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CONFLICT AS A RELATIONAL TURNING POINT

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

Turning points, which represent changes that transform a relationship, are consistent with a dialectical view of relationships (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Previous research has presumed that turning points produce either positive or negative outcomes for relationships, generally in terms of commitment or closeness. Further, extant research has not considered individual differences in the experience of turning points. This study investigated how conflict functions as a turning point, with attention to the antecedents and outcomes of turning points. Participants were 284 individuals in romantic relationships. Almost half of participants reported a combination of positive and negative outcomes resulting from their conflict turning point. As the length of participants' relationships increased, they were less likely to perceive that relational uncertainty and jealousy contributed to their conflict turning point. The constant comparative method showed that participants in early-stage relationships were more likely to perceive alcohol as contributing to their conflict turning point, while participants in more established relationships were more likely to perceive major life changes as contributing to their conflict turning point. The constant comparative method also revealed that outcomes of conflict turning points were aggravated emotions and demonstrations of care and concern. Additionally, individuals high in the solution-oriented conflict style were more likely to report conflict as a turning point with primarily constructive outcomes for their relationship, while individuals who felt persecuted were more likely to report conflict as a turning point with primarily destructive outcomes for their relationship. Finally, Machiavellians were more likely to strategically manage conflict episodes to avoid a turning point. Implications of these findings are noted.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Conflict is inherent in all close, meaningful relationships (Canary, 2003). Ironically, the closer and more interdependent two individuals become, the more likely they are to experience incompatibility in goals, values, needs, or interests. The conflict they experience can serve as a catalyst for change, both personally and relationally.

Relationships are constantly changing, although sometimes events trigger relational shifts that are so significant, they lead relaters to redefine the relationship. Such shifts, or turning points, are events that transform the nature or state of a relationship (Baxter & Bullis, 1986). Turning points can be brought on by many situations—a first kiss, infidelity, and a relational milestone such as an anniversary, to name a few. Conflict is a relational phenomenon that is particularlygermane to the examination of turning points, as conflict can have multifaceted antecedents and outcomes (Siegert & Stamp, 1994).

In the past 20 years, researchers have become increasingly interested in relational turning points. Turning points occur within all long-term close relationships, and by examining relational turning points, researchers gain access to the moments at which a relationship is transformed and the broader context of these transformations. The jagged, "up and down" nature of relating, as illustrated by the turning point, is consistent with a dialectical view of relationships. With this in mind, dialectical theory is briefly overviewed, as is relational conflict. Because they seem to bear on the unfolding of conflict turning points, three factors—conflict style, taking conflict personally, and Machiavellianism—are briefly discussed. I conclude with a discussion of how this

dissertation offers methodological balance by considering conflict turning points from both a processual and a variable analytic perspective.

Dialectical Theory

Turning points are indicative of the interplay of dialectical tensions within relationships. Dialectical tensions are interdependent, yet mutually negated contradictions that are native to interpersonal relationships (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Four concepts and their corresponding assumptions are central to dialectical theory: contradiction, change, praxis, and totality. Contradiction refers to "the dynamic interplay between unified oppositions" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 8). By their nature, activated contradictions produce relational change. This change is contextualized praxically, such that the actions relaters take frame their reality, which simultaneously casts them as actors and objects. For this reason, Baxter and Montgomery argue that relationships must be viewed in total, with consideration of individual, relational, and contextual features.

Dialectical tensions are natural, normative, and persistent features of relationships. Most research has focused on three internal contradictions that are commonly experienced within the boundaries of the relationship. These three contradictions are Autonomy-Connection, Predictability-Novelty, and Openness-Closedness. Given the ongoing nature, these and other contradictions are constantly at play, reflecting a dynamic "knot" of contradictions (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Dialectical theory provides an alternative to dominant relationship theories, which tend to frame the poles of Connection, Predictability, and Openness as indicative of close, committed, and satisfying relationships (Baxter & Erbert, 1999). Research has

demonstrated that *both* poles of contradictions are essential to relational health (for example, both autonomy and connection are crucial; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Turning point analyses informed by dialectical theory have illustrated that relationships often do not grow steadily and linearly, but experience turbulent ups and downs (Johnson et al., 2004).

Conflict

Many relaters recall an episode of conflict as a turning point in their relationship (Baxter & Erbert, 1999). Conflict is pervasive in close relationships, in part because it can occur only when two people interact and are interdependent (Canary, 2003). Conflict involves perceived goal or value opposition or incompatibility (Rahim, 2001). Canary (2003) suggested that the interplay of dialectical tensions may instigate conflict.

Some turning point research has suggested that conflict produces negative outcomes for relationships. Although many people focus on the negative aspects of conflict in their daily lives, research has shown that interpersonal conflict is not inherently negative, but can be both destructive and constructive (Rahim, 2001). Conflict can produce beneficial outcomes for a relationship, such as clarified feelings about the partner and the relationship, enhanced awareness of relational interdependence, and shared history that allows relaters to interpret and explain their relationship (Siegert & Stamp, 1994). However, previous research does not capture the multifaceted influences of conflict as a relational turning point.

Indeed, the extant research tends to situate individual turning points within other turning points that are linked to define the trajectory of a relationship. Typically, these turning points are examined for influences on commitment or closeness, such that a

single turning point can be examined only for its type (e.g., whether it was based on conflict, get-to-know time, etc.), its valence (whether it yields a positive or negative influence on commitment or closeness), and sometimes its placement among other turning points (Baxter & Bullis, 1986). Extant research has framed turning points as producing *either* positive *or* negative influences on the relationship, even though dialectical theory suggests that dialectical tensions produce relational change that is not solely positive or negative (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, 1998). This is not to say that previous studies have not been fruitful, as they have paved the way for an emergent understanding of turning points and the dialectical tensions that often underlie turning points. However, opportunities abound for continued exploration of the nature of specific turning points as well as the web of factors related to turning points (Bernat, 2003).

Conceivably, there are individual differences in the experience of conflict as a relational turning point. One's conflict style, the tendency to take conflict personally, and Machiavellianism are dispositions that may impact the experience of conflict turning points. These characteristics may influence how individuals experience conflict as a turning point that transforms the relationship (if they experience conflict at all) and how the conflict turning point alters the relationship.

Conflict Style

Individuals tend to have consistent styles of managing interpersonal conflict, although these styles may be influenced by situational and partner features (Rahim, 2001). A conflict "style" essentially reflects patterns in interpersonal conflict management (Putnam & Wilson, 1982).

The Putnam and Wilson (1982) three-factor model of conflict is considered to be

theoretically parsimonious and empirically sound. This model has accumulated evidence for three styles of handling conflict: non-confrontation (obliging), solution-orientation (integrating), and control (dominating). Although originally designed to measure dyadic conflict in organizations, the model has been extended to conflict in close interpersonal relationships (Rogan & LaFrance, 2003).

As will be investigated in this dissertation, the three styles of managing conflict may be differentially related to conflict turning points. Specifically, it will be hypothesized that individuals with the non-confrontational style are unlikely to report conflict episodes (because of their avoidant strategies), but of the conflicts they do experience, they are more likely to perceive them as turning points. It will also be hypothesized that individuals with the controlling style are more likely to report conflict episodes (because of their aggressive strategies), but less likely to perceive them as turning points. Finally, it will be hypothesized that individuals with the solution-oriented style are more likely to report conflict as a turning point with more beneficial outcomes for the relationship. Thus, conflict style may bear influence on how individuals enact and perceive conflict.

Taking Conflict Personally

Taking conflict personally (TCP) is a negative emotional personalization of interpersonal conflict episodes. TCP is characterized by "a feeling of being personally engaged in a punishing life event while involved in a conflict" (Dallinger & Hample, 1995, p. 273). When taking conflict personally, individuals perceive they are being attacked on a personal, not substantive, basis, and they perceive face threat (Hample, 1999).

TCP has three core dimensions: direct personalization (i.e., perceptions that the conflict is emotional, face-threatening, and damaging to one's self), stress reactions (i.e., feelings of emotional and physical tension), and persecution feelings (i.e., perceptions of maltreatment and that others are "out to get me"; Dallinger & Hample, 1995). TCP is negatively associated with positive relational effects (i.e., beliefs that conflict can lead to constructive interpersonal outcomes) and positively associated with negative relational effects (i.e., beliefs that conflict can lead to destructive interpersonal outcomes; Hample, Dallinger, & Fofana, 1995). Finally, TCP is positively associated with a dislike of conflict. TCP has both state and trait components (Hample et al., 1995).

As described by Hample (1999), TCP is informed by Lewin's (1951) field theory, particularly with its emphasis on affective climate of the life space (an individual's perception of his or her social environment). Hample (1999)investigated the preconflict, conflict, and postconflict life spaces in relation to TCP, showing that an individual's predispositions and situational thoughts and feelings impact their perceptions of conflict.

Research has linked TCP to many personality traits and situational variables, including verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness (Hample & Dallinger, 1995); conflict style (Dallinger & Hample, 1995); conflict control expectancies (Avtgis, 2002); relationship type, sex, and self-monitoring (Dallinger & Hample, 2001); relational closeness and satisfaction, who initiates the argument, and whether it is a serial argument (Dallinger & Callister, 1997).

High personalizers of conflict find conflict to be a considerably more negative experience than low personalizers. Because they find conflict so punishing, it will be hypothesized that individuals who are predisposed to take conflict personally will

conceive of conflict as a turning point which produces destructive outcomes for the relationship.

Machiavellianism

Machiavellianism is a personality trait characterized by cynical views of humankind. Individuals high in Machiavellianism, known as Machs, scheme to exploit others, whom they perceive to be inherently bad and deficient. Machs are distinguished by the willingness and ability to manipulate others for their own purposes.

Machs strategically use cunning, deceit, flattery, emotional appeals, and other exploitative measures to achieve their desired ends (Grams & Rogers, 1990). They consider situations carefully, sizing up opportunities and responding in ways that will maximize personal benefits (Martin, Anderson, & Thweatt, 1998). Overall, Machs are persuasive, ingratiating themselves to others and self-disclosing strategically (Fehr, Samsom, & Paulhus, 1992).

Investigations of Machs' conflict styles have produced mixed findings. Overall, it seems that associations between conflict style and Machiavellianism are weak at best. King and Miles (1990) argued that Machs are versatile in conflict situations and employ whatever conflict management strategies best suit their purpose at the time. They stated, "High 'Machs' seem to have a propensity to choose the style or strategy most appropriate for the situation to maximize their own goals" (p. 241). Thus, given their tendencies to manipulate and exploit others for their own personal gain, it will be hypothesized that Machs are more likely to strategically orchestrate conflict episodes to achieve or avoid relational turning points, depending on their interests. Comparatively, individuals low in Machiavellianism may be less strategic in their planning and communication behaviors

surrounding conflict episodes, and may fail to recognize and exploit their transformational potential

Answering Bolton's Call for Methodological Balance

Bolton (1961), who is often cited for his landmark essay on turning points, issued a call for researchers to achieve balance by studying relationships from multiple approaches. He argued that researchers should avoid exclusive emphasis on personality traits and other global, non-situational features typically studied with a variable analytic approach. Instead, Bolton encouraged researchers to focus on the progression or process of relationships. He stated, "Along with correlations between variables presumed to represent characteristics of non-situated social and psychological variables, we need propositions about, as Foote puts it, *the manner in which one episode of interaction conditions another*" (p. 240, italics added).

This dissertation heeds Bolton's call by studying conflict turning points from multiple perspectives: a processual perspective and a variable analytic perspective. The processual perspective accounts for participants' understandings of the antecedents of the conflict turning point, the conflict itself, and the outcomes of the conflict turning point. The variable analytic perspective accounts for how participants' conflict styles, personalization of conflict (TCP), and Machiavellianism interacts with their conflict turning point experiences. Together, these two perspectives can advance a more complete and detailed model of conflict turning points.

With these issues in mind, Chapter 2 proceeds with a review of literature, beginning with an overview of dialectical theory, which is the theoretical parent of turning point analyses. Next, conflict is considered, with special focus on how conflict

functions as a turning point. Then, conflict style, taking conflict personally, and Machiavellianism are discussed. In Chapter 3, a detailed method is presented (with instruments provided in the Appendix). Results are presented in Chapter 4. The theoretical and practical implications of the findings are discussion in Chapter 5, along with limitations.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

As relationship researchers have increasingly focused on the real-world complexities of relationships, the concept of turning point has garnered considerable theoretical and research attention in the past 20 years. The idea of turning points is consistent with a process-oriented view of relationships. That is, instead of conceiving of relationships as static creations that progress steadily over time (if at all), a process view suggests that relationships progress in shifts of turning points that vary in valence (Baxter & Bullis, 1986). Much of the research on turning points has been produced by scholars who embrace a dialectical perspective of the relating process. Therefore, I begin with an overview of dialectical theory, including its history, concepts, and assumptions.

Dialectical Theory

Leslie Baxter, Barbara Montgomery, and colleagues pioneered theoretical and empirical research efforts in dialectical theory. Dialectical theory posits that relationships are permeated by contradictions, which reflect interdependent yet mutually negated tensions (Baxter, 1988a). These contradictions facilitate change in relationships.

Dialectical theory, as set forth by Baxter and Montgomery (1996, 1998), has been influenced heavily by the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin. A Soviet dissident, Bakhtin was critical of the regimes of Lenin and Stalin. Although he completed most of his writings in the 1920s and 1930s, his work was not disseminated widely for another 50 years. One of Bakhtin's most important contributions was his expansive critique of the concept of dialogue (Baxter, 2004). His notion of the interplay of unified but opposing forces laid the groundwork for Baxter and Montgomery's perspective of dialectics.

Dialectical theory has not been formally structured, although this does not preclude the development of formalized propositions or other features of traditional, well-developed theory. Instead, dialectical theory reflects a collection of related concepts and assumptions (Baxter & Erbert, 1999). Four concepts and their corresponding assumptions are key to dialectical theory: contradiction, change, praxis, and totality. Given the centrality of these concepts in dialectical theory, they will be discussed in further detail.

Contradiction

A contradiction is "the dynamic interplay between unified oppositions" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 8). A contradiction functions as a catalyst for relational change. In order to be considered a contradiction, a phenomenon must have two opposing features which are incompatible and mutually negate the other. Additionally, these two opposing features must be interdependent, or unified, such that both features exist simultaneously. Finally, contradictions are marked by the dynamic interplay between unified oppositions, or the back-and-forth movements fueled by tension. This interplay "serves as the driving force for ongoing change in any social system, including personal relationships" (p. 10).

In dialectical theory, the term "contradiction" is free of lay connotations. In their everyday lives, people refer to contradictions as inconsistencies, and usually undesirable ones at that. However, in dialectical theory contradictions refer to tensions which are natural and inseparable from the process of relating, and therefore are "liberated from any negative connotations whatsoever" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 7).

Change

Given the features of contradiction, it is not surprising that change is a key element of dialectical theory. Change is intrinsic to contradiction, given that contradiction

involves the dynamic interplay of unified oppositions. Change in and of itself reflects a contradiction, whereby the poles are flux and stability. Change is accentuated by stability. For example, a couple may experience considerable interplay of the autonomy-connection dialectic for some time, then experience a period of relative stability in which this contradiction does not produce tension.

Some theorists (e.g., Conville, 1998) have adopted a teleological approach. Such an approach is based on the presumption that relationships move toward ideal states (e.g., marriage). Other theorists (e.g., Baxter & Montgomery, 1998; Rawlins, 1998) have adopted an indeterminate approach. Indeterminancy suggests that relational movement does not reflect growth, progress, deterioration, decay, and other concepts similarly employed to suggest (dis)preferred outcomes.

Baxter and Montgomery (1996) suggested that change can be cyclical, reflecting the ebb and flow of the interplay of unified tensions (e.g., vacillating struggles with "not enough" autonomy and "not enough" connection). Change can also be linear *in the sense* that relational movement cannot return to a previous state (however, linear change is not necessarily "forward" or "progressive" change; Rawlins (1983) employed the term motion which, perhaps, avoids the connotation of development). Taken together, cyclical linear change could be conceived of as a spiral of change, constantly evolving yet reflecting pattern in the interplay of contradictions.

Praxis

The concept of praxis captures the notion that people experience contradictions in relating, and these experiences are contextualized by past and future contradictions. In essence, people are at once actors and objects of their own actions. Baxter and

Montgomery (1996) explained:

> People function as proactive actors who make communicative choices in how to function in their social world. Simultaneously, however, they become reactive objects, because their actions become reified in a variety of normative and institutionalized practices that establish the boundaries of subsequent communicative moves. (p. 13)

Rawlins (1998) argues that praxis captures the reflexive social nature of human beings. He said, "Human communicators are conceived of as both ongoing producers and products of their own choices in encompassing and historically conditioned cultural contexts" (p. 65). Because they are both actors and objects, people actively "generate and constrain options" (p. 65) which impact contradictions. As Johnson, Wittenberg, Villagran, Mazur, and Villagran (2003) summarized, relaters' communication practices possess reflexive influence. Thus, every communicative act is embedded in an ongoing chain of interaction, with previous acts influencing the present act, which will influence future acts.

Totality

The concept of totality addresses the assumption that phenomena can be understood only in context (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). By emphasizing totality, dialectical theorists highlight the interconnected relationships and patterns among people and phenomena in the process of relating. The idea of totality is compatible with the concept of holism from general systems theory.

Totality is a concept that is important theoretically, but is often difficult to capture in research. By the very nature of research, phenomena tend to be studied in isolation.

Even when multiple aspects of relationships are brought to the foreground in research, there are still many other aspects that remain hidden in the background. Therefore, totality is a concept that is difficult to achieve in the practice of research.

Dialectical Theory as an Alternative to Traditional Theories of Relating

Research on dialectical theory has amassed as increasing numbers of researchers have grown suspicious of dominant theories of relating. One of these foundational theories is social penetration theory, developed by Altman and Taylor (1973). Social penetration theory posits that relationships develop linearly as relaters increase breadth and depth of self-disclosure. The original version of social penetration theory favored openness, suggesting that relationship closeness and satisfaction are directly related to honest and forthright self-disclosure (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Yet as recent theory and research has demonstrated, some degree of privacy management is crucial to individual and relational well-being (Petronio, 2000). Although unknown to manycommunication scholars, Altman, Vinsel, and Brown (1981) revised social penetration theory, arguing "while some relationships may generally proceed toward greater openness, they also probably have cycles or phases of closedness between participants. … Even in the healthiest relationship, people cycle in and out of close contact with one another" (p. 112). They also discussed how relationships may develop in non-linear and cyclical shifts.

Another influential theory is interdependence theory (Kelley et al., 1983). This theory specifies that relaters grow closer to the degree that they have frequent, diverse, and strong interactions; in other words, they become closer as they become more interdependent. The theory captures the need for connection, yet it does not explain the

need for individual autonomy, which is also essential to relationships (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Yet another influential theory is uncertainty reduction theory, initially proposed by Berger and Calabrese (1975). This theory asserts that uncertainty decreases as relationships develop. Berger and Calabrese theorized that a number of variables associated with relationship development (e.g., amount of verbal communication, nonverbal affiliative expressiveness, intimacy level of communication content, etc.) are inversely related to level of uncertainty. By privileging certainty, uncertainty reduction theory does not explain relaters' simultaneous need for novelty and spontaneity in relationships.

In contrast, dialectical theory focuses on the jagged nature of relating: the complexities, disorder, and messiness (Baxter & Mongtomery, 1996). By focusing on the interplay of contradictory needs, dialectical theory overcomes limitations of previous research by casting light on formerly marginalized aspects of relating. For example, dialectical theory improves upon social penetration theory with its inclusion of the need for closedness *and* privacy. Dialectical theory supplements interdependence theory with its account of the need for autonomy *and* connection. And dialectical theory balances uncertainty reduction theory with its treatment of certainty *and* novelty, unpredictability, and spontaneity. Whereas alternative theories seek to "smooth out" the bumpiness of relating, dialectical theory reflects "a belief that social life is a dynamic knot of contradictions, a *ceaseless interplay* between contrary or opposing tendencies" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 3, italics original). Thus, dialectical theory advances social scientific understanding of close relationships by accounting for the complexity and

density of relational life.

Dialectical theory suggests that both poles of a contradiction are essential to relating. For example, *both* connection *and* autonomy are important, as partners need some degree of interdependence and yet some degree of independence *at the same time*. The "both/and" concept of relating characterizes dialectical theory (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). They suggested:

> A healthy relationship is not one in which the interplay of opposites has been extinguished or resolved, because these opposing features are inherent in the very fabric of relating. Instead, a healthy relationship is one in which the parties manage to satisfy both oppositional demands, that is, relational well-being is marked by the capacity to achieve "both/and" status. (p. 6)

Although Baxter and Montgomery did not explicitly define relational "health" for close relationships, it seems likely that this notion is congruent with relational closeness, commitment, and satisfaction—variables that are commonly measured in relation to specific turning points.

Commonly Experienced Dialectics

Baxter and her colleagues (e.g., Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) have identified and organized a set of dialectics that commonly are experienced by relational partners. These contradictions may be internal or external. Internal contradictions are those experienced between the dyad within the boundaries of the relationship, whereas external contradictions are those experienced by the dyad between the interfaces of the relationship and the larger environment. For an example of an internal contradiction, a couple may struggle with simultaneous needs for autonomy and connection within the

confines of the relationship. A parallel example of an external contradiction could position the couple as struggling with their need for inclusion in their larger social network and the mutually negated, yet interdependent need for seclusion and privacy from their social network. Like other contradictions, internal and external contradictions may yield reciprocal influence. For example, a couple who struggles with autonomy within their relationship very well may struggle with autonomy in their broader environment. Baxter and Montgomery suggest that the overlapping interplay of multiple contradictions reflects a dynamic "knot" of contradictions.

