simply received too late. When one accepts responsibility for his or her actions, it is easier to forgive that person. If an apology is received too late, it is more difficult for a partner to forgive and go back to that person because too much hurt and resentment has built up.

Lack of Forgiveness (4). When one does not accept responsibility for his or her actions immediately, or if these actions are repeated, resentment starts to build. Often, partner's are too hurt and angry with their significant other to forgive.

Immobilization (10). Immobilization refers to one's resistance to express true feelings for fear of getting hurt (e.g., "held in feelings"; "too stubborn to express how I felt"; "blocked out my true feelings").

Scorekeeping (2). Scorekeeping is the opposite of 'focus on friendship', a successful strategy. Often times, as intimate relationships escalate, partners' will expect the same behavioral patterns exhibited by their partner in the initial phases of that relationship. Couples fail to focus on the friendship aspect of their romantic relationship and levels of expectancy increase as a result. Couples will hold grudges and keep score of who made the last mistake, who called last, who said what, when, and how.

Lack of Cooperation (6). Lack of cooperation refers to a partner's refusal to listen and stubbornness in the relationship. Often, partners' stubbornly insist that they do not have communication problems. External help, such as counseling, is avoided because partners' fail to realize that communication is a full-time job requiring creativity and imagination.

Lack of Patience (1). One's incapability to bear affliction indicates a lack of patience. Patience is a virtue in relationships. One is always in a hurry to go on to the next level in relationships. If you are impatient, you may lose out all together (e.g., "wanted to marry her eventually, but I wasn't out of school yet; she was ready to get married right then so we terminated the relationship").

Raised Expectations (1). Partners have expectations that are formed in the initial stages of a relationship. The behavior exhibited by a partner in the initial stage of a relationship will set the norm or standard for that relationship. As a relationship escalates, a partner will anticipate or possess raised expectations of the other partner's behavior based on initial expectations. Raised expectations over the course of a relationship can lead a couple into trouble because partners' put on their best face in the beginning of a relationship. When a relationship begins, one partner usually gives more than the other partner. Over time, the other partner must start to give back or the relationship will deteriorate. A partner can get used to being the receiver in the relationship and problems begin (e.g., "my partner called me everyday the first year we dated then slowly stopped calling as much, I felt he should be the one to always call and I really had a difficult time calling him because I was so used to the standard that had been set").

Guilt Trip (1). A guilt trip occurs when a partner places responsibility of wrongdoing on another partner. A partner can usually see right through this tactic (e.g., “she cried and tried to make me feel guilty”). A guilt trip is seen as a manipulative tactic.

Inconsistency (3). When one’s behavior is hot and cold, a partner recognizes this inconsistency (e.g., “she would be real nice and then get angry”; “my partner would start to intensify and then pull away”).

Lack of reciprocation (2). Lack of reciprocation refers to one’s failure to respond in kind. Characteristics such as refusal to return phone calls, return letters, or return e-mail messages indicate negative reciprocity. The effort to resolve relational problems becomes one-sided when there is no reciprocity.

No Sharing Tasks/Lack of Equity (1). Not performing one’s fair share of work in the relationship creates a lack of equity. Some indicators of inequity (e.g., “not taking turns driving to see one another on weekends”; “not taking turns doing the dishes”). People will not stay in relationships as long as they are not fair and equal.

Avoidance (9). Partners sometimes refuse to admit there are problems in their relationship (e.g., “We pretended we were happy”). Problems are usually not addressed among couples’ for fear of breaking up. However, over time, avoidance builds tension among partner’s resulting in termination.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study examined the strategies that individuals used to negotiate breaking points and the strategies that led to successful and/or unsuccessful outcomes. Past studies in communication research have addressed relational maintenance in general, but not specifically at the breaking point. A content analysis was performed on surveys completed by participants resulting in twenty-two successful strategies and twenty-eight unsuccessful strategies. Recurring statements revealed by individuals became themes. Any related themes were grouped together into categories and became maintenance strategies.

It is important to note some contextual and strategic aspects that might account for differences in categories that existed both in successful and unsuccessful strategies. *Trial separation* (70), as a successful strategy and *withdrawal* (86), as a unsuccessful strategy are both characterized by taking breaks or having cooling-off periods. A break is a time for re-evaluation and identity adjustment. Although, the difference between a trial separation and withdrawal is whether communication ceases all together or will sustain at some point during the break. Subjects' responses indicated that during a trial separation, the time spent away from the partner encourages appreciation for the relationship, but contact is sustained at some point. During a withdrawal period, a partner will completely pull away from the relationship and all communication ceases.

