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THE EFFECTS OF ATTRIBUTIONAL STYLE AND
COPING STYLE ON RELATIONSHIP
SATISFACTION

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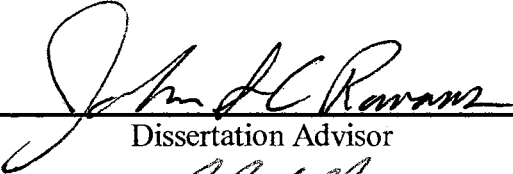
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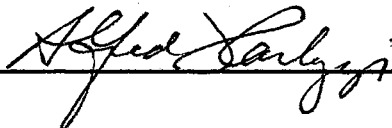
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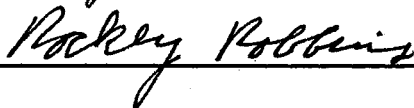
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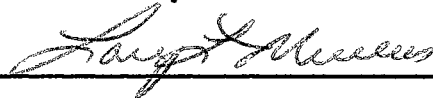
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

George Bernard Shaw wrote, "Love is a gross exaggeration of the difference between one person and everybody else." As Shaw suggests romantic love seems to color the perception of its object. Implicit in this comment is the idea that satisfying relationships reflect intimates' ability to perceive their partner in a way that reflects some congruence between that perception and their beliefs related to the relationship. We may overlook the faults of the person we are in love with, or we may exalt his/her graces. Friends who may see less appealing aspects in our love relationships cannot tarnish our romantic perspective. Perhaps it is this element of idiosyncratic perception that accounts for the difficulty science has encountered in its attempt to describe and predict relationship satisfaction, for while many variables have been linked to relationship satisfaction, few have been able to describe or consistently predict satisfaction in partnered relationships. It may well be that Shaw's conceptualization of love as "gross exaggerations of differences" which emphasizes the importance of perception distortions in romantic relationships may function as a new avenue for understanding relationships satisfaction.

There is no shortage of research on relationship satisfaction (Bradbury & Fincham, 1989; Craddock, 1983; Cupach & Metts, 1986; Davis & Oathout, 1987; Hardesty & Betz, 1980; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992). Early research in the area of relationship satisfaction generally examined the behavior of individuals in relationships (Gottman, Notarius, Markman, Banks, Yoppi, & Rubin, 1976; Chrisstensen, Sullaway, & King, 1983; Elwood & Jacobson, 1982; Willis, Weiss, & Patterson, 1974). These investigations focused on

behavioral correlates of satisfaction working under the assumption that relationship difficulties are best alleviated by changing the behavior of partners (Fincham, 1994). Measuring partner behavior change, though, became an interesting variable in itself. This research led to the surprising finding that couples coding of their own behavior was more predictive of satisfaction than that obtained by observer-coding studies (Gottman et al., 1976). Likewise, data from diary studies of daily marital behaviors produced poor interspouse agreement (Fincham, 1994). Thus early investigations were hounded by the need to examine idiosyncratic meanings of behaviors.

Research that focuses on cognition and relationship satisfaction provides some, although still limited, guidance on the content of the cognitions that are important for predicting satisfaction (Fincham, 1994). This research did further the idea that an emphasis on the importance of cognitive variables in understanding marital satisfaction is needed. Further, it suggests that investigations should shift toward indices of a spouse's perceptual/cognitive "biases" (Christensen, Sullaway & King, 1983). Cognitive investigations focused on relationship beliefs, (Epstein & Eidelson, 1981, Larson, 1988; Metts & Cupach, 1990; Fincham & Bradbury, 1987) attributional style, (Bradbury, 1990; Fincham and Bradbury, 1987; Fincham and Bradbury, 1993; see Baucom & Epstein, 1990; Bradbury & Fincham, 1990; Fletcher & Fincham, 1991; for reviews) or coping style (Canary & Cupain, 1988, Sillars, 1985) of the individual as they are influenced by or influence relationship satisfaction. Other researchers, to a lesser extent, have attempted to define the relationship between attributional style and coping style, holding satisfaction as a constant (Bradbury & Fincham, 1992). However, Fincham (1994) argues that marital outcome research thus far does not support an emphasis on cognitive variables alone. He

notes that research on cognition in partnered relationships has focused "on the study of cognitive contents (what people think, the judgments they make, and so on) with limited attention to cognitive structures (how spouses mentally represent information about the partner/marriage) and cognitive processes (how spouses process or operate on information - e.g., to make judgments." Additionally, Bradbury and Fincham (1994) argue that behavioral variables and cognitive variables should be considered together when attempting to describe the process of being satisfied in one's relationships. This study attempts to fill that void by investigating the cognitive processes of attributional style and coping style of partnered individuals. The focus of this study is on the extent to which attributional style and coping style are related to the satisfaction of partnered individuals.

Overview of Related Theories

In their study of relationship satisfaction, some psychologists have attempted to characterize and measure behavioral, affective and physiological responses related to the construct of relationships satisfaction (Sternberg, 1986). The types of constructs researchers have investigated in order to provide some prediction of satisfaction are divergent and numerous. Constructs such as intimacy, relationship illusions (Hall & Taylor, 1976; Murray & Holmes, 1993, 1994; 1997) commitment, context, communication patterns, fairness in close relationships (Bierhoff, 1996, Buunk, & van Yperen, 1991; Sternberg, 1986), the availability of alternative partners (Johnson & Rusbult, 1989) and gender differences (Kraft & Witte, 1992) have been investigated - and this list is by no means exhaustive. This research has been used to construct theories that attempt to account for satisfied relationships (Sternberg, 1986). Theories most widely cited include Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love, Rusbult's Investment Model, The

Attachment Model of Relationship Satisfaction and models from the cognitive paradigm.

While some correlation has been found between the above multiple variables and satisfaction, until cognitive models were incorporated into the study, research failed to account for individual differences that prevented consistent predictability of satisfaction in any given relationship. The introduction of cognitive models allowed for the individual's perception thus including the need for, and the presence of, these different constructs (Rausch, Barry, Hertel, & Swain, 1974). For example, researchers began to investigate how the individual determined if constructs such as commitment and fairness were necessary and/or present in their romantic relationship. It also allowed for a study of how different partners measure what were "enough" commitment, communication, fairness, and so on. Cognitive conceptualizations suggest that behavior may not be as predictive of satisfaction as are the beliefs of individuals that those behaviors are important, and that they have them to a given degree in the romantic relationship. That is, what are the individual's expectations (based on his/her beliefs about romantic satisfaction) and how does he/she perceive that those expectations are met or not.

It was this new cognitive model for looking at relationship satisfaction that led to the intensification of the study of relationship satisfaction in the seventies and eighties (Beirhoff, 1996). At that time, research was greatly influenced by increased understanding of cognitive models of human behavior (DeBord, Romans, & Krieshok, 1996). The investigation of relationship satisfaction began to integrate cognitive models of human behavior. Cognitive paradigms addressed the study of relationship satisfaction as a function of the way individuals perceive and give meaning to events that occur within the relationship. It allowed for a subjective perception that influenced the way individuals

determined which constructs were important in a relationship, as well as an explanation of how the individual determines if and how much of the construct is present.

Much of the research on relationship satisfaction is guided by the cognitive mediation model of Diguisueppe & Zee (1986). The model maintains that emotional and behavioral reactions of one member of a relationship are influenced by that members' idiosyncratic perception of the nature and meanings of the interactions between the couple (DeBord et al., 1996). In this way, the perception is more important than the actual interaction. Perceptions, according to this model, are influenced by the beliefs about relationships in general that each partner brings to the dyad.

Other research informed by cognitive models has looked closely at how ideals or beliefs about love influence the way one perceives the relationship as a satisfactory one (Epstein & Eidelson, 1981; Fincham & Bradbury, 1987; Larson, 1988; Metts & Cupach, 1990). Additionally, research on cognitive components cite a number of factors as important to the cognitive process the individual utilizes to organize events into an existing belief system (DiGiuseppe & Zee, 1986; Ellis, 1978; Epstein, 1982). This research indicates satisfaction is, to a large extent, a function of beliefs the individual brings to the relationship, of attributional style that is a function of those core beliefs, and of coping style, which is believed to be the behavioral outcome of attributional style. Coping style and attributional style are thought to be multi-dimensional constructs that interact to maintain core relationship beliefs. Therefore, beliefs are thought to contribute indirectly to satisfaction, with attributional style serving as the "gateway" between coping style of stressful events in the environment, and the meaning those events have for the individual (Metts & Cupach, 1990).

Cognitive explanations of romantic satisfaction stress the need to look at the interaction of beliefs, coping, and perceptions of individuals and couples. Researchers in this area also suggest that attributional style, coping style, and satisfaction should be studied as a function of the dyad in which it takes place (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987; Bradbury & Fincham, 1992). Under this view, the behavior of one partner is a salient variable in the response to the other (Canary & Cupain, 1988; Sillars, 1985). What one partner believes, and the attributions one partner makes of the other partner's behavior may be as important or more important than objective reality (Jones 1986; Sternberg & Barnes, 1985). This research suggests that the basic processes structuring perception in romantic relationships are rooted more in the head of perceivers than in interpersonal realities (Murray & Holmes, 1997).

This study operates under the paradigm set by cognitive models and research, which accounts for notions of perceptual individual differences and the interaction of those differences in explaining relationship satisfaction. That model posits that the individual's cognitive style structures the meaning that individual attributes to stressors from the environment, which then become translated into outcomes. This meaning-making process is called attributional style. This attributional process is thought to be a mediator of coping style, and these interact to influence relationship satisfaction. The way the individual reacts to a stressor from the environment is their coping style. Coping styles can be problem-focused and helpful for the individual or emotion-focused or disengagement focused and less helpful to the individual (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989).

Many researchers have already begun the process of identifying the relationships of the

meaning making process (attributional style) and coping style and relationship satisfaction, but say there is still much to be done. For example, Cassidy and Burnside (1996) identified attributional style and coping style as two different aspects of a cognitive appraisal system of the individual. They believe their research indicates it is this appraisal system that determines the individual's response and ultimately a behavioral outcome, (ie. satisfaction). Metts & Cupach (1990) agree it is likely that an individual's relationship beliefs serve as an interpretive frame, which mediates the connection between behavior and satisfaction. Attribution style, their research indicates, that colors an individual's perception of both their own and their partner's behavior. They call for further research to investigate the interactive qualities of attribution style, coping style and relationship satisfaction. Ptacek & Dodge (1994) established a correlation between coping and satisfaction. They ask that future research assess this relationship further with a measure of coping that is more specific to relationship stress.

The interaction of intraindividual beliefs, too, is an important concern of cognitive investigations. Beirhoff (1996) invites further research that is related to attributional style and coping that explores intra-couple outcomes (1996). Bradbury and Fincham (1992) cite the need for research that investigates the degree to which attributional tendencies precede rather than follow from marital interaction. This study attempts to address that mandate by looking at the way in which attributions and behavior function together to influence satisfaction.

Differences in gender may also account for those intraindividual differences in attributional style, in coping and in relationship satisfaction. While there has been some research that indicates men and women are similar in attributional style (Campbell &

Henry, 1999), several researchers in the area of relationship satisfaction have found differences in attributional style, coping and satisfaction (Fincham & Bradbury, 1989).

It is the purpose of this study to address some of those concerns by looking at the association between attribution style and coping style of the individual and its effect on relationship satisfaction. The study will also investigate the interaction of the different attribution style and coping style of the partners in a dyad. The association between attributions and coping behavior as predictors of relationship satisfaction in partnered relationships seems plausible, however, it does not appear this relationship has been directly addressed in the literature on relationship satisfaction. The literature has determined that attributional style is related to relationship satisfaction. That is, individuals with a positive attributional style tend to view negative external events as external to their partner, not related to other aspects of the relationship and not global. Further, individuals with a solution-focused coping style (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987) are also more likely to be satisfied in their relationships. Likewise, individuals with a solution-focused coping style are more likely to have a positive attributional style (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987). Therefore, it seems likely that individuals with a positive attributional style and an active coping style would be more likely to be satisfied in their partnered relationships than those with negative attributional style and emotion-focused or disengaged coping style.

Definition of Terms

Attributional Style refers to the explanatory style of the individual; it is the way the individual looks at the world. Seligman (1990) divides explanatory style into two categories, optimistic and pessimistic. Pessimists believe bad events are their fault, will

last a long time, and will undermine everything they do. In other words, a negative event is due to some internal cause, is stable, and global in nature. Optimists, on the other hand, perceive bad events as short lived, related to the single situation and due to some external force (Seligman, 1990). Attributional style is further divided into causal and responsibility attributions in the relationship satisfaction literature and will be assessed by the Relationship Attribution Measure (RAM), which delineates those types of attributions.

Relationship satisfaction indicates the individual's subjective evaluation of happiness and/or contentment with his/her relationship, as measured by the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS).

Coping style is the manner in which an individual responds to an external cue that causes a psychological or physical outcome. Traditionally, coping was divided into two types, active or problem-focused coping and emotion-focused (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Folkman & Lazarus, 1985; Carver, Scheier & Weintraub, 1989), with problem-focused coping being considered the more functional type. In 1989, Carver, Scheier & Weintraub further divided those into categories to measure problem-focused coping (active coping) through planning, active coping, suppression of attention to competing activities and the exercise of restraint. These were termed more functional types of coping. To measure responses that potentially impede active coping, they devised categories to measure behavioral disengagement, mental disengagement, focusing on and venting of emotions and uses of alcohol or drugs as ways of disengaging. Coping style will be measured with the COPE (Carver et al, 1989).

Partner refers to a respondent's spouse, significant other, or boyfriend/girlfriend.

Relationship is defined as an exclusive romantic union between partners. It is not

limited to, but does include marriage of those partners. This study will include relationships that are heterosexual or gay/lesbian, married or partnered and living together, as well as nonmarried cohabiting people.

Research Underlying Hypothesis

This study asks, will individuals who possess a positive attributional style and an active coping style be more likely to be involved in a satisfied relationship than are individuals who possess both a negative attributional style and emotion-focused or disengaged coping style?

Further, the study addresses the question: Does the attributional or coping styles of one of the partners predict satisfaction of the other member in the dyad?

Can the combination of attributional and coping style of both partners predict the satisfaction of the individuals in the partnership?

To what degree is the gender of the participant associated with satisfaction when coping style and attributional style are considered? Differences in gender are related to relationship satisfaction in previous research (Bryson, Bryson, Licht, & Licht, 1976; Kurdec, 1991; Lamke, Sollie, Durbin, & Fitzpatrick, 1994; McGowen & Hart, 1992; Ray, 1988; Vera & Betz, 1992). Gender differences are also noted in research that looks at attributional style and coping (Bradbury and Fincham, 1994).

Hypotheses

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship of attributional style and problem-solving style and their correlations with relationship satisfaction. It is hypothesized that individuals with an optimistic attributional style and a problem-focused coping style will be more satisfied in their partnership. Further, it is hypothesized that couples who share an optimistic attributional style and a problem-focused coping style will report a more

satisfied relationship than those who share a pessimistic attributional style and a less useful coping style.