The combination of internal and external contradictions formed "supra-dialectics," which reflect "umbrella" contradictions (Baxter & Erbert, 1999). The first supra-dialectic of Integration-Separation consists of the internal contradiction of Autonomy-Connection and the external contradiction of Inclusion-Seclusion. The second supra-dialectic of Stability-Change is comprised of the internal contradiction of Predictability-Novelty and the external contradiction of Conventionality-Uniqueness. The third supra-dialectic of Expression-Privacy contains the internal contradiction of Openness-Closedness and the external contradiction of Revelation-Concealment.

The majority of empirical studies has focused on the internal contradictions of Autonomy-Connection, Predictability-Novelty, and Openness-Closedness (for an exception, see Baxter & Erbert, 1999). Most studies focus on a single contradiction, although contradictions are often interrelated. Furthermore, additional contradictions exist, such as loyalty-betrayal (Baxter, Mazanec, Nicholson, Pittman, Smith, & West, 1997). Some relationship events, such as the renewal of marriage vows, facilitate specific interconnected webs or "knots" of contradiction; Braithwaite and Baxter (1995) identified

three contradictions pertaining to the private-public nature of the renewal event, stability-change in the marital relationship, and the negotiation of the conventionality-uniqueness of the renewal process and marital relationship. In a nutshell, while certain contradictions seem predominant in the literature, in actual relating processes, contradictions are many and varied.

Informed by dialectical theory's emphasis on contradiction, change, praxis, and totality in relationships, some relationship researchers have investigated how relationships change over time. They have been particularly interested in turning points, which reflect shifts in relational movement. Turning point research will be discussed next.

Turning Point Research

The origin of the turning point concept usually is attributed to Bolton (1961). Bolton urged relationship researchers to shift focus from demographic variables and personality traits to relaters' transactions, which are demarcated by turning points. He defined turning points as "points of transformation" that may indicate subtle or dramatic changes (p. 237). Building on Bolton's work, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) defined turning points as "moments in a relationship's history when the pressures of dialogic interplay are of sufficient intensity that a major quantitative or qualitative change occurs for the pair" (p. 72).

Other scholars have examined phenomena similar to turning points, calling them "critical events" (Olson & Golish, 2002; Owen, 1987; Planalp & Honeycutt, 1985), "relational transitions" (Conville, 1988), "transition points" (Levinger, 1983), and "transition phases" (Masheter & Harris, 1986).[1] However, substantively more scholarship

(especially by Baxter and colleagues) has focused on the turning point. Indeed, a June, 2004 search on the databases Communication and Mass Media Complete, PsycInfo, and Academic Search Elite produced a total of 17 refereed journal articles with an exclusive focus on relational turning points. (Each had the term "turning point" or "turning points" in the title.)[2]

Turning points are native to all meaningful relationships and have been studied in dating relationships (Siegert & Stamp, 1994), marital relationships (Huston, Surra, Fitzgerald, & Cate, 1981), post-divorce relationships (Graham, 1997) and friendships (Johnson et al., 2003). Turning points have also been studied in the context of family, including parent-child relationships (Golish, 2000), blended family relationships (e.g., Baxter et al., 1999), and grandparent-child relationships (Holladay, Lackovich, Lee, Coleman, Harding, & Denton, 1998). Finally, turning points have been studied in interpersonal relationships bound to organizational contexts (e.g., Barge & Musambira, 1992; Bullis & Bach, 1989).

Research on turning points reveals how certain turning points impact the relationship. Turning point analyses afford participants the opportunity to consider and interpret the moments at which their relationships were significantly altered, and to describe the context of these transformations. Almost always, relational changes are measured by individual relater's perceptions of how a turning point increased or decreased relational commitment (e.g., Baxter & Bullis, 1986) or closeness (e.g., Golish, 2000).

Several researchers have examined relationship trajectories or patterns in relationship progression. Turning point analyses are useful in understanding

indeterminate relational *change* (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996), which traditionally has been studied as relationship development, maintenance, and deterioration (Montgomery, 1993; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998). In their analysis of trajectories of ongoing friendships, Johnson et al. (2003) detected five common trajectories for relationship development. In another study of friendships that had ended, Johnson et al. (2004) found six common trajectories for the course of terminated friendships. In both studies, Johnson and her colleagues found that over half of participants reported non-linear courses in friendship development. Specifically, they found evidence for a dialectical perspective, whereby friendships were characterized by interchanging periods of development and deterioration (as measured by closeness). Participants in both studies reported the turning points of activities, interests, talking/hanging out, geographic distance, change in contact, meeting/interacting with others, and conflict.

Most turning point research utilizes the method of the Retrospective Interview Technique (RIT). The RIT involves interviews in which participants disclose turning points in their relationship history and create a graph which visually depicts their relationship trajectory. Typically, the ordinate axis plots the degree of commitment (or closeness) from 0-100 percent and the abscissa axis plots the relationship's duration in months from the time of first meeting to the present. With the RIT, a turning point is defined by *either* an increase *or* a decrease in the relational variable of study (e.g., commitment or closeness). This method of graphing requires participants to interpret the impact of a turning point as *either* positively *or* negatively valenced. Therefore, RIT procedures restrict participants' options by limiting the ways in which they can frame the influence(s) of turning points.

By definition, a turning point reflects some quantitative or qualitative change that transforms the state or nature of the relationship (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). A quantitative change could reflect, for example, an increase or decrease in commitment. A qualitative change could reflect, for example, changed knowledge of the partner from meeting the partners' family. The vast majority of turning point analyses has employed the RIT, and as such, has focused predominantly on turning points that produce quantitative changes in commitment and closeness. As such, we have come to learn much about the associations between turning points (and underlying dialectics) and the relationship variables of commitment and closeness. Yet, previous research has neglected qualitative changes and other indicators of quantitative changes, leaving much unexplored territory.

Although relationship researchers consider commitment and closeness as important indicators of relationship quality, other variables or features are important to the study of relationships. One of the few turning point analyses that contextualized turning points within other relationship features was conducted by Siegert and Stamp (1994). These researchers distilled themes from interview data using the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Siegert and Stamp (1994) found that four conditions contributed to the turning point of the "first big fight" (FBF). These conditions are uncertainty regarding relationship, jealousy, violations of expectations, and personality or background differences. Moreover, participants perceived that the FBF clarified their feelings about their partner and the relationship, changed perceptions of relational interdependence, and developed thematic conflict based on shared history. The Siegert and Stamp study is unique in that it captured multiple antecedents and outcomes of the

FBF turning point.

As stated, the RIT requires participants to interpret the impact of a turning point as *either* positively *or* negatively valenced. However, some turning points are fraught with multiple, complex positive *and* negative implications for relationships and the individual relaters. This makes sense given that dialectical theory posits that neither the poles of dialectical tensions, nor tensions themselves, are inherently positive or negative (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). The activation of dialectical tensions can both strengthen and stress a relationship (Baxter & Montgomery, 1998). For example, a conflict over how to spend time together can serve as a turning point that triggers the Predictability-Novelty dialectic. Following this conflict, the relaters may feel excitement about doing new activities together on weekends, which strengthens their relationship (e.g., enhances perceived closeness and commitment). Concurrently, they may feel pressured to "break out" of their weekend routines, which is a stressor to the relationship (e.g., reduces perceived closeness and commitment). If this couple were to complete the RIT, they could report major changes in relationship progression, but they would be forced to oversimplify the impacts of the conflict as a turning point. That is, the RIT procedure would prohibit them from reporting the complex fluctuations that stem from the interplay of dialectical tensions. *More importantly, it would prohibit them from revealing the multifaceted positive and negative ways conflict influenced their relationship.*

Previous turning point analyses have established a base of knowledge. They have demonstrated that relationship progression often is non-linear (Johnson et al., 2003, 2004). They have shown that turning points influence commitment (e.g., Baxter & Bullis, 1986), closeness (e.g., Golish, 2000), and even satisfaction (Erbert, 2000). However, we

do not fully understand the totality of turning points, which is crucial to a dialectical perspective of relationships (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). For example, little research has examined how relationship variables have *simultaneously* fluctuated in response to conflict turning points, with attention to the positive *and* negative implications.

Hypothesis 1 is limited to turning points that arise from episodes of conflict. There are two primary reasons for the tightened focus of this hypothesis. First, attention to one type of conflict turning point will yield a more comprehensive and nuanced view of a single category of turning point, as opposed to an imprecise and incomplete view of a broad array of turning points. Second, conflict is pervasive in close relationships. Conflict has the potential to yield positive and negative outcomes for individuals and their relationship, and often it is the catalyst for relationship deterioration (Canary, 2003). Baxter and Erbert (1999) reported that approximately half of romantic partners reported that at least one episode of conflict was a turning point in their relationships. The following hypothesis is offered:

H1: A substantial proportion of participants perceive that conflict turning points generate positive *and* negative outcomes for the relationship.

In the next section, I will discuss conflict, with particular attention to its conceptualization. From there, I will discuss how conflict can function as a turning point in close relationships.

Conflict

Despite substantial research attention to the concept of conflict, ironically, much conflict exists over its definition (Rahim, 2001). Perhaps due to historical lack of definitional clarity and agreement, many scholars have failed to provide clear and precise

conceptualizations of conflict (Putnam & Wilson, 1982). Baron (1990) identified five elements common to definitions of conflict in organizations. Although Baron's analysis is situated in organizational conflict, many scholars agree that conflict is a central construct with features that transcend context (Putnam & Folger, 1988). Baron (1990) stated that conflict involves "*opposing interests* between individuals or groups in a zero-sum situation; … Such opposed interests must be *recognized* for conflict to exist; … Conflict involves *beliefs*, by each side, that the other will thwart (or has already thwarted) its interests" (p. 199, italics original). He further stated, "Conflict is a *process*; it develops out of existing relationships between individuals or groups and reflects their past interactions and the contexts in which they took place; … *Actions* by one or both sides do, in fact, produce thwarting of others' goals" (p. 199, italics original).

Baron's conceptualization is most useful in considerations of zero-sum conflict, or conflict in which only one party can triumph, and does so at the other's expense (Rahim, 2001). However, there can be situations of nonzero-sum conflict in which it is entirely possible for all parties to attain some benefit. The principle thatmost interpersonal conflicts are nonzero-sum underlies the demand for mediation and other conflict management practices that foster the interests of all involved (Folger & Bush, 1996).

If a conflict situation *is* nonzero-sum, certain conditions need to occur in order for all parties to actually obtainbenefits. In other words, a nonzero -sum conflict does not guarantee that all parties will accrue benefits. The way parties approach a conflict situation has a significant impact on the unfolding interaction and parties' perceptions of the conflict. Deutsch (2000) suggested that a cooperative (win-win) orientation facilitates

constructive conflict, while a competitive (win-lose) orientation facilitates destructive conflict.

Deutsch (2000) described a cooperative orientation as one in which individuals focus on identifying and discussing differences with the goal of collaboratively developing the best solution for all involved. He emphasized that a cooperative orientation involves viewing others' perspectives and resources as valuable assets in the problem-solving process. Cooperation is distinguished by a flexible and helpful attitude with emphasis on common interests, goals, and values.

In contrast to a cooperative orientation, a competitive orientation to conflict is characterized by a desire to win at the other's expense (Deutsch, 2000). Individuals with a competitive orientation seek to advance their position without integrating others' positions, and such individuals are concerned with their own advancement only. Individuals with a competitive orientation tend to devalue others as obstacles that must be overcome. Competitiveness may be marked by rigid attempts to thwart other's interests, goals, and values, which are cast as contrary to one's own. Thus, a cooperative orientation promotes constructive conflict (what Deutsch termed constructive controversy) whereas a competitive orientation promotes destructive conflict (what he calls competitive debate).

Laypeople (and some researchers) tend to construe conflict as negative because it has potential to be painful and threatening (Bavelas, Rogers, & Millar, 1985). However, most conflict scholars believe that conflict *can* be constructive and promote beneficial outcomes (Rahim, 2001). Therefore, many interpersonal conflict scholars employ definitions which encompass both constructive and destructive conflict. For example,

Canary (2003) argued that conflict occurs when individuals perceive that their goals or values are opposing and incompatible. He also argued that for conflict to take place, individuals must interact and be interdependent. By definition, individuals involved in a meaningful relationship are interdependent, which ripens opportunities for conflict. Canary's broader definition is not restricted to conflict that is zerɵ sum and involves interference of the other, and thereby permits explorations of constructive and destructive interpersonal conflicts.

Baxter and Montgomery (1996) advanced a dialectical perspective of conflict in their brief discussion of the heuristic value of dialectics. They advanced a view that allows for constructive and destructive conflict:

> If we view conflict dialogically, it ceases to be something that is problematic and that needs to be managed. Instead, it becomes an exemplar of dialogue, so long as the parties are not trying to silence one another. Critical to "good conversation" is respect for the voice of the other without forcing the other to share one's viewpoint. … Conflict is a good example of where couples and researchers alike have been socialized to think and act in distinctly nondialogical ways. (p. 238)

Thus, Baxter and Montgomery suggested that conflict can be dialogical, although it is not always so. Seemingly, dialogical conflict can be constructive whereas nondialogical conflict is more likely to be destructive.

Defining Features of Conflict and Contradiction

Referencing Erbert (2000), Canary (2003) suggested that conflict in close relationships can be conceived as the outcome of activated dialectical tensions. Contradictions, which are "the dynamic interplay between unified oppositions" (Baxter &

Montgomery, 1996, p. 8), can function as a mechanism for relational change, which can include conflict.

Erbert (2000) offered distinctions between conflict and contradiction. He argued that both concepts involve opposition and interdependence. However, Erbert distinguished conflict as including "the critical features of struggle and interference between parties in managing incompatibilities over relationship needs" (p. 641). By emphasizing interference of the other, Erbert's definition of conflict parallels Baron's (1990) conceptualization of conflict, as both scholars seem to conceive of conflict primarily as destructive.

For the sake of clarity, let us further examine how constructive conflict relates to dialectical tensions. If the concept of contradiction is differentiated from destructive conflict by the notion of *interference of the other*, then is contradiction differentiated from constructive conflict by the corresponding notion of the facilitation of the other? According to Erbert (2000), the answer is no. Erbert stated, "The fact that relationship parties experience tension between competing desires does not necessarily result in conflict. Both parties may recognize tensions or contradictions that exist over relationship issues but work harmoniously to manage or deal with the concerns" (p. 641). Erbert suggested that "working harmoniously" reflects the absence of conflict, although surely such action may reflect a constructive conflict process that is beneficial to the individuals involved, if not their relationship.

Rather than using the notion of interference to distinguish between conflict and contradiction, it seems more useful to hone in on the components of a contradiction. The aforementioned definition of contradiction is "the dynamic interplay between unified

oppositions" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 8). In dialectical theory, contradiction involves interdependent yet *mutually negated* forces. In constructive conflict, individuals must be interdependent but their positions need not mutually negate each other.

Moreover, dialectical tensions are omnipresent within a relationship, whereas conflicts tend to be situated within specific moments in history. Perhaps contradictions occur largely unconsciously, while conflict tends to be within the awareness of the parties involved. This said, dialectical tensions may become dominant at some points in a relationship and subside at other points. The intense interplay of dialectical tensions may result in specific moments of transformation of the relationship (i.e., turning points). In contrast, conflicts tend to be specific to a particular issue, value, or goal. Conflicts tend to be situated as specific points in time, although they may become thematic over the course of a relationship, such that previous conflicts contextualize future conflicts (Siegert & Stamp, 1994).

Despite the role of dialectical tensions in conflict, little systematic research has utilized dialectical theory as a framework for examining conflict in relationships (Erbert, 2000). An exception is a study by Erbert which provides groundwork for the examination of conflict and dialectical tensions. Unfortunately, Erbert's conceptualization and corresponding operational definition of conflict focused primarily on negative aspects. Participants were asked to report times when they had a "fight, argument, or significant disagreement about something" (p. 644). However, Erbert did ask participants to report positive and negative outcomes of each conflict episode.

Erbert (2000) examined the relationship between marital conflict and dialectical tensions by administering a revised version of the RIT. He recruited 25 marital couples to

participate in separate interviews. First, he asked participants to chart conflict episodes (*without distinguishing which, if any, were turning points*) within the past 12 months, as opposed to the inception of the relationship. Second, rather than chart commitment or closeness, Erbert asked participants to report satisfaction with how each conflict was managed. Participants also completed other instruments to determine the extent to which six contradictions, and the poles of the contradictions, were central or important to each conflict episode reported in the RIT.

Erbert (2000) found that the dialectical tensions of autonomy-connection and openness-closedness were perceived as more important or central to marital conflicts than were other contradictions. The autonomy-connection dialectic was perceived as particularly important to conflicts about finances, employment, and time. The openness-closedness dialectic was perceived as particularly important to conflicts about personal criticism, finances, household chores, employment, and communication.

Erbert (2000) also found that not all conflict is dialectical; that is, not all conflict is based on contradictions (e.g., pulls between autonomy and connection). Only 36 percent of reported conflicts were dialectical; of these, 20 percent were antagonistic (i.e., partners embraced oppositional positions) and 16 percent were non-antagonistic (i.e., partners recognize contradictions, but do not become entrenched in oppositional positions). The remaining 64 percent of conflicts were non-dialectical, or not based in contradiction. In his conceptualization of conflict, Erbert offered a Giddenian view that "conflict occurs when two people are antagonistic, that is, when two people struggle over oppositional positions" (p. 641). Based on Erbert's implicit alignment of antagonism with destructive conflict, it seems that his idea of non-antagonistic conflict may correspond to

constructive conflict.

Topics of Conflict

Using the grounded theory method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), Erbert (2000) generated a taxonomy of conflict topics, or issue types, that are associated with dialectical tensions. These topics are criticism, finances, house-chores, children, employment, time, communication, in-laws, holidays, sex, vacations, crisis, stress, special occasion, and other parties. Participants reported a mean of 4.20 conflicts over the past year, although given Erbert's operationalization, participants may have underreported constructive conflicts. For both males and females, the most commonly reported conflict topics were personal criticism, finances, and household chores; these three topics accounted for 42.5 percent of all conflicts reported.

Other than Erbert (2000), relatively few researchers have examined the topic or issue of conflict episodes, and of these most have developed macro-level classification schemes. Grimshaw (1990) ethnographically derived three major categories of the content of conflict: things or rights, beliefs, and factual claims. Alberts (1989) inductively derived five categories of complaints, which pertain to behavioral, personal characteristic, performance, complaining, and personal appearance aspects of the partner. Braiker and Kelley (1979) separated conflict into the behavioral, normative, and personal levels. Baxter, Wilmot, Simmons, and Swartz (1993) and Cahn (1990) sorted conflict according to the nature of the type of communication involved (e.g., silent treatment, civil discussion).

Another study that examined the topic of conflict was conducted by Olson and Golish (2002). These scholars investigated the conflict topics of romantic couples who

engage in aggression and violence. Using the RIT, Olson and Golish identified nine conflict topics that were "critical events" associated with the use of aggression. Arranged in descending order of frequency, these conflict topics were problematic behavior of partner, life changes, involvement of a third party, extended family issues, parenting, finances, communication issues, daily routines, and other. However, Olson and Golish cautioned that "what these aggressive couples argue about may be different from non-aggressive couples" because aggressive couples may make "more extreme and explicit attempts to control the other" (p. 196).

The Siegert and Stamp (1994) study also suggests that the antecedents of the first big fight (a distinct type of conflict turning point) can be the very subject matter of conflict. These antecedents are uncertainty regarding relationship, jealousy, violations of expectations, and personality or background differences.

There is some overlap between the conflict topic taxonomies developed by Erbert (2000) and Olson and Golish (2002). Both sets of authors include topics relating to finances, children, communication, extended family, and third parties. However, three of the categories derived by Olson and Golish (problematic behavior of the partner, life changes, and daily routines) are not directly linked to Erbert's (2000) categories.

In his study, Erbert (2000) did not identify which conflict episodes were turning points. It is conceivable, however, that some topics are associated with conflict episodes, although not necessarily turning point. For example, a couple may experience a regular conflict about a household chore such as taking out the garbage that may not escalate into a turning point. Other topics, perhaps about sex or finances, may be more likely to transform the relationship.

The extent to which previous findings can be generalized to other types of conflict turning points (e.g., non-aggressive, non-first big fight) is unknown. Therefore, the following research question is posed:

RQ1: What topics are most likely to be reported as conflict turning points?

The discussion heretofore reveals a number of deficiencies in our understanding of conflict as it relates to dialectical tensions, with a gaping void as to how conflict acts as a turning point. Nevertheless, some previous research does demonstrate that conflict is one type of turning point that can alter the nature or state of a relationship (Baxter & Erbert, 1999; Siegert & Stamp, 1994). It can also act as a catalyst for personal and social growth (Erbert, 2000). However, little research has captured the multifaceted nature of conflict as a turning point in the progression of relationships.

Conflict as a Turning Point

In their seminal article, Baxter and Bullis (1986) used the RIT to derive 26 turning points, which aligned with 14 supra-types of turning points. The 14 supra-types of turning points were: get-to-know time, quality time, physical separation, external competition, reunion, passion, disengagement, positive psychic change, exclusivity, negative psychic change, making up, serious commitment, sacrifice, and other. None of these supra-types explicitly refer to conflict, although some (e.g., “negative psychic change” and “disengagement”) implicate conflict (Siegert & Stamp, 1994). Subsequently, researchers have identified conflict as a turning point in its own right. For example, Baxter and Erbert (1999) found that approximately half of romantic partners reported at least one instance of conflict (defined as a fight or argument) as a turning point. Johnson et al. (2003) found that friends characterized the turning point of conflict as negatively

valenced but the resolution of conflict as a turning point which was positively valenced.