Direct talk, both as a successful strategy (59) and an unsuccessful strategy (48), has a significant difference. Direct talk refers to open communication in the relationship, and a partner's communicative behavior is critical to the relationship's success. When

partners have a problem in the relationship, they directly discuss that specific problem. However, a partner's verbal and behavioral communicative pattern is critical when initiating a direct confrontation. Subjects' responses indicated that destructive communicative styles, such as putting a partner on the defense, can result in anger.

Express unhappiness, both as a successful strategy (10) and an unsuccessful strategy (9), has some significant differences. Expression of unhappiness is a discussion of unhappy feelings about a specific situation. Although, one should express their needs when expressing unhappiness, he or she must possess the following characteristics of expression. Subjects' responses indicated that partners must be direct and discrete when expressing unhappiness. If one is not direct with his or her partner and the partner never gets the hint, then resentment will push the relationship into a downward, destructive spiral. Also, partners must be discrete in expressing all that is on their mind. Too much expression of anger or 'nagging' is damaging to the relationship. Couples' must overlook some tense moments and refrain from repeatedly having the same conversation over and over again.

Intensification, both as a successful strategy (26) and an unsuccessful strategy (8), has significant differences. Intensification by a partner refers to everyday 'talk', initiating daily phone calls, writing letters, giving gifts, complimenting partner, and surprising partner with something new out of the routine. Intensification by a partner must be exhibited in the early stages of a breaking point or at the precise point that a given turning point turns into a breaking point for the couple. However, even though intensification can be a good strategy, subjects' responses indicated that intensification does not work when the partner already has his or her mind made up that the relationship is over, and when the

intensification behavior is so much of a drastic change that it seems unbelievable to the other partner.

Apology, both as a successful strategy (7) and an unsuccessful strategy (2), has one significant difference. Apologies are beneficial to relationships as partners' not only accept responsibility for their actions but also can forgive one another. Subjects' responses indicated that the key to whether an apology is successful or unsuccessful is the time in which it is received. Sometimes, apologies are simply received too late. When one accepts responsibility for his or her actions, it is easier to forgive that person. If an apology is received too late, it is more difficult for a partner to forgive and go back to that person because of hurt and resentment.

Successful strategies used most often were: *Trial separation* (70), *Direct talk* (59), *Behavioral change* (35), *Persistence/Intensification* (35), and *Express unhappiness* (10). Unsuccessful strategies used most often were: *Withdrawal* (86), *Direct talk* (48), *Lack of reliability* (25), and *Neglect* (22).

Since, subjects surveyed were able to generate more than one strategy; perhaps, a method of interviewing partners to generate even more strategies would prove beneficial. More information is gained from interviews as subjects are allowed more time to respond to questions with in depth answers. The technique to interviewing enables one to learn more information by probing for higher quality responses from subjects.

This study also extends the work of Stafford and Canary (1991), Baxter and Dindia (1987), and Tolhuizen (1989) supporting the majority of strategies reported by couples' to maintain/repair or to intensify dating relationships. Baxter has identified and examined turning points in romantic relationships. This study looked at a significantly

different point called a breaking point. The successful and unsuccessful strategies emerging from this study, support and expand communication research. Contextual and strategic aspects that might account for differences in categories that existed both in successful and unsuccessful strategies were considered. Although, other factors need to be looked at in future studies. Some variables to consider for future research are: gender differences in negotiation of breaking points, differences in heterosexual and homosexual relationships, events that precipitate breaking points, causes of breaking points, partner initiating the breaking point, length of relationship at the breaking point, age and life experiences at the breaking point.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This study provides an opportunity for future research in the area of relational maintenance, specifically at the breaking point. Additionally, the attempt of this research to study the strategies in which a couple uses to negotiate a breaking point, resulting from a turning point, makes it atypical in communication research. A number of questions, related to the nature of strategy selection and the use of strategies within and among couples' at the breaking point in relationships, have arisen as a result of this study. An attempt to find additional answers in couples' selection and use of strategies to negotiate breaking points, both individually as well as collectively, should serve to generate hypotheses in future studies. The ability to recognize and distinguish successful and unsuccessful strategies used to negotiate breaking points should be of importance to all members of society.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A
RELATIONAL SURVEY

RELATIONSHIP STUDY

I am conducting a study about how people maintain and end intimate relationships. Specifically, I am interested in what I call "breaking points," which can be defined as the specific moment in a relationship when one person or the other **or** both persons decide that their relationship has deteriorated to the point that one, the other or both begin to consider de-escalating or ending that relationship. A relationship can have one or many "breaking points," and it is possible for a relationship to dissolve during a first breaking point or for a relationship to endure many breaking points. Even relationships that eventually end permanently may survive several breaking points.