The null hypotheses are as follows:

Ho 1: There is no relationship between the individual's own attributional style and their own coping style and their own relationships satisfaction.

Ho 2: There is no relationship between the individual's attributional style, and coping style and the relationship satisfaction of their partner.

Ho 3: There is no relationship between the interaction of partners' attributional styles, their coping styles and the relationship satisfaction of the individual partners.

Ho 4: There is no relationship between the partner's attributional style, coping style and relationship satisfaction when styles are similar.

Ho 5: There is no relationship between the partner's attributional style, coping style and relationship satisfaction when styles are dissimilar.

Ho 6: There is no relationship between the individual's attributional style and their coping style and relationship satisfaction and the gender of the individual.

Significance of the Study

The pursuit for understanding what attributes the individual brings to a relationship to help create a satisfied union is a long-standing one. As cognitive therapeutic techniques become more prevalent in the treatment of marital problems (Epstein, 1985), a more complete understanding of the attributional process and its relationship with coping outcomes can facilitate the therapist's understanding and treatment of idiosyncratic perceptions of events that occur within the relationship. As these perceptions and outcomes are investigated, they can begin to be incorporated into the therapeutic setting in

attempts to facilitate the maintenance of satisfying romantic relationships.

Assumptions and Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. The first is that the study utilizes self-report questionnaires. Issues related to social desirability must be considered, particularly as they relate to disclosure of relationship satisfaction. It is plausible that even though confidentiality is insured with the survey and arrangements were made to allow individual's privacy in their answers from their mates, the idea that someone else might see their answers might influence the way they responded to the survey.

Because of the nature of the task, individuals can only report how they might interpret events and how they might respond to different events in the relationship. When faced with the situation in real life, their behaviors and emotions might be quite different.

Further, while participants were asked to not share answers with their partners in an effort to minimize that influencing the way they respond, it is plausible that partner's did sometimes share information. Knowing they would ask their partner to share answers, or anticipating that one's partner might ask to see his/her responses might change the way the individual scored the questionnaires.

Summary and Overview of Remaining Chapters

In summary, this study investigates the interaction of partnered individual's attributional styles, the interaction of their coping styles, to see if those styles can predict relationship satisfaction. It explores the way an individual's attributional and coping style influence his/her own satisfaction as well as that of his/her partner. Additionally, it examines gender differences that might affect the relationship between attributional style and coping style as predictors of relationship satisfaction.

Chapter II is a review of the literature related to relationship beliefs, attributional processes, coping strategies and reactions to stress in partnered relationships. It then evaluates the current literature regarding attribution, coping and relationship satisfaction. The following section reviews theories that attempt to explain relationship satisfaction, focusing on the cognitive mediation model that specifically accounts for attributional and coping styles as a function of relationship satisfaction.

Chapter III describes the methodology and participants involved in the study. It describes and provides reliability and validity information regarding the three instruments used in this study. Additionally, it describes the data analysis.

Chapter IV reviews procedures that were used in data analysis and presents all the research findings.

Chapter V is the discussion chapter. It provides a more in-depth look at the findings of this particular research and discusses the ways in which the findings relate back to other literature in the area of relationship satisfaction. It also reviews some of the limitations of this particular study. Finally, it speaks to the direction that future research in this area might take.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

There is a great deal of research on relationship satisfaction, including how it can be measured and what variables make a significant contribution toward satisfaction.

However, many questions remain as to how individuals differ in terms of reporting satisfaction and how individual differences cause external events to be attributed in such a way as to positively or negatively affect the relationship dyad in terms of behaviors observed. Those interested in the construct have proposed several theories of relationship satisfaction.

Theories of Relationship Satisfaction

The attempts to predict relationship satisfaction through psychological theory have been guided by four theories in particular. All of these theories allow for determining outcome by a process of individual appraisal of whether certain variables are necessary and/or present in a given relationship. Only cognitive models, however, explain how that cognitive appraisal might take place. The other three, Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love (1986), Rusbult's Investment Model (1980), and The Attachment Model of Relationship Satisfaction, are important in that they name constructs which might be measured during the cognitive appraisal process.

Triangular Theory of Love

Under Sternberg's theory (1986), relationship satisfaction is a function of three different constructs: intimacy, passion and commitment. According to the theory, satisfaction is a combination, to varying degree, of these three constructs. The amounts

vary according to the particular stage of a relationship and for the individual type of relationship itself. Sternberg varies the area and shape of his love triangle to represent a wide variety of different kinds of love relationships, or to represent the course of a close relationship and its level of satisfaction over time (Sternberg, 1986).

Sternberg (1997) tested his theory by examining the construct validity of a love scale based upon his triangular theory of love. He asked 185 adults to complete several questionnaires that included demographic data and the Sternberg Triangular Love Scale. He also asked the participant to complete a relationship satisfaction questionnaire, the Rubin Love Scale, and the Rubin Liking Scale (Rubin, 1970) in order to ascertain the external validation of the Sternberg scale. Half of the participants rated all the statements on the basis of how important and half on the basis of how characteristic each statement was. The construct validation included aspects of internal (consistency with the theory) and external (correlation with external measures) validation. The author concluded that the data were generally, but not completely, supportive of the utility of the triangular love scale.

Acker & Davis (1992) tested Sternberg's theory and found support for the passion and commitment dimension of the theory, but not the intimacy component. These authors concluded that support for the distinctness of the intimacy construct in the Triangular Theory was weak, and that since their respondents' experience of love did not include intimacy as a separate entity, their results undercut the argument that the triangular components actually reflect the structure of love. In this study, commitment was the most consistent predictor of relationship satisfaction and the effects of passion and intimacy fluctuated according to gender.

Hasselbrock and Buhl (1996) did find some support for the model when they examined the three dimensions of intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment in individuals' perceptions of love relationships. However, that research was based on short descriptions of the dimensions provided by only 39 participants.

Investment Model of Relationship Satisfaction

The investment model of Rusbult (1979) assumes individuals are motivated to maximize rewards while minimizing costs in a comparison of outcome versus expectations, which, in turn, determines the degree of commitment to and satisfaction with one's relationship. This model postulates that individuals will be more satisfied in relationships when they exceed their generalized expectations and comparison level. That is, one will be more satisfied when there is less discrepancy between expected rewards and costs in one's relationship as compared to those with an alternative partner. Further, Rusbult predicts that an individual's commitment to maintaining a relationship is a function of three factors: declining satisfaction increases in alternative quality, or divestiture, which leads to declining commitment and relationship dissolution. This model has been used to describe the development of satisfaction and commitment in romantic associations (Rusbult, 1980a). Rusbult's theory focuses on commitment in relationships rather than satisfaction, with satisfaction greatly influencing one's commitment to remain in the relationship (Rusbult, Zembrodt, and Gunn, 1982).

Rusbult has provided empirical support for his theory. In an early test, he found that 171 undergraduates commitment to their relationship increased with investment size and decreased with the value of alternatives, but was not appreciably affected by relationship costs. Further, he found that satisfaction/attraction significantly increased as relationship

costs decreased. In a second part of that same research, relationship satisfaction was predicted by relationship reward value and relationship cost value. As expected, commitment to relationships increased as relationship reward value and investment size increased and as alternative value and relationship cost value decreased.

In 1986, Rusbult and colleagues conducted a cross-sectional survey of 130 participants who were in romantic involvements to assess the generalizability of his investment model. Consistent with model predictions, satisfaction was positively related to level of rewards, and commitment was positively associated with satisfaction, negatively associated with alternative quality, and positively associated with investment size. Greater reward value promoted greater commitment to maintain relationships.

Later, (1996) when looking at an undergraduate population, Rusbult found that model variables were moderately associated with other measures reflecting superior couple functioning, and were essentially unrelated to measures assessing personal dispositions.

Other investigations of this model have found support for the idea that greater marital satisfaction, happiness, and adjustment as associated with better communication between partners (Beir & Sternberg, 1977; Murphy & Mendelson, 1973), greater self-disclosure (Critelli & Dupre, 1978), more expressions of love and affection (Fineberg & Lowman, 1985), more frequent exchanges of pleasurable behaviors (Wills et al, 1974), and greater perceptual accuracy between partners (Margolin, Talovic, & Weinstein, 1983). Further, researchers have found that satisfaction is associated with neglect responses such as the expression of negative affect hostility, and belligerent complaints, (Billings 1979; Gottman, Markman, & Norarius, 1978; Hawkins, 1968) and negative attributions about partners' communications (Gottman et al., 1976).

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory as formulated by Bowlby (1973) has been applied to the study of relationship quality, including satisfaction by a number of researchers (Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Shaver & Hazan, 1988; Jones & Cunningham, 1996). Generally, the findings of this research have supported Bowlby's belief that the working models people develop from early social interaction are related to their relationship style in adulthood (Jones & Cunningham, 1996) causing relationship satisfaction to be a product of that social interaction style. This theory contends that individuals are strongly motivated to seek feelings of safety and security in their romantic relationships (Bowlby, 1977, 1982).

Pistole (1989) found support for the attachment theory of relationship satisfaction when she looked at adult attachment style in relation to conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction. Her research with college undergraduates supported the idea that secure individuals experienced greater relationship satisfaction when partners used a mutually focused conflict style.

In an examination of attachment style and relationship satisfaction among unmarried heterosexual couples, Hammond and Fletcher (1991) found that partners were less avoidant, less anxious and more secure reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Their research included a four-month longitudinal component that suggested that relationship satisfaction might influence attachment style rather the vice-versa. Fuller & Fincham (1995) later studied attachment style of 53 married couples over a 24-month period. Interestingly, they found that 35 percent of the participants changed their attachment style over the two-year period.

Jones and Cunningham (1996) examined the relevance of attachment style, romantic

beliefs, self-esteem, and gender roles to relationship satisfaction. They sampled 186 heterosexual dating couples to determine whether male and female anxiety over abandonment and comfort with closeness, and interactions among them, provided a significant variance in relationship satisfaction. They found support for the idea that attachment style can predict satisfaction after controlling for the effect of beliefs, self-esteem, and genders roles.

Each of these theories adds an important piece to the understanding of relationship satisfaction. What they fail to do satisfactorily is account for the differences among and between individuals in the meaning making of events that occur within a relationship. It is this subjective attribution or meaning-making that cognitive mediation models have attempted to address. Consequently, researchers interested in the cognitive processes involved in determining relationship satisfaction have turned their efforts toward describing the process through which people perceive, establish, maintain, or dissolve, close relationships (Ptacek & Dodge, 1995). In other words, researchers have attempted to understand the cognitive processes through which individuals define, measure, compare with, and then interpret concepts such as passion, intimacy and commitment or alternative relationships and their benefits and/or the attachment style of the individual.

Cognitive Models

The cognitive mediation model posits that idiosyncratic perceptions of interactions between partners are more significant than the interaction themselves. It suggests these perceptions of the interactions are influenced by beliefs the partners bring to the relationship that are related to romantic relationships in general. Beliefs about one's self, relationships in general, and one's partner can moderate perceptions of interactions. The

implication from this model is that one's emotional and behavioral reactions are, in part, determined by that individual's perception of the nature and meaning of the interactions between them (DeBord, et al, 1996). As presented by DiGiuseppe and Zee (1986), this model is based on a rational-emotive perspective conceptualization of relationships. It focuses on the role of cognition in partnered relationships. In particular, the model attempts to explain relationship difficulties by identifying an individual's irrational cognitive processes, and the interaction of disturbed cognition with related processes in the domains of sensing, feeling, and behavior (Ellis, 1961). A basic assumption under this paradigm of understanding relationships is that those who hold rational beliefs are more likely to experience appropriate emotional responses and display more functional ways of behaving. Conversely then, those who hold irrational beliefs lead to inappropriate and dysfunctional ways of feeling and behaving (Ellis, 1962). DiGiuseppe and Zee (1986, p. 34) define irrational beliefs as those which "are usually expressed as absolutistic demands or overly extreme evaluative statements". They distinguish between relationship dissatisfaction and relationship disturbance through the level of adaptability the individual displays to a situation. For instance, an individual who is rationally dissatisfied with their relationship might "experience emotions such as sadness, disappointment, annoyance, regret, or concern about the relationship, rather than feeling inappropriately and dysfunctional depressed angry, guilty, or panicked about it. The person's behavior, too, will fall into the adaptive range: he or she may try to improve the relationship by various means or, if improvement is not feasible, may either attempt to make the best of an apparently bad bargain or decide to leave the relationship"(DiGiuseppe and Zee, 1986, pg 26). Relationship disturbance occurs when one individual places irrational needs or

demands that the relationships be what it is not. When this happens, the partner's relationship might be characterized by intense, inappropriate negative emotions such as severe anxiety, rage, guilt or depression and by maladaptive behaviors.

The appraisal process is thought to occur in terms of "standards." Compared to the assumptions that a person makes about the way relationships are, standards involve the characteristics that the individual believes a partner or the relationship should have (Baucom, Epstein, & Sayers & Sher, 1989). An individual may hold an extreme or irrational standard about intimate relationships that is unrealistic or might apply an extreme negative evaluation when that standard is not met (Baucom, et al, 1989).

Research that has tested this idea is somewhat limited. Epstein and Eidelson (1981) found that spouses' marital distress and low involvement in marital therapy was more strongly correlated with a measure of unrealistic assumptions and standards about intimate relationship than with a measure of irrational beliefs. Jordan and McCormick (1988) also found that unrealistic assumptions and standards about relationships were more predictive of general marital distress than were extreme standards about sexual relationships.

Investigating and understanding an individual's cognitions about their relationship expectations is an important part of treating couples under this conceptualization. While the research applying the Cognitive Mediation Model directly to partnered relationship satisfaction is somewhat limited, (Epstein & Eidelson, 1982; Jordan & McCormick, 1988; DeBord, Romans, & Krieshok, 1996) research between cognitive variables and satisfaction is plentiful (Berley & Jacobson, 1984; Eidelson & Epstein, 1982; Epstein, 1982; Jacobson & Margolin, 1979; O'Leary & Turkewitz, 1978; Stuart, 1980).

Research that examines cognition and relationship satisfaction focuses on explaining

the processing or cognitive style by which the individual makes meaning of events in the environment. This cognitive style is believed to be formed early in an individual's life and leads to the formation of general relationship beliefs which then influence the individual's perceptions (Catlin & Epstein, 1992; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Singer & Salovey, 1991) of relationship satisfaction in his/her current relationship. The extent to which individuals endorse their beliefs, attitudes, or expectations about their relationships is an important element in determining relationship satisfaction (Epstein & Eidelson, 1981; Larson, 1988).

However, as DeBord et al. (1996) found, it may be important to differentiate between relationship-specific beliefs and general irrational beliefs when predicting outcomes. This research indicated that those individuals who embraced high levels of relationship-specific irrational beliefs also reported better-adjusted marriages. Adherence to general irrational beliefs did not predict adjustment.

Beliefs

In attempting to define cognitive style, much research has focused on the romantic beliefs each individual brings to the romantic dyad. It is thought that each individual measures his/her beliefs compared to his/her perception that the relationship meets those ideals and is either satisfied or dissatisfied, depending on the discrepancy between beliefs and ideals (Jones, 1986; Sternberg & Barnes, 1985). These beliefs influence the individual's perceptions of what happens in a relationship as well as the way the individual then communicates with his /her partner (Fincham & Bradbury, 1988) and in an indirect way influence the individuals satisfaction in the relationship (Metts & Cupach, 1990).