In addition to previous research which considers a turning point as a discrete event, Bernat (2003) examined the "micro-turning-points" (mTPs) of romantic couples' most recent turning point. She defined mTPs as the finer-grained series of moments or events "that cumulatively contribute meaning and significance to the turning point" (p. 3). Bernat inductively derived eight categories of mTPs which, in descending order of frequency, are relationship distress, dyadic discussion, resolution/restoration, inner contemplation, relationship satisfaction, quality time, instrumental task, and physical separation. Interestingly, the most commonly cited mTP, relationship distress, is comprised of two subtypes, de-escalatory signal and overt conflict. De-escalatory signal is characterized by avoidance, whereas overt conflict is typified by confrontation.

Previous research has not distinguished what features of a conflict episode elevate it to turning point status. Erbert (2000) examined marital conflict episodes, but he did not ask participants to identify which (if any) of these episodes were turning points. Siegert and Stamp (1994) examined one type of conflict turning point, the first big fight, which by definition can happen only once in any given relationship.

Relational partners usually do not conceive of every conflict episode as a turning point. Benoit and Benoit (1987) found that the majority of participants who kept diaries of their arguments reported no change for themselves (52 percent), their partner (61 percent), or their relationship (70 percent).

Therefore, we do not know what features of conflict are indicative of conflict episodes that reach turning point status. It would be useful to identify which features, however, produce meaningful transformation of the state or nature of relationships. With

this in mind, the following research question is put forward:

RQ2: What are the features of conflict turning points that differentiate them from non-turning point conflict episodes?

Thus, conflict is sometimes posited as a turning point in the history of relationships, although little systematic study has been conducted to better understand the nature of conflict as a turning point. One exception is an analysis of the first big fight (FBF), a specific episode of conflict that is a relational milestone for many couples (Siegert & Stamp, 1994). The FBF involves "an episode of conflict during which partners recall discussing for the first time certain feelings, doubts, disappointments, expectations, ideals, and/or assessments about their relationship" (p. 345). The FBF may be memorable because it stimulates new ways of thinking about and communicating within the relationship—and because of its potential to strengthen or destroy fragile, nascent relationships.

Siegert and Stamp (1994) conducted a fine-grained analysis of the FBF via the grounded theory method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This study was unique in that it avoided two of the pitfalls Baxter and Bullis (1986) describe as common to turning point research. First, the Siegert and Stamp (1994) study focused on discovering fine distinctions about turning points themselves (as opposed to acquiring knowledge about fluctuations in commitment or some other relational variable). Second, the Siegert and Stamp study was less reductionistic than previous research and provided a more nuanced and comprehensive view of the nature of one type of turning point.

However, the Siegert and Stamp (1994) study did not avoid the third pitfall described by Baxter and Bullis (1986). Baxter and Bullis argued that although many

studies have overlooked the details of turning points, they have also failed to situate turning points within the broader progression of relationships. Citing previous studies that appear to be "likely candidates" as turning points, Baxter and Bullis stated, "All of these studies provide detailed looks at isolated event types, but none is comprehensive in determining how these events fit in the broader portrait of turning points in relationship progress" (p. 472). In defense, Siegert and Stamp (1994) argued that a fine-grained analysis of the FBF and other specific turning points brings us closer "to an in-depth and comprehensive view of them" (p. 347). In order to eventually achieve totality in a dialectical perspective, a foundation of deep understanding is essential (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Siegert and Stamp (1994) conducted interviews with couples whose relationship had survived the FBF, couples who had not yet had their FBF, and individuals who had recently broken up with their relational partners as a result of their FBF. They did not report marital status of their college student participants, although most likely the majority were unmarried. They found that four conditions contributed to the FBF: uncertainty regarding relationship, jealousy, violations of expectations, and personality or background differences. Moreover, participants perceived that the FBF clarified their feelings about their partner and the relationship, changed perceptions of relational interdependence, and developed thematic conflict based on shared history. Couples who had survived the FBF tended to perceive more positive effects than non-survivors. Compared to survivors, non-survivors perceived fundamental differences between themselves and their partner (which they believed should become resolved without any direct discussion). Non-survivors perceived that the FBF increased their uncertainty

about their relationships and they reported difficulty in discussing relationship problems with their partner (whereas survivors reported a "more cooperative, confrontational approach," p. 356).

Although Erbert (2000) did not look specifically at conflict episodes that were turning points, he did generate a taxonomy of 15 conflict topics. It is interesting to note that there is relatively little overlap between Erbert's 15 conflict topics and Siegert and Stamp's (1994) four conditions that contributed to the FBF. Erbert (2000) found that "other parties" were a source of conflict, and this could be related to Siegert and Stamp's (1994) finding that jealousy sometimes preceded the FBF. Erbert's (2000) other conflict topics do not clearly relate to other conditions found by Siegert and Stamp (1994).

There may be at least two reasons for the lack of overlap between Erbert (2000) and Siegert and Stamp's (1994) findings. First, Erbert (2000) focused on "everyday" conflicts, whereas Siegert and Stamp (1994) focused on the first big fight. Second, Erbert's (2000) participants were couples who had been married for at least one year; the mean length of marriage was 8.08 years. Siegert and Stamp's (1994) sample consisted of dating couples (relationship length was not reported). Of course, marital and dating relationships are distinctly differently. Well-established relationships typically do not face the same challenges of newly-formed relationships (Dindia, 2003). For example, couples with lengthy relational histories may not perceive that relational uncertainty, jealousy, expectancy violations, and personality or background differences contribute to conflict turning points. Compared to a newly-formed couple, a couple who has been married for many years should be more likely to feel more certain about their relationship, less concerned about potential rivals, and better able to predict the partner's

behavior. Also, couples with lengthy histories have likely worked out many personality and background differences that appeared in the beginning stages of their relationship. This leads to the following hypotheses regarding relationship length:

H2a: As relationship length increases, relational partners are less likely to perceive that relational uncertainty is associated with a conflict turning point.

H2b: As relationship length increases, relational partners are less likely to perceive that jealousy is associated with a conflict turning point.

H2c: As relationship length increases, relational partners are less likely to perceive that expectancy violations are associated with a conflict turning point.

H2d: As relationship length increases, relational partners are less likely to perceive that personality differences are associated with a conflict turning point.

H2e: As relationship length increases, relational partners are less likely to perceive that background differences are associated with a conflict turning point.

Other antecedent conditions may influence conflict turning points for well-established couples. Given the lack of previous research, the following research question is posed:

RQ3: As relationship length increases, what antecedent conditions are most salient to conflict turning points?

Siegert and Stamp (1994) found that the FBF changed participants' feelings about their partner and their relationship, impacted perceptions of interdependence within the relationship, and introduced a shared history of conflict. It is unknown if other conflict turning points possess similar influences, leading to the fourth research question:

RQ4: How do various types of conflict turning points: (a) impact feelings about their

partner and the relationship, (b) impact perceptions of relational interdependence, and (c) impact thematic conflict?

Additionally, the Siegert and Stamp (1994) study was focused on one type of conflict turning point with three primary outcomes. It would be useful to identify additional outcomes of other types of conflict turning points.

RQ5: What are other outcomes of conflict turning points?

Thus, the Siegert and Stamp (1994) study made sense of retrospective accounts of the FBF, and in doing so, provided an analysis of perceived causes and effects of one type of conflict. Importantly, their analysis demonstrated that the FBF can hold positive and negative outcomes. Although their findings may not extrapolate to all types of conflict, they do provide an indication of the nature of one type of turning point that involves conflict.

Individual differences in conflict turning points. A turning point is a privately held, subjective interpretation of some event in a relationship. For some romantic partners, the first kiss may be a turning point; for others, perhaps the first big fight; and yet others may not recognize any events as having transformed their relationship. When Baxter and Bullis (1986) asked romantic partners to identify turning points in their relationships, the partners agreed on only 54.5 percent of all turning points. Even though romantic partners may experience relationship events jointly, their perceptions of the impact of events may be incredibly different.

Despite considerable diversity in individual interpretations of the impact of relationship events, little to no research has investigated *why* interpretations vary. The interpretations of some relationship events may be related to specific types of individual

differences, so it seems valuable to consider explanations for variance in the interpretations of turning points. When focusing on turning points that spring from conflict episodes, three individual differences seem particularly worthy of investigation. These are conflict style, taking conflict personally, and Machiavellianism.

Conflict style is an individual difference that is often examined in studies of interpersonal conflict. Essentially, individuals tend to have "styles" or consistent sets of strategies that they use inconflict situations; three styles were identified by Putnam and Wilson (1982). Siegert and Stamp (1994) found that survivors of the FBF reported dealing with conflict in confrontational yet cooperative ways, while non-survivors reported avoidant and indirect strategies. Their study provides initial support for forthcoming hypotheses that conflict styles relate to conflict turning points. The concept of conflict style will be further discussed momentarily.

Taking conflict personally (TCP), a relatively new construct which involves the negative emotional personalization of interpersonal conflict episodes, has both state and trait components (Dallinger & Hample, 1995). Some individuals have a predisposition to personalize conflict, making them prone to feelings of hurt, persecution, and stress. Such individuals also have a tendency to perceive many negative but few positive effects of conflict on their relationships. Situational features of conflict can also induce TCP. Logically, individuals who take conflict personally should be more likely to perceive that a conflict episode is indeed a turning point, and one that produces destructive outcomes for their relationship.

Machiavellianism is a third variable that may partially explain differences in conflict turning points. Distinguished by their tendency to manipulate others for personal

gain, Machiavellians tend to be flexible and opportunistic communicators. They appear to manage conflict situations deftly (King & Miles, 1990). Compared to individuals who are low in this personality trait, Machiavellians may be more likely to strategize and manage conflict episodes to accomplish their relational objectives. Before taking up Machiavellianism and TCP further, however, let us consider conflict style in greater detail.

Conflict Style

A considerable body of evidence has demonstrated that individuals tend to have consistent styles of managing interpersonal conflict, although features of the situation and the partner's communication may influence conflict behavior (cf. Rahim, 2001). A conflict "style" essentially reflects patterns in interpersonal communicative behavior by which conflict is expressed (Putnam & Wilson, 1982).

Although myriad conceptualizations of conflict styles exist, a prevailing model in the communication field is the Putnam and Wilson (1982) three-factor model. This model has accumulated evidence for three styles of handling conflict: non-confrontation (obliging), solution-orientation (integrating), and control (dominating). Similar models have been derived by Hocker and Wilmot (1991) and Lawrence and Lorsch (1967). Although originally confined to the organizational context, Putnam and Wilson's (1982) model has been extended to other facets of relational life, including close interpersonal relationships.

Putnam and Wilson's (1982) model suggests that individuals tend to engage in one of three strategies for managing interpersonal conflict. The first style, non-confrontation, is demonstrated by avoidant and indirect means of dealing with conflict.

Individuals with a non-confrontational style tend to oblige and accommodate others. They may remain silent or "gloss over" differences to avoid or withdraw from conflict. In contrast, the controlling style is manifested by communication that is direct, competitive, and dominating. Individuals with a controlling style may argue persistently for their position and try to take control of the situation. The solution-oriented style also is direct, but is marked by a problem-solving, collaborative, and integrative approach. Individuals with a solution-orientation may focus on the needs, interests, values, and goals of all involved in an effort to compromise or develop solutions that are better than those initially proposed.

Putnam and Wilson's (1982) model was influenced by earlier conceptualizations of conflict. The five-factor model was popularized by Blake and Mouton (1964), although the true originator seems to be Mary Parker Follett (1926/1940). Follett conceptualized three primary styles—domination, compromise, and integration—and two secondary styles—avoidance and suppression. Blake and Mouton's (1964) model classified conflict styles on the basis of two intersecting continua which formed a 2 x 2 grid. One continuum pertained to concern for productivity and the other to concern for people; when juxtaposed they form four quadrants and one intersection which represent five styles of managing conflict. Subsequent scholars (e.g., Rahim, 2001; Thomas, 1976) adapted the grid to reflect the dimensions of concern for self and concern for others. As the grid's dimensions have been modified, the five styles have remained fairly consistent. They are avoiding (low concern for self/low concern for others), accommodating/obliging (low concern for self/high concern for others), compromising (moderate concern for self/moderate concern for others), competing/dominating (high

concern for self/low concern for others), and collaborating/integrating (high concern for self/high concern for others).[3] Like the Putnam and Wilson (1982) conceptualization, five-factor models originated as explanations of organizational conflict, although they have been extended to other domains of social life.

In addition to demonstrating empirical evidence for a simpler solution, the three-factor model is more theoretically parsimonious than five-factor models (Putnam & Wilson, 1982). Essentially, the Putnam and Wilson conceptualization collapses the avoiding and accommodating styles into a single style, non-confrontation, and the compromising and collaborating styles into the single style of solution-orientation. They note that their three-factor model reflects three approaches to conflict: win-win (solution-orientation), win-lose (controlling), and lose-lose (non-confrontation).

Putnam and Wilson (1982) argued that conflict style is one of many factors that may influence the way in which conflict unfolds. They noted that some individuals exercise more than one conflict style and argue that many contextual features of conflict (such as the "target" of conflict) must be considered for thorough and accurate explanation. Putnam and Folger (1988) urged researchers to examine features of conflict (such as conflict style) that transcend the specific situation, yet make attempts to account for additional variance in the expression of conflict.

Rahim (2001) argued that conflict styles are most appropriated when matched to the situation. Although there is a tendency to view certain conflict styles (e.g., controlling/dominating) as inherently deficient and others (e.g., solution-oriented/collaborating) as naturally superior, each style varies in appropriateness depending on situational features.

Given the discussion to this point, it seems that conflict style may be linked to conflict turning points. Specifically, conflict style may influence whether a conflict episode occurs at all. Benoit and Hample (1997) documented accounts and identified strategies by which individuals avoid and "cut short" (i.e., abbreviate) arguments. They found that when avoiding conflict, individuals let it pass, pseudo-articulate with someone other than the target of the conflict, or disagree in an indirect manner (such that direct conflict would not occur). Benoit and Hample found that either when avoiding or cutting short conflict, individuals exercised the strategies of withdrawal, changing the topic, or agreeing verbally or through actions. Although Benoit and Hample did not account for conflict style in their analysis, it seems likely that efforts to avoid and cut short arguments may be indicative of the non-confrontational style.

Moreover, conflict style may be related to whether a conflict episode is construed as a turning point, and whether the turning point has outcomes that are constructive and/or destructive. For example, an individual who approaches conflict as an opportunity to collaborate (i.e., solution-oriented style) probably will perceive the impact of a lengthy conflict episode differently from an individual who avoids (or even fears) conflict (i.e., non-confrontational style). The solution-oriented individual may be comfortable with high levels of conflict and not perceive the conflict episode as a turning point, or he/she may perceive it as a constructive turning point that enabled better decision-making, increased commitment, and other benefits. On the other hand, the non-confrontational individual may find conflict stressful—even painful—and if unable to avoid conflict, may experience a particularly "big" or significant conflict episode and construe it as a destructive turning point that destroyed trust, commitment, and provoked other problems.

Thus, the three styles of managing conflict should be differentially related to conflict turning points. Specifically, individuals with the non-confrontational style avoid conflict and deal with it indirectly. Therefore, they should be less likely to report conflict episodes. However, given their discomfort with conflict, once engaged in a conflict episode, they should be more likely to construe it as a relational turning point.

H3: Individuals with a non-confrontational conflict style are less likely to report conflict episodes, but more likely to construe a conflict episode as a turning point.

In contrast, individuals with the controlling style are dominating and competitive. They have a forceful, confrontational approach to conflict, and therefore seem most likely to experience overt conflict episodes. However, given their forceful nature, individuals with the controlling style may be unaware of the relational ramifications of their approach. As such, these individuals should be less likely to report conflict as a turning point.

H4: Individuals with a controlling conflict style are more likely to report conflict episodes, but less likely to construe a conflict episode as a turning point.

As stated, conflict turning points may produce outcomes that are both constructive and destructive to the relationship and to individual relaters. However, by definition, individuals with the solution-oriented conflict style are focused on solving problems in a collaborative manner. Such individuals are more likely to perceive that conflict can be advantageous. Rogan and LaFrance (2003) found that the solution-orientation style was significantly associated with relational goals, which they defined as pertaining to "relationship dynamics of the parties interaction, including power, affiliation, and trust" (p. 461). Additionally, Siegert and Stamp (1994) observed that individuals exercising a

confrontational yet cooperative approach perceive more beneficial outcomes to the FBF. Taking the findings of Rogan and LaFrance's (2003) and Siegert and Stamp (1994) together, the following hypothesis is posited:

H5: Individuals with a solution-oriented conflict style are more likely to report conflict turning points as having primarily constructive outcomes for their relationship.

In addition to conflict style, another factor that may interplay with conflict turning points is the degree to which individuals personalize conflict. As will be argued, individuals who take conflict personally may be more likely to construe conflict episodes as turning points with destructive outcomes.

Taking Conflict Personally

Taking conflict personally (TCP) is a negative emotional personalization of interpersonal conflict episodes. Dallinger and Hample (1995) defined TCP as "a feeling of being personally engaged in a punishing life event while involved in a conflict. A person feels threatened, anxious, damaged, devalued, and insulted" (p. 273). When taking conflict personally, individuals perceive they are being attacked on a personal, not substantive, basis, and they perceive face threat (Hample, 1999). Despite admonitions "not to take it personally," empirical evidence suggests that many people do tend to personalize conflict (Hample & Dallinger, 1995).

Dallinger and Hample (1995) operationalized TCP as having three core dimensions: direct personalization (i.e., perceptions that the conflict is emotional, face-threatening, and damaging to one's self), stress reactions (i.e., feelings of emotional and physical tension), and persecution feelings (i.e., perceptions of maltreatment and that

others are “out to get me”). Hample et al. (1995) documented TCP’s negative association with positive relational effects (i.e., beliefs that conflict can lead to constructive interpersonal outcomes) and TCP’s positive association with negative relational effects (i.e., beliefs that conflict can lead to destructive interpersonal outcomes). They also examined the valence, or whether individuals like or dislike arguing, and found that high TCP is related to negative valence.

Theoretical Foundation of TCP

The theoretical construct of TCP is informed by Lewin’s (1951) field theory. Lewin conceived of behavior as a joint function of a person and his or her life space (perception of the social environment). Lewin and most other researchers have focused on the climate, or affective atmosphere, of the life space. Hample and Dallinger (1995) argued that TCP is partially indicative of an individual’s perception of the climate surrounding interpersonal conflict.

Lewin (1951) defined conflict in terms of overlapping force fields (i.e., goal incompatibility). Hample (1999) examined the preconflict, conflict, and postconflict life spaces in relation to TCP. Each of these life spaces will be overviewed briefly.

Preconflict life spaces. In the preconflict life space, individuals bring to bear various predispositions (including trait TCP), past experiences, and perceptions that guide expectations and perceptions of social interaction (Hample, 1999). They rely upon cognitive structures to predict features of conflict, as well as the sequence in which the features will be manifested.

Climate is a situational feature that influences the preconflict life space. Climate conditions of avoidance, anxiety, confidence, and defensiveness are especially pertinent

to TCP (Hample, 1999). High levels of TCP are associated with conflict avoidance and withdrawal strategies (Dallinger & Hample, 1995) and heightened communication apprehension (a specific form of anxiety; Myers & Bailey, 1991). Hample (1999) suggested that low levels of TCP are associated with self-confidence about one's own communication ability.

In their studies of TCP and climate, Hample, Dallinger, and colleagues have focused most of their efforts on one aspect of climate, defensiveness. Although related to TCP, the concept of defensive communication climate is distinctly different. Gibb (1961) suggested that defensive communication is "behavior which occurs when an individual perceives threat or anticipates threat in the group" (p. 141). A defensive communication "climate" or state is characterized by "defensive communicators [who] send off multiple value, motive, and affect cues, but also … distort what they receive" (p. 142). Gibb claimed that defensive communication is both elicited and displayed by communication that is evaluative, controlling, strategic, non-empathic, dogmatic, and conveys superiority. In contrast, supportive communication is characterized by communication that is descriptive, problem-oriented, spontaneous, empathic, provisional, and promotes equality. Hample and Dallinger (1995) argued that defensiveness is not elicited so much by actual communicative behaviors, but by attributions of motives for behaviors.

Gibb's (1961) concept and the concept of TCP are compatible with their emphases on face threat and direct personalization, although TCP accounts for stress reactions, persecution feelings, and relational effects. Hample and Dallinger (1995) point out that a majority of the literature considers only the affective climate of defensiveness at the expense of individual predispositions to be defensive (for an exception, see Stamp,

Vangelisti, & Daly, 1992). In contrast, TCP accounts for both state and trait components, as will be discussed momentarily. Finally, defensiveness is thought to characterize the general climate, whereas TCP reflects affect toward conflict situations (Hample & Dallinger, 1995).

Dallinger and Callister (1997) found that degree of defensiveness prior to an argument was correlated to TCP level, higher stress, and greater feelings of persecution. They suggested that defensiveness and TCP may operate cyclically, "such that when one expects to feel defensive in an argument, one is likely to take it personally" (p. 95). Dallinger and Callister found evidence that individuals experience higher levels of defensiveness when discussing serial arguments with their partners, particularly when the relationship is close but unsatisfying.

Conflict life spaces. Hample (1999) reported that when conflict has been initiated, two features seem characteristic and particularly salient to the moment at hand. These features are aggression and reciprocity. Once actually engaged in conflict, high personalizers appear to become more aggressive than low personalizers (Hample & Dallinger, 1993). High personalizers are more likely to be conflict avoidant, and yet once they leave the preconflict life space and enter the life space of conflict, they appear to respond to their partner's arguing behavior and other features of the present situation. However, Hample (1999) noted that this finding has not been replicated with the strength of the original finding.