Responses to breaking points often are critical in determining whether the relationship is maintained or terminated. I am interested in the behaviors and/or verbal strategies that people use at breaking points in relationships, both when the behaviors or verbal strategies were **SUCCESSFUL** resulting in a continuation of the relationship **AND** when behaviors or verbal strategies were **UNSUCCESSFUL** resulting in the termination of the relationship.

There are **TWO PARTS** to this survey. The first part asks you to recall a breaking point in a relationship that you negotiated successfully (that is, you and your partner "worked it out.") The second part asks you to recall a breaking point in a relationship that you and your partner negotiated unsuccessfully (that is, you and your partner could/did not work it out and the relationship ended permanently).

PART ONE

Please recall a relationship in which you and your partner (current or past) negotiated a **BREAKING POINT** successfully; that is, remember a time when the interaction between you and your partner enabled the relationship to continue. Please respond to the following questions:

1. Who initiated a discussion of the "breaking point" (circle one)?

I did

My partner did

We both did

2. What event or series of events **CAUSED** the "breaking point" in the relationship to occur (i.e., what happened that made you, the other person, or both of you consider breaking up)? List as many reasons as possible.

3. How long had you and your partner been dating when the breaking point occurred?

4. What did you, your partner, or both of you DO and/or SAY to address the "breaking point"? Be as specific as possible.

5. Why do you believe these behavior and/or verbal strategies worked?

PART TWO

Please recall a relationship in which you and your partner (current or past) negotiated a **BREAKING POINT** unsuccessfully; that is, remember a time when the interaction between you and your partner **DID NOT** enable the relationship to continue. Please respond to the following questions:

1. Who initiated a discussion of the "breaking point" (circle one)?

I did

My partner did

We both did

2. What event or series of events **CAUSED** the "breaking point" in the relationship to occur (i.e., what happened that made you, the other person, or both of you consider breaking up)? List as many reasons as possible.

3. How long had you and your partner been dating when the breaking point occurred?

4. What did you, your partner, or both of you DO and/or SAY to address the "breaking point"? Be as specific as possible.

5. Why do you believe these behavior and/or verbal strategies failed?

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APPENDIX B

TABLES

Table I

RELATIONAL MAINTENANCE STRATEGIES

(Dindia and Baxter (1987), Tolhuizen (1989))

| Strategy | Description | Example |
|--|---|---|
| Changing external environment | Creating a fertile or supportive environment | Romantic candlelight setting |
| Communication Strategies/ Increased Contact | Intensifier attempts to be in contact with and to interact with partner more often and for longer periods of time | Ritualistic phone call to inquire 'how things are going' |
| Metacommunication/ Relationship Negotiation | Talk about the problem/ initiate direct discussion | Discuss relationship and disclose feelings |
| Prosocial Strategies/Increase Rewards/Tokens of Affection | Being nice, courteous and polite, refraining from criticism, rude or impolite behavior, or pouting and giving 'silent treatment'/Intensifier compliments partner, does favors, or performs tasks to increase rewards of the relationship for partner/Intensifier gives gifts, cards, flowers to symbolize feelings of affection | Help clean up partner's apartment/ Take partner to work when their car is in shop/Sending him or her a funny little card to show how much you care |

(Table continues)

(Table I continued)

| Strategy | Description | Example |
|--|---|--|
| Ceremonies | Expressions of affection through compliment-giving and gift-giving | Celebrations such as anniversaries or birthdays |
| Anti-rituals/Spontaneity | Actions designed to introduce novelty or stimulation into the relationship | Surprise your partner or do something new and different together to change the predictable and routine |
| Togetherness | Spending more time together with little regard as to how that time is spent | Enacting specific times and activities |
| Individual Autonomy | Opposite of togetherness | Spending more time alone to insure giving space to partner |
| Seeking outside help/Social support and assistance | Professional counseling/ Advice, information, or support from a friend or relative/Individual uses or religion | Talk to best friend about feelings toward partner and seek advice/Pray for guidance |