Beliefs are a major component of cognitive appraisal (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). They are thought to be relatively stable constructs that are generated and revised through

personal experience (Epstien, 1980; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Janoff-Bulman, 1989; Janoff-Bulman & Timko, 1987; Marris, 1986; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Patterson, 1993; Singer & Salovey, 1991). Individuals maintain their beliefs by interpreting situations in ways that are consistent with their preexisting global beliefs (Park & Cohen, 1993; Park & Folkman, 1997). Beliefs include components of affective constructs such as emotions or attitudes (Fletcher & Kimmmonth, 1992). Emotions in close relationships are intimately linked to elaborate knowledge structures that include beliefs concerning the typical course of an emotion including its eliciting events, physiological symptoms, associated urges, and consequences (Fitness & Fletcher, 1993).

The study of beliefs and their relationship to romantic satisfaction is complex. That relationship has been examined through an investigation of the extent to which an individual endorses how those beliefs make a relationship functional, healthy, normal, or satisfying (Metts & Cupach, 1990). This investigation of beliefs has also focused on similarity and complementarity of partners (Fincham, 1994). The relationship between beliefs and satisfaction has been studied directly (Bradbury & Fincham, 1988) and the link between beliefs, attributions and relationship satisfaction (Fincham & Bradbury, 1989) has been examined. Consequently, beliefs have been shown to be an important aspect of the individual differences component in studies of relationship satisfaction (Baucom et al., 1980; Bradbury & Fincham, 1988; Fincham & Bradbury, 1989; Metts & Cupach, 1990).

Since beliefs are contextual and idiosyncratic, they can be unrealistic. Epstein (1986) found the most pervasive and enduring cognitive variables implicated in marital distress are extreme beliefs about one's self, one's partner, and the nature of marital interactions. Several researchers (DeBord, et al., 1996; Eidelson & Epstein, 1982; Epstein et al, 1987;

Epstein & Eidelson, 1981; Jones & Stanton, 1988) have found that irrational beliefs related to marriage accounted for more variance in marital adjustment than did general irrational ones. Further, DeBord, et al. (1996) found that more irrational or dysfunctional relationship-specific beliefs were more prevalent in highly adjusted marriages than in maladjusted ones. These researchers attributed this surprising finding to the attributions individuals made regarding their relationship-specific beliefs, indicating those more optimistic (and irrational) regarding their relationships are more satisfied (DeBord, et al, 1996).

In a study designed to test their contextual model of marriage, Bradbury & Fincham (1988) had 78 spouses complete instruments to assess marital satisfaction and individual differences in relationship beliefs. That research found support for the idea that beliefs about relationships in general and beliefs about specific relationship events each contribute unique variance in marital satisfaction.

Metts and Cupach (1990) have investigated the relationship between dysfunctional relationship beliefs and problem-solving style on relationship satisfaction. These researchers sampled college students who were currently involved in a romantic relationship with a member of the opposite sex that had lasted at least one month. Each participant completed the Relationship Beliefs Inventory (RBI), a measure of problem-solving response tendencies, and the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS). Problem solving responses were assessed with a 28-item self-report instrument designed by Rusbult, Johnson, and Morrow (1986) to measure general strategies for coping. The use of "voice" as a coping strategy was positively related to relationship satisfaction, while "exit" and "neglect" were negatively related to relationship satisfaction. Further, their

research suggests that dysfunctional relationship beliefs exhibited positive correlation with the destructive problem-solving responses of "exit" and "neglect" and negative correlation with the constructive problem-solving response of "voice". Dysfunctional beliefs were negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction, and problem-solving style tended to influence the association between dysfunctional beliefs and relationship satisfaction.

Beliefs are thought to be constructed, maintained and/or changed through a process of assigning meaning to external events (Parks & Cohen, 1993). Therefore, understanding or explanation of beliefs must be done through an examination of attributional or meaning-making style of the individual. The task of meaning-making in a situation is to reduce the incongruence between the initial meaning of a situation and the person's preexisting global meaning in term of beliefs and goals (Epstein, 1993; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Pearlin, 1991; Tait & Silver, 1989; Thompson & Jangian, 1988

Attributional Style

Attributional style can be described as the somewhat stable foundation the individual gives the meaning making process. Those individuals with an optimistic attributional style tend to attribute meanings to external events and behaviors that would be considered more positive. A positive attributional style would then suggest that happy partners produce attributions regarding environmental events (including partner behaviors) that enhance relationship quality, and that unhappy individuals produce attributions that maintain their current levels of distress.

Most operational definitions of meaning making are described in terms of attributions about causality and perceived benefits (e.g., Park & Lazarus, 1997; Bulman & Wortman, 1977; Downey, Silver, & Wortman., 1990; Thompson, 1985; 1991). Most commonly,

marital attributions have been investigated through the paradigm of reformulated learned helplessness theory (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978). Baucom, Epstein, Sayers & Sher call this a "logical thing" due to cognitive similarities between depression and marital maladjustment (Epstein, 1985, as cited in Baucom et al., 1989). An understanding of attributions as provided through learned helplessness theory (Abramson et al., 1978) provides the foundation for predicting the mechanism by which an individual translates events in the environment so as to give them meaning. It both introduces and explains attributional style in terms of pessimistic or optimistic netting. According to this theory, stressors, either good or bad, become so as the individual provides meaning to a given situation. The individual's global meaning making structure influences the process of ascribing meaning to a given situation. Global meanings encompass personal and enduring beliefs and valued goals (Recker & Wong, 1988). When applied to beliefs about relationships, it involves an individual's basic goals and fundamental assumptions as well as expectations about their relationships. Attributional style is either optimistic or pessimistic (Seligman, 1990); events that occur in the environment are deemed global or specific, stable or unstable, and either internal or external. According to Seligman and his colleagues, one's attributional style reflects biases in perceptions of life events. Those individuals with a pessimistic style tend to attribute the causes of negative life events to stable, internal personality traits that are likely to impact other areas of their lives (Abramson et al., 1978). Stress reactions are more likely to occur when an experience of stress is attributed to stable, global, and internal causes (Metalsky, Halberstadt, & Abramson, 1987). Further, Seligman (1990) argues that a pessimistic attributional style leads to greater stress than does an optimistic one (Seligman et al., 1988; Seligman &

Schuman, 1986).

In their review of the literature examining the impact of attributions in marriage, Fincham and Bradbury (1988) say the association between attributions and marital satisfaction is established. They call for the next step of investigating attributions to include a delineation of which types of attributions are most salient in relation to relationship satisfaction. The response to that directive is clear. More recently, researchers have described and investigated different attributional dimensions thought to be more specific to marital adjustment (Shaver & Drown, 1986; Thompson, 1991; Vievra, Tennen, Affleck, Allen, & McCann, 1990). Those investigations focus on motives of the partner such as causal attributions, selective incidence attributions, and responsibility attributions. Causal attributions involve questions related to “Why did this event happen?” Selective incidence attributions surround questions such as “Why me?” Responsibility attributions question who or what is to be held responsible. The most investigated constructs in this domain are causal attributions, which concern the explanations a spouse makes for an event (e.g., a partner behavior), and responsibility attributions, which deal with accountability or answerability for the event. Distressed spouses are hypothesized to make attributions for negative events that accentuate their impact (e.g., they locate the cause in their partner, see it as stable or unchanging, and see it as global or influencing many areas of the relationship), whereas nondistressed spouses are thought to make attributions that minimize the impact of negative events (e.g., they do not locate the cause in the partner and they see it as unstable and specific). There appears to be little correlation between these types of attributions and they differ in their implications for meaning making (Thompson, 1991). For example, it has been shown that responsibility

attributions, rather than causal attributions, are central to marital dysfunction. More specifically, it seems that distressed spouses, as compared with non-distressed spouses are more likely to see negative partner behavior as blameworthy, intentional, and reflective of selfish concerns (Fincham et al., 1987).

These studies documented the robust associations between causal and responsibility attributions and marital satisfaction and instigated the need for a measure that reliably assesses those types of attributions and allows for comparisons across research studies. In an attempt to provide an instrument that addressed that need, Fincham and Bradbury (1992) developed the Relationship Attribution Measure (RAM). This instrument attempts to distinguish types of attributions, previously been shown to be related to relationship satisfaction. In particular, it makes a distinction between causal and responsibility attributions that are related to those of blame.

Much of the research of relationship satisfaction has focused on the attributions that spouses make for events that occur in their relationships. These studies have documented an association between attributions about those events and marital satisfaction (Fincham & Beach, 1988; Fincham & Bradbury, 1987; 1989; Lussier, & Sabourin, & Wright, 1993). The greater part of this research indicates that distressed spouses, as compared to their nondistressed counterparts, make attributions that accentuate the impact of negative marital events.

The study probably most cited is that of Fincham and Bradbury (1987) in which a longitudinal relationship between attributions and marital satisfaction was assessed. In this study, 34 couples were assessed for their causal and responsibility attributions for marital difficulties and negative spouse behaviors and their relation to marital satisfaction. The

couples independently completed several questionnaires including: a demographics survey; the Marital Adjustment Test (MAT); the Marital Attributional Style Questionnaire; and the Relationship Beliefs Inventory (RBI). Participants were also asked what they considered the major cause of marital difficulties and then rated the extent to which the cause rested in the spouse (locus), affected only the area mentioned in the stimulus event as opposed to other areas of the marriage (globality), and was likely to be present when the event occurred in the future (stability). Researchers looked at the effect of responsibility judgments by indicating the extent to which the spouse deserved to be blamed for the stimulus event, the extent to which the spouse behavior (or spouse behavior contributed to the difficulty) was intentional, and the extent to which it reflected selfish concerns. Their results were consistent with previous findings that extreme groups of distressed and nondistressed spouses differ in their attributions, specifically that causal and responsibility attributions are significantly related to marital satisfaction. Those spouses whose causal and responsibility attributional style scores were high were more likely to be dissatisfied with their relationships. That is, if one spouse sees the cause negative behavior related to relationship difficulties as internal to the spouse, stable and global, then he/she is likely to be dissatisfied in the relationship. Likewise, spouses' who reported low causal and responsibility attributions, were more likely to be satisfied with the relationship. So if they believed behavior related to relationship difficulties was outside the control of the spouse, and that the spouse was not to blame for those behaviors, then that individual was more satisfied with their relationship. This held true for wives one year after the initial investigation, indicating that for women, at least, attributional style can predict future satisfaction.

These researchers also looked at the influence of beliefs and relationships satisfaction. As they expected, unrealistic expectations related to the relationships were related to attributions. Correlations with unrealistic relationships expectations were significant for both husbands' and wives' causal and responsibility indexes. Those spouses with unrealistic expectations were more likely to be dissatisfied. However, attributions and unrealistic relationship expectations did not equally predict marital satisfaction one year later. Attributions, which were stable over the course of a year and continued to show about the same degree of variation as did marital satisfaction scores, proved to be the better predictor for satisfaction, for wives. For husband, though, their own attributional style did not predict their later marital satisfaction. Therefore, this study did not find evidence that there is a possible causal relationship between husbands' attributions and marital satisfaction. This study is touted as the first to provide evidence for a causal explanation for attributions on satisfaction, previously assumed in theoretical accounts to exist between attributions and marital satisfaction.

Two years later, Fincham and Bradbury (1989) again looked at the relationship between attributions and satisfaction in marriages. This time they assessed the relationship attributional complexity, unrealistic relationship beliefs and satisfaction. Satisfaction in this case, was assessed with the Marital Adjustment Test and attributions with the Attributional Complexity Scale (Fletcher, Fincham and Cramer, 1987). Again, they found causal attributions to be related to marital satisfaction. They again found a gender difference in relationship attributions and satisfaction. In this study, wives' attributions were related to husband's satisfaction. Therefore, when wives held positive attributional styles, their husbands were more likely to be satisfied. This investigation indicated that an

interaction of attributional style between partners might be an important construct to investigate further. In this study, the researchers also found that unrealistic relationship beliefs and attributional complexity predicted causal attributions. That is, higher levels of unrealistic relationship beliefs may result in explanations that locate the cause for negative partner behaviors in the partner and locate the cause for the negative partner behaviors in the partner and reflect stable global factors. Further they found evidence for hypothesis that the idea that the degree to which a person uses a complex attributional schemata (based on seven related attributional constructs: level of interest in explaining behavior, preference for multiple cause explanations rather than single cause explanations, metacognition concerning explanations, awareness that behavior is a function of interaction with others, tendency to infer abstract internal attributions, tendency to infer abstract external causes and tendency to infer external causes operating from the past)(Fletcher et al., 1986) influences satisfaction. Fincham and Bradbury (1989) believe it is the intra individual differences that mediate the relationship between attribution and relationship satisfaction.

Fincham and Beach (1988) looked at attributional differences in distressed versus nondistressed couples. In this study, they also assessed the differences in responding to real or hypothetical behaviors. Again, they found that attributions predicted marital satisfaction. They also found support for the use of hypothetical behaviors in research related to marital satisfaction. In their study, attributions for real (problem-related) and hypothetical behaviors predicted marital satisfaction equally. This study provided support for the idea of using hypothetical situations to ask individuals to report the way they believed they would respond to a real situation.

In their reviews of the literature on attributions and relationship satisfaction, numerous other researchers claim validation for the idea that attributions can predict behavior in marital interactions (Bradbury & Fincham, 1992; Miller & Bradbury, 1995) as well as changes in marital satisfaction (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987, 1993). Fincham (1994) characterizes the attribution-satisfaction association as the most robust phenomenon in the marital literature.

Summary of Research on Attributional Style

Baucom et al, (1989) in their review of cognitive explanations of marital satisfaction, point to common findings across studies that assess the role of attributions in marital satisfaction.

"In spite of several methodological issues to be discussed, there have been some common findings across studies (e.g., Fincham, Beach, & Baucom, 1988; Fincham & O'Leary, 1983; Jacobson, McDonald, Follette, & Berley, 1985). Distressed spouses tend to rate causes of negative partner behavior as more global and stable than do nondistressed individuals, whereas nondistressed spouses rate causes of positive behavior of the partner as more and stable. In addition, distressed spouses have a tendency to blame their partners for negative marital events. These attributional tendencies serve to accentuate the positive in nondistressed relationships and the negative in distressed relationships (p 33)."

Studies that focus on causal or blame attributions (Epstein, Pretzer, & Fleming, 1987; Fincham, Beach & Neson, 1987; Fincham & Bradbury, 1988; Pretzer, Epstein, & Fleming, 1987, as cited in Baucom, et al, 1989) also have consistently found strong associations between those attributions and marital satisfaction.

Coping Style

Attributional models in social psychology commonly assume that an individual's attributions will affect his or her subsequent behavior (e.g., Heider, 1959, Kelley, 1973).