After reviewing related research findings, Hample (1999) suggested that high personalizers may be more likely to reciprocate aggression than low personalizers. He speculated that high personalizers may be prone to two behavioral patterns: the game face

and the cornered rabbit. First, Hample supposed that high personalizers "believe that conflicts are inherently antagonistic" and perceive that they must fight, or "put on a confrontive, hostile game face" (p. 187). The second option is that high personalizers "want to be passive and gentle, but they continually find themselves assaulted during conflicts, backed into a small space they cannot escape, and so they desperately respond in kind" (p. 187). Thus, although they prefer to avoid conflict in the preconflict life space, high personalizers tend to reciprocate aggression in the conflict life space. They must deal with the aftermath of the conflict in the postconflict life space.

Postconflict life spaces. Immediately following conflict, individuals' state TCP will fluctuate but be related to trait TCP (Hample et al., 1995). Additionally, individuals perceive that they and their partners personalized conflict and perceived negative relational effects to similar degrees (Hample, 1999).

After the conflict has passed, the postconflict space merges with the preconflict space, reflecting the preconflict-conflict-postconflict cyclical loop of the life space. Conflict affects the postconflict life space, which affects the preconflict life space. Conflict is especially stressful for the high personalizer, and is associated with a number of individual and relational problems, such as persistent negative affect, relationships that are less close and satisfying, and violence (Hample, 1999).

Trait and StateComponents of TCP

Dallinger and Hample (1995) conceived of TCP as having both trait- and state-like qualities. Research indicates that individuals demonstrate consistency in their tendencies to personalize conflict. Individuals high in trait TCP occupy a life space pervaded with negative feelings and an ongoing readiness to personalize conflict.

Dallinger and Hample (1995) suggest that individuals high in trait TCP may be prone to hurt feelings, lack of tolerance of others' transgressions, lack of trust with intimates, and lack of self-esteem.

Trait TCP is predictive of state TCP on all dimensions (Hample et al., 1995), particularly for sibling relationships, and to lesser degrees, for romantic relationships and parent-child relationships (Dallinger & Hample, 2001). Although individuals seem to display consistency in TCP, they may depart from basal levels of TCP in stressful conflict situations. Several situational factors appear to influence TCP, including the content of the conflict, the implications of the conflict for a relationship, power struggles, and intense emotion (Dallinger & Hample, 1995). Hample et al. (1995) found that individuals' arguing behaviors are associated with their own state TCP and their partners' arguing behaviors.

Hample et al. (1995) found that individuals' perceptions of their partner's state TCP were weakly to moderately correlated with partner's self-reported TCP. They conclude that individuals possess some sensitivity as to whether their partners are taking conflict personally, although their sensitivity may be impaired. However, the participants in Hample et al.'s study were dyads of friends and classmates; the relationships of some of these dyads may have been limited in closeness and knowledge about the partner. Given that acquaintances are among the least likely to take conflict personally (Dallinger & Hample, 2001), Hample et al.'s (1995) findings regarding self- and other-perceptions of TCP may not extend to close dyads with ongoing relationship histories.

Situating TCP within the Nomological Network

TCP partially accounts for feelings about conflict in an individual's life space

(Hample, 1999). Research has linked TCP to many personality traits and situational variables, including verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness (Hample & Dallinger, 1995); conflict style (Dallinger & Hample, 1995); conflict control expectancies (Avtgis, 2002); relationship type, sex, and self-monitoring (Dallinger & Hample, 2001); relational closeness and satisfaction, who brings up the argument and whether it is a serial argument (Dallinger & Callister, 1997).

In an effort to assess convergent validity, Hample and Dallinger (1995) examined the associations between TCP and the personality traits of verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness, both of which are thought to trigger specific communicative behaviors under certain conditions. Verbal aggressiveness "predisposes persons to attack the self-concepts of other people instead of, or in addition to, their positions on topics of communication" (Infante & Wigley, 1986, p. 61). In contrast, argumentativeness predisposes individuals to engage in issue-based arguing (Infante & Rancer, 1996). Although verbal aggressiveness leads to destructive outcomes, argumentativeness is thought to lead to more constructive outcomes and is considered a personal asset. Essentially, Hample and Dallinger (1995) found that verbally aggressive individuals liked conflict and perceived it as producing little stress, with more positive and fewer negative relational outcomes. They also found that individuals who prefer to avoid arguments are high in all of the dimensions of TCP: direct personalization, persecution feelings, and stress reaction. They tend to dislike conflict and perceive negative relational effects but not positive relational effects of conflict. Thus, TCP was associated with verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness in predictable ways.

Dallinger and Hample (1995) examined the relationship between TCP and

conflict style within organizational contexts. Using Putnam and Wilson's (1982) three-factor model, they found that individuals with a non-confrontational conflict style, and to a lesser degree, individuals with a controlling style, were high in direct personalization, stress reactions, and persecution feelings. These individuals also had low expectations for conflict to yield positive effects in their work relationships. Individuals with a solution-orientation style were low in direct personalization, stress reactions, persecution feelings, and concerns about relational effects. Thus, Dallinger and Hample's (1995) prediction that TCP was most strongly related to the non-confrontational style was supported.

Dallinger and Hample (1995) also examined the relationship between subordinates' level of TCP and perceived supervisor conflict style. Using Blake and Mouton's (1964) five-factor model, they found that individuals who perceived their supervisor used a forcing (dominating) style had higher stress reactions and held greater feelings of persecution with low expectations of future positive relational effects. Additionally, they discovered that individuals who perceived their supervisor used a compromising style were high in direct personalization, stress reactions, and feelings of persecution. Finally, they found that high levels of direct personalization, stress reactions, and feelings of persecution, along with low expectations of future positive relational effects, were related to low satisfaction with one's supervisor.

It is notable that Dallinger and Hample (1995) found that individuals with a non-confrontational conflict style were highest in direct personalization, stress reactions, and persecution feelings. Hample and Dallinger (1993) found that individuals who personalize arguments tend to be more aggressive in them. It appears that if non-confrontational individuals are unable to avoid arguments, they may become aggressive

and forceful, although more research is needed to support this claim.

In addition to conflict style, conflict control expectancies are related to TCP. People vary in the degree to which they believe they can control conflict episodes; those who believe they exercise influence on conflict outcomes have an internal control expectancies while those who believe conflict outcomes to be beyond their realm of influence have external control expectancies. Avtgis (2002) found that adult children with internal control expectancies reported less TCP when considering conflict with their parents. Specifically, he found that adult children with internal orientations reported less direct personalization, less persecution feelings, less stress reaction, greater likelihood of positive relational effects, and lower likelihood of negative relational effects. There was no association between control expectancy and perceived valence of conflict.

TCP appears to be influential in a variety of close relationships. Dallinger and Hample (2001) found that relationship type is a significant predictor of TCP. Individuals seem most likely to take conflict personally with parents, and to a lesser degree, romantic partners and coworkers. They seem least likely to take conflict personally with siblings, best friends, and acquaintances.

Interestingly, sex is an important factor for the TCP dimension of stress reactions (Dallinger & Hample, 2001). In every type of relationship (with romantic partners, best friends, parents, siblings, coworkers, and acquaintances), women reported greater stress in conflict interactions. Dallinger and Hample (1995) found that women reported more direct personalization and stress reactions; unfortunately, they did not account for relationship type. Dallinger and Hample (1993) reasoned that women are socialized to be more deferential and cooperative in conflict situations. In contrast, men are socialized to

be more assertive and competitive when faced with conflict. Given that the avoidant conflict style is associated with higher levels of TCP (on the dimensions of direct personalization, stress reactions, and persecution feelings; Dallinger & Hample, 1995), it follows that women tend to take conflict personally more than men.

TCP appears to be weakly linked to self-monitoring, which is the tendency to adapt one's communicative behavior to features of the situation in order to maximize desired responses. Specifically, individuals with higher self-monitoring scores were less likely to report beliefs that the conflict could yield positive relational effects and they were more likely to report that they disliked conflict interactions (Dallinger & Hample, 2001).

Generally, relaters who perceive solidarity and closeness with their romantic partners and are satisfied with their relationship experience lower TCP (Dallinger & Callister, 1997; Dallinger & Hample, 2001). However, given that conflict tends to be thematic over the course of a relationship, individuals may develop sensitivities to certain conflict topics. Dallinger and Callister (1997) noted:

> Earlier conflict between the relational partners on a particular issue may lead to differential reactions to a conflict episode. Because conflict cycles have developed over time, just the thought or mentioning of a particular topic may raise a partner's TCP level, even prior to the beginning of the next argument on the same topic. (p. 90)

TCP partially explains why individuals in close relationships respond the way they do in episodes of conflict, particularly when the individuals have a steeped history of conflict interactions.

State levels of TCP are likely to increase when individuals feel as though they are being attacked. Verbal and nonverbal signs may be inferred as indicators of persecution. For example, individuals are likely to personalize conflict when their partner broaches a topic of serial argument (Dallinger & Callister, 1997).

Taken together, the previous discussion of TCP suggests that high personalizers find conflict to be a considerably more negative experience than do low personalizers. Because they find conflict so punishing, high personalizers should be more likely to perceive that a conflict episode transformed their relationships. High personalizers tend to see conflict as inherently antagonistic and produce negative effects for the relationship (Hample, 1999; Hample & Dallinger, 1995). As such, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H6: Individuals who are predisposed to take conflict personally are more likely to construe a conflict episode as a turning point.

H7: Individuals who are predisposed to take conflict personally are more likely to perceive conflict turning points as presenting primarily destructive outcomes for their relationship.

Machiavellianism

A final variable which may interact with the experience of conflict turning points is Machiavellianism. Individuals high in the personality trait of Machiavellianism manipulate situations for their own benefits. Given their tendencies, it seems likely that they may exploit conflict turning points for their own personal gain in relationships.

Machiavellianism is a personality trait characterized by cynical views of humankind. Individuals high in Machiavellianism, known as Machs, perceive others as

untrustworthy, selfish, weak, and vicious. Guided by these views, Machs scheme to exploit others in social interaction. They are distinguished by the willingness and ability to manipulate others for their own purposes. They strategically use cunning, deceit, flattery, emotional appeals, and other exploitative measures to achieve their desired ends (Grams & Rogers, 1990).

Machs are opportunistic and flexible communicators, able to assess situations and adaptively choose from a broad array of behaviors for interacting with others (Martin et al., 1998). They are persuasive, ingratiating themselves to others and self-disclosing strategically (Fehr et al., 1992). O'Hair and Cody (1987) found that individuals who scored high on items measuring cynicism reported greater use of distributive and indirect tactics, whereas individuals high on immorality reported less use of exchange and referent tactics. Individuals high on deceit reported using more "other-benefit" and fewer exchange tactics.

One of the factors that contributes to Machs' success in manipulating others pertains to their ability to inhibit affect (Christie, 1970; Geis & Christie, 1970). Machs are able to restrain affect that would prevent their personal gain. They have the capacity to restrict affective involvement in situations implicated with emotional and moral concerns. Instead, Machs display a cool emotional detachment that seems to facilitate their ability to calculate their next move. However, they do not appear socially disconnected or noticeably manipulating, since this would prevent them from being successful in their manipulation. On the contrary, Machs often appear charming and persuasive. Geis and Christie (1970) claimed that while Machs may be exploitative, they generally are not vicious or vindictive—or at least do not appear so

The relationship between Machiavellianism and locus of control has been demonstrated in a number of studies. Mudrack's (1990) meta-analytic review of 20 studies illustrated that those who take a cynical, manipulative view toward human nature also perceive a world that is largely controlled by outside forces. Given this externality, "the use of manipulation, deception, or ingratiation tactics may thus reflect an attempt on the part of the Machiavellian to assert some influence over a hostile environment that subverts the efficacy of more internally oriented approaches, such as hard work" (Mudrack, 1990, p. 126). Furthermore, Paulhus (1983) found that Machs hold an external locus of control over the broad sociopolitical environment but an internal locus of control over their interpersonal relationships. Feeling as though they are unable to control the entire expanse of their network, Machs target relational partners to achieve dominance.

Some studies have examined Machiavellian interaction in relation to conflict. Machs are characterized as high in dominance and low in nurturance (Paulhus & Martin, 1987). They are more likely to admit hostility and aggression toward others (e.g., Jones, Nickel, & Schmidt, 1979), although they may not differ from low Machs behaviorally (Fehr et al., 1992).

Three studies have examined Machs' self-reported conflict styles. Using Lawrence and Lorsch's (1969) three-pronged model of conflict resolution styles (confronting, forcing, and smoothing), Jones and Melcher (1982) hypothesized that Machs were likely to use the confronting style and unlikely to use the smoothing style. Given the Machiavellian tendency to exploit and manipulate others, they reasoned, "A Machiavellian would prefer to enter into that conflict resolving mode which would affort [sic] the most opportunity for dealing with the issues of conflict in order to manipulate

the other party to the Machiavellian's own preferred goal or solution" (p. 653). They believed that Machs would be unlikely to use the smoothing style because it would require concern for and support of others. Machs prefer to advance their own interests, and since the smoothing style would require Machs to suppress their interests, Jones and Melcher believed that Machs prefer the alternative of the confronting style. They found support for their hypotheses, although the correlations between Machiavellianism and the confronting style were weak (r = .11 – .20), as were the correlations between Machiavellianism and the smoothing style (r = -.16 – -.23).

Jones (Jones & White, 1985) attempted to replicate his findings (Jones & Melcher, 1982). Jones and White (1985) offered the same two hypotheses and a third new one which predicted that Machiavellianism would be positively related to the forcing conflict style. Jones and White reasoned that Machs preferred the confrontational mode because it facilitates rational game playing and the forcing mode because their lack of morality does not prevent them from dominating others. They obtained support only for a weak positive correlation between Machiavellianism and the forcing conflict style, although the other unsupported correlations were in the predicted directions.

As part of their study, King and Miles (1990) also explored the relationship between conflict style and Machiavellianism. Using multiple scenarios, they employed both Putnam and Wilson's (1982) Organizational Communication Conflict Instrument (OCCI) and the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory (ROCI-II; Rahim, 1983). For both the OCCI and ROCI-II, the correlations between Machiavellianism and conflict styles were consistently low and nonsignificant without exception. For the OCCI, the correlations between Machiavellianism and the solution-oriented style [which

corresponds to Lawrence & Lorsch's (1969) confrontation style] ranged from .00 to -.15. The correlations between Machiavellianism and the controlling style (which corresponds to Lawrence & Lorsch's forcing style) ranged from -.02 to -.05. Finally, the correlations between Machiavellianism and the nonconfrontation style (which corresponds to Lawrence & Lorsch's smoothing style) ranged from -.01 to .10.

Interestingly, King and Miles' (1990) results conflicted with the predictions and results of Jones (Jones & Melcher, 1982; Jones & White, 1985). In fact, for all three styles, the results of King and Miles (1990) and Jones (Jones & Melcher, 1982; Jones & White, 1985) are in the opposite directions (although the results of King & Miles, 1990, were not significant). The directions of the correlations for Machiavellianism and the five conflict styles measured by the ROCI-II were similar to the correlations for Machiavellianism and the OCCI conflict styles.

The lack of congruency between the findings of King and Miles (1990) and Jones (Jones & Melcher, 1982; Jones & White, 1985) produces several implications. One implication pertains to measurement error. It is possible that Lawrence and Lorsch's (1969) three-pronged model operationalizes conflict styles differently than the Putnam and Wilson (1982) three-pronged model and the Rahim (1983) five-pronged model and that one or more of the models are flawed. Another implication pertains to sampling error. Perhaps flukes in sampling contributed to the results of King and Miles (1990) and/or Jones (Jones & Melcher, 1982; Jones & White, 1985).

However, a more theoretically-informed response suggests that Machs manage conflict with greater sophistication than hypothesized by Jones (Jones & Melcher, 1982; Jones & White, 1985). King and Miles (1990) argued, "High 'Machs' seem to have a

propensity to choose the style or strategy most appropriate for the situation to maximize their own goals, a finding that offers support to their being characterized as pragmatic, strategy-oriented game players (Christie & Geis, 1970)" (p. 241).

Indeed, research in the last 15 years or so has increasingly demonstrated that Machs are highly responsive to situational features. Although they have a dominant, self-centered nature (Paulhus & Martin, 1987), Machs do not rely solely upon forceful, aggressive strategies to achieve their ends. Instead, they appear to exercise a full repertoire of strategies, although they do so with their own interests in mind. They employ strategies tactically, looking for opportunities to profit and modifying their interaction behaviors accordingly (Grams & Rogers, 1990; Martin, Anderson, & Thweatt, 1998). Moreover, Machs' tactics may be related to which dimensions of Machiavellianism (i.e., deceit, immorality, flattery, and cynicism) are individually salient (O'Hair & Cody, 1987).

Machs are mindful that in order to achieve their goals, they must manage how others perceive the situation. Although attuned to the social environment, some research suggests that Machs are low self-monitors (Ickes, Reidhead, & Patterson, 1986).This may be because Machiavellians are self-focused and self-monitoring requires taking the perspective of others. Leone and Corte (1994) found that among low self-monitors, those who were high in Machiavellianism were more concerned about self-presentation, whereas those who were low in Machiavellianism were more concerned about self-congruence, or being true to themselves.

Bolino and Turnley (2003) found that Machs were slightly more likely to engage in aggressive or passive impression management tactics, whereas individuals low in

Machiavellianism were slightly more likely to engage in positive impression management tactics. They concluded that Machs may take an "all-or-nothing" approach, predisposing them to exercise passive impression management strategies when few benefits are attainable and aggressive impression management strategies when more benefits are attainable. Machs are more likely to employ deceptive strategies, such as intimidation and supplication (the strategic appearance of neediness), which partially accounts for their aggressive impression management tendencies. Again, Machs consider situational features when determining how to present themselves in order to obtain their goals.

These and other studies suggest a relationship between Machiavellianism and conflict, with implications for how Machs may manage conflict turning points. Specifically, Machs may manage conflict in ways that will produce the greatest benefits to themselves. They may exercise an array of strategies to achieve their goals, including relationship goals. With this in mind, it seems feasible that Machs may orchestrate certain conflict episodes to achieve certain changes in a relationship. For example, a Mach may devise and employ strategies so that an argument will lead his or her partner to profess love and express intimacy. Or a Mach may intentionally alienate his or her partner in private and then ingratiate himself or herself to the partner in public to appear favorable to others yet obtain more autonomy from the partner. Yet still, a Mach may avoid or cut short a conflict in order to prevent the relationship from changing. Compared to individuals low in Machiavellianism, then, it seems likely that Machs strategically plan conflict episodes. Depending on their motives, Machs enact communicative behaviors that will facilitate or inhibit relational turning points. Based on this logic, the following hypothesis is posed:

H8: Compared to individuals low in Machiavellianism, Machs are more likely to strategize and manage conflict episodes to accomplish their relational objectives (i.e., the achievement or avoidance of a relational turning point).

It is conceivable that conflict style, taking conflict personally (TCP), and Machiavellianism may interact in predictable ways. Dallinger and Hample (1995) reported that TCP is most strongly related to the non-confrontational conflict style, and to a lesser degree, the controlling style. Individuals with a non-confrontational style were more likely to experience direct personalization, stress reactions, and persecution feelings. Whereas Machs have the ability to remain dispassionate and detached in social interactions, individuals low in Machiavellianism are much more likely to become emotionally involved. The constellation of low Machiavellianism, high TCP, and non-confrontational conflict style should be associated with a tendency to construe conflict episodes as relational turning points. This leads to the next hypothesis:

H9: Individuals who are low in Machiavellianism, high in taking conflict personally, and more likely to report using a non-confrontational conflict style are more likely to construe conflict as a turning point.

Rationale

Although researchers have come to include conflict in their categorization of turning points, relatively few researchers—with the exceptions of Erbert (2000) and Siegert and Stamp (1994)—have focused their examinations on conflict. This is surprising, given that conflict can result from dialectical tensions (Erbert, 2000). While the Erbert (2000) and Siegert and Stamp (1994) studies provided interesting analyses, they are only first steps. The Erbert (2000) study examined episodes of conflict, but these

were not necessarily turning points, and as such, his study is not a turning point analysis. Moreover, Erbert's operationalization privileged a negative conceptualization and operationalization of conflict and while it provided a classification system for conflict topics, it did not examine antecedent conditions and outcomes to the conflict episode.

The Siegert and Stamp (1994) study provided rich detail about the antecedents and outcomes of one type of conflict—the FBF. The FBF occurs only one time, and often early in the relationship. The generalizability of findings to other types of conflict turning points is questionable. Therefore, a study which builds upon previous research and further fleshes out the nature, antecedents, and outcomes of conflict is warranted.

This prospectus advances new ways of thinking about turning points in general, with specific focus on conflict as a relational turning point. Although previous research has posited that a turning point produces *either* positive *or* negative influences, dialectical theory and theoretical work on conflict provides implications that conflict turning points may have more multifaceted positive *and* negative influences. Additionally, previous research indicates that conflict style, TCP, and Machiavellianism may influence participants' experiences with conflict turning points. Therefore, to bridge gaps in the literature and to more fully understand conflict turning points, several hypotheses and research questions have been presented. In the next chapter, the method to investigate these hypotheses and research questions is discussed

CHAPTER 3

Method

This study examined conflict as a turning point in heterosexual romantic relationships by employing a combination of open- and closed-ended survey questions. The purpose of the open-ended questions was to gather data about perceived topics, antecedents, and outcomes of conflict turning points, while the purpose of the closed-ended questions was to detect how participants' conflict styles, personalization of conflict (TCP), and Machiavellianism are associated with their conflict turning point experiences.