(Table continues)

(Table I continued)

| Strategy | Description | Example |
|--|--|---|
| Definitional bid: Direct definitional bid/ Accept definitional bid | Intensifier makes direct request or bid for a more serious and exclusive relationship/Intensifier agrees to a direct request for a more serious and exclusive relationship from his or her partner | Asking partner straight forward to make a full commitment/ waiting until partner wants and asks for a more serious commitment |
| Personalized Communication | Intensifier discloses personal information | Telling your partner a great deal about yourself-more than you've told others |
| Verbal Expressions of Affection | Intensifier makes direct declaration of love, caring and/ or affection for partner | Telling your partner you love them |
| Suggestive Actions | Intensifier uses hints, flirting, and other tactics characterized by deception such as playing hard to get or attempting to make partner jealous | Flirting with partner like mad dropping all kinds of hints hoping he or she will get message |
| Nonverbal Expressions of Affection | Intensifier uses nonverbal actions to communicate feelings of closeness, interest in, or liking and affection for partner | Using more eye contact or physical touch to get physically closer to partner |

(Table continues)

(Table I continued)

| Strategy | Description | Example |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| Social Enmeshment | Intensifier attempts to interact with and to get to know the family and important friends of partner and promotes interaction between his or her own partner and his or her own family and friends | Inviting partner over to family's house more often |
| Personal Appearance | Intensifier attempts to enhance his or her own appearance in order to look physically attractive for his or her partner | Dressing in nice clothes and always looking your best when you know you will see partner |
| Sexual Intimacy | Intensifier initiates or engages in a more intimate sexual relationship with partner | Showing more passion toward partner |
| Behavioral Adaptation | Intensifier adapts his or her own behavior or performs actions in the presence of partner designed to make a good impression | Acting like a gentleman or a lady around partner |

Table II

RELATIONAL MAINTENANCE STRATEGIES USED TO NEGOTIATE
BREAKING POINTS SUCCESSFULLY

| Strategy | Description | Example |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
| Trial Separation (70) | Taking breaks or having cooling-off periods/ Separation=Better appreciation for the relationship | Time away makes you appreciate your partner |
| Direct Talk (59) | Every day 'talk' or open communication in the relationship/Direct discussion about specific problem/Confrontation | Discussion of our opposing views on religion/Called more to show how much she cares/We were growing apart, confronted partner to see what was causing this |
| Persistence/Intensification (35) | Giving full effort to the relationship/Everyday 'talk', initiating phone calls, writing letters, giving gifts, surprising partner with something new out of the routine, and complimenting partner | He wouldn't let go/She was willing to do anything to save the relationship/ Sent my partner candy and flowers |

(Table continues)

(Table II continued)

| Strategy | Description | Example |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| Behavioral Change (35) | A recognized destructive behavioral pattern that has been adjusted and changed | Alcohol cause abuse/Quit drinking all together |
| Express Unhappiness (10) | Partners should express their unhappiness in relationships to avoid any false attributions or assumptions/Be discrete in expression | Told partner I needed just as much time as his career did/ Don't express everything |
| Apology (7) | Accepted responsibility for a specific action | He said he was sorry |
| Reassurance (7) | Showing faithfulness and commitment to the relationship in times of distress | Told him I loved him and how important he was to me |
| Sharing Tasks/Equity (7) | Performing one's fair share of work in the relationship illustrates equity in operation | Took turns driving to see one another on weekends |
| Honesty (7) | Being truthful about personal feelings | Knew if we didn't slow things down that my partner would get hurt |
| Warning (5) | Threat to change a specific behavior of a partner | Either you stop talking to your ex-girlfriend or its over |

(Table continues)

(Table II continued)

| Strategy | Description | Example |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Independence (5) | Maintaining outside friendships and having a life outside of the relationship | Told partner I needed more space, not as much togetherness |
| Positivity (5) | Acting cheerful/Refrain from criticism | Smile/Have up-beat attitude |
| Accepting Differences (5) | Recognizing behavior patterns and accepting differences | Interpreting your partner's behavior in a situation based on a past similar experience allows you to adjust your own behavior |
| Focus On Friendship (4) | Focusing on friendship will decrease levels of expectancy/ Refrain from scorekeeping | Did not keep tabs on who called who last |
| Seek Counseling (4) | Counseling provides an external source to look within the relationship and depict destructive behaviors among couples' | Counseling enhanced our interpersonal skills |
| Feign Disinterest (4) | A partner avoids showing any interest in a significant other in hopes of making him or her miss the relationship | Agreed to break up because I knew she expected me to stop her, then she starts thinking |