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) identify cognitive appraisal as the central aspect of what they call vulnerability. In this sense, vulnerability is defined as determining the way in which environmental stressors are translated into a behavioral or emotional outcome and will be called coping style and/or problem-solving style. That is, the way an individual deals with stress. For purposes of this study coping will be assessed as either problem-focused (dealing directly with the stress), emotion-focused (responding emotionally to the stress, or less useful coping (responding by avoiding the stress or using drugs or alcohol). The process through which people integrate their global meaning with the meaning of a specific situation can result in these coping style or problem-solving styles in the form of outcomes.

Using a little different verbiage, Cassidy & Burnside (1996) argue the importance of including individual differences in vulnerability or coping as central to understanding behavioral outcomes as a result of exposure to that stress. They agree for the need to conceptualize this process in terms of cognitive understanding. Central to understanding individual differences, they argue, is knowing the individual differences in the ways people think about and give meaning to their experience. In other words, they agree an incorporation of attribution style is an important element of cognitive appraisal. In order to test their hypotheses, these researchers investigated the role of several variables they believe that contribute to an individual's "cognitive architecture." Because their focus was on psychological vulnerability to stress, they looked at individuals who were experiencing some form of psychological distress. They asked 611 individuals, including 48 individuals who were at the time attending the acute unit of a psychiatric hospital for a range of affective disorders and 54 individuals attending self-help groups for a range of addictive

disorders to complete The Locus of Control of Behaviour Scale (Craig, Franklin, & Andrews, 1984); the Beck Hopelessness Inventory (Beck, 1987); a 12 item perceived social support scale; and the Attributional Style Questionnaire (Petersen et al., 1982). Their analysis of these questionnaires included a multivariate analysis of covariance with the cognitive style variables as independent variables, co-varying age, sex and marital status. Their findings suggest that cognitive variables can distinguish distressed from nondistressed individuals. Further, they claim, that since these cognitive variables add contributory variance they should be taken together when considering differences in individual's response to stress. And while their results cannot be directly generalized to the general population or to relationship satisfaction, the researchers were able to point to a significant relationship between the process of cognitive appraisal and coping. They call for further investigation of the interaction of cognitive appraisal and coping in models that address cognitive interventions. Cognitive appraisal seems to be key that mediates the translation of external events into coping behaviors, which in turn influence the interaction. Cognitive appraisal, it is believed, is mediated through both attributional and coping style of the individual (Park & Folkman, 1997).

Researchers have found consistent and coherent patterns of relations between self-reported marital satisfaction and particular coping strategies such as positive approach, confrontation, escape or avoidance, disengagement, self-interest, and conflict (Bowman, 1990; Cohan & Bradbury, 1994; Houser, Konstam, & Ham, 1990). Coping strategies such as optimistic comparisons and negotiating, have been found to relate positively with marital satisfaction, while resignation and selective ignoring have been found to have a negative correlation (Fleishman, 1984; Menaghan, 1982; Sabourin, Cassidy & Burnside

(1996) offered a theory explaining the process of cognitive appraisal and reactions to stress in relation to life satisfaction. Their research supports the assumption that that cognition about the causes and consequences of events were related to method of coping and, thus, to behavioral outcomes. This research provides further support for the relationship between attributions and behavior. These authors identified variables that they believed contributed significantly to the cognitive style of the individual. Attributional style accounted for the largest portion of variance of those variables (Cassidy & Burnside, 1996).

The way in which the individual reacts to a stressful situation is influenced by that individual's attributions regarding the stressful event (Fincham and Bradbury, 1992). Fincham and Bradbury (1992) investigated the link between attributions and behavior in spousal interactions in two different studies. In one study, they introduced and validated the Relationship Attribution Measure (RAM). As part of that process, they looked specifically at responsibility attributions and their relationship to reported anger and whining in response to a stimulus behavior and to the amount of anger and whining displayed during a problem solving interaction between partners. They assessed attributional style and coping style in 47 couples that had been recruited for a study through advertisements in the local media. Participants independently completed several questionnaires including the Marital Adjustment Test (MAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959); the Relationship Attribution Measure (RAM: Fincham & Bradbury, 1992); a shortened version of the Spouse Observation Checklist (SOC); and the Inventory of Marital Problems. Researchers used actual negative partner behaviors that had occurred in the last week, as identified in the SOC, to ask each spouse to rate attributions for those actual

behaviors. Then, responses to the Inventory of Marital Problems were used to identify a topic that both spouses had identified as causing difficulty in their marriage. These difficulties then served as a topic for a problem-solving discussion. The couples were then asked to discuss the topic they had been identified and their discussion was videotaped and later coded for expression of anger and whining. Their results indicated that for wives, responsibility attributions are related to observed anger and not simply to self-reports of anticipated anger. That is, they found that wives who were angry were also more likely to hold their spouse accountable for difficulties in the marriage. They also found an association between responsibility attributions and whining for both husbands and wives. This time, for both husbands and wives, those who were more likely to whine during the interaction were also more likely to blame the other for difficulties in the relationship. They did not however, find an association between responsibility attributions and anger for husbands. So when the men were angry, during this exchange, they did not blame their wives for the difficulties.

Also in 1992, Fincham and Bradbury examined whether a spouses' attributions for events in their marriage were related to their behavior in interaction with marital quality as a correlate. Again, they recruited a nonclinical sample of 47 couples through advertisements in the local media. Each spouse independently completed a demographics questionnaire, the MAT, and the Inventory of Marital Problems. From the Inventory of Marital Problems the experimenter chose a topic that both spouses experienced as a difficulty in the marriage. Spouses were then instructed individually to make causal and responsibility attribution ratings for the topic yielding the highest summed value. Spouses were then asked to individually make attributions for a second topic rated as being a

difficulty in the marriage. This topic however was not necessarily the same for both spouses. Participants were then asked to sit facing each other and discuss a mutually agreeable solution to the problem they both viewed as presenting difficulty for them. The discussion was videotaped and later coded for problem-solving behaviors exhibited. Results, as expected, indicated that spouses' maladaptive attributions were related to less effective problem-solving behaviors, particularly among wives. Further, their research indicated that maladaptive attributions and less effective problem solving behaviors were more strongly related for distressed than nondistressed couples, particularly among wives.

In this same study, the authors were interested in the possibility that attributions pertaining to real behaviors and to hypothetical behaviors may be different. They found evidence for the idea that the use of hypothetical partner behavior as stimuli in attribution research does not lead to artificial results. This finding is important in evaluating other research which asks partners how they believe they will respond to a given situation involving the relationship.

Ptacek & Dodge (1994) investigated the way an individual's coping style influences the perception of satisfaction in the romantic relationship dyad. They hypothesized that problem-focused coping and adaptive emotional-focused coping (e.g., seeking emotional social support, turning to religion, or attempting to view the situation in the best possible light) would correlate positively with relationship satisfaction. Conversely, then, less adaptive emotional-focused methods (e.g., disengaging mentally or behaviorally from stress situations) would correlate negatively with relationship satisfaction. They were also interested in the way perceptions of one partner about the other's coping related to relationship satisfaction. To test their hypothesis, they asked parents of students from two

Catholic elementary schools to complete both the COPE Scale (Carver et al., 1989) and the Spanier's (1976) Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS). Their study assessed the coping style of each individual in a partnership as well as the perceived coping style of the significant other. Two groups, one made up of forty dating student couples and the other, thirty married couples, who were slightly older than the students, were surveyed. The married couples were recruited from parents of children in two Catholic elementary schools. Both groups were assessed as to how they typically cope with stress as well as how they believed their partners typically cope with stress by completing the COPE Scale. Relationship satisfaction was measured with the DAS. The results of this investigation suggest, agreeing with previous research, that spouses' maladaptive attributions were related to less effective problem-solving behaviors, particularly among wives.

Interestingly, there is no published research that investigates the link between attributional style, coping style and relationship satisfaction in couples, with attributional style and coping style serving as independent predictors of satisfaction. There have been, however, studies that approximate the idea of integrating these concepts as a predictor of satisfaction.

As described earlier, Metts and Cupach (1990) examined and found a correlation between relationship beliefs and relationship satisfaction. However, dysfunctional beliefs failed to predict satisfaction when coping style was controlled. Thus, these researchers found some support for the idea that coping style mediated the association between dysfunctional beliefs and relationship satisfaction. In the Metts and Cupach study (1990) there was no measure of the individual's attributional style. Therefore the meaning-

making process of one's own, or of one's partner's, coping style was not accounted for in this study.

Kurdek (1991) came close to using attributional and coping style as predictors of relationship satisfaction with his proposal of an integration of three prominent theories in an effort to predict significant portions of variance in relationship satisfaction. His conceptualization involved integrating variables from the contextual model (Bradbury & Fincham, 1988), the investment model (Rusbult, 1983), and the problem-solving model (Markman, Floyd, Stanley & Stroasli, 1988). In his study, Kurdek used variables from each model, which he assumed to account for relationship satisfaction at different levels of generality. The contextual model accounts for individual belief systems, partners bring to the relationship. The investment model accounts for reward and costs incurred in the relationship and the problem-solving model focuses on the process of partner appraisal of stress within the relationship. Kurdek (1991) tested and found support for his model in the gay community. Later, Kurdek (1995) looked at the relationship between husbands and wives' use of three conflict resolution styles (conflict engagement, withdraw, and compliance) and change in each partner's marital satisfaction over a two-year period. This time, Kurdek had 155 married couples complete surveys annually that assessed their conflict resolution styles, and their satisfaction with the relationship. He assessed conflict resolution style with the Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI, Kurdek, 1994), which assess coping in two parts. In part one, CRSI-Self, participants report how frequently they use each of 16 different coping style to deal with arguments or disagreements with their partner. Part two is the CRSI-Partner. In this section, participants use the same questions to rate how frequently their partners use the same 16

styles. Kudek then averaged both sets of scores (self and partner) to determine a coping style. Marital satisfaction was measured with the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (Schumm, Paff-Bergen, Hatch, Obiorah, Copeland, Meens & Bugaighis, 1986). Participants had been married four years at the time of the first data collection. The second data collection was completed for this study close to the couples fourth, fifth and sixth wedding anniversary. This research suggested that changes in conflict resolution style predicted husband, but not wives marital satisfaction. Changes in marital satisfaction did not predict change in conflict resolution style. The frequency in which wives used conflict engagement and husbands used withdraw as conflict resolution styles was most predictive of each spouse's marital satisfaction.

In a similar integration of constructs, Norman, Conner & Rance (1995) investigated the attribution, and coping styles of teleworkers in reaction to work-related stress (Norman, et al, 1995). This study validated the idea that optimistic attributions are more likely to lead to more adaptive coping strategies and, in turn, to more positive psychological and job-related outcomes. This study is of interest because it is one that investigates the link between attribution styles, coping style and satisfaction, with some support for the idea that attributional style mediates the relationship between coping style and relationship satisfaction. It does lend credence to the idea that attribution style influences coping style, indirectly influencing satisfaction across a wide area of domains.

Summary of Coping and Attributional style

The result of this research suggests that attributions may be related to behavior. Early studies supported such an association for attributions (see Bradbury & Fincham, 1990) but did not show that the attribution-behavior relation occurred independently of marital

satisfaction. However, more recent research (Bradbury & Fincham, 1992; Metts & Cupach, 1990; Ptacek & Dodge, 1994) found support for the idea that negative attributions are related to less effective problem-solving behaviors and that negative causal and responsibility attributions are related to increased rates of negative behavior.

Gender Differences

Differences in gender have been shown to exist in terms of satisfaction in previous research (Bryson, Bryson, Licht, & Licht, 1976; Kurdec, 1991; Lamke, Sollie, Durbin, & Fitzpatrick, 1994; McGowen & Hart, 1992; Ray, 1988; Vera & Betz, 1992). Gender differences are also noted in research that looks more specifically at attributional style and coping (Bradbury and Fincham, 1994).

In their study of the difference in attributional style of distressed and nondistressed couples, Fincham and Bradbury (1987) found that for women, their own negative attributions predicted less satisfaction with their marriages one year in the future. This same prediction was not true for the men in their study. In 1989, Bradbury and Fincham again found gender differences in relationship attributions and satisfaction. In this research, they found that wives' attributions were related to husband's satisfaction. That is, when women held positive attributional styles, their husbands were more likely to be satisfied.

When assessing behaviors and satisfaction with their relationships, Fincham and Bradbury (1992) again found gender differences. Women who were observed to be angry with their partners were more likely to hold their partners responsible for conflict in their relationship. Conversely, men who were angry over a disagreement between the two did not blame their wives for marital difficulties. In another study, these same authors (1992) found that maladaptive attributions and less effective problem solving behaviors were more typical for

distressed wives in a relationship. Ptacek and Dodge (1994) supported that notion, when they found that maladaptive attributions were related to less effective problem-solving behaviors for wives.

Conclusion

There is a great deal of research on relationship satisfaction, how it can be measured and what variables make up that satisfaction. However, many questions remain as to how individuals differ in terms of perceiving satisfaction and how individual differences cause external events to be attributed in such a way as to positively or negatively affect the relationship dyad in terms of behaviors observed - including that of satisfaction. While a vast literature can be located to support each of these variables as contributing to relationship satisfaction, they have tended to be presented as competing rather than as contributory explanations. The literature would appear to provide extensive evidence that attributional style and problem-solving style are each independently implicated in determining satisfaction or dissatisfaction with partnered relationships. They would appear to each reflect different aspects of the cognitive appraisal system of the person which will determine their satisfaction.

The current study attempt to bring these variables together in a more comprehensive analysis of relationship satisfaction. It attempts to measure the way attributional style and coping style (cognitive appraisal and behavioral correlates) each influence one's relationship satisfaction.

This study examines relationship satisfaction as predicted by attributional style and coping style of both the individual and the romantic couple. It is hypothesized that couples who both have a positive attributional style and a more functional coping style will

report high relationship satisfaction. The rationale behind this hypothesis is that individuals who attribute stressful experiences in the relationship to more external, transient, and specific causes, and whose attribution regarding responsibility and blame are more benign, who then behave in active coping styles will be more satisfied, and then believe the relationship to be more satisfied. The study also attempted to determine if gender differences influenced one's attributional style, coping style and/or their satisfaction with the relationship.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

This chapter presents information regarding the participants, the procedures, the instruments for this study, and the procedures for data analysis.

Participants

Participants were 103-partnered couples from throughout the United States who each volunteered to complete a research packet. The only requirement for the participants was that they be currently involved in a romantic relationship and that their partners also participate. Participants were acquired by mailing packets to acquaintances of the researcher who gave packets to their partnered-friends. One colleague took 10 packets to acquaintances from her home town in Iowa; another took 20 packets to his mother who teaches at a middle school in southern Florida; another took 20 packets to his place of employment in Houston; Texas; packets were also distributed in New Orleans, Louisiana, Dallas, Texas, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, Seattle, Washington, and Little Rock, Arkansas.

A total of 175 packets were distributed, 103 of which were returned, providing a response rate of 63%. Sixteen of the packets had incomplete data that made them unusable. However, there were some questionnaires which had a small variety of data incomplete and which did not skew the analysis and which were included in the analyses. For this reason many of the sums do not equal the total 87.