In order to understand conflict as a turning point in relationships, this study privileged participants' personal meanings and perspectives as they understood them. Several scholars (e.g., Baxter & Pittman, 2001) have argued that given the subjective, co-constructed nature of relational history, it is fitting to examine dyadic processes from the perspective of the participant. Additionally, it is extremely difficult to study turning points as they naturally occur. As Hopper and Drummond (1990) pointed out, "Relational turning points, by definition, represent critical junctures in romantic relationships; they usually occur privately and unpredictably" (p. 44). Therefore, this study followed the tradition of previous research by examining participants' retrospective understandings of turning points.

Participants

Three hundred fifty eight participants were recruited from the pool of students in introductory communication and management courses at the University of Oklahoma.[4] As a condition of participation, participants had to be currently involved in a heterosexual romantic relationship.[5] Fifty students did not meet this criterion; their data were

eliminated from analyses. Nineteen participants could not recall a conflict turning point and the surveys from an additional five participants were incomplete and therefore not usable, requiring elimination of these data from analyses. Therefore, the data from 284 participants were included in data analysis. In exchange for participation, students obtained course credit.

Of the 284 participants, 55 percent were female (n = 155). The mean age was 22.07 (SD = 3.79; *Median* = 21). Seventy-three percent of participants were white (n = 208), seven percent were Asian/Pacific Islander (n = 19), four percent were Latino (n = 12), three percent were Native American (n = 8), three percent reported other ethnicities (n = 9), one percent were African American (n = 4), and one percent did not report their ethnicity (n = 4). An additional seven percent were international students representing a variety of countries (n = 20). Considering class status, seven percent of participants were first-year students (n = 19), 13 percent were sophomores (n = 36), 25 percent were juniors (n = 71), and 54 percent were seniors (n = 153). Less than one percent were graduate students (n = 1) and one percent failed to report their class status (n = 4).

Participants' mean length of their relationship was 28.22 months (SD = 32.81; median = 18) and 21.1 percent of participants lived with their partners in the same residence (n = 60). Participants' relationship status varied. Seventy-eight percent were involved in dating relationships (n = 222), six percent were engaged (n = 17), 10 percent were married (n = 29), and one percent were separated or divorced (n = 4). Another two percent were romantically involved with their partner but did not consider themselves in any of the aforementioned categories (n = 6). Finally, two percent failed to report their relationship status(n = 6).

Procedures and Measures

Participants completed a survey consisting of open- and closed-ended questions. The open-ended questions were primarily designed to elicit descriptions of participants' personal experiences with conflict turning points within their own romantic relationships. (See Appendix for the survey.) To begin, participants were asked to report the topic and date of conflict episodes in the recent past (see Part One of the survey). Participants were asked about the nature and topic(s) of their most recent conflict turning point, with some questions about topic stemming from Erbert (2000), Olson and Golish (2002), and Siegert and Stamp (1994; see Part Two). Additionally, participants were queried as to how their most recent conflict turning point differed from conflicts that are not turning points (see Part Three).

Antecedents of Conflict Turning Points

Participants were asked to report perceived causes of their conflict turning point, including 15 closed-ended questions reflective of Siegert and Stamp's (1994) four antecedent conditions of the FBF (see Part Four, questions 7-21). These antecedents are uncertainty about the relationship, jealousy, violations of expectations, and personality and background differences. In this study, personality differences and background differences were measured separately. Each of the five antecedents was measured using three items on a seven-point scale. Each scale provided acceptable reliability, with alphas ranging from .74 to .81.

Outcomes of Conflict Turning Points

Participants were asked to report perceived outcomes of their conflict turning point, including 12 closed-ended questions reflective on Siegert and Stamp's (1994) three

outcomes of the FBF (see Part Four, questions 30-41). These outcomes are clarification of feelings about the partner and the relationship, perceptions of relational interdependence, and the development of thematic conflict. Each of the three outcomes was measured using four items (two of which were reverse-coded) on a seven-point scale. The four-item clarification of feelings scale provided a low reliability of .61. The four-item interdependence scale provided an unacceptable reliability of .43. Upon inspection, it became clear that the item "This particular conflict led me to become more aware of my interdependence with my partner" was problematic. This item was dropped to improve the reliability of the three-item interdependence scale to .52. The four-item thematic conflict scale provided a low reliability of .56. Due to the low reliabilities of the scales measuring the outcomes of conflict turning points, relevant findings should be interpreted with caution.

Conflict Style

Conflict style was assessed using a slightly modified version of the Putnam and Wilson (1982) Organizational Communication Conflict Instrument (OCCI; see Part Six). The OCCI is a 30-item, seven-point scale that assesses participants' perceived conflict management style. Although originally created for measuring conflict in organizational contexts, the OCCI has been used to measure conflict in interpersonal contexts (e.g., Rogan & LaFrance, 2003). The OCCI was modified by replacing the term "supervisor" with "romantic partner." Additionally, participants were asked to complete the OCCI in the context of their most recent conflict turning point. The OCCI has demonstrated acceptable validity and reliability (Wilson & Waltman, 1988). Rogan and LaFrance (2003) reported alpha coefficients of .90 (non-confrontation), .87 (control), and .87

(solution-orientation); in this study, alpha coefficients were .90, .82, and .84 respectively.

Perceptions of Constructiveness and Destructiveness of Conflict Turning Points

Questions were posed to determine participants' perceptions of the constructiveness and destructiveness of their most recent conflict turning point. Perceptions of constructiveness were measured using four items on a seven-point scale (see Part Five, questions 1-4). Perceptions of destructiveness were measured using four items on a seven-point scale (see Part Five, questions 5-8). Each scale provided acceptable reliability with respective alphas of .90 and .89.

Taking Conflict Personally

Taking conflict personally (TCP) was measured using the Revised Taking Conflict Personally Scale (Hample & Dallinger, 1995; see Part Seven). The Revised TCP Scale is a 37-item instrument with six subscales that measure direct personalization, persecution feelings, stress reactions, positive relational effects, negative relational effects, and like/dislike valence. Although originally set on a five-point scale, a seven-point scale (7 = Strongly agree, 1 = Strongly disagree) was used in this study for the sake of consistency with other measures in the present study. Also, the instrument was revised by replacing terms referring to others (e.g., "the rest of the group," "people," etc.) with the term "romantic partner" wherever possible. The instrument has demonstrated acceptable psychometric properties. Avtgis (2002) reported Cronbach's alphas ranging from .74 to .84; similar alphas were reported by Hample and Dallinger (1995) and Hample et al. (1995). In this study, alpha coefficients were .82 (direct personalization), .72 (stress reactions), and .80 (persecution feelings).

Machiavellianism

Machiavellianism was assessed using the Mach IV of Christie and Geis (1970) and the brief Machiavellianism Scale of Allsopp, Eysenck, and Eysenck (1991; see Part Eight). The Mach IV is a 20-item, seven-point scale that assesses Machiavellian beliefs. Following the recommendation of Zook and Sipps (1996), language referring to men was changed to gender neutral language in items 8, 14, and 20. The Mach IV is the most commonly employed measure of Machiavellianism and its reliability is generally lower than preferred but acceptable (Wrightsman, 1991; Zook & Sipps, 1996). In this study, the alpha coefficient for the Mach IV was .67.

The Mach IV items were summed because the majority of past research on Machiavellianism has followed this procedure, and subsequent results will facilitate better comparison with the extant body of research. It is important to note, though, that Hunter, Gerbing, and Boster (1982) identified four factors in a confirmatory factor analysis of the Mach IV: deceit, flattery, immorality, and cynicism. They argued that these factors represent distinct beliefs and must be treated independently. However, inspection of their findings reveals that many items cross-loaded and the subscales are highly intercorrelated (as high as .78 in their study). Moreover, given that the predicted relationships between the four factors and other variables in this studyare identical, it was parsimonious to aggregate the items into one score of Machiavellianism.

The Allsopp et al. (1991) measure is a 10-item scale of Machiavellianism which appears to capture the deceit and immorality components (Mudrack & Mason, 1995). Using a seven-point scale, participants responded to 10 declarative statements reflecting Machiavellian beliefs. This format is a modification of Allsopp et al.'s (1991) procedure, which employs questions with dichotomous "yes-no" response options. Mudrack and

Mason (1995) suggested that the modifications of declarative statements and increased response options may improve validity and reliability. Because past research has found this scale to be unidimensional, the items were mean aggregated to form one score. Allsopp et al. (1991) reported Cronbach's alpha of .75 although Becker and O'Hair (2004) obtained Cronbach's alpha of .88. In this study, the alpha coefficient was .86. Taken together, these alphas suggest that the Allsopp measure yields acceptable reliability that is higher than the Mach IV.

Achievement and Avoidance of Conflict Turning Points

Questions were posed to measure self-reported achievement and avoidance of conflict turning points. The strategic achievement of conflict turning points was measured using eight items on a seven-point scale (see Part Five, questions 9-16) and the strategic avoidance of conflict turning points was measured using eight items on a seven-point scale (see Part Five, questions 17-24). Each scale provided acceptable reliability with respective alphas of .85 and .80

CHAPTER 4

Results

Overview of Data Analytic Methods

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyze the data produced by closed- and open-ended questions on the survey. Data from the closed-ended questions were analyzed using conventional quantitative data analytic methods. Following inspection of the hypotheses and research design, it was determined that frequency computations (for Hypothesis 1 and Research Question 1), multiple regression analyses (for Hypotheses 2-9), and a multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA, for Research Question 4) were the most appropriate statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and intercorrelations for all quantitative measures employed in the study are presented in Table 1. With the exception of the scales measuring the outcomes of conflict turning points (i.e., clarification of feelings, interdependence, and thematic conflict), all of the scales demonstrated acceptable reliability.

Data from the open-ended questions were analyzed using the constant comparative method, which is also known as the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The constant comparative method requires the researcher to follow a systematic set of procedures to analyze the data and produce categories that are grounded in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The constant comparative method is a qualitative method commonly used in research undergirded by dialectical theory (e.g., Erbert, 2000).

The constant comparative method calls for the researcher to become familiar with the data through repeated readings of the data. The data were dissected into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences. Specifically, line-by-

line analysis was used. As Strauss and Corbin (1990) explained, “This involves close examination, phrase by phrase, and even sometimes of single words. This is perhaps the most detailed type of analysis, but the most generative” (p. 72). Compared to sentence, paragraph, and document analysis, line-by line analysis tends to facilitate fine-grained yet exhaustive category development. Participants generated approximately 21,000 lines of written text for this research. Through the generation of theoretical notes, all of this data was coded and analyzed.

Throughout the coding process, two key analytic procedures—making comparisons and generating and considering questions—were employed. In making comparisons, I consistently looked for similarities and differences among various data. For example, I made “close-in” and “far-out” comparisons by comparing tentatively developed categories to examples that were similar and different. I also paid careful attention to language indicative of extremes (e.g., “This was the *worst* fight ever”). As Strauss and Corbin (1990) noted, such language can function as a red flag to the researcher, as it can suggest tendencies (e.g., the tendency to make a global evaluation of the conflict turning point). Thus, through the making of comparisons, I sought to discover abstractions that grouped and unified specific instances of a category.

As I inspected the data, I also asked myself the basic questions of “what?”, “who?”, “when?”, “where?”, “why?”, “how?”, and “how much?”, as well as more complex questions such as “what are the multiple meanings embedded in this data?” In posing these questions, my goal was to carefully consider multiple facets of the data.

The techniques of making comparisons and asking questions were key to developing theoretical sensitivity to the data. Theoretical sensitivity is achieved when a

researcher “steeps” himself or herself in the data and reflects on the data from multiple perspectives. That is, the researcher must look beyond taken-for-granted assumptions of the data and seek to clarify and in some cases, debunk these assumptions. To achieve theoretical sensitivity, a researcher must commit an abundance of time and careful consideration of the data. The outcome of this commitment, however, can be fruitful. A theoretically sensitive researcher can glean textured regularities within the data—regularities that are contextualized and rich with meaning.

By identifying consistencies and patterns in the data, I derived 14 major categories (e.g., categories of antecedents to conflict turning points). The properties and dimensions of categories were examined, which allowed for more refined classifications within categories (i.e., 6 subcategories and 15 sub-subcategories). Some data are reflective of multiple categories. Each category will be illustrated in part through participants’ direct quotations; *italics* are used to highlight salient features of various participants’ statements. Throughout the coding process, abstractions were compared to the actual data to verify their sensibility.

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 stated, “A substantial proportion of participants perceive that conflict turning points generate positive *and* negative outcomes for the relationship.” In support of this hypothesis, 49.1 percent of participants reported a combination of positive and negative outcomes. As one 22-year-old female (#016) illustrated, many participants listed positive *and* negative results of their conflict turning point. She said, “It was positive because I felt better after venting and talking. I understood him more instead of thinking men were from Mars…. [It was also] negative—because he betrayed my trust

and that's hard to build up.

A small proportion (7.4 percent) of participants reported only negative outcomes. These participants typically reported that their relationship was very strained. For example, a 22-year-old male (#065) reported that his conflict turning point, in which he "apparently" provoked jealousy in his girlfriend, made him question their relationship. "It has made things very awkward and uncomfortable between us a lot of the time," he said. "It has made me think twice about trying to talk things out." He explained:

> *It changed [our relationship] in ways that were only negative because now, we're still resentful from the fight.* We didn't work things out in a positive manner and things are just much worse off for us now. I really can't see any positive aspect of it except that maybe we see that we aren't right for each other. Not only did we deal with this conflict poorly, but we didn't learn how to deal with conflict better in the future.

Additionally, 41.3 percent of participants reported only positive outcomes. For example, one 24-year-old male (#097) described his conflict with his wife as pertaining to a host of financial problems, including "budgeting (monthly), debt payoff, saving, and investments…. We seek to be financially secure [because] I learned that a large percentage of marriages fail due to financial reasons." However, he felt as though the conflict had enriched his marriage:

> [It is only] positive in that we have better learned how to manage our money. Communication has improved. We are more aware of each other's needs. We are learning to make sacrifices in order to achieve our goals.

Finally, 2.1 percent of participants reported neither positive nor negative

outcomes. These participants seemed ambivalent about the valence and nature of the outcomes generated by their conflict turning point. For example, a 43-year-old male (#046) who argued with his long-time girlfriend about how they should spend time together wrote, “I am not sure how this incident will end up affecting my future conflicts or our relationship.” A 23-year-old male (#117) indicated that he was confused as to how to interact with his girlfriend and, at the time of participation, unable to specify the valence of the outcomes from their conflict turning point about finances.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, “What topics are most likely to be reported as a conflict turning point?” To begin, open-ended responses to question five of Part Two were analyzed using the constant comparative method. This analysis yielded the detection of eight new topics. These topics pertained to drinking alcohol, distance, the future of the relationship (including the topic of marriage), the participant’s behavior, the participant’s family, activities, trust, and morals and values (including religion).

Some of these newly detected topics seem better represented as subordinate topics. For example, the topic of drinking alcohol seems subordinate to the topic of the partner’s (and participant’s) behavior. Additionally, the topic of distance seems subordinate to the topic of time (i.e., spending time together). Finally, the topic of the future of the relationship (often in reference to marriage) seems to be a subtype of the topic of uncertainty about the relationship.

Some of the newly detected topics are related to other topics. For example, future researchers could combine the new topic of the participant’s behavior with the topic of partner’s behavior. Similarly, the new topic of the participant’s family could be combined

with the topic of the partner's family.

In addition to answering an open-ended question about the topic of the conflict, participants were asked to report topics from a checklist of 23 topics compiled from the findings of Erbert (2000), Olson and Golish (2002), and Siegert and Stamp (1994). They were allowed to check as many topics as came up in their conflict. Participants were also given the option of writing additional topics in an "other" category (responses in this category reflected the eight new topics). They were then asked to circle the main topic of their conflict.

Two sets of frequency computations revealed the topics that are most likely to be reported as the issues discussed in conflict turning points (see Table 2). One set reflects frequency of each topic as the main topic of conflict turning point, while the other set reflects overall frequency (regardless of whether the topic was a primary or secondary issue).

The four most commonly reported topics of conflict were uncertainty about the relationship, time, the partner's behavior, and communication. These topics were frequently reported as main topics of conflict turning points. They were also frequently reported as one of many topics.

Uncertainty about the relationship was reported as the main topic of conflict by 16.3 percent of participants and as one of many topics by 44.0 percent of participants. Uncertainty about the relationship sometimes centered on timing of marriage, but more often reflected uncertainty about whether the relationship should continue. For example, a 20-year-old female (#159) reported:

Initially, the conflict was about preparation for exams. I was upset because I saw

lack of preparation as an indicator of laziness and not working to meet goals as deception ("don't tell me you are going to do well when you don't study"). *I felt that I could not continue a relationship with him if we did not have common goals.*

Time was reported as the main topic of conflict by 14.5 percent of participants and as one of many topics by 50.0 percent of participants. Most of the conflicts about time pertained to how participants and their partners spent time together or with their families. For example, a 29-year-old female (#179) reported:

My husband works 50-60 hours a week and feels like he deserves to play on the computer to wind down. I have agreed to a certain extent. But, I recently pointed out that *it takes away from the time with the children*.

The partner's behavior was reported as the main topic of conflict by 7.8 percent of participants and as one of many topics by 53.9 percent of participants. Compared to the topic of communication, the topic of partner's behavior tended to focus on the partner's actions as opposed to verbal messages. For example, a 21-year-old male (#024) explained that his wife's behavior was the central issue for their most recent conflict turning point.

We were watching TV and were just messing around. I had the remote and she took it from me and put it on "Will and Grace." I got so ticked that I took it back. She lightly batted at my face with an open palm. I swatted her hands from my face. *Then she slapped my head very hard and broke my glasses. I got up and left. I went back after a while and she tried to make it up but I was so mad.*

Communication was reported as the main topic of conflict by 7.4 percent of participants and as one of many topics by 52.5 percent of participants. Participants'

descriptions of communication problems varied considerably, but they usually focused on verbal messages, nonverbal messages, lack of messages, or some combination thereof. For example, a 19-year-old female (#155) and her boyfriend experienced a conflict due to his failure to honestly communicate with her.

> *I found out that when we had just started "dating," he was already in a relationship but didn't tell me.* He apparently ended that relationship to date me but wasn't planning on telling me. I only found out by accident.

Clusters of Topics

Finally, the constant comparative method yielded the discovery of five "clusters" of topics. These clusters represent topics that often emerged within the same description of the conflict. Although topics within a cluster were not always co-present in a participant's account, topics did tend to appear together. Therefore, these clusters of topics are described to provide the reader with a sense of the themes present within participants' conflict turning points.

The first cluster of topics includes finances, employment, household chores, children, and major life changes. For example, a 27-year-old male (#008) indicated that the topics of finances, employment, children, and major life changes were some of the topics that arose in a recent conflict he and his wife experienced. He reported:

> We (my wife and I) have a *baby* on the way. The discussion was about how to handle the *financial responsibility* between the two of us. *We both work* and I am in school full time. The discussion became more of a pep talk as *I assured my wife things might be tight, but we were OK*.

The second cluster of topics is that of time, communication, stress, and daily

routines. These four topics tended to be reported together within a participant's account. For example, a 23-year-old female (#279) reported that all four of these topics arose in their recent conflict.

> *We had been unable to see each other over at least a two-week span*. Each time we made plans something would come up. The last time it happened *he seemed to get upset*. *We did not talk* for about a week and a half, almost two weeks. This conversation marks a long discussion about who was to blame for our inability to meet.

The third cluster of topics pertains to holidays, vacations, and special occasions. A 22-year-old male (#128) reported that these three topics, among others, came up in his recent conflict with his girlfriend. He explained:

> My girlfriend wanted to go to her house for *Thanksgiving* after I had already made *plans* for us to go to my house. She agreed to this and said now that she doesn't feel like she can miss everyone at her house over Thanksgiving.

The fourth cluster of topics pertains to uncertainty about the relationship, partner's behavior, other people, jealousy, and sex. For example, a 21-year-old female (#176) reported that these five topics were among the several that she and her boyfriend argued about in their conflict. She said:

> On July 24th, he went to a bachelor party. *He promised "no strippers" and he wouldn't get drunk.* He came home two hours later than he said he would and could barely stand, he was so drunk. He said he just drank too much and a week later I forgave him. However, I found out mid-August ($\approx$ 14th) that *he got really drunk and there was a stripper at his fraternity house. He claims he stayed*

outside drinking with friends, but my trust in him was ruined.

The fifth and final cluster of topics pertains to personality differences and background differences. For example, a 20-year-old male (#071) reported, "We were discussing who we planned to vote for, and this was the first real situation where we completely disagreed on an issue." This participant reported personality differences as the main topic of their conflict. More commonly, however, participants reported that personality differences and background differences were two of many topics that arose within their conflict.

Research Question 2

The purpose of Research Question 2 was to investigate the features of conflict turning points that differentiate them from non-turning point conflict episodes. Participants' responses to question 8 in Part Three were analyzed using the constant comparative method. In the open coding process, it became apparent that participants organized the defining features of conflict turning points temporally. That is, they typically specified whether the defining features were situated within the immediate conflict interaction itself or following the conflict. If participants articulated defining features that occurred following the conflict interaction, they typically classified these defining features as important outcomes for the relationship. Therefore, this temporal organizational structure will be utilized to describe the essential features of conflict episodes that have transformational value within relationships (see Tables 3 and 4).

Features of Interaction in Conflict Turning Points

There are two major features of interaction in conflict turning points. First, participants often described the new realizations that they came to within the context of

the conflict interaction itself. Second, participants often described dramatic changes in interaction patterns, such that the conflict interaction was a departure from their previous interactions. Each of these major features of interaction will be described in turn, and examples will be provided to illustrate categories of these features.