(Table continues)

(Table II continued)

| Strategy | Description | Example |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| Forgiveness (3) | Just forgiving a partner for his or her undesired actions | To forgive is the best gift you can give yourself |
| Avoid Assumption (3) | Avoid speculation and making assumptions in the relationship | Don't make it out to be more than it really is/Not assume partner is cheating if he has no past history of that |
| Focus On The Present (2) | Enjoy one another now/Make it a habit to not look so far ahead in future and not dwell on the past | When arguing, deal with the issue at hand and not bring up past quarrels |
| Promise (1) | A partner's 'word' to fulfill a desired action | He promised to move back in the summer to start wedding plans |
| Prayer (1) | Praying for guidance in the relationship | Prayer is awesome |
| Dishonesty (1) | Lying or just not telling a partner the full story will save the relationship | Knew my partner would not agree with some things I've done in the past, so I chose not to disclose all information |

Table III

RELATIONAL MAINTENANCE STRATEGIES USED TO NEGOTIATE
BREAKING POINTS UNSUCCESSFULLY

| Strategy | Description | Example |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| Withdrawal (86) | A break or cooling-off period in which all communication ceases | Out of sight, out of mind |
| Direct Talk (48) | Open communication putting partner on the defense | Tired of you trying to run my life and demanding all of my time |
| Lack of Reliability (25) | No trust replenishment and unkept promises/Dishonesty and repeated behaviors | He promised to never cheat on me again/ Then it happened again |
| Neglect (22) | Low maintenance/Lack of attention/ Lack of effort/ and no sacrifice | He stopped calling as much/He never tells me I look nice |
| No Behavioral Change (20) | Both recognized and unrecognized destructive behavioral patterns that are not adjusted to or changed | She simply tried to change but could not/ She wanted to spend more time together than I did- Could not agree on a happy medium |

(Table continues)

(Table III continued)

| Strategy | Description | Example |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Resignation (18) | The lack of persistence to keep a relationship/Acceptance of termination/Apathy | Just gave up and was not patient to wait on partner/ Decided to let go/Wasn't interested enough to keep it going |
| Warning (11) | A threat or demand to change a specific behavior of a partner | If you move, then it's over/ This fighting must stop or it's over |
| Overdependence (11) | Losing independency, not giving space to partner, and expressing insecurities | 'We' as opposed to 'I'/Demanded to know where I was going |
| Immobilization (10) | One's resistance to express true feelings for fear of getting hurt | Held in feelings/Too stubborn to express how I felt |
| Delay (9) | Intensification is after the expected time/Giving too much space to partner | Problems should have been addressed long ago/Now too much water under bridge |

(Table continues)

(Table III continued)

| Strategy | Description | Example |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| Express Unhappiness (9) | Discussion of unhappy feelings about a specific situation/Often not direct or too much expression | Dropped many hints about how stale the relationship was/Having same conversation over and over |
| Avoidance (9) | Partners' shun or do not want to admit there is problems in the relationship | Partner pretended to be happy |
| Verbal & Behavioral (8) Obsession | Nagging, pouncing, and obsessive behavior | Having same conversation over and over again/Blaming partner by saying the word 'you'/ Stalking partner |
| Intensification (8) | Characteristics, such as everyday 'talk', initiating daily phone calls, writing letters, giving gifts, and surprising partner, displayed at the point in which the partner has his or her mind made up that it is already over or when the intense behavior is so much of a drastic change that it seems unbelievable | Could see right through his flattery/ Sent him a bouquet of balloons congratulating him for his new job |
| Lack of Cooperation (6) | Stubbornness by partners' and refusal to listen | A partner insists that there are no problems in the relationship |

(Table continues)

(Table III continued)

| Strategy | Description | Example |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| Lack of Appreciation (5) | Taking a partner for granted | Explained feelings of not being a priority and not feeling appreciated/ Partner took me as overreacting |
| Lack of Understanding (4) | Failure to try to understand or to sympathize with a significant other's situation | Until you walk a mile in another person's shoes; there will always be a lack of understanding |
| Lack of Forgiveness (4) | No forgiveness due to hurt and anger | Hard to forgive when there is much resentment |
| Uncertainty/Skepticism (4) | Expression of doubt and low assurances in the relationship | Don't know if this will work/You can't change |
| Seek Advice (3) | Advice sought after by partner's distress should come from an unbiased source | My friends didn't like him anyway and missed me going out with them for girls night out |