There were 89 men and 85 women who participated in the study. There were 83 heterosexual and four gay and lesbian couples in the survey making a total of 87-partnered couples. The males ranged from ages 18 to 72, and the females ranged from 18 to 64 in

age. Table 1 includes the mean ages and standard deviations.

Table 1

Age Means and Standard Deviations Total and According to Gender

Sample	N	Mean Age	Standard Deviation
Total	174	37.77	12.70
Males	89	38.50	13.70
Females	85	37.04	12.80

The racial diversity of the participants included 88.5% Caucasians, 1.1 % Hispanics 2.3% Native American, 4.6% African American/Black, 1.1% Asian-American/Asian, and 2.3 % indicated Other as their racial heritage. Table 2 summarizes the information regarding race.

Table 2

Demographic Information Regarding Race

Ethnicity	<u>N</u>	%
African-American/Black	8	4.6
Asian-American/Asian	1	1.1
Caucasian	155	88.5
Hispanic	2	1.1
Native American	2	2.3
Other	6	3.4

Since being in a romantic partnership was a condition for inclusion in the study, the demographics included a question regarding how long a person had been in the relationship. Eighty-seven partners responded to this question. The mean length of relationship was 174 months (14 1/2 years), and the range was from 3 months to 620 months (51 years). Type of relationship was also a demographic question with 75.9% of the participants being married or in a committed homosexual relationship; 12.6% claiming to be dating and living separately; 9.2% were unmarried and cohabitating.

Participants were also asked how many times they had been partnered prior to their current relationship. Of the males responding to this question, 72.4% said this was their first partnership; 16% reported one prior partnership; 4.6% said they had been partnered two times previously; and 1.1% said they had been partnered at least three times prior to their current relationships. When looking at female responses, 67.8% reported this to be their first time partnered relationship, 17.2% reported they had been partnered at least one other time; 6.9% reported two previous partnerships; and 3.4% reported they had been partnered at least three times previously.

A large percentage of the participants in the survey had completed a degree including college or beyond (males 56.9% and females 55.1%). This statistic is not representative of the general population of which only 25 percent of Caucasians in the United States are college educated (aol1.infoplease.com, 2001). Table 4 is a breakdown of the level of education for participants by gender.

Table 3

Level of Education by Gender

	Males	Females
Completed High School	17.2%	14.9%
Some College	25.3%	29.9%
Completed College	34.5%	33.3%
Completed Master's Degree	19.5%	18.4%
Completed Ph.D or M.D.	3.4%	3.4%

Slightly more than half (57.5%) of the participants reported they had no children currently living in their household. Eighteen percent of the participants reported one child at home; 16.1% reported two children living at home and 6.9% reported three or more children living in the home. Of those participants with children living in the home, 16.1 reported one of those children was a teenager, and 4.5% reported they had two teenagers living with them in their home.

When asked about their average yearly income 21.8% of the participants said they made less than \$20,000 per year as a couple. Most of the couples (56.3%) reported they earned between \$20,000 and \$90,000 each year, and 21.8% said they earned more than \$90,000 per year.

Procedures

The participants were volunteers from various work settings across the United States. Each partner was given a separate packet of forms to complete and mail back in individual envelopes to the researcher. Complete instructions, including the request that partners complete their packets separately and not share their answers were printed on the front of each packet.

Each packet included the following items: instructions, informed consent, demographics questionnaire, Relationship Attribution Measure, COPE, and Marital Satisfaction Scale. Each questionnaire was complete with its own set of instructions. The packet took approximately 30 minutes to complete. In the packets the order of the instruments was counter-balanced to help control for possible order effects.

The packets were each coded so that partners could be identified. Upon receipt, they were screened for completeness and scorability. While the majority of the participants

completed all the information, some packets were received that had missing information. Missing information was treated as that, and the available information was included in the sample. In 13 cases, either a matching partner packet was not returned or there was enough data missing to invalidate an individual questionnaire, then that partnered questionnaire was not utilized. It was determined there was too much data missing if an entire questionnaire was not completed. There did not appear to be any question that was avoided more often than another.

Instrumentation

Demographic Questionnaire

The demographic questionnaire consisted of twenty items (Appendix A). The items queried the respondent's age, gender, race/ethnicity, level of education, socio-economic status, number of marriages, type of current relationship (ie married/committed, cohabiting, dating and living separately, other), length of relationship with this partner, age, gender, race/ethnicity of the partner, education level of the partner.

Relationship Attribution Measure Attributional Style Questionnaire

Attributional style was measured with the Relationship Attribution Measure (RAM; Fincham & Bradbury, 1992). This measure was designed and standardized to measure attributions related specifically to relationships (Fincham & Bradbury, 1992). It assesses attributions related to causality and responsibility in a straight forward and concrete manner as called for in earlier marital attribution literature (Fincham & Bradbury, 1992). The RAM was slightly revised to reflect the focus of this paper in that the word "partner" was substituted for "husband/wife" throughout the instrument. Partners were asked to rate, on a 6-point scale, the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with six attributional

statements made about each of three negative partner behaviors. (e.g. "Your partner begins to spend less time with you"). Three of the attributional statements are designed to rate causal attributions dimensions that assess locus of control, stability, and globality. Two statements assess responsibility-blame attributions that focus on motivation and intent. The final statement is related to blame. The higher the score on each of the subscales are associated with more dysfunctional marital interactions and marital dissatisfaction (Brody, Arias, Fincham, 1996). While the constructs of causal, responsibility and blame attributions have been theoretically delineated (Brody et al, 1996), other researchers have shown that they share considerable variation (Karney, Bradbury, Fincham & Sullivan, 1994). Therefore, for the present analysis they were combined so as to be indicators of a single latent construct for partners.

Reliability of this instrument was established by showing the measure to be internally consistent and by demonstrating adequate test-retest reliability. All RAM subscales, except causal locus dimension for wives, show acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha > .70$), and each attributional dimension correlated with marital satisfaction. In a test-retest reliability study, with the exception of the two attributional dimensions (wives locus and husbands' intent) correlations were high (for wives: locus = .43, stability = .90, globality = .80, causal composite = .84, intent = .75, motivation = .88, blame = .76, and responsibility composite = .87; for husbands: locus = .57, stability = .60, globality = .83, causal composite = .72, intent = .32, motivation = .79, blame = .51, and responsibility composite = .61).

COPE

The COPE is a 53-item scale used to measure coping strategies which individuals typically employ in response to stress. That instrument measures 14 theoretically distinct

categories of coping, representing three broad dimensions labeled problem-focused, emotion-focused, and less useful coping. Five scales are used to measure problem-focused coping which include active coping, planning, suppression of competing activities, restraint coping, seeking of instrumental social support (Carver et al., 1989). Emotion-focused coping is measured through five scales that assess seeking of emotional social support, positive reinterpretation, acceptance, denial, and turning to religion (Carver et al., 1989). Three scales assess coping responses thought to be less useful including a focus on and venting of emotions, behavioral disengagement, and mental disengagement. An additional scale, measuring use of alcohol and drugs as coping behavior, is assessed with one item. Four items assessed all other scales. Participants are asked to indicate on the four point scales how often they used each strategy in response to stressful events in their life.

Park and Folkman (1997) recommend the COPE as a measure of determining situational meaning making. It has been widely used in assessing coping behavior in the study of relationship satisfaction (Ptacek, & Dodge, 1995). An eight-week test-retest of the instrument yielded reliability coefficients for the 14 subscales ranged from .46 to .86 (Carver et al., 1989). Specifically, the test-retest reliabilities on each scale are as follows: active coping, .56; planning, .63; suppression of competing activities .46; restraint coping .51; seeking social support - instrumental .64; seeking social support- emotional, .77; positive reinterpretation & growth .48; acceptance, .63; turning to religion, .86; Focus on and venting of emotions, .69; denial, .54; behavioral disengagement, .66; mental disengagement, .58, alcohol-drug disengagement, .57. Cronbach's alpha reliability were reported for each scale as: active coping .62; planning, .80; suppression of competing

activities, .68; restraint coping, .72; seeking social support - instrumental, .75; seeking social support - emotional, .85; positive reinterpretation & growth, .68; acceptance, .65; turning to religion, .92; Focus on and venting of emotions, .77; denial, .71; behavioral disengagement, .63; mental disengagement, .45. These subscales will be combined into the three broad dimensions of coping as delineated by Caver et al (1989) in their research. Under these dimensions, problem-focused coping is derived from the subscales active coping, planning, suppression of competing activities, restraint coping, and seeking of instrumental support. Emotion-focused coping is made up of items assessing seeking social support for instrumental reasons, seeking social support more emotional reasons, positive reinterpretation and growth; acceptance, and turning to religion. Less than useful coping comes from the items that measure focus on and venting of emotions; behavioral disengagement, and mental disengagement.

Marital Satisfaction Scale

The Marital Satisfaction Scale (MSS-Roach, Frazier, & Bowden, 1981), (brief version) as adapted for nonmarried dyads, was administered to assess relationship satisfaction. This brief version of the scale is made up of 48 items that assess relationship satisfaction as an attitude. It purposely seeks to avoid activating cognitive processes that would ask involve participants to recall frequencies of given behaviors. In this way it differs from other instruments of satisfaction that define satisfaction as an assessment of the state of the individual's relationship. This instrument attempts to measure one's attitude along a continuum of greater or lesser favorability at a given point in time. Because the other two instruments, which are used in this study as predictor variables, seek to assess cognitive processes, it seemed more appropriate to use an instrument that evoked affect or opinion

rather than cognition for criterion purposes. It is hoped the selection of this instrument does more accurately assess the attitude that is influenced by the cognitive processes of attributional style and coping.

The researcher adapted the instrument so that it was appropriate for non-married partners. Therefore, when the instrument used the word “spouse” it was changed to “partner” and when the instrument originally asked about the “marriage,” for purposes of this study, the word “relationship” was used.

Scoring on each item ranges from 1-5 with response categories ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, with 5 indicating the most favorable attitude toward one’s relationship. The highest possible score on the revised version of this scale is 240. Factor analysis indicated that 70 of the items were significantly related to a single factor at the .05 level. Cronbach’s alpha for the scale is .982, indicating high internal consistency for the short version. The instrument correlates at a low level (.33) with the Marlow-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlow, 1960, as cited in Roach, Frazier, & Bowen, 1981).

Analysis of Data

Data analysis consisted of a combination of multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), correlation, and multiple regression (MR).

For the question one and two (Will the attributional style and the coping style of one partner predict their own satisfaction) a multiple regression analysis was completed for each gender with the independent variables (IV’s) of attributional style, problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping and less useful coping, and the dependent variable (DV) of relationship satisfaction for that person.

The question of gender was answered during this analysis since respondents were coded by gender with partner a = male partner and partner b=female partner during data entry.

The last question (will partner's whose attributional and coping styles are similar, be more satisfied than partner's whose style is different) was answered with a doubly multivariate repeated measures analysis of variance with the IV of attributional style, problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and less useful coping and relationship satisfaction serving as within variables and with relationship satisfaction of the two partners serving as between variables.

In addition a correlation analysis was completed for the variables of age, length of relationship, and satisfaction of each partner. Further t-tests were conducted between the styles of partners to determine if a difference in style exists due to gender. These tests looked at attributional style, problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and less useful coping by gender to examine differences in style that might be due to gender.

Reliability Analysis for each of the instruments used for analysis was also computed.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter describes the results of this study. This study evaluated the way in which attributional style and coping style are related to relationship satisfaction. It investigated the way in which an individual's own attributional style, either negative or positive and their own coping style, problem-focused, emotion-focused or less useful coping was related to their own satisfaction with their relationship. The purpose was also to examine how an individual's attributional style and their own coping style are related to the satisfaction of their partner. It evaluated if having like styles might lead to a more satisfied relationship. Finally, it also evaluated whether gender of the participants was a significant factor in the way one experienced satisfaction as mediated by attributional style and coping style.

Participants in the study were 89 men and 85 women, from throughout the United States. Their ages ranged from 18 to 72 and the length of their relationships ranged from 3 months to 51 years.

The first procedure was to determine descriptive statistics for each of the scales. Table three lists the means and standard deviations for the variables of problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, less useful coping, attributional style and relationship satisfaction. For the problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping and less useful coping scales, as well as the relationship satisfaction scale, the higher the scores, the more highly one endorsed that item. For the attributional style scale, the higher the score, the more negative attributions one makes.

Attributional style scores for the survey group ranged from 32 to 116, with the mean

score of being 71.01 for males and 70.31 for females. The higher the score on the RAM, the more likely the individual is to be pessimistic in their outlook. The lowest possible score on the instrument is 24 and the highest is 144. Scores on individual items ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (agree strongly). On each individual question then, (e.g., The reason my partner criticized me is not likely to change) a score of 1 is indicative of a more optimistic outlook, while a score of 6 indicates a more pessimistic view of the partner.

Participants responded to questions that produced a score that described their level of coping across three domains. On all of these instruments, the higher the score the more likely was the individual to cope use that particular style of coping. The range of scores for Problem-focused coping could be from 20 to 80; the range for emotion-focused coping theoretically could be 16 to 64; and the range for less useful coping is from 12 to 48.

Lastly, participants were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with their current partnership. The range of scores possible on this instrument was from 47 to 235. The mean scores and standard deviations by gender of attributional style, coping styles and relationship satisfaction are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations Attributional Style, Problem-focused coping, Emotion-focused coping, Less Useful Coping and Relationship Satisfaction by Gender

	Male	<u>SD</u>	Female	<u>SD</u>
Attribution	71.01	13.45	70.31	16.91
Problem-focused	44.81	7.21	43.65	11.03
Emotion-focused	53.71	11.41	54.56	11.03
Less Useful	24.79	7.49	25.35	8.13
Relationship Satisfaction	154.04	15.41	153.73	15.20

Analysis of Data

Data analysis performed included multiple regression (MR) MANOVA and correlation. Before analysis began individual scale scores from the COPE were grouped into the broad categories of Problem-Focused Coping, Emotion Focused Coping, and Less Useful Coping. This grouping has been used in previous studies and provides a useful way to look at general styles of coping. Problem-Focused Coping was made up from the scales of Active Coping (Questions 5, 25, 47, 50 of the questionnaire); Planning (Questions 19, 32, 39, 56); Suppression of Competing Activities (Questions 15, 33, 42, 55); and Restraint Coping (Questions 10, 22, 41, 49). Emotion-Focused Coping was derived from scales Seeking Social Support for Instrumental Reasons (Questions 4, 14, 30, 45); Seeking Social Support for Emotional Reasons (questions 11, 23, 34, 52); Positive Reinterpretation of Growth (Questions 1, 29, 38, 59); Acceptance (questions 13, 21, 44, 54); and Turning to Religion (Questions 7, 18, 48, 50). Less Useful Coping came from the scales Focus on and Venting of Emotions (Questions 3, 17, 28, 46); Denial (Questions 6, 27, 40, 57); Behavioral Disengagement (Questions 9, 24, 37, 51); Mental disengagement (Questions 9, 24, 37, 51); and Alcohol –Drug Use (Questions 12, 35, 53, 26).