New realizations. Participants' new realizations from the conflict interaction involved a heightened awareness about their feelings and perceptions toward their partner and relationship. Their realizations stemmed from open discussion with the partner, construction and interpretation of feelings, and construction and interpretation of perceptions.

To begin, participants often came to new realizations from open discussion with their partner. Such participants often commented how they and their partner shared their thoughts and feelings in an honest and genuine manner. They described the ways in which they emotionally exposed themselves to their partner and their partner did not capitalize on these vulnerabilities, but rather often shared their own vulnerabilities. For example, a 22-year-old female (#261) reported that she and her partner experienced a conflict turning point because:

> We had never really told each other how we really felt about our relationship and each other. We talked a lot about trust and our feelings about us together. *We opened up really for the first time and were honest. Things we kept inside that were bothering us finally came out.* We both felt more trusting and safe to be open and honest in the future.

These participants described the depth of emotional self-disclosure and expressions of care and concern that they exchanged with their partner. Another

participant who came to a new realization about her partner and relationship through open discussion was a 42-year-old female participant (#032) who argued with her husband about her devotion to her dogs.

> *We spent almost 2 hours last Friday hashing this out.* I felt he was being ridiculous, he thought the same with me. He wrote me a letter—pretty serious stuff, we came together for another talk and something strange happened. In the middle of all the yelling/tears/accusations, etc., I felt the strongest urge to just take his hand and tell him, "You're right, I'm sorry, I want to make this work." We held each other, apologized to each other, and I told him he will see a positive change—which I immediately implemented. … *I realized that the discussion/fight about the dogs was not so much about "the dogs" for him – probably more about "I'm threatened by the time/energy you give them, I'm fearful that you'll leave me because it appears you don't love me."*

A second way that participants came to new realizations was from the (co)construction and interpretation of their feelings. Within the context of the conflict interaction, participants reported experiencing feelings that were intense and extreme in valence. They sometimes reported radical changes in their feelings about their partner within the conflict interaction. Finally, they often described creations (or collapses) of shared understanding that united (or divided) them as a couple.

For example, a 22-year-old female participant (#103) experienced two interrelated conflicts with her boyfriend. She said, "He lied to me about having porn on his computer, even though he knows I despise it. I found it and then he repeatedly lied about putting it on there." She explained that the latter interaction was a turning point, saying:

> *During our conflict, my feelings inside about him changed*. I used to be the one that would run and chase after him and say "I'm sorry" even though I didn't do it. *But now, I don't even care if he leaves,* because it doesn't hurt my stomach anymore.

Apparently, this participant used her physiological stress reaction to conflict as a barometer of her feelings about her partner. This example illustrates the intense and strongly-valenced nature of feelings that generated new realizations about the partner and relationship.

A 21-year-old female participant's (#113) account highlights the shared understanding of feelings that seemed to precipitate new realizations for some participants. This participant reported:

> We have been dating for almost 2 years in a long distance relationship. I wanted to know if this was going anywhere or if it had been a waste of time. It wasn't so much to get him to ask me to marry him as it was me wanting to know that he thought it was possible. *I think positive understanding came from it and I know we're considering a life together that would bring major changes.*

She explained that she believed this conflict interaction posed a turning point in their relationship because:

> "*I think this one was very significant because of the information being exchanged. It was very frank and honest and now we are considering a very different future.* Now, with decisions we make, we must keep in mind that both of us will be greatly affected and influenced by the other."

Finally, participants also came to new realizations that sprung from the

(co)construction and interpretation of perceptions about their partner and relationship. These perceptions tended to be focused on differences between the participant and partner or the need for the participant and/or partner to change.

For example, a 21-year-old female (#026) reported that her conflict turning point with her partner reflected "a difference of opinion about our religious beliefs (denomination). I am Baptist and he is non-denominational. He believes in 'speaking in tongues' and I do not. *Our conflict was defending our own beliefs and opinions on this.*" She believed that her conflict interaction with her partner was a turning point because, "*It made me see that we have some serious differences in our backgrounds and how we have been raised.* This conflict has been the most serious conflict."

An account from a 24-year-old female (#068) illustrates a new realization from the (co)construction and interpretation of perceptions pertaining to the need for her partner to change. Explaining that it "bugs" her that her boyfriend talks on the telephone with his ex-girlfriend, she said that this conflict interaction posed a turning point because:

> During the conflict, he realized how much this bothered me, and that I wasn't budging. He thinks I'm jealous, and *I think talking to his ex-girlfriend is unacceptable. I think he finally realized the severity of this conflict, and that if his behavior continues, I wouldn't stand for it.*

Changes in interaction patterns. In addition to new realizations about their partner and relationship that were generated within the conflict interaction, participants' accounts also emphasized the importance of changes in interaction patterns. These shifts in interaction, as noted within the conflict interaction, were a key feature of conflict turning points. The changes in interaction patterns typically pertained to the order of the conflict

and newness of the topic, the importance of the topic of the conflict, participants' and partners' communication and actions, participants' comfort level in the conflict interaction, and the interference of third parties in the relationship.

To begin, participants sometimes articulated that their conflict interaction produced a turning point because of the order of the conflict. In some cases, the conflict was the first the participants had experienced. In the cases of many more mature relationships, participants had already experienced their "first big fight" with their partner. Approximately half of these participants reported that although their conflict was not their first ever, the topic of the conflict was novel and represented a significant departure from their typical interactions. In the remaining cases, the conflict was a growing issue, taking on a life of its own. In both situations, the order of the conflict reflected extremity.

For example, a 23-year-old male (#127) reported that the first conflict he and his partner experienced was a turning point for their relationship. He further stated, "It was a rough test for both of us. The other conflicts were not even close in extent to this. The conflict was necessary and *many things we have never talked about before came up*."

Participants also discussed shifts in the importance of the topic of the conflict as being an indicator of a turning point. In all cases, the topic of the conflict became more (not less) important to participants. Additionally, participants often described changes in their partners' and their own communication and actions in the conflict interaction. These changes in communication and action were often explicitly contrasted against established interaction patterns. For example, one 22-year-old male (#105) reported:

In the last four months, I had been drinking more than the occasional one night a

> week. It used to not be that big of a deal but now that we are moving closer to marriage and more commitment, *this has become a big issue.* She doesn't want to spend the rest of her life with a drunk.

This participant explained that their conflict was a turning point because:

> *For once, I listened to her during our conflict.* I cut out the drinking and actually started getting a lot more accomplished and feeling better physically. I look back and thank her, and actually respect her more for standing up to me and making me make this decision. I also feel closer to her that she cares that much for me.

This participant's account illustrates how a shift in the importance of the conflict topic, as well as a shift in his own communication during (and after) the conflict interaction demarcated this particular conflict as a turning point.

Participants sometimes reported changes in the comfort level of the conflict interaction as being indicative of a turning point. Almost always, participants described reductions in comfort level as a marker of a turning point. For example, a 20-year-old female (#072) reported:

> We were having some issues about financial stuff and at this time, my husband is not currently working (I am) even though he has the perfect opportunity to. *It just kinda frustrates me and everything sort of snowballed together and we got into an argument with yelling and I said I felt taken for granted and that he was just being lazy. We were not very nice to each other and communicated very poorly with each other*. It made us both realize instead of treating each other so badly and negatively, that maybe we should talk it out more kindly and positively.

Finally, participants occasionally described the interference of third parties as

producing a conflict turning point. In all cases, the conflict interaction occurred between the participant and his or her partner in a private setting, although the conflict was instigated by the actions of a third party. For example, a 24-year-old male participant (#120) reported:

> I was in town for the weekend and we had went to a play in the theatre. On the way back to my hotel, her mom called and was checking to see how long she would be. We got into a fight because I thought it was childish to not tell her mom we would be home later without a specific time. I felt like she was 21 years old and a junior in college and that stuff was ridiculous. *It brought her parents' involvement in our relationship to the forefront. It was a growing issue with her parents and it finally came to a head.*

This particular example not only illustrates the impact of third party interference, but the newness of the conflict. In this case, the conflict was becoming increasingly old but important. The combination of shifting factors seems to have propelled this interaction into a conflict turning point.

Features of Outcomes of Conflict Turning Points

As has been described, participants collectively identified multiple features of conflict turning points that occurred within the conflict interaction itself. However, they also collectively identified myriad features of conflict turning points that *followed* the conflict interaction. Most often, when they discussed features of conflict turning points that occurred following the conflict interaction, they cast these features as meaningful outcomes for the relationship.

There are four major features of outcomes of conflict turning points. The first

feature is a statement of global evaluation of valence of the outcomes of the conflict. The second is a (re)definition of the relationship, usually in regard to levels of commitment, closeness, trust, certainty, and importance of the relationship. The third feature is change in subsequent interactions, which pertained to the efforts that participants and/or their partners made to change and the comfort level of interactions that followed the conflict interaction. The last feature is the development and/or execution of a plan or agreement for future interaction. Each of these major features of outcomes of conflict turning points will be described in turn, and examples will be provided to illustrate categories of these features.

Global evaluation of outcomes. To begin, participants sometimes offered a global statement about the outcomes of the conflict turning point. This statement usually specified the valence of the outcomes, which was generally positive. For example, a 20-year-old female (#106) said, "We have been so much better since then." A 23-year-old male (#216) similarly explained that his sex life with his wife had improved as a result of the conflict turning point.

(Re)definition of the relationship. The second major feature of the outcomes of conflict turning points pertains to the (re)definition of their relationships. Participants sometimes defined (or redefined) their relationship as a result of their conflict interaction, and because of this change in definition, their relationship was transformed in a way that they found meaningful.

The first and most common way in which participants (re)defined their relationship was in terms of commitment. Consistent with the positivity of a majority of the responses, many participants explained that their conflict interaction produced a

heightened level of commitment toward the other. They often contrasted the discomfort of the interaction itself with the favorable outcome of enhanced commitment. For example, a 20-year-old female (#130) reported that she was "mad" when her boyfriend did not answer his mobile phone when he was out with friends late. She further explained, "But since having the long 'talk' about everything, we have both realized the seriousness of 'us.'"

Participants also (re)defined their relationship in terms of closeness. For example, a 27-year-old male (#265) experienced a conflict with his partner when his partner "started going out and having a relationship with another person." The participant reported, "[Although] there is still a relationship between us, we are not as close as we used to be."

The third way in which participants (re)defined their relationship was in terms of trust. Typically, participants described that their conflict interaction, which stemmed from some violation such as deceit or improper conduct, led to less trust. For example, a 20-year-old male (#039) reported:

> We went back to her room to "cuddle." We were laying in bed next to each other. I took advantage of her sexually. We didn't have sex, but I did take advantage of her. She didn't do anything that night but the next day she was really ticked and ready to break up with me.

This participant believed that their conflict interaction changed the amount of trust his partner had in him. He stated, "*I know I'm going to have to do a lot to regain the trust I used to have. Even though we are still together, our relationship won't be the same anytime soon.*"

The fourth way in which participants (re)defined their relationship was in terms of the certainty they had about their relationship, often in regard to the future of the relationship. For example, a 22-year-old female participant (#148) reported, "Our conflict was a realigning of goals; as a result of the conflict, we decided to move into together." She explained, "This conflict solidified my faith in this relationship. *It cleared up some uncertainties we were facing*." Another 23-year-old male participant (#258) and his girlfriend were struggling with uncertainty about their relationship when he accepted an out-of-state internship. He said, "I feel that this conflict was a turning point because *we now know that we want to try to make the relationship work even though it will be hard.*"

The fifth and final way that participants (re)defined their relationship was in terms of the importance of the relationship. For example, a 19-year-old male (#133) described a conflict that arose when his girlfriend asked him if she could sleep at her out-of-town ex-boyfriend's house. The participant reported valuing his relationship more since then, explaining "this conflict made me realize what might happen if I lose her. I realized I would be lost without her."

Changes in subsequent interactions. The third major feature of the outcomes of conflict turning points pertains to changes in the participants' subsequent interactions with their partners. These changes in subsequent interactions pertained to efforts to change by the participant and/or partner and the comfort level of the interactions.

Participants sometimes described the efforts that they and/or their partners were making to change. They framed these efforts as resulting from their conflict interaction. For example, a 21-year-old male (#112) reported that he and his partner argued about "me not expressing any feelings towards her and not listening enough to her problems."

He believed that the conflict was a turning point because in their interactions that followed, "*I have tried a lot harder* to express my feelings."

Although participants sometimes reported effort to change as a defining feature of their conflict turning point, more participants reported about changes in the comfort level and ease of subsequent interactions. By far, most participants who described changes in comfort level believed that their subsequent interactions with their partner had become strained. For example, a 25-year-old female (#102) who was a stepmother to her husband's teenage daughter reported:

> We have had a difficult time successfully blending our family. His daughter has caused problems. He wouldn't correct her behavior so it has progressed and gotten to the point where I have no relationship with her at all and have no desire to. She has treated me badly, talked awful about me, and he never stopped her.

This participant reported that a series of conflict interactions had produced strain within their marriage. She said:

> It seems like *his daughter is wedging a gap that is increasing as time goes by*. We really do not have any other major conflicts; other than this, we are highly compatible. *When children are involved, it becomes a very tense situation.*

Development and execution of a plan or agreement. The fourth and last major feature of the outcomes of conflict turning points pertains to the development and execution of a plan or agreement for future interactions. Specifically, participants often explained they arrived at conclusions about how they would communicate and act in the interactions that followed their conflict interaction.

Some participants focused on the *development* of their plan or agreement for

subsequent interactions. For example, a 21-year-old pregnant female (#140) described a conflict in which her husband wanted to buy "another" video game. "I felt it was frivolous to spend $65 on this 'mystery' game." She reported their negotiation of an agreement for the future. "Afterward, we decided to cut down on spending toward things we didn't need… We decided together to cut back on frivolous/entertainment spending to save for the baby and other key goals for our future."

Other participants focused on the *execution* of their plan or agreement for subsequent interactions. Sometimes these plans seem to have been jointly discussed. For example, a 26-year-old male (#254) reported that his wife rejected his overtures for sex. He said, "I informed her that it [sex] was a security thing for me and I was hurt when she acted uninterested in sex.… I felt I had to confront her about my frustration." This participant explained that the conflict was a turning point because, "*We made changes* based on what we both realized from this conflict."

The reports of other participants suggest that some plans were not developed jointly and/or explicitly, but may have been developed more individually and/or tacitly. For example a female participant (who did not report her age, #253) was angry that her boyfriend wanted to date other people. She believed that the turning point in their relationship arose from her change in behavior toward him. "I'm not going to call him and waste my time," she stated. "It's his responsibility to call. This conflict made me not talk every day with him and not see him three times a week [like before the conflict]." In this instance, the participant executed a plan that seems to have been unilaterally developed.

Some participants reported executing plans that they worked out with their

partner, but they did not report explicit discussion of developing the plan. For example, a 23-year-old female (#111) reported that she and her husband struggled with spending enough time together at home. She believed that a recent conflict about this issue was a turning point because, "*We have both tried to change our lifestyles and personal preferences so that we each feel more included in each other's life.* I try not to be as needy and he tries to take off work early some days."

Hypotheses 2a-e

Hypotheses 2a-e specified that as relationship length increases, relational partners are less likely to perceive that relational uncertainty, jealousy, expectancy violations, personality differences, and background differences are associated with a conflict turning point. This hypothesis was tested using multivariate regression. Treating relationship length as an independent variable and relational uncertainty, jealousy, expectancy violations, personality differences, and background differences as dependent variables, the overall test was significant, F (4, 273) = 20.87,$p < .001$, Wilks' Lambda = .77. Follow-up univariate tests showed that relationship length was predictive of perceptions that relational uncertainty, $\beta = -.014$, $t = -4.11$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .0002$, and jealousy, $\beta = -.012$, $t = -3.58$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .0001$, were associated with a conflict turning point. Relationship length was not predictive of perceptions that violations of expectations, $\beta = 0.005$, $t = 1.59$, *n.s.*, personality differences, $\beta = 0.005$, $t = 1.54$, *n.s.*, or background differences, $\beta = 0.003$, $t = .76$, *n.s.*, were associated with a conflict turning point.

Participants also responded to open-ended questions about how uncertainty about the future of their relationship and jealousy influenced their conflict turning point, *if at all.* Unfortunately, most participants failed to respond in depth, if at all, to these open-

ended questions. The majority of participants who did respond provided descriptions of their overall levels of uncertainty and jealousy, as opposed to descriptions of how uncertainty and jealousy contributed to their conflict turning point. Therefore, these data could not be analyzed using the constant comparative method to flesh out the statistically significant findings.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 posed, "As relationship length increases, what antecedent conditions are most salient to conflict turning points?" As with other qualitative data, these data were analyzed using the constant comparative method. There were two major antecedent conditions of conflict turning points that appeared to be contingent upon relationship length. These conditions pertained to the use of alcohol and perceptions of change.

Alcohol as a Contributing Factor in Conflict Turning Points

First, participants in relatively new relationships seemed much more likely to point out the use of alcohol as an antecedent condition of their conflict turning point. There seemed to be two ways in which alcohol led to transformational conflict. First, the consumption of alcohol sometimes led to *unfavorable interactions* between the participant and his or her partner while one or both were inebriated. Such was the case with a 22-year-old male (#011) who had been dating his girlfriend for eight months. He described, "I watched my girlfriend for about 20 minutes talk with an old boyfriend. *She also was drunk* and very touchie [sic]. *So I walked over to her and called her out about being drunk and a slut because that is what it looked like*."

The second way in which alcohol led to transformational conflict pertains to

unfavorable outcomes from drinking. For example, a 23-year-old female (#012) who had been dating her boyfriend for seven months reported, "*He got a DUI and wrecked his car because he was driving drunk.* He blacked out and doesn't remember any of it but I was mad because I felt he was being careless and irresponsible."

Comparatively, participants in longer relationships rarely reported alcohol as a contributing factor to their conflict turning points. It seemed as though their conflicts were more centered around their homes, whereas participants in shorter relationships were more likely to describe their conflicts as occurring in public settings (such as parties or on campus).

Change as a Contributing Factor in Conflict Turning Points

The second antecedent condition that appeared to be related to relationship length was change. Participants in relatively longer relationships seemed much more likely to point out that their relationship had changed dramatically, and this change contributed to their conflict turning point. For example, a 23-year-old female (#027) who had been with her husband for over three years reported that after the birth of their baby, their lives changed dramatically. One specific change pertained to the division of household chores, which led to a major conflict in their relationship.

Conversely, participants in relatively shorter relationships did not have extensive histories with their partners. As such, they were less likely to be able to perceive global changes in the course of their relationships.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 posed, "How do various types of conflict turning points: (a) impact feelings about their partner and the relationship, (b) impact perceptions of

relational interdependence, and (c) impact thematic conflict?" The type of conflict turning point was operationalized in terms of whether it was the first big fight and by the topic of the conflict. Initially, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted using first big fight status and main topic of the conflict as independent variables and the three outcomes (clarification of feelings, interdependence, and thematic conflict) as dependent variables. However, due to the large number of possible main topics of conflict, the data were uninterpretable. Therefore, the clusters of topics that were identified in the analysis for Research Question 1 were employed as the groups of the independent variable of main conflict topic. For example, if a participant reported that his or her main topic of conflict pertained to finances, then that participant would be assigned to the first cluster (which encompassed the topics of finances, employment, household chores, children, and major life changes). Participants whose main topic of conflict was not included in one of the five clusters derived in Research Question 1 were assigned to a sixth "Other" cluster.

A multivariate analysis of variance was conducted using first big fight status and main conflict topic *cluster* as independent variables and the three outcomes (clarification of feelings, interdependence, and thematic conflict) as dependent variables. The multivariate test (Wilks' Lambda) was not significant for the main effect of first big fight, $\lambda = .99$, F (3, 236) = .53, *n.s.* The multivariate test (Wilks' Lambda) was not significant for the main effect of main conflict topic cluster, $\lambda = .92$, F (15, 652) = 1.36, *n.s.* The multivariate test (Wilks' Lambda) was not significant for the interaction between first big fight and main conflict topic cluster, $\lambda = .91$, F (15, 652) = 1.43, *n.s.* Because the multivariate tests were not significant, univariate tests were not conducted.

Research Question 5

Research Question 5 asked, "What are other outcomes of conflict turning points?" As with other qualitative data, these data were analyzed using the constant comparative method. In addition to the outcomes described in Research Question 4 (i.e., clarification of feelings about the partner and the relationship, perceptions of relational interdependence, and thematic conflict), two other outcomes seem to follow conflict turning points. These outcomes pertain to aggravated emotions and demonstrations of care and concern.

Aggravated Emotions as an Outcome of Conflict Turning Points

Participants regularly described how their conflict turning point produced uncomfortable and even painful emotional experiences. For example, a 20-year-old female (#260) described her conflict turning point as occurring after her boyfriend learned that she had outperformed him on another test. When describing the effects of this conflict turning point, she reported:

> *I felt hurt.* I don't want to feel like I have to do badly on something so he feels good about himself. Now I'm going to be worried about how much I can beat him at a game or if my success will intimidate him.

Another 19-year-old female (#155) described her conflict turning point as stemming from her fiancé's failure to tell her that he was simultaneously dating another woman at the beginning of their relationship. She reported, "*It really upset me.*… He thought I would break up with him and *he got really upset and worried. He cried.*" These exemplars illustrate how conflict turning points often produced distressing emotions for one or both intimates in the relationship.

Demonstrations of Care and Concern as an Outcome of Conflict Turning Points

The second commonly reported outcome of conflict turning points was demonstrations of care and concern. Participants often described how their conflict turning point led them (and/or their partner) to express their feelings of care and concern. Most often, they described these demonstrations of care and concern as following the days since the conflict turning point. For example, a 21-year-old male (#124) reported about his fiancée:

> I knew that she was my number one but I was not treating her as my number one. And I needed to start. [Since then] *we spend more time together and tell the other person we are thinking of them* either through text messages, phone, letters, email, etc.