(Table continues)

(Table III continued)

| Strategy | Description | Example |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| Inconsistency (3) | No sustained steadiness in one's behavior | Partner would be real nice and then get angry |
| Lack of Reciprocation (2) | A partner's failure to give mutually in response | One's refusal to return phone calls or letters |
| Failed Apology (2) | An apology that is received too late | If an apology is received too late, it is more difficult for a partner to forgive and go back to that person due to hurt and resentment |
| Scorekeeping (2) | Holding grudges and keeping score of who made the last mistake, who called last, who said what, when, and how | Will not call unless partner calls first |
| Lack of Patience (1) | Incapable of bearing affliction | Wanted to marry eventually, but partner was ready right then/ relationship was terminated |

(Table continues)

(Table III continued)

| Strategy | Description | Example |
|---|--|---|
| Raised Expectations (1) | Increased anticipation of a partner's behavior as a result of standards set in the initial stage of the relationship | Partner called everyday the first year we dated and then slowly stopped calling as much/Felt he should always be the one to call/Had a difficult time calling him due to standards set early on |
| Guilt Trip (1) | Placing responsibility of wrongdoing on partner | Partner cried and tried to make me feel guilty |
| No Sharing Tasks/ (1) Lack of Equity | Not performing one's fair share of work in the relationship illustrates lack of equity in operation | Partner would not take turns driving to see one another on weekends |

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APPENDIX C

IRB FORM

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW

Date: 02-11-97

IRB #: AS-97-044

Proposal Title: PARTNER PERCEPTIONS DURING RELATONAL TURNING POINTS

Principal Investigator(s): David Schrader, Amy Post-McCorkle

Reviewed and Processed as: Modification and Continuation

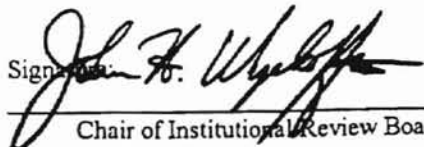
Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

ALL APPROVALS MAY BE SUBJECT TO REVIEW BY FULL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD AT NEXT MEETING, AS WELL AS ARE SUBJECT TO MONITORING AT ANY TIME DURING THE APPROVAL PERIOD.

APPROVAL STATUS PERIOD VALID FOR DATA COLLECTION FOR A ONE CALENDAR YEAR PERIOD AFTER WHICH A CONTINUATION OR RENEWAL REQUEST IS REQUIRED TO BE SUBMITTED FOR BOARD APPROVAL.

ANY MODIFICATIONS TO APPROVED PROJECT MUST ALSO BE SUBMITTED FOR APPROVAL.

Comments, Modifications/Conditions for Approval or Disapproval are as follows:

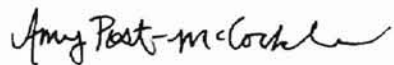
Signature: 
Chair of Institutional Review Board
Cc: Amy Post-McCorkle

Date: February 9, 1998

To Whom it may Concern:

Enclosed is the Institutional Review Board Human Subjects form. After conferring with my thesis committee, it is a consensus of opinion that the proposed title, "Partner Perceptions During Relational Turning Points" be changed to "Maintenance Strategies In Distressed Relationships: Negotiating Breaking Points."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Amy Post-McCorkle".

Amy Post-McCorkle

u

VITA

Amy Delois Post-McCorkle

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: MAINTENANCE STRATEGIES IN DISTRESSED RELATIONSHIPS:
NEGOTIATING BREAKING POINTS

Major Field: Speech Communication

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Sayre, Oklahoma, On February 11, 1972, the daughter of Scott and Johnita McCorkle and Joe Post.

Education: Graduated from Mustang High School, Mustang, Oklahoma in May 1990; received Bachelor of Arts in Communications from Cameron University, Lawton, Oklahoma in May 1994. Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts degree with a major in Speech Communication at Oklahoma State University in May 1998.

Experience: Raised in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; self-employed as a Tennis Teaching Professional during summers; employed by Oklahoma State University, Department of Speech Communication as a Graduate Teaching Assistant/Instructor; Oklahoma State University, Department of Speech Communication, 1996 to 1998.

Professional Memberships: Speech Communications Graduate Association, United States Professional Tennis Association.