The first research question, "Will individuals who possess a positive attributional and an active coping style be more likely to be satisfied in their relationship than are individuals who possess both a negative attributional style and an emotion-focused or less useful coping style" was analyzed through MR with the independent variables (IV) of attributional style, problem-focused coping style, emotion-focused coping style and less useful coping style, and the dependent variable (DV) marital satisfaction. A correlational

analysis was completed for the variables of age, length of relationship, number of times partnered, number of children, education level, socio-economic status, and marital satisfaction of participants. For all of the analyses, the male partner was coded as partner A and the female partner was coded as partner B. Data collection yielded only three gay and lesbian relationships which were analyzed as if they were heterosexual ones due to the limited number, thus limited ability to make inferences to that population.

For the second question (does the coping style and attributional style of a given partner predict their partners satisfaction) was analyzed with MR using the IV problem-focused coping style of partner a, emoting-focused coping style of partner a, less-useful coping style of partner a and attributional style of partner a and the DV marital satisfaction of partner b. The equation was then analyzed using the IV's for partner B to predict the satisfaction of partner A. Again, Partner A was coded as male and Partner B as female for this analysis.

To answer the last question, (Will couples with similar styles in attribution and coping be more satisfied than are couples whose attributional style and coping style are dissimilar?) a doubly multivariate matched pairs MANOVA was performed.

In addition to these analyses, the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of all the study variables were examined with a zero-ordered correlations table.

Additionally, cronbach alphas were analyzed for reliability of each of the instruments.

Research Question 1

Will individuals whose own attributional style is more positive and who are more likely to be problem-focused in their own coping style be more likely to be satisfied with their relationship than are individuals whose attributional style is more negative and who are more likely to use emotion-focused or disengaged coping?

This question was evaluated by multiple regression with one's own attributional style and coping style (including problem-focused, emotion-focused, and less useful) being the predictor variables. The criterion variable was one's own relationship satisfaction.

When looking at partner A (males), or at Partner B (females) the regression analysis was not significant for any of the predictor variables. That is neither an individual's own coping style, nor his or her own attributional style, whether male or female, predicted their own relationship satisfaction.

Research Question 2

Does one's coping style and attributional style predict the relationship satisfaction of one's partner?

This question was answered through multiple regression analysis with relationship satisfaction of partner A (male partner) being the criterion variable. Predictor variables included attributional style of partner B (female partner), problem-focused coping of partner B (female partner), emotion-focused coping of partner B (female partner), and less useful coping of partner B (female partner).

The regression analysis was significant only for problem-focused coping [$F = 2.970$ (4,84) $p < .02$]. The variables attributional style, emotion-focused coping and less useful coping were dropped from the regression equation because they accounted for less than .05 percent of the variance. R^2 for the variable problem-focused coping was .129, indicating that 12.9% of variance in relationship satisfaction for men can be attributed to problem-focused coping of his female partner. According to this research, only problem-focused coping on the part of the female partner can predict relationship satisfaction in her male partner. The results of the Regression analysis are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Regression of Attributional Style, Problem-focused Coping, Emotion-focused Coping, and Less Useful Coping Styles of the Female Partner on Relationship Satisfaction of Their Male Partners

Variable	Model	R	R Square	Adj R Square	Standard Error of Estimate
Attributional Style	1	.360	.129	.086	14.7703

The question was also analyzed for Partner B's (female partner) satisfaction as the criterion variable and for the female partner - A's problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping and less useful coping acting as predictor variables. This regression equation was again significant for problem-focused coping style [F (1,85) 23.445, p.00]. Again in this equation, the variables of attributional style, emotion-focused coping and less useful coping on the part of Partner A were dropped from the model because they failed to bring significant variance to the analysis. This finding suggests that when a male partner's coping style is problem focused, his female partner is more likely to be satisfied in the relationship. In this equation, $R^2 = .218$ indicating that 21.8% of the variance in relationship satisfaction is attributed to the partner's problem-focused coping style. This regression analysis is shown on table 6.

Table 6

Regression of Attributional Style, Problem-focused Coping, Emotion-focused Coping, and Less Useful Coping Styles of the Male Partner on Relationship Satisfaction of Their Female Partners

Variable	Model	R	R Square	Adj R Square	Standard Error of Estimate
Attributional Style	1	.467	.218	.209	13.5258

Research Question 3

When the styles of both partners is the same, that is when their coping or attributional style is similar will the partners be more satisfied than if partners are dissimilar in style?

This question was evaluated by means of a doubly multivariate repeated measures design where the satisfaction of partner A (male) and partner B (female) served as a between independent variable and the other four variables, attributional style, problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and less useful coping, each form two levels of a within independent variable called pair. The within variables were recoded into two levels, either same or different. Coding was achieved by determining the pair used the same style if their scores were within 10 points of each other. The researcher determined that 10 points constituted a difference, as that was an average of the standard deviations of the different scales. The scores on each scale were considered different if they were more than 10 points from each other. The mean of those couples that were the same in style and the mean of those who were dissimilar in style were then compared to determine if there was a difference in satisfaction between those groups. This analysis is similar to performing four separate 2 X 2 between within designs, but it is preceded by the multivariate tests.

This analysis of differences of the means for the between subjects group, that is the difference in satisfaction between groups of individuals who used problem-focused, emotion-focused and less satisfied coping strategies yielded no significant differences. The number of individuals who were assigned to each group is as follows: attributional style, same n = 49, different n = 35; problem-focused coping, same n= 69, different = 16; emotion-focused coping same n= 49, different n=35; and less useful coping same n=27, different n=58. Table 7 indicates the outcome of that analysis.

Table 7

Multivariate Analysis of Difference in Satisfaction Between Groups of Individuals Who
Were satisfied and Less Satisfied

Variable	DF	F	p
Problem-focused Difference	1	1.76	.20
Attributional Difference	1	1.30	.26
Emotion-focused Difference	1	.77	.38
Less Useful Difference	1	.023	.63

The multivariate analysis of the within tests, which analyzed the satisfaction of partners who shared similar attributional and coping styles and those whose attributional and coping styles were dissimilar was also not significant. The results of that analysis are shown in Table 8 below.

Table 8

Multivariate Analysis of the Satisfaction of Partners Who Used Different Coping and Attributional Styles and Those Partners Who Used the Same Coping and Attributional Style

Variable	Df	F	p
Problem-focused Difference	6	1.89	.50
Attribution Difference	6	1.41	.83
Emotion-focused Difference	6	1.39	.24
Less-Useful Difference	6	.42	.83

A correlations table was prepared to examine the correlations between various demographic data and relationship satisfaction. Significant correlations emerged from a number of these correlations. The correlations of the demographic variables age of partners, type of relationship, length of relationship in months, and satisfaction of the partners is shown on Table 9.

Table 9
Summary of Pearson Correlation Coefficients for Demographic Variables and Relationship Satisfaction

	Age Male	Age Female	Length of Relationship	Satisfaction of Male Partner	Satisfaction of Female Partner
Age Male.	1.00				
Age Female.	.96**	1.00			
Length of Relationship	-.82**	.85*	1.00		
Satisfaction of Male Partner	-.18	-.18	-.17	1.00	
Satisfaction of Female Partner	-.07	.00	.00	-.40**	1.00

*p = .05, **p = .01.

Correlations between attributional style and coping styles across gender were also investigated. Those correlations are shown in Tables 10 and 11.

Table 10

Summary of Pearson Correlations Coefficients for Attributinal Style and Coping Style of Women and Satisfaction of Men

	Problem-Focused	Emotion-Focused	Less -Focused	Attrib Style	Satisfaction
Problem-Focused	1.00				
Emotion-Focused	.48**	1.00			
Less-Focused	-.02	.31*	1.00		
Attrib Style	-.17	-.16	.20	1.00	
Satisfaction	.18	.08	-.17	-.17	1.00

*p = .05 ** p = .01

Table 11

Summary of Pearson Correlations Coefficients for Attributional Style and Coping Style of Men and Satisfaction of Women

	Problem-Focused	Emotion-Focused	Less -Focused	Attribution Style	Satisfaction
Problem-Focused	1.00				
Emotion-Focused	.48**	1.00			
Less-Focused	-.02	.31**	1.00		
Attrib Style	-.17	-.16	.20	1.00	
Satisfaction	.47**	.20	-.03	-.17	1.00

*p = .05 ** .p = .01

According to these results, the satisfaction of partner b (female) is correlated with problem –focused coping of partner a ($R^2 = .47$). However, the satisfaction of the male partner is not correlated with the attributional style or the coping style of his partner.

Correlations related to satisfaction and coping style and attributional style by gender were also run and are shown on Table 12 and 13 for men and women respectively.

Table 12

Summary of Pearson Correlations Coefficients for Attributional Style and Coping Style of Men and Satisfaction of Men

	Problem-Focused	Emotion-Focused	Less -Focused	Attribution Style	Satisfaction
Problem-Focused	1.00				
Emotion-Focused	.48**	1.00			
Less-Focused	-.02	.31	1.00		
Attribution Style	-.17	-.16	.20	1.00	
Satisfaction	-.18	.08	-.17	-.17	1.00

*p = .05 ** .p = .01

Table 13

Summary of Pearson Correlations Coefficients for Attributional Style and Coping Style of Women and Satisfaction of Women

	Problem-Focused	Emotion-Focused	Less -Focused	Attribution Style	Satisfaction
Problem-Focused	1.00				
Emotion-Focused	.50**	1.00			
Less-Focused	.05	.06	1.00		
Attribution Style	.10	.14	-.04	1.00	
Satisfaction	-.16	.01	.16	-.19	1.00

*p = .05 ** .p = .01

A number of paired sample t-tests were performed to examine differences between the genders with respect to attributional style, coping style and satisfaction. None of these tests were significant, indicating that as a group, these men and women were not different in their attributional styles, their coping styles or in their satisfaction.

When looking at correlations between length of relationship and style of coping a number of significant relationships emerged. Length of relationship is negatively correlated with emotion-focused coping for males ($R^2 = -.240$, $p = .05$). For males, the length of relationship is also negatively correlated with less useful coping. So, according to this analyses, either men are more likely to use either emotion-focused coping or less useful coping the longer they are in a relationship, or men who are less likely to use less useful coping strategies are more likely to be long term relationships. For females those correlations did not emerge. It seemed likely that age may also be a factor in one's coping style and may account for the difference in styles reported by men.

Age, then correlated with attributional style and coping style for each gender. For men, age was negatively correlated with emotion-focused coping ($R^2 = -.266$, $p = .05$), and with less useful coping ($R^2 = -.316$, $p = .01$). Suggesting men may be less likely to use emotion-focused or less useful coping as they age. For women, age was negatively correlated with emotion-focused coping ($R^2 = -.285$, $p = .01$).

Reliability Analysis for each of the instruments used for analysis was also computed. The results of that analysis yielded a Chronbach's alpha of .36 for the RAM, indicating low internal reliability. Because previous research looked at the different scales of the RAM rather than the instrument as a whole, comparisons to other alpha data are unavailable.

The MSS yielded an alpha of .86, indicating good reliability for this instrument. This is consistent with the alpha of .982 reported by the instrument's authors (Roach, Frazier, & Bowen, 1981).

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

This chapter presents a summary of the study that looked at the attributional style and coping style as it relates to relationship satisfaction in romantically involved couples.

While there is an abundance of research pertaining to couples and satisfaction, this study examined the interaction of attributional style and coping style in relation to overall happiness, or satisfaction, in the partnership.

This chapter discusses the statistical results and conclusions that were derived from responses of 89 couples to three different survey instruments. The results and concerns are discussed in relation to their implications for both theory and practice.

Finally, limitations of the present study are outlined, including validity and reliability concerns, generalizability of the results, participant numbers, and others.

Recommendations for future research are also listed and discussed.

Summary

This study examined the relationship between coping style and attributional style and relationship satisfaction in partnered relationships of both heterosexual and gay and lesbian romantically involved couples. While there have been many variables that have been investigated in an attempt to describe how relationship satisfaction occurs, the emphasis during the past decade or so has been one of isolating and describing one's perceptions of one's own and one's partner's way of viewing the world. This view is then incorporated in to a general attributional style that has been demonstrated to be related to one's satisfaction in their relationship (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990). Other, earlier studies investigated behavioral correlates that influenced satisfaction. This research, too, had

limited success in predicting couples that would be satisfied. The goal of this study was to assess the influence of both attributional style and coping style (as a behavioral variable) on relationship satisfaction. It attempted to look at the influence of one partner on the other by investigating partnered couples.

This study examined an individual's self-perception of her or his own style of coping and his or her self-perception of his or her own attributional style in the relationship. According to the research, and to the hypothesis of this study, this is done in an attempt to allow predictions not only of the individual's satisfaction, but also of the satisfaction of his/her partner.

The study also examined the interaction of styles in the relationship when partners have a like style of coping and a like style of attribution, in terms of events that occur between partners in the relationship. This was done in an attempt to determine if attributional style or coping style was more important in relationship satisfaction, or if the combination of the two styles created a third entity, whose interaction better predicted relationship satisfaction than either of the two styles alone.

Finally, the study evaluated the correlations between age and length of relationship of the partners and satisfaction to determine if those variables were related to either happiness or dissatisfaction in a relationship systematically. This was also computed and analyzed for correlations between age and length of relationship and style of coping.

The participants were 87-partnered couples, 89 men and 85 women, from a broad section of the United States including the upper mid-west, the south, and the plains states. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 72 years and the length of their relationships ranged from 3 months to 51 years. The participants and their partner

volunteered to complete three questionnaires, plus a short demographic questionnaire.

The questionnaire included The Relationship Attributions Measure (Fincham & Bradbury, 1992), the COPE (Carver, et al, 1989) and the Marital Satisfaction Scale (Roach, et al, 1981). Participants who were selected for the study met the requirement of considering themselves to be in a romantic relationship with their partner, who also agreed to participate. Both partners in the relationship were required to complete the survey. If one partner did not complete his or her survey, neither survey from the partner set was included in the final calculations of the result.

Conclusions

Question 1:

This question centered around an individual's self-perceived attributional style and coping style. The question was intended to predict one's own satisfaction with their romantic relationship and with their chosen partner. According to the results of this study, neither an individual's own attributional style, nor their coping style predict relationship satisfaction. This was consistent for men and women.

For women or men who participated in this study, the style of coping that they employ when faced with issues in the relationship, either good or more importantly, challenging, does not appear to predict whether they consider themselves satisfied overall in the relationship. Likewise, how a man or woman in a relationship attributes events in the relationship does not seem to predict their overall happiness as a couple. This is contrary to previous research that has shown that attributional style, in particular may determine marital satisfaction (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987). In their study, Fincham and Bradbury (1987) investigated the relationship between attributions and marital satisfaction over a

one-year period. In this study, 34 couples were assessed for their causal and responsibility attributions for marital difficulties and negative spouse behaviors and their relation to marital satisfaction. Their results indicated that extreme groups of distressed and nondistressed spouses differ in their attributions, specifically that causal and responsibility attributions are significantly related to marital satisfaction. Those spouses whose causal and responsibility attributional style scores were high were more likely to be dissatisfied with their relationships. That is, if one spouse sees the cause negative behavior related to relationship difficulties as internal to the spouse, stable and global, then he/she is likely to be dissatisfied in the relationship. Likewise, spouses' who reported low causal and responsibility attributions, were more likely to be satisfied with the relationship. So if they believed behavior related to relationship difficulties was outside the control of the spouse, and that the spouse was not to blame for those behaviors, then that individual was more satisfied with their relationship. This held true for wives one year after the initial investigation, indicating that attributional style can predict future satisfaction.