Similarly, a 29-year-old male (#109) reported that he had implemented changes to show his wife that he loved and cared about her. He said:

> *I've begun to listen more closely to her needs and to communicate more often about our daily changes or plans.* I'm more likely to let her know if I will be coming home late or just say hello for a second.

Hypotheses 3 and 4

Hypothesis 3 stated, "Individuals with a non-confrontational conflict style are less likely to report conflict episodes, but more likely to construe a conflict episode as a turning point" and Hypothesis 4 stated, "Individuals with a controlling conflict style are more likely to report conflict episodes, but less likely to construe a conflict episode as a turning point." The likelihood of construing a conflict episode as a turning point was measured by forming a turning point perception score, which reflected the ratio of the number of reported conflict episodes to the number of reported conflict turning points.

Because the number of conflict episodes and the turning point perception score were dependent, these hypotheses are tested in two steps using multiple regression. First, the three conflict styles were treated as independent variables and the number of conflict episodes was treated as the dependent variable. This overall test was significant, F (3, 279) = 5.38, $p < .01$. Failing to support Hypothesis 3, the non-confrontational conflict style was not a significant predictor of the number of conflict episodes, $\beta = -.03$, $t = -.29$, *n.s.* In support of Hypothesis 4, however, the controlling style was predictive of the number of conflict episodes, $\beta = .38$, $t = 3.90$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .14$. Next, the three conflict styles were treated as independent variables and the turning point perception score was treated as the dependent variable. This overall test was not significant, F (3, 277) = 1.09, *n.s.*, failing to support Hypotheses 3 and 4. Taking the results from these two steps together, Hypothesis 3 was not supported and Hypothesis 4 was only partially supported.

Hypothesis 5

Hypothesis 5 stated, "Individuals with a solution-oriented conflict style are more likely to report conflict turning points as having primarily constructive outcomes for their relationship." First, a difference score was created by subtracting the perceived destructive outcomes score (from questions 5 to 8 of Part Five) from the perceived constructive outcomes score (from questions 1 to 4 of Part Five) to form a turning point valence score. Treating the three conflict styles as independent variables and the turning point valence score as a dependent variable, the overall test was significant, F (3, 279) = 22.53, $p < .001$. Following up with univariate tests, the solution-orientation was a significant predictor of the turning point valence score, $\beta = .27$, $t = 4.93$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .07$. Therefore, Hypothesis 5 was supported. Interestingly, the controlling and non-

confrontational styles were also predictive of the turning point valence score, β = -.20, t = -3.60, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .04$ and β = -.27, t = -4.99, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .07$, respectively. However, the controlling and non-confrontational styles were predictive of perceiving primarily *destructive* outcomes for the relationship.

Hypothesis 6

Hypothesis 6 posed, "Individuals who are predisposed to take conflict personally are more likely to construe a conflict episode as a turning point." To test this hypothesis using multiple regression, I treated the three core dimensions of TCP as independent variables and the turning point perception score as the dependent variable. The overall test was not significant, F (3, 278) = .43, *n.s.* This suggests that none of the three dimensions of TCP were associated with construing a conflict episode as a turning point. Therefore, Hypothesis 6 was not supported.

Hypothesis 7

Hypothesis 7 stated, "Individuals who are predisposed to take conflict personally are more likely to perceive conflict turning points as presenting primarily destructive outcomes for their relationship." Each of the three core dimensions of TCP were treated as independent variables and the turning point valence score (as for Hypothesis 5) was treated as a dependent variable. The overall test was significant, F (3, 280) = 21.83, $p <$ .001. Following up with univariate tests, direct personalization was not a significant predictor of the perceived destructive outcomes score, β = .03, t = .42, *n.s.*, nor were stress reactions, β = -.06, t = -.97, *n.s.* However, persecution feelings were a significant predictor, β = -.43, t = -7.22, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .18$. Therefore, Hypothesis 7 was partially supported.

Hypothesis 8

Hypothesis 8 stated, "Compared to individuals low in Machiavellianism, Machs are more likely to strategically manage conflict episodes to accomplish their relational objectives (i.e., the achievement or avoidance of a relational turning point)." To investigate this hypothesis, I ran a multiple regression analysis using Machiavellianism (from Part Eight) as the independent variable and strategic management to achieve turning points score (from questions 9 to 12 and 17 to 20 in Part Five) and strategic management to avoid turning points score (from questions 13 to 16 and 21 to 24 in Part Five) as the dependent variables. The overall test was significant, F (1, 274) = 9.64, $p <$ .01, Wilks' Lambda = .97. Machiavellianism, as measured by the Mach IV, was not a significant predictor of the strategic management to achieve a turning point, $\beta = .001$, $t =$ .13, *n.s*. (Measurement of Machiavellianism using the Allsopp et al. (1991) instrument produced a similar result, $\beta = .10$, $t = 1.33$, *n.s*.). However, Machiavellianism, as measured by the Mach IV, was a significant predictor of the strategic management to avoid a turning point, $\beta = .01$, $t = 2.22$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .0002$. (Again, measurement of Machiavellianism using the Allsopp et al. (1991) instrument produced a similar result, $\beta = .20$, $t = 3.03$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .04$.) Together, these results suggest partial support for Hypothesis 8.

Hypothesis 9

Hypothesis 9 stated, "Individualswho are low in Machiavellianism, high in taking conflict personally, and more likely to report using a non-confrontational conflict style are more likely to construe a conflict episode as a turning point." To test this hypothesis, I utilized moderated multiple regression analysis (Aiken & West, 1991;

Cohen & Cohen, 1983). This involved a three step procedure. First, I tested a multiple regression equation that included the main effects of Machiavellianism, taking conflict personally, and non-confrontational conflict style on conflict turning point perception score (step 1). Next, I added the two-way interactions between each of these variables (step 2). Finally, I added the three-way interaction each of these variables (step 3). The results of the moderated regression analysis are displayed in Table 5.

In step 1, none of the main effects were significantly associated with the turning point perception score. Moreover, the shared variance between the main effects and turning point perception score was very low (R^2 = .003). Upon adding the two-way interactions in step 2, again none of the main effects or interactions were significant and the inclusion of the interactions led to only marginal gains in shared variance. Finally, in step 3, the addition of the three-way interaction was not significant and led to marginal gains in shared variance. (See Table 5.)

Due to the low reliability of the Mach IV scale, this hypothesis was tested also using the Allsopp et al. (1991) scale. The results of this test were comparable (without any significant relationships between the variables) to the test with the Mach IV scale.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to investigate how conflict functions as a turning point, situating these turning points within a set of antecedents and outcomes. In particular, this study examined how turning points produce both constructive and destructive outcomes in romantic relationships. Almost halfof participants reported a combination of positive and negative outcomes resulting from their conflict turning point. As the length of participants' relationships increased, they were less likely to perceive that relational uncertainty and jealousy contributed to their conflict turning point. The constant comparative method showed that participants in early-stage relationships were more likely to perceive alcohol as contributing to their conflict turning point, while participants in more established relationships were more likely to perceive major life changes as contributing to their conflict turning point. The constant comparative method also revealed that outcomes of conflict turning points were aggravated emotions and demonstrations of care and concern.

Additionally, this study examined how three individual differences—conflict style, taking conflict personally, and Machiavellianism—influenced perceptions of conflict turning points. Individuals with a solution-oriented conflict style were more likely to report conflict as a turning point with primarily constructive outcomes for their relationship, while individuals who felt persecuted were more likely to report conflict as a turning point with primarily destructive outcomes for their relationship. Finally, Machiavellians were more likely to strategically manage conflict episodes to avoid a turning point. The findings generated in this study offer important implications both

theoretically and practically. To begin, theoretical implications will be considered.

Theoretical Implications of Findings

Positive and Negative Outcomes of Conflict Turning Points

By employing a method that allowed participants to describe multiple outcomes of varied valences, this study used an operationalization that was consistent with Bolton's (1961) and Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) conceptualization of turning points as reflecting quantitative and qualitative changes. This study demonstrated that conflict turning points generate both positive and negative outcomes for relationships.

Indeed, Hypothesis 1 was supported, providing evidence that a substantial proportion of participants perceive that conflict turning points generate positive *and* negative outcomes for the relationship. Over 49 percent of participants perceived a combination of positive and negative outcomes. This finding yields an important implication for the Retrospective Interview Technique (RIT). The RIT requires participants to describe a series of turning points by characterizing each turning point as leading to either an increase or a decrease in a single variable (e.g., commitment or closeness). However, in the present study, many participants perceive that their turning points reflect complex constellations of relational change. Future researchers using the RIT may wish to interview participants about *multiple* aspects of their turning points. For example, researchers could ask participants to describe fluctuations in commitment *and* closeness *and* trust *and* importance of the relationship, and so on. These fluctuations could be graphed in "layers" to reflect the messy and dense nature of turning points.

In addition to the 49 percent of participants who perceived a combination of positive and negative outcomes, 41 percent perceived only positive outcomes as resulting

from their conflict turning point. Combining these two percentages, over 90 percent of participants perceived some positive outcomes as resulting from their conflict turning point. This finding is particularly interesting in light of the negative connotations of conflict that are often held by romantic partners.

Why did participants report so many favorable outcomes of their conflict turning points? Murray and Holmes (1993) studied the cognitive processes in which individuals transform their romantic partners' faults into virtues. They concluded that when faced with a less-than-perfect partner, individuals "construct stories about their partners to diminish feelings of doubt, thereby affirming and protecting their positive convictions" (p. 707). Murray, Holmes, and Griffin (1996) argued that maintenance of a relationship is partially dependent upon partner idealization, because such idealization contributes to satisfaction and decreases in doubts and conflicts. Because participants reported about past conflicts in their current relationship, they may have transformed negativity from their conflict turning points into positivity. Participants who terminated their relationships, following their conflict turning point, may have been less likely to report positive outcomes from that conflict. Future research should test differences in the conflict turning points of those in ongoing relationships as well as terminated relationships.

Topics of Conflict Turning Points

The four most commonly reported topics of conflict were uncertainty about the relationship, time, the partner's behavior, and communication. Because they are associated with conflict episodes that became turning points, these topics highlight the subjects that are particularly significant to relationships. These findings overlap with

those of previous researchers (Erbert, 2000; Olson & Golish, 2002; Siegert & Stamp, 1994), although previous researchers have not specifically studied topics of conflict turning points.

Uncertainty about the relationship was reported as the main topic of conflict by 16.3 percent of participants and as one of many topics by 44.0 percent of participants. Uncertainty about the relationship sometimes centered on timing of marriage, but more often reflected uncertainty about whether the relationship should continue. The prevalence of this topic may be attributed to the nature of the sample, which included a majority of individuals in dating relationships. No individuals in marital relationships reported relational uncertainty as the topic of their conflict. In his study of married couples, Erbert (2000) did not find relational uncertainty as a topic of conflict. Olson and Golish (2002) also did not find relational uncertainty as a topic of conflict for their participants, who were individuals in varied types of violent relationships. Siegert and Stamp (1994) identified relational uncertainty as central to the FBF, which is a type of conflict turning point and is more relevant to dating couples such as those in the present sample.

Time was reported as the main topic of conflict by 14.5 percent of participants and as one of many topics by 50.0 percent of participants. Most of the conflicts about time pertained to how participants and their partners spent time together. In his study, Erbert (2000) found that 7.6 percent of married couples reported time as a main topic of conflict. Olson and Golish (2002) did not find time as a topic of conflict for the participants in their study.

The partner's behavior was reported as the main topic of conflict by 7.8 percent of

participants and as one of many topics by 53.9 percent of participants. Compared to the topic of communication, the topic of partner's behavior tended to focus on the partner's actions as opposed to verbal messages. A similar topic, "problematic behavior of partner," was a topic of conflict for 22.4 percent individuals in violent relationships in Olson and Golish's study (2002). Erbert (2000) did not find partner's behavior as a topic of conflict.

Communication was reported as the main topic of conflict by 7.4 percent of participants and as one of many topics by 52.5 percent of participants. Participants' accounts varied considerably, as they focused on verbal messages, nonverbal messages, lack of messages, or some combination thereof. Communication was a topic of conflict for 8.6 percent of individuals in Olson and Golish's study (2002). Similarly, communication was a topic of conflict for 6.2 percent of married couples in Erbert's (2000) study.

These results indicate that the topics of relational uncertainty and time are more likely to be fodder for conflict for primarily young college students in dating relationships than for married couples and individuals in violent relationships. However, all three samples reported communication as a topic of conflict at relatively comparable rates. This latter finding highlights the prevalence of meta-communication during times of turmoil in relationships.

In addition to examining the frequency of individual topics, the constant comparative method was used to detect five "clusters" of topics. These clusters represent topics that often emerged within the same description of the topics of conflict.

The first cluster of topics includes finances, employment, household chores,

children, and major life changes. The second cluster of topics is that of time, communication, stress, and daily routines. The third cluster of topics pertains to holidays, vacations, and special occasions. The fourth cluster of topics pertains to uncertainty about the relationship, partner's behavior, other people, jealousy, and sex, and the fifth cluster of topics pertains to personality differences and background differences.

The vast majority (96 percent) of participants reported multiple topics of discussion in their conflict turning point. This finding is consistent with previous research which suggests that cross-complaining is typical of marital conflict interaction (Gottman, Markman, & Notarius, 1977), whereby spouses alternate in their discussion of multiple topics of conflict. Although this study did not look at the patterns in which topics were discussed, these findings suggest that many different types of couples (not just married couples) introduce multiple interconnected topics in their conflict turning points

Defining Features of Conflict Turning Points

The purpose of Research Question 2 was to investigate the defining features of conflict turning points. The data revealed that participants organized the defining features of conflict turning points temporally, based on whether the features were situated within the immediate conflict *interaction* itself or *outcomes* that followed the conflict. This temporal organizational structure was employed to describe the essential features of conflict episodes that have transformational value within relationships.

There are two major defining features of *interaction* in conflict turning points. First, participants often described the new realizations that they came to within the context of the conflict interaction itself. Second, participants often described dramatic changes in interaction patterns, such that the conflict interaction was a departure from

their previous interactions.

There are four major defining features of *outcomes* of conflict turning points. The first feature is a statement of global evaluation of valence of the outcomes of the conflict. The second is a (re)definition of the relationship in regard to levels of commitment, closeness, trust, certainty, and importance of the relationship. The third feature is change in subsequent interactions, which pertains to the efforts that participants and/or their partners make to change and the comfort level of interactions that follow the conflict interaction. The last feature is the development and/or execution of a plan or agreement for future interaction.

These results suggest that a prototype approach is useful for organizing the defining features of conflict turning points. When classifying the members of categories using a prototype approach, researchers focus on how individuals apply the members of a category in their everyday language (Fehr, 1988). More specifically, researchers focus on how individuals recognize a member of a category by its similarity or resemblance to the prototype (a notion generated by Wittgenstein, 1953). For example, when studying the prototype of love, Fehr and Russell (1991) found that participants judged maternal love to be more similar to the prototype of love than they judged puppy love.

To extend a prototype approach to the findings at hand, the defining features of conflict turning points may be reflective of the prototype of the conflict turning point. Participants described how and why their conflict turning point differed from other conflict episodes that were not turning points. Participants' responses were analyzed to reveal hierarchy in the structure of their responses, based on their temporal organization. For example, a category of the conflict turning point is "interaction," which has the

subcategories of “new realizations” and “changes in interaction patterns.” These subcategories each have sub-subcategories. Aron and Westbay (1996) argued that explorations of structure (e.g., subgroupings) are useful to clarify the content of prototypes.

In principle, any of the defining features identified in the analysis could be characteristic of conflict episodes that are turning points as well as conflict episodes that are *not* turning points. From a classical approach, the defining features of conflict turning points would have to be unique to the conflict episodes that are turning points. As Fehr and Russell (1991) explained, “Traditionally, the general terms of a language were thought to denote categories of objects or events, each member of which possessed features that were each necessary and together sufficient to define membership in that category” (p. 425).

Rather than apply a classical definition in which essential features must be present (Aron & Westbay, 1996), an increasing number of scholars are applying a prototype approach. As Fehr (1988) stated, a prototype approach “is concerned with the everyday use of natural language concepts” (p. 559). Fehr and Russell (1991) argued that a prototype approach is more appropriate than a classical approach when researchers are concerned with lay understandings and categorizations of a phenomenon. Because the present research was concerned with participant’s personal understandings of the defining features of conflict turning points, a prototype approach is applicable

This study identified features indicative that a conflict episode posed a relational turning point. These features provide detail about the moments at which participants’ relationships were significantly altered. Moreover, these features may reveal the

movement of dialectical tensions.

Change and contradiction are key concepts in dialectical theory. According to Baxter and Montgomery (1996), a contradiction is "the dynamic interplay between unified oppositions" (p. 8); it functions as a catalyst for relational change. In this study, conflict often fueled shifting movements between unified oppositions. The previously mentioned example of a 22-year-old woman (#103), upset about her boyfriend's computer pornography, highlights her shifts in needs for autonomy and connection (e.g., "I used to be the one that would run and chase after him… But now, I don't even care if he leaves…"). This participant came to a new realization in her conflict with her boyfriend, and this new realization transformed their relationship, making the conflict a turning point. At the same time, the conflict was contextualized by the interplay of the autonomy-connection contradiction, which facilitated the turning point.

The purpose of Research Question 2 was exploratory, as the specific goal was to generate a descriptive taxonomy of the defining features of conflict turning points. Future research should investigate the connections between the defining features and contradictions. Specific relationships may exist between some of these features and contradictions; for example, perhaps the feature of "changes in interaction patterns" is linked to back-and-forth movement in the predictability-novelty contradiction. Investigation about these and other connections would extend dialectical theory.

Another contribution of theoretical significance is that this study suggests that individuals generate multiple defining features of conflict turning points. Rather than identifying essential features that must be present (consistent with a classical approach), participants' written responses reveal that they can recognize a conflict turning point by

many different defining features (i.e., they use a prototype approach). Their responses also reveal hierarchy in the temporally-based structure, with multiple subordinate categories. Future research should investigate ratings of the degree to which each defining feature is an example of a conflict turning point and whether the defining features can be reliably ordered from better to poorer examples of conflict turning points. Additionally, future research should determine which defining features are more central and which are more peripheral to the prototype of a conflict turning point.

Antecedents of Conflict Turning Points

This study also revealed that as relationships mature over time, intimates change in their perceptions of what contributes to their conflict turning points. Early in their relationship, intimates appear more likely to perceive relational uncertainty, jealousy, and alcohol as leading to their conflict turning point. Later in their relationship, intimates appear more likely to perceive major life changes, such as the birth of a child, as leading to their conflict turning point.

Hypotheses 2a-e predicted that as relationship length increases, relational partners are less likely to perceive that relational uncertainty, jealousy, expectancy violations, personality differences, and background differences are associated with a conflict turning point. However, as relationship length increased, participants were significantly more likely to perceive that relational uncertainty and jealousy were associated with a conflict turning point. Although these latter two relationships were statistically significant, they accounted for virtually no variance, suggesting limited practical significance.

Guerrero, Eloy, Jorgensen, and Andersen (1993) found that individuals who felt romantic love for their partner but were not in a committed marital relationship were

more prone to jealousy than those individuals who felt romantic love within a committed marital relationship. They also found that compared to individuals in marital relationships, individuals in dating relationships used more negative and avoidant communication behaviors, such as arguing with and ignoring their partner, to manage their jealousy. The Guerrero et al. study is consistent with the finding at hand that individuals who have shorter relational histories (e.g., in dating relationships) are more likely to perceive that jealousy contributed to their conflict turning point.

As the leading theorist of uncertainty reduction theory, Berger has long claimed (cf., Berger & Calabrese, 1975) that uncertainty is most prevalent in initial interactions, such as those of a dating couple. As intimates gather increased partner knowledge, they are less likely to perceive uncertainty about the relationship. Moreover, Afifi and Reichert (1996) documented a positive relationship between relational uncertainty and jealousy. This supports the present study's finding that individuals who have shorter relational histories (e.g., dating relationships) are more likely to perceive that uncertainty contributed to their conflict turning point.

The constant comparative method was used to investigate Research Question 3, which posed, "As relationship length increases, what antecedent conditions are most salient to conflict turning points?" The analysis revealed two antecedent conditions of conflict turning points—use of alcohol and perceptions of change—that appeared to be contingent upon relationship length.

Participants in the early stages of their relationships seemed much more likely to point out the use of alcohol as an antecedent condition of their conflict turning point. These participants described how alcohol use sometimes led to conflict interactions

between the participant and his or her partner, as well as undesirable outcomes of alcohol use. They described these alcohol-induced conflict interactions and outcomes as turning points in their relationships.

In comparison, participants in matured relationships rarely reported alcohol as a contributing factor to their conflict turning points. It seemed as though their conflicts were more centered around their homes, whereas participants in shorter relationships were more likely to describe their conflicts as occurring in public settings (such as parties).

Participants' use of alcohol may be linked to their age. In the present study, participants' relationship length and age were significantly correlated ($r = .69$, $p < .01$). Research has shown that young people tend to engage in risky consumption of alcohol. For example, in 2001, 3.2 percent of nationwide visits to hospital emergency departments were alcohol-related visits by people ages 13-25 (Elder, Shults, Swahn, Strife, & Ryan, 2004). Almost half (49 percent) of these visits involved people younger than 21. Young people's propensity for alcohol consumption may be linked to their expectancies about the outcomes of drinking. Positive expectancies are predictive of alcohol use, whereas negative expectancies are predictive of abstention. Young people are more likely to hold expectancies of positive outcomes for their drinking, but as they age, they are more likely to hold expectancies of negative outcomes (Leigh & Stacy, 2004).