One likely explanation for the contradictory findings of this question may lie in the demographic make-up of the sampled population. As described earlier, this group of participants were largely Caucasian (88.5%), well-educated (55% college education or beyond) and affluent (78% more than \$20,00 per year). It may be that individuals who have not faced prejudice and poverty may feel more self-efficacious, thus more able to control the outcome of their interactions.

Question 2

The second question examined looks at the role of one's self-perceived coping style and his or her attributional styles as these styles pertain to predicting the relationship

satisfaction of the individual's partner. In other words, does one's own way of handling the various situations and events that arise during the course of a committed romantic relationship affect the happiness/satisfaction of the partner of that individual?

The results of this investigation suggest that a female partner's satisfaction can be predicted by looking at her male partner's coping style. Specifically, she is more likely to be satisfied, if her male partner is problem-focused in his coping style. This study also suggested that the emotion-focused coping and less useful coping, as well as attributional style were not predictors of partner satisfaction.

Just as for the females, with problem-focused coping males as mates, when the satisfaction of the male partner was analyzed, the problem-focused coping style of the female partner was a useful predictor of male partner satisfaction. When the female partner was able to attack issues and problems analytically and with a solution orientation, her male partner's relationship satisfaction was more likely to be higher.

The analysis of this question suggested that emotion-focused coping and less useful coping, as well as attributional style were not predictors of partner satisfaction. This was true for both genders. That is, when one partner used a style such as crying and/or emotionally disengaging the satisfaction of the relationship is not influenced.

This research is consistent with previous research that indicated that husband's marital satisfaction is related to the way in which their wives' resolved conflict (Kurdek, 1995). In the 1995 study Kurdek looked at the relationship between husbands and wives' use of three conflict resolution styles (conflict engagement, withdraw, and compliance) and change in each partner's marital satisfaction over a two-year period. This previous research suggested that changes in conflict resolution style predicted husband, but not

wives marital satisfaction. On the other hand, changes in marital satisfaction did not predict change in conflict resolution style. The frequency in which wives used conflict engagement and husbands used withdraw as conflict resolution styles was most predictive of each spouse's marital satisfaction.

Question 3:

This question addresses the interaction of the partners in terms of attributional and coping styles. Are partners who have similar coping and/or attributional styles more likely to be satisfied? Or, do opposites attract when it comes to these styles? According to the responses to the questionnaire, there is no relationship between partners having a similar style and their satisfaction with their relationship, regardless of gender, or coping style most often employed. It can be surmised, perhaps, that whether the partners are alike in style is less important than if the style of the partner is pleasing, or acceptable to the individual. Early studies supported the notion for an association between attributions and coping (see Bradbury & Fincham, 1990) but did not show that the attribution-behavior relation occurred independently of marital satisfaction. However, more recent research (Bradbury & Fincham, 1992; Metts & Cupach, 1990; Ptacek & Dodge, 1994) found support for the idea that negative attributions are related to less effective problem-solving behaviors and that negative causal and responsibility attributions are related to increased rates of negative behavior. Neither of these studies, however, looked at the way in which having similar styles might influence satisfaction.

One reason this finding may be different than findings of previous researchers may be related to the population surveyed. This study tapped into a very well educated group of partnered individuals. This group, by and large, had also been partnered for long periods

of time (mean length of relationship = 14.5 years). These demographic characteristics of the population could influence the way the individuals both perceive the way they and their spouse behave and the way they view differences in the relationship. It may be that as one is better educated, their style of coping becomes more androgynous and thus less different. It may also be that these individuals are more tolerant of different attributional and coping styles of their partners.

Overall, the important finding for this study is that it supports previous notions garnered from the literature that one's coping style likely influences relationship satisfaction. However, unlike previous assertions in the literature, this study does not indicate that attributional style is related to relationship satisfaction.

With respect to gender differences, it was expected, consistent with previous research that differences would emerge. This was not the case. While numerous studies of attributional style and coping style have found differences in gender (Fincham and Bradbury, 1987; Bradbury and Fincham, 1989; Fincham and Bradbury, 1992; Ptacek and Dodge, 1994), in this study, the satisfaction of both men and women could only be related to problem-focused coping on the part of the opposite sex partner. In these earlier studies, it appeared that women, in particular, who held negative attributional styles and less healthy coping methods were more likely to be dissatisfied. It seems plausible that it socio-economic class may be the differentiating factor between previous research and the present study. In this study, both men and women were more likely to be upper income and well-educated. This may indicate they do have resources, both physical and mental, that allow them to feel they have more control over their environment and their own outcome – more self-efficacy. This self-efficacy may influence both their way of viewing

the world, in a more optimistic way and their way of coping, (i.e. more problem-focused because they can effect change).

Several interesting correlations resulted from this study in relation to satisfaction. One example in particular of an interesting correlational relationship is between coping style, the male partner's age and the length of time that the man is in the relationship. This study would suggest that as they get older, men are less likely to use emotion-focused and/or less useful coping strategies. As men age, they are more likely to use problem-focused coping styles, which this study indicates is a predictor of their female partner's satisfaction in a relationship. This finding may bear further investigation.

The results also indicate that men are less likely to use emotion-focused and less useful coping strategies, the longer they are involved in a relationship. The longer a man is invested in a relationship, the more likely he is to use a problem-focused coping style, again the best predictor in this study of female satisfaction. Though a possible alternative explanation for this finding is that men or women who utilize better coping strategies such as problem-focused ones are more like to remain married, it seems more likely that older men use better coping strategies as a result of learning over time. In this study, younger men used fewer problem coping strategies, regardless of the length of their relationship. The older men, who had been in a relationship for a number of years, used far more positive coping strategies.

Implications

This study has some important implications, particularly as it relates to the understanding of romantic relationships and the practice of marriage and family therapy. While a great deal of research supports the idea that both attributional style and coping

style are related to satisfaction within the relationship, there has been no investigation that looks at how those influence satisfaction when considered together.

This research suggests that coping style may be more predictive of relationship satisfaction than attributional style. Given that attributional style is now virtually assumed to be directly related to satisfaction (Fincham & Bradbury, 1994) the idea that attributional style as a predictor is redundant when coping style is assessed is, and should be, according to this study's results, controversial. It seems the relationship between attributions and coping needs to be more examination.

If, as indicated by this research, more satisfied relationships occur when one's partner is problem-focused in their coping style, then accessing for and training partners in the use of problem-focused coping skills becomes the most efficient and efficacious way to treat dissatisfied couples. It could also be viewed as an important tool in the prevention of relationship dissatisfaction during the course of pre-marital counseling, individual counseling and/or relationship counseling.

The suggestion that length of relationship is correlated to a more problem-focused coping style and that more satisfied relationship are those in which one's partner has a more problem-focused coping style needs to be more fully investigated. It may be that as individuals, particularly males, become older, their coping style becomes more problem-focused, leading them to feel more satisfied in their relationships. As stated earlier, another possible explanation is that it might be that the couples that are more problem-focused in their coping style tend to have longer lasting romantic relationships.

Understanding the dynamics of length of relationship and changes in coping style, as well as their influence on relationship satisfaction seems to be one that is important when

working with couples in marriage and family therapy.

This study suggests that in the area of coping and in attributional style, men and women report similar styles in their own behavior. That is, there does not appear to be gender differences attributional style or coping style when men and women rate their own ways of behaving.

In summary, then from a practical standpoint, this research indicates that it may be important to begin assessing an individual's way of coping and then begin to train them to be more problem-focused in their style.

Limitations

There a number of limitations to the study that deals with the sample population. One of the limitations was the limited number of same-sex romantic relations that inhibit the ability to look at the similarities and differences between same-sex and different sex relationships. Only three couples described theirs as a gay or lesbian relationship. This allows this study to have some generalizability to the heterosexual population, but not at all to gay and lesbian ones. The majority of the participants in the study were at least bachelor's level college educated (56.9% of the males and 55.1% of the females). While it was important to the researcher that the samples not come from the college student population, the participants were still from an educated group and probably not representative of the general population.

Another limitation to the study is the correlation of three different instruments in order to predict relationship satisfaction. Reliability estimates on each of these instruments was within acceptable limits, however, reliability rates on individual scales on the COPE are as low, in some cases, as .46, with only moderate reliability. There was no

data related to reliability estimates on the three constructs of problem-focused behavior, emotion-focused behavior and less useful behavior used in this study. When three instruments are correlated, reliability can be reduced and when one instrument is somewhat unstable, the stability of the overall reliability can come into question (Pedhazur, 1973).

The COPE was originally developed to describe and categorize coping behavior in response to some traumatic event and has been used extensively in hospital settings. And while it has been used in research related to coping in relationships, it is not specifically designed for that endeavor. An instrument that more directly assesses the way in which an individual might react to a given event, particularly one that is likely to occur in partnered relationship, might provide a more pertinent description of one's behavior in the relationship.

It seems possible, too, that the COPE may contain some gender and cultural bias when determining "good" versus "bad" coping. Good coping, according the developers of the instrument, involves taking an active role in problem solving. Bad coping, on the other hand involves methods that are more avoidant in nature. It seems, on the face of the assumptions, that individuals from cultures other than the dominant one, as well as females would be more likely to utilize an avoidance style of coping. There is in fact, some research to support the idea that both cultural and gender factors influence one's method of coping (Blanchard-Fields, Sulsky, & Robinson-Whelen, 1991; Lutzky, Knight, 1994; Pattanayak, Panda, & Mohanty, 1997)

Further, for purposes of this study in order to make the variables more simple, the RAM was used as a one-dimensional tool. That is, attributions were simply measured on

a continuum with higher scores being indicative of a more pessimistic (negative) style and higher scores being indicative of a more optimistic (positive) style. In earlier studies, the instrument was used to further delineate style by one's attributions of globality, stability, and cause or responsibility for an action of one's partner. This delineation brings a richer understanding of exactly how attributions influence the way the individual views his own and his partner's behavior. Further, the use of the tool (RAM) in a way that is different from previous studies puts some limitations on this studies ability to compare its results to results of previous studies. It might also partially explain why attributional style did not predict relationship satisfaction in this study, again, contrary to a large body of existing research.

Future Directions

Clearly, the relationship between coping and attributional style needs further study. There continue to be inconsistencies relative to whether these are, in fact, distinct constructs, or perhaps so closely related that they cannot be described except as a whole.

This study suggests that there is not a link between attributional style and coping style—or at the very least that attributional style, when evaluated with coping style, does not add any significant variance toward predicting relationship satisfaction. On the face of it, this finding is in contrast to earlier studies that suggest attributional style is related to marital satisfaction. This association has been described as “quite robust” (see Bradbury & Fincham, 1990).

Several studies have found a link between attributional style and behavior such that individual's with optimistic attributions are more likely to use more adaptive coping strategies and, in turn, to be more positive in their relations. Fincham and Bradbury

(1988) determined that dissatisfied spouses were more likely to exhibit higher rates of negative behavior when they were led to believe that their partner was responsible for writing an unfavorable description of them when compared to a group of satisfied spouses who were led to believe that their partner was not responsible for writing the negative descriptions. . Doherty reported that wives' tendency to infer negative intent on the part of their husbands covaried with the amount of verbal criticism they displayed in interaction with their husbands. Spouses were asked by Fincham and O'Leary (1983) to make attributions for hypothetical positive and negative marital events and to report their likely affective and behavioral responses to those events. These researchers found that attributions were related to affective reactions for positive events. Later, Fincham, Beach, and Nelson (1987) found that spouses attributions were related to their reported affective and behavioral responses, but only when the attribution judgments concerned the partner's accountability for their actions. Only one study, which looked at coping style and attributional style together to assess satisfaction. That study, however, focused on the behavioral and attributional style of workers in the telecommunications industry and used those style to predict job satisfaction (Norman, et al, 1995). Certainly, the generalizability of this study to relationship satisfaction is limited.

Likewise, investigations of the relationship between behavior and satisfaction have found them to be related. Observational studies of interpersonal behavior in relationships suggests that dissatisfied couples, compared with satisfied couples show higher rates of negative behavior, more reciprocation of negative behavior, and a greater degree of behavioral stereotypy or rigidity (for reviews see Christensen, 1987; Weiss & Heyman, 1990). Bradbury and Fincham, (1992) Kurdek's (1995) research suggests that husbands

are more satisfied when their wives used conflict engagement as a style of resolving conflict. This relationship between behavior and satisfaction is supported by the findings of his study.

Similarly, these results support in part another study (Metts & Cupach, 1990) which found a correlation between relationship beliefs and relationship satisfaction. In this study, beliefs failed to predict satisfaction when coping style was controlled, lending further support for the idea that coping style may be serve as a mediator between beliefs and relationship satisfaction. The Metts and Cupach (1990) study did not measure attributional style directly, only dysfunctional beliefs. It seems likely that a complicated relationship exists between one's own meaning-making process (attributional style) and between their coping style, such that the influence of one's coping style and one's attributional style that influences one variable to lessen the impact of the other. That suggestion would be consistent with studies that there is a relationship between attributions and behavior, but that that relation occurred independently of marital satisfaction (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990). The explanation also helps explain the apparent inconsistency between the Bradbury & Fincham (1990) study of later studies that suggest that negative attributions are related to less effective problem-solving behaviors (Bradbury & Fincham, 1992; Mets & Cupach, 1990; Ptacek & Dodge, 1994).

Earlier research was an attempt to delineate the ways in which one's beliefs about themselves influenced their perceptions about behavior (their own and their partners). This research came about as our understanding of cognitive structuring changed the way we studied behavior as part of a romantic relationship.

This research continues to add to the general body of research by examining the

cognitive processes that lead to idiosyncratic beliefs. It allows a more in-depth and specific investigation at the ways in which one's own perceptions of one's own coping and attributional style can influence the perception of being satisfied. Specifically, it suggest that it our perception of our partner's behavior that may contribute significantly to our satisfaction within a relationship.

This research was conducted under the auspices of theories that incorporate both behavioral and cognitive components in an explanation of how some couples come to be satisfied in their relationships and other do not. It used the Contextual model (Bradbury & Fincham, 1994) to investigate the way in which the individual perceives his/her own behavior as well as that of his/her partner, assigns meaning to that behavior, and then exhibits a behavior of his or her own. Primary to this theory, is the idea that an "act can seldom be independent of the context of the other events in which it is embedded," (Raush, Barry, Hertel, & Swain, 1974, p.11). This model concludes that the behaviors which individuals exchange in an interaction can have different meanings, depending on other events in the interaction. While the results of this study don't support the association between attribution and behavior as predictors of satisfaction, it's ability to dispute the contextual model are limited. In fact, this study does not preclude the possibility that marital satisfaction influences attributions. Some researchers have previously suggested that husband's attributions may simply reflect their marital satisfaction, whereas wives' attributions actually influence their marital satisfaction over time. (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987). Again, the relationship between attributional and coping style is one that merits more study.

In conclusion, from this study, it appears that both men and women are more likely to

be satisfied in their partnered-relationships when their partner is problem-focused in their approach to coping. It also seems likely that people become more problem-focused in their coping styles as they become older.

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APPENDIX A
COVER LETTER

Dear Research Participant:

Thank you for participating in this study of married/partnered relationships. Enclosed are three questionnaires, which explore the way you think about and respond to your partner and your satisfaction with your relationship. It should take about thirty minutes to complete the survey. *It is important that both you and your partner fill out the questionnaires completely and separately.* While the packets are coded so as to keep partner questionnaires together, responses will be dealt with as a whole and answers are completely anonymous. You are under no obligation to complete this questionnaire. However, if you choose to do so, packets can be returned in a box that will be left in your classroom for the next two weeks. Your instructor will deliver those to me and they will be kept in a locked file drawer. After that date packets can be delivered to the 4th floor of Willard Hall to a locked box marked **Relationship Satisfaction Surveys.**

I hope that you will assist me in my dissertation project.

Sincerely

Rhonda Johnson, M.Ed.

For questions or to request results of this study, please contact:

Rhonda Johnson
Oklahoma State University
434 Willard Hall
Stillwater, OK 74074
(405) 340-8969

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Demographic Information

1. Age _____

2. Gender _____ Female _____ Male

3. Race/Ethnicity: _____ American Indian _____ Asian/American
_____ Black/African American _____ White/Anglo
_____ Hispanic/Latino _____ Other:

Please specify the status of the significant, romantic relationship in which you are currently involved:

_____ Married _____ Unmarried, cohabitating
_____ Dating, living separately _____ Other _____

Length of relationship with partner described in last question, expressed in number of years and months. For example, if you have been partnered 6 years and 5 months you would answer 6 years and 5 months. _____ years _____ months

How many times have you been partnered (i.e. lived with another person for at least 6 months)

_____ 0 times _____ 1 time
_____ 2 times _____ 3 times
_____ more than 3 times

How many years of education have you completed.

_____ High School _____ Some College
_____ Completed college _____ Master's Degree _____ Ph.D.

How many children live full-time in your household? _____

How many of those children are ages 13-18? _____

What is your average annual income?

_____ Below \$20,000 per year
_____ Between \$20,000 and \$90,000 per year.
_____ More than \$90,000 per year.

APPENDIX C

RELATIONSHIP ATTRIBUTION MEASURE

RAM

This questionnaire describes several things that your spouse might do. Imagine your spouse performing each behavior and then read the statements that follow it.

Please circle the number that indicates how much you agree or disagree with each statement, using the rating scale below:

1	2	3	4	5	6
Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Disagree somewhat	Agree somewhat	Agree	Agree strongly

Your partner Criticizes Something You Say:

1. 1 2 3 4 5 6 My partner's behavior was due to something about him/her (e.g., the type of person he/she is, the mood he/she was in).
2. 1 2 3 4 5 6 The reason my partner criticized me is *not* likely to change.
3. 1 2 3 4 5 6 The reason my partner criticized me is something that affects other areas of our marriage.
4. 1 2 3 4 5 6 My partner criticized me on purpose rather than unintentionally.
5. 1 2 3 4 5 6 My partner's behavior was motivated by selfish rather than unselfish concerns.
6. 1 2 3 4 5 6 My partner deserves to be blamed for criticizing me.

Your Partner Begins To Spend Less Time With You:

7. 1 2 3 4 5 6 My partner's behavior was due to something about him/her (e.g., the type of person he/she is, the mood he/she was in).
8. 1 2 3 4 5 6 The reason my partner spends less time with me is *not* likely to change.
9. 1 2 3 4 5 6 The reason my partner spends less time with me is something that affects other areas of our marriage.
10. 1 2 3 4 5 6 My partner spends less time with me on purpose rather than unintentionally.
11. 1 2 3 4 5 6 My partner's behavior was motivated by selfish rather than unselfish concerns.
12. 1 2 3 4 5 6 My partner deserves to be blamed for spending less time with me.

Your Partner Does Not Pay Attention to What You Are Saying:

13. 2 3 4 5 6 My partner's behavior was due to something about him/her (e.g., the type of person he/she is, the mood he/she was in).
14. 1 2 3 4 5 6 The reason my partner does not pay attention to what I'm saying is *not* likely to change.
15. 1 2 3 4 5 6 The reason my partner does not pay attention to what I am saying is something that affects other areas of our marriage.
16. 1 2 3 4 5 6 My partner does not pay attention to me on purpose rather than unintentionally.
17. 1 2 3 4 5 6 My partner's behavior was motivated by selfish rather than unselfish concerns.
18. 1 2 3 4 5 6 My partner deserves to be blamed for not paying attention to me.

Your Partner Is Cool and Distant:

19. 1 2 3 4 5 6 My partner's behavior was due to something about him/her (e.g., the type of person he/she is, the mood he/she was in).
20. 1 2 3 4 5 6 The reason my partner is cool and distant is *not* likely to change.
21. 1 2 3 4 5 6 The reason my partner is cool and distant is something that affects other areas of our marriage.
22. 1 2 3 4 5 6 My partner is cool and distant on purpose rather than unintentionally.
23. 1 2 3 4 5 6 My partner's behavior was motivated by selfish rather than unselfish concerns.
24. 1 2 3 4 5 6 My partner deserves to be blamed for being cool and distant.

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APPENDIX D

COPE

COPE

We are interested in how people respond when they confront difficult or stressful events in their lives. There are lots of ways to try to deal with stress. This questionnaire asks you to indicate what you generally do and feel, when you experience stressful events. Obviously, different events bring out somewhat different responses, but think about what you usually do when you are under a lot of stress.

Then respond to each of the following items by indicating the number most appropriately describes the way you typically respond, according to the response choices listed just below. Please try to respond to each item separately in your mind from each other item. Choose your answers thoughtfully, and make your answers as true FOR YOU as you can. Please answer every item. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers, so choose the most accurate answer for YOU--not what you think "most people" would say or do. Indicate what YOU usually do when YOU experience a stressful event.

- 1 = I usually don't do this at all
- 2 = I usually do this a little bit
- 3 = I usually do this a medium amount
- 4 = I usually do this a lot

- 1 2 3 4 1. I try to grow as a person as a result of the experience.
- 1 2 3 4 2. I turn to work or other substitute activities to take my mind off things.
- 1 2 3 4 3. I get upset and let my emotions out.
- 1 2 3 4 4. I try to get advice from someone about what to do.
- 1 2 3 4 5. I concentrate my efforts on doing something about it.
- 1 2 3 4 6. I say to myself "this isn't real."
- 1 2 3 4 7. I put my trust in God.
- 1 2 3 4 8. I laugh about the situation.
- 1 2 3 4 9. I admit to myself that I can't deal with it, and quit trying.
- 1 2 3 4 10. I restrain myself from doing anything too quickly.

- 1 2 3 4 11. I discuss my feelings with someone.
- 1 2 3 4 12. I use alcohol or drugs to make myself feel better.
- 1 2 3 4 13. I get used to the idea that it happened.
- 1 2 3 4 14. I talk to someone to find out more about the situation.
- 1 2 3 4 15. I keep myself from getting distracted by other thoughts or activities.
- 1 2 3 4 16. I daydream about things other than this.
- 1 2 3 4 17. I get upset, and am really aware of it.
- 1 2 3 4 18. I seek God's help.
- 1 2 3 4 19. I make a plan of action.
- 1 2 3 4 20. I make jokes about it.

- 1 2 3 4 21. I accept that this has happened and that it can't be changed.
- 1 2 3 4 22. I hold off doing anything about it until the situation permits.
- 1 2 3 4 23. I try to get emotional support from friends or relatives.

Please complete the questions on back

- 1 2 3 4 24. I just give up trying to reach my goal.
- 1 2 3 4 25. I take additional action to try to get rid of the problem.
- 1 2 3 4 26. I try to lose myself for a while by drinking alcohol or taking drugs.
- 1 2 3 4 27. I refuse to believe that it has happened.
- 1 2 3 4 28. I let my feelings out.
- 1 2 3 4 29. I try to see it in a different light, to make it seem more positive.
- 1 2 3 4 30. I talk to someone who could do something concrete about the problem.
- 1 2 3 4 31. I sleep more than usual.
- 1 2 3 4 32. I try to come up with a strategy about what to do.
- 1 2 3 4 33. I focus on dealing with this problem, and if necessary let other things slide a little.
- 1 2 3 4 34. I get sympathy and understanding from someone.
- 1 2 3 4 35. I drink alcohol or take drugs, in order to think about it less.
- 1 2 3 4 36. I kid around about it.
- 1 2 3 4 37. I give up the attempt to get what I want.
- 1 2 3 4 38. I look for something good in what is happening.
- 1 2 3 4 39. I think about how I might best handle the problem.
- 1 2 3 4 40. I pretend that it hasn't really happened.
- 1 2 3 4 41. I make sure not to make matters worse by acting too soon.
- 1 2 3 4 42. I try hard to prevent other things from interfering with my efforts at .
- 1 2 3 4 43. I go to movies or watch TV, to think about it less.
- 1 2 3 4 44. I accept the reality of the fact that it happened.
- 1 2 3 4 45. I ask people who have had similar experiences what they did.
- 1 2 3 4 46. I feel a lot of emotional distress and I find myself expressing those feelings a lot.
- 1 2 3 4 47. I take direct action to get around the problem.
- 1 2 3 4 48. I try to find comfort in my religion.
- 1 2 3 4 49. I force myself to wait for the right time to do something.
- 1 2 3 4 50. I make fun of the situation.
- 1 2 3 4 51. I reduce the amount of effort I'm putting into solving the problem.
- 1 2 3 4 52. I talk to someone about how I feel.
- 1 2 3 4 53. I use alcohol or drugs to help me get through it.
- 1 2 3 4 54. I learn to live with it.
- 1 2 3 4 55. I put aside other activities in order to concentrate on this.
- 1 2 3 4 56. I think hard about what steps to take.
- 1 2 3 4 57. I act as though it hasn't even happened.
- 1 2 3 4 58. I do what has to be done, one step at a time.
- 1 2 3 4 59. I learn something from the experience.
- 1 2 3 4 60. I pray more than usual.

Carver, C.S., Scheier, M.F. & Weintraub, J. K. (1989). Assessing coping strategies: A theoretically based approach. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 56 (2), 267-283.

APPENDIX E
MARITAL SATISFACTION SCALE

MSS

Please respond to the following items by circling the appropriate corresponding number.

5= strongly agree (SA); 4=agree (A); 3=neither agree nor disagree (N); 2 =disagree (D); 1=strongly disagree (SD)

	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. My partner could make things easier for me if he/she cared to	5	4	3	2	1
2. I worry a lot about this relationship.	5	4	3	2	1
3. If I could start over again, I would choose someone other than my present partner.	5	4	3	2	1
4. I can always trust my partner.	5	4	3	2	1
5. My life would seem empty without this relationship.	5	4	3	2	1
6. This relationship is too confining to suit me.	5	4	3	2	1
7. I feel that I am "in a rut" in this relationship.	5	4	3	2	1
8. I know where I stand with my partner.	5	4	3	2	1
9. This relationship has a bad effect on my health.	5	4	3	2	1
10. I become upset, angry, or irritable because of things that occur in this relationship.	5	4	3	2	1
11. I feel competent and full able to handle this relationship	5	4	3	2	1
12. This present relationship is not one I would wish to remain in permanently.		5	4	3	2
13. I expect this relationship to give me increasing satisfaction the longer it continues.	5	4	3	2	1
14. I get discouraged trying to make this relationship work out.	5	4	3	2	1
15. I consider this relationship situation to be as pleasant	5	4	3	2	1
16. This relationship gives me more real personal satisfaction than anything else I do.	5	4	3	2	1
17. I think this relationship gets more difficult for me each year	5	4	3	2	1
18. My partner gets me badly flustered and jittery.	5	4	3	2	1
19. My partner gives me sufficient opportunity to express my opinions.	5	4	3	2	1
20. I have made a success of this relationship so far.	5	4	3	2	1
21. My partner regards me as an equal.	5	4	3	2	1

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22. I must look outside this relationship for those things that make life worthwhile	5	4	3	2	1
23. My partner inspires me to do my best work.	5	4	3	2	1
24. This relationship has "smothered" my personality.	5	4	3	2	1
25. The future of this relationship looks promising to me.	5	4	3	2	1
26. I am really interested in my partner.	5	4	3	2	1
27. I get along well with my partner.	5	4	3	2	1
28. I am afraid of losing my partner due to relationship dissolution	5	4	3	2	1
29. My partner makes unfair demands on my free time.	5	4	3	2	1
30. My partner seems unreasonable in his/her dealings with me.	5	4	3	2	1
31. My relationship helps me toward the goals I have	5	4	3	2	1
32. My partner is willing to make helpful improvements in our relationship.	5	4	3	2	1
33. This relationship suffers from disagreement concerning matters of recreation.	5	4	3	2	1
34. Demonstrations of affection by me and my partner are mutually acceptable.	5	4	3	2	1
35. An unhappy sexual relationship is a drawback in our relationship.	5	4	3	2	1
36. My partner and I agree on what is right and proper conduct.	5	4	3	2	1
37. My partner and I do not share the same philosophy of life.	5	4	3	2	1
38. My partner and I enjoy several mutually satisfying outside interests together.	5	4	3	2	1
39. I sometimes wish I had not gotten into a relationship with my present partner.	5	4	3	2	1
40. My present relationship is definitely unhappy.	5	4	3	2	1
41. I look forward to sexual activity with my partner with pleasant anticipation.	5	4	3	2	1
42. My partner has respect for me.	5	4	3	2	1
43. I have definite difficulty confiding in my partner.	5	4	3	2	1
44. Most of the time my partner understands the way I feel.	5	4	3	2	1
45. My partner does not listen to what I have to say.	5	4	3	2	1
46. I frequently enjoy pleasant conversations with my partner.	5	4	3	2	1
47. I am definitely satisfied with this relationship.	5	4	3	2	1

Roach, A.J., Frazier, L.P., & Bowden, S.R. (1981). The Marital Satisfaction Scale. Development of a measure for intervention research. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 43(3), 537-546.

APPENDIX F
IRB APPROVAL

APPENDIX F

Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board

Protocol Expires: 5/11/01

Date: December 20, 1999

IRB Application No ED00174

Proposal Title: THE EFFECTS OF ATTRIBUTIONAL STYLE AND COPING STYLE
ON RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION

Principal
Investigator(s):

Rhonda L. Johnson
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Reviewed
and Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

Signature:



Carol Olson, Director of University Research Compliance

December 20, 1999

Date

Approvals are valid for one calendar year, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modification to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval with the advisor's signature. The IRB office MUST be notified in writing when a project is complete. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. Expedited and exempt projects may be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board.

VITA

Rhonda L. Johnson

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation: THE EFFECTS OF ATTRIBUTIONAL STYLE AND COPING STYLE
ON RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION

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