The other antecedent condition that appeared to be related to relationship length was change. Participants in relatively longer relationships seemed much more likely to point out that their relationship had experienced major changes over the course of time, and these changes contributed to their conflict turning point. These changes often

pertained to major life events such as the birth of a baby or change in employment. In comparison, participants in relatively shorter relationships did not have extensive histories with their partners. As such, they were less likely to be able to perceive global changes in the course of their relationships.

Romantic relationships evolve considerably over the course of time (Nussbaum, Pecchioni, Baringer, & Kundrat, 2002). Mares and Fitzpatrick (2004) noted that as marital couples age together, they are less likely to report conflict and more likely to report positive affect toward their relationship. It seems that as couples accrue a lifetime of experiences, they become less bothered by problems and perceive their problems as less important (Zietlow & Sillars, 1988). Older couples are more likely to make noncommittal remarks, except when the topic is salient (Sillars & Zietlow, 1993). Therefore, couples who have an extended shared history may be less likely to perceive minor irritations as turning points in their relationships.

Outcomes of Conflict Turning Points

Research Questions 4 and 5 examined the outcomes of conflict turning points. In regard to Research Question 4, a MANOVA was used to investigate how various types of conflict turning points: (a) impact feelings about their partner and the relationship, (b) impact perceptions of relational interdependence, and (c) impact thematic conflict? The type of conflict turning point was operationalized in terms of whether it was the first big fight and by the cluster of conflict topics (as identified in Research Question 1). The multivariate test was not significant, so little can be concluded.

Research Question 5 was concerned with other outcomes of conflict turning points. Using the constant comparative method, two additional outcomes were detected.

First, participants regularly described how their conflict turning point produced uncomfortable and even painful emotional experiences for the participant and/or the partner. This finding is consistent with Berscheid's (1983) argument that an interruption of highly organized behavior sequences (such as those characteristic of intimates' everyday relating) triggers emotional experience.

The other additional outcome of conflict turning points is the expression of feelings of care and concern. Most often, they described these demonstrations of care and concern as following the days since the conflict turning point. Stafford and Canary (1991) found that "assurances" were one of five major types of communicative and behavioral relational maintenance strategies. These assurances, which Stafford and Canary defined as attitudes and communicative behaviors demonstrating love, faithfulness, commitment, and an orientation toward a shared future, seem comparable to our participants' descriptions of expressions of care and concern that followed conflict turning points. Perhaps demonstrations of care and concern reflect a relational maintenance strategy that is triggered by conflict.

Conflict Style, Taking Conflict Personally, and Turning Point Perception

Hypotheses 3 and 4 examined the relationships between conflict style and the likelihood of reporting conflict episodes, as well as conflict style and the likelihood of perceiving a conflict episode as a turning point. Failing to support Hypothesis 3, the non-confrontational conflict style was not a significant predictor of the number of conflict episodes, nor of perceiving that a conflict episode was a turning point. In partial support of Hypothesis 4, the controlling conflict style was positively associated with the number of conflict episodes, but was not a significant predictor of perceiving that a conflict

episode was a turning point. Taking the results from these two steps together, Hypothesis 3 was not supported and Hypothesis 4 was only partially supported. Furthermore, Hypothesis 6, which suggested that individuals who are predisposed to take conflict personally are more likely to construe a conflict episode as a turning point, was not supported. Although lack of statistical power could possibly prevent the detection of significant findings (if, in fact, they exist), more than likely, the operationalization of turning point perception impeded accuracy of measurement.

Unfortunately, the likelihood of perceiving a conflict turning point—a key variable in this study—may have been insufficiently operationalized. The likelihood of perceiving a conflict episode as a turning point was measured by forming a turning point perception score. This turning point perception score reflected the ratio of the number of reported conflict episodes to the number of reported conflict turning points. Even though participants were provided oral and written directions with the definition of conflict and asked to report as many conflict episodes as possible, many participants seemed to have reported only "big" or major conflicts. The mean number of reported conflict episodes was 5.02 (*Median* = 5, *SD* = 2.13); the mean number of reported conflict turning points was 1.86 (*Median* = 2, *SD* = .95). As a result, the variability in turning point perception scores was restricted, making it less likely for the turning point perception score to share variance with its predictors.

To increase the likelihood that participants accurately report the number of conflict episodes they have experienced in recent memory, other measurement techniques should be employed. For example, a diary method could be used, or participants could be posed with specific questions to measure how many times they have argued about various

topics in a certain time frame. Perhaps the conflict topics that were investigated in Research Question 1 could serve as a starting point for such questions.

Conflict Style and Outcomes of Conflict Turning Points

In support of Hypothesis 5, individuals with a solution-oriented conflict style were likely to report conflict turning points as having primarily constructive outcomes for their relationships. In comparison, individuals with a non-confrontationalor confrontational conflict style were likely to report conflict turning points as having primarily destructive outcomes for their relationships.

These findings are consistent with previous literature, which suggest that individuals with a solution-oriented conflict style are more likely to perceive that conflict can be beneficial. Rogan and LaFrance (2003) found that the solution-orientation style was associated with concern about relational goals, and Siegert and Stamp (1994) found that individuals exercising a confrontational yet cooperative approach perceived more beneficial outcomes resulting from the FBF. The solution-orientation style reflects a cooperative win-win approach, while the non-confrontational style reflects a lose-lose approach, given that adherents to this style believe that conflict is inherently destructive and should be avoided (Deutsch, 2000). Finally, the controlling conflict style reflects a win-lose approach. Rogan and LaFrance (2003) found that individuals with the controlling style tend to be verbally aggressive but were not concerned about relational, face, or instrumental goals. The finding from the present study suggests that individuals with the controlling style believe that conflict turning points produced relational outcomes that were more negative than positive. Perhaps these individuals, although not concerned with relational goals, recognize the ruinous implications of their ways of

handling conflict.

Taking Conflict Personally and Outcomes of Conflict Turning Points

Hypothesis 7, which stated that individuals who are predisposed to take conflict personally are more likely to perceive conflict turning points as presenting primarily destructive outcomes for their relationship, was partially supported. Although the overall test was significant, univariate tests showed that direct personalization and stress reactions were *not* significant predictors of the turning point valence score However, persecution feelings were a significant predictor and accounted for 18 percent of the variance.

The finding from the present study suggests that individuals who feel heavily persecuted are likely to perceive a conflict turning point as yielding destructive relational outcomes. According to Dallinger and Hample (1995), taking conflict personally reflects feelings that one is being attacked on a personal and emotional (as opposed to a substantive) basis. Quite possibly, individuals who are sensitive to feelings of persecution also feel that they are victims of verbal aggressiveness. Verbal aggressiveness is defined by attacks on an individual's character or self-concept, as opposed to an issue (Infante & Wigley, 1986). As Infante and Rancer (1996) described, verbal aggressiveness is linked to many destructive outcomes in relationships, including conflict escalation, lower marital satisfaction, physical violence, relationship deterioration, and depression.

Perhaps when individuals are victims of verbal aggression, they feel extremely persecuted and victimized. These individuals may be more likely to construe that conflict episode as a turning point with primarily destructive outcomes. Future research should explore the degree to which individuals who take conflict personally (particularly in

regard to persecution feelings) perceive that they are victims of verbal aggression. Moreover, research should examine whether these individuals are more likely to perceive the conflict episode as one that is a turning point with overwhelmingly negative outcomes.

Machiavellianism and Strategic Management of Conflict Episodes

Hypothesis 8, which stated thatMach s are more likely to strategically manage conflict episodes to accomplish their relational objectives (i.e., the achievement or avoidance of a relational turning point), was partially supported. Machiavellianism was not a significant predictor of the strategic management to achieve a turning point. However, Machiavellianism was a significant predictor of the strategic management to *avoid* a turning point.

Machiavellianism is a personality trait characterized by cynical views of humankind and tactics to exploit and manipulate others. Martin et al. (1998) argued that Machs are opportunistic and flexible communicators, able to assess situations and selectively choose from a broad array of behaviors for interacting with others. Compared to individuals low in Machiavellianism, Machs are slightly more likely to engage in passive or aggressive impression management tactics (Bolino & Turnley, 2003). Machs may take an “all-or-nothing” approach, predisposing them to exercise passive impression management strategies when few benefits are attainable and aggressive impression management strategies when more benefits are attainable. Moreover, Machs are more likely to employ deceptive strategies, such as intimidation and supplication (the strategic appearance of neediness), which partially accounts for their aggressive impression management tendencies. Again, Machs consider situational features when determining

how to present themselves in order to obtain their goals.

Perhaps because Machs readily adapt their communicative behavior in social interactions, the relationships between Machiavellianism and various styles of managing conflict are weak and inconsistent (Jones & Melcher, 1982; Jones & White, 1985; King & Miles, 1990). In the present study, Machiavellianism was significantly associated with avoiding—but not achieving—conflict turning points. Perhaps Machs are reluctant to expose salient features of their motives and intentions through a major conflict episode, particularly if they find the relationship personally rewarding.

The Influences of Machiavellianism, Taking Conflict Personally, and Non-confrontational Conflict Style on Turning Point Perception

Hypothesis 9, which stated that individuals who are low in Machiavellianism, high in taking conflict personally, and more likely to report using a non-confrontational conflict style are more likely to construe a conflict episode as a turning point, was not supported. As with Hypotheses 3, 4, and 6, the turning point perception score may have been problematic, limiting the likelihood of detecting a significant result (if in fact, such a pattern exists).

Practical Implications of Findings

In addition to the theoretical and conceptual merit of this study, it also has practical value. The relational effects of conflict are, as Roloff and Soule (2002) described, a "fundamental issue" (p. 516). This study has shown that conflict turning points produce multifaceted change. Moreover, this change is contextualized by a range of events that lead up to the conflict turning point and topics that are discussed during the conflict.

Uncertainty about the relationship appears to be a major factor in some conflict turning points. Relational uncertainty was the most common topic of conflicts that were turning points. Additionally, participants in early-stage relationships were more likely to perceive that relational uncertainty contributed to their conflict turning point. Premarital and marriage counselors should discuss dialectical tensions with couples. Discussions of this sort could help couples to understand that the tensions of certainty-uncertainty may be normal and can be managed in productive ways (Baxter, 1988, 1990).

Premarital and marriage counselors can also help couples understand that their conflict management approaches can impact their experiences of conflict turning points. In this study, solution-oriented individuals tended to perceive that conflict turning points yielded primarily constructive relational outcomes, whereas controlling and non-confrontational individuals tended to perceive that conflict turning points yielded primarily destructive relational outcomes. Furthermore, individuals who felt persecuted were likely to perceive that conflict turning points yielded primarily destructive relational outcomes. Counselors can help couples to identify their tendencies and to modify their patterns of communication and perceptions.

Limitations

Retrospective measurement techniques are appropriate when it is not ethical or practically feasible to induce the phenomenon under study and when the participants' personal understandings are the focus of investigation (Baxter & Pittman, 2001). However, some shortcomings can result from the use of retrospective self-reports. Poole, McPhee, and Canary (2002) have summarized that participants' cognitive biases, memory limitations, language deficiencies, and lack of insight can plague retrospective

self-report methods.

Cognitive Biases

Metts, Sprecher, and Cupach (1991) have argued that cognitive biases can be problematic in retrospective self-reports. Two pertinent biases to this research are the positivity and social desirability biases. Positivity bias occurs when participants weight positive information more heavily than negative information and social desirability occurs when participants attempt to present a positive and socially acceptable self-image (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960).

To combat cognitive biases, participants were provided clear directions in oral and written form. They were instructed:

> Please read each question carefully and answer as honestly as you can. Be sure to answer every question and respond in as much detail as possible. If you have questions while completing the survey, please ask the researcher for assistance. Your responses will remain completely confidential.

More detailed instructions were also provided on the informed consent form. Metts et al. (1991) suggest that clear instructions are a valuable way to improve response accuracy.

Nevertheless, participants involved in the current study may have exhibited characteristics associated with positivity bias and social desirability. First, it is logical to assume that a certain amount of positivity bias exists in self report data. This makes sense in light of the fact that respondents were self-reporting about a relationship in which they were currently involved. If, however, participants had evaluated past relationships or other people's relationships, the negativity effect, or weighting negative information more heavily might have occurred. Second, participants may have sought to appear

socially desirable. For example, 90 percent of participants indicated that their conflict turning point produced only positive or a combination of positive and negative outcomes. Because conflict interactions are often avoided and socially disapproved, participants may not have felt comfortable disclosing some negatively-valenced information. On the other hand, some participants reported about incredibly personal, intimate interactions, including domestic violence, debates on having an abortion, sexual problems, and the like. Because participants reported about their conflict turning points in written form, as opposed to face-to-face interviews, they may have been less motivated to frame their disclosures as socially desirable.

Memory Limitations

People sometimes have difficulty in recalling past events or practices, particularly as the event or practice becomes more distant in time. Their memories may be affected by their current emotional states (Gottman, 1994). Participants involved in the current study may have experienced limitations in their ability to remember various conflict episodes. If their conflict turning point occurred in the distant past, they may have experienced difficulty in remembering the details of the turning point. However, the median length of time between a participant's conflict turning point and involvement in the study was 18 days. Over 63 percent of participants reported about a conflict turning point that had occurred within the previous month, and 86 percent reported about a conflict turning point that had occurred within the previous three months. Because the emphasis on this study was on participants' personal meanings *as they understood them*, and because the majority of participants reported about a relationship-changing conflict that had recently occurred, memory limitations do not appear to be a major shortcoming of this study.

Language Deficiencies and Lack of Insight

Language deficiencies occur when participants do not have the capacity to skillfully express their experiences and understanding. Lack of insight occurs when participants are not perceptive or observant about the phenomena which they are asked to report. Language deficiencies and lack of insight may have been problematic for a small proportion of participants in this study. However, since a college student sample was employed, the majority of participants should have been able to competently reflect upon and describe their conflict turning point. Therefore, language deficiencies and lack of insight should not have been a problem for this study.

Ecological Fallacy

Another potential limitation of this study pertains to the level of measurement. Baxter (1988) has warned that the ecological fallacy can occur when only one partner reports about a relationship, but the results are generalized to the level of the dyad. She has advocated that both partners be measured whenever possible. However, this study was focused on individuals' perceptions of the defining features of their conflict turning points. As such, it made sense to measure at the level of the individual.

Low Reliabilities

Another measurement issue pertains to the low reliability of some scales. The scales measuring clarification of feelings about the partner and relationship, perceptions of relational interdependence, and thematic conflict had low reliability coefficients (.61, .52, and .56 respectively). These data were collected to investigate Research Question 4, which was tested using a MANOVA. The findings from Research Question 4 should be interpreted with caution in light of the low reliabilities. Perhaps these low reliabilities

contributed to the lack of statistical significance of the MANOVA.

Sampling

A final limitation of this study pertains to sampling procedures. Following the vast majority of interpersonal communication research, a convenience sample of college students was employed. However, external validity may have been compromised, since this sample contains a disproportionate amount of individuals in dating relationships. Therefore, the results from this study can be generalized to younger people in dating or early-marital relationships. Future research should examine changes in couples' management of conflict over the course of their relationship together.

Conclusion

This study produced theoretical and practical contributions to the body of research on interpersonal communication. The turning point is a key concept in dialectical theory—a theory which highlights the complicated, messy nature of actual relating processes. By using a method other than the Retrospective Interview Technique (RIT), this study examined how turning points produce both constructive and destructive outcomes in romantic relationships. Because many participants perceived that their turning points reflect complex constellations of relational change, future researchers who use the RIT may wish to interview participants about *multiple* aspects of their turning points. A more thorough depiction of the multifaceted change contextualizing turning points would be consistent with Baxter and Montgomery's (1996; 1998) theoretical stance.

The four most common topics of conflict turning points were uncertainty about the relationship, time, the partner's behavior, and communication. In contrast to previous

research, the topics of relational uncertainty and time may be more common among a sample of primarily young college students in dating relationships. However, communication was reported as a topic of conflict turning points at a rate similar to other samples (e.g., samples of married couples and individuals in violent relationships). Additionally, participants usually reported multiple topics that arose in their conflict turning points. This latter finding suggests that dating couples are like married couples in their proclivity to introduce multiple topics in the heat of conflict.

This study also produced a foundation from which to further study the defining features of conflict turning points (i.e., the features of conflict turning points that distinguish them from conflict episodes that do not transform a relationship). Specifically, a hierarchically- and temporally-organized structure of features indicates that a prototype approach may hold heuristic value. Participants recognized a variety of features as indicative of conflict turning points, which is consistent with a prototype definition (as opposed to a classical definition). Future research is needed to replicate and refine the prototypes of the conflict turning point. Additionally, research is needed to examine how these defining features reveal the movement of dialectical tensions.

Interpersonal communication scholars have argued that relationships change over time, and as they mature, different issues become more or less salient for intimates. As the length of participants' relationships increased, they were less likely to perceive that relational uncertainty and jealousy contributed to their conflict turning point. The constant comparative method showed that participants in early-stage relationships were more likely to perceive alcohol as contributing to their conflict turning point, while participants in more established relationships were more likely to perceive major life

changes as contributing to their conflict turning point. The constant comparative method also revealed that outcomes of conflict turning points were aggravated emotions and demonstrations of care and concern.

Additionally, this study examined how three individual differences—conflict style, taking conflict personally, and Machiavellianism—influenced perceptions of conflict turning points. Individuals with a solution-oriented conflict style were more likely to report conflict as a turning point with primarily constructive outcomes for their relationship. Individuals who felt persecuted were more likely to report conflict as a turning point with primarily destructive outcomes for their relationship. Perhaps these individuals felt as though they were victims of verbal aggression, as these victims tend to perceive negative relational consequences. Finally, Machiavellians were more likely to strategically manage conflict episodes to avoid a turning point. Perhaps individuals who are highly Machiavellian are reluctant to facilitate a conflict turning point, as such action may reveal their egocentric motives.

As a practical implication of this study, premarital and marriage counselors should help couples manage dialectical tensions, such as those that stem from uncertainty about the relationship (a common topic of conflict turning points in this study). Additionally, counselors should also help couples understand that their conflict management approaches can impact their experiences of conflict turning points

Prior to this study, the literature had not adequately considered the nature and experience of conflict turning points in romantic relationships. This study contributes to the interpersonal communication literatures on conflict and turning points by investigating how conflict functions as a turning point, with attention to the antecedents

and outcomes of turning points. Indeed, this study found that conflict is a turning point for many individuals in romantic relationships, reinforcing the importance of this research for understanding relationship dynamics.

Notes

[1] For example, Planalp and Honeycutt (1985) found six categories of events that increased uncertainty in relationships: competing relationships, unexplained loss of contact and/or closeness, sexual behavior, deception, change in personality and/or values, and betraying confidence. These events impacted participants' communication, emotions, and cognitions about their partners, which is linked to changes in closeness and relationship status.

[2] Four of these 17 turning point articles were first-authored by Baxter (Baxter, Braithwaite, Nicholson, & Demo, 1999; Baxter & Bullis, 1986; Baxter & Erbert, 1999; Baxter & Pittman, 2001). Just as she has been the predominant influence in scholarship on dialectical theory, Baxter has also been the leader in turning point analyses.

[3] These conflict styles represent a Western perspective. While avoiding is believed to reflect low concern for self and others in much of the United States, it is thought to demonstrate high concern for others in some Eastern cultures.

[4] The primary analyses for this dissertation are multiple regression analyses. Relatively little previous research provides the data necessary to compute power analyses. However, four previous studies by Dalliger and Hample provide expected correlations for Hypothesis 7 (which examines the relationship between TCP and the perception that the conflict turning point presents destructive outcomes); a mean correlation of .25 was obtained between TCP and negative relational effects. Previous research also illuminates expected correlations for Hypothesis 9 (which argues that individuals low in Machiavellianism and TCP will be more likely to report using a non-confrontational conflict style). Core TCP and the non-confrontational conflict style had a

mean correlation of .31 in Dallinger and Hample (1995). As stated in the literature review, findings between Machiavellianism and the non-confrontational conflict style have been mixed; the mean correlation is -.08.

Setting alpha and beta at their conventional standards of .05 and .80, respectively (using one-tailed tests, because I am assuming directionality), approximately 68 participants are needed to detect a correlation of .30 and approximately 153 participants are needed to detect a correlation of .20 (Cohen, 1988). For weak-to-moderate and larger correlations, my large sample size of 300 participants should supply adequate power to detect significant differences (if, in fact, differences do exist).

For weaker correlations, power may become an issue. For example, a sample size of 300 may not be sufficient to detect a relationship between Machiavellianism and conflict style. However, I expect that by accounting for TCP in the relationship between Machiavellianism and conflict style, I will be better able to detect any differences that do exist.

Of course, increasing the number of participants to an overly large and unwieldy sample size should not be the automatic solution to increase power. For example, with the conventional standards of .05 and .80, respectively (with one-tailed tests), a sample size of 617 participants ensures sufficient power to detect a correlation of .10 or greater. However, such action increases the probability of Type I error, and even if weak correlations become statistically significant, they may not be socially and practically significant. Finally, a large sample size can be difficult to recruit and the abundance of data can be difficult to manage.

[5] The participation criterion of current involvement in a romantic relationship was

instituted to attract participants who were likely to have experienced a conflict turning point within recent memory.

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Appendix

Study Instruments

Instructions: Thank you for participating in this study. Please read each question carefully and answer as honestly as you can. Be sure to answer every question and respond in as much detail as possible. If you have questions while completing the survey, please ask the researcher for assistance. Your responses will remain completely confidential.

PART ONE

First, we would like you to list all of the conflicts you have experienced with your romantic partner within the last several months. Conflict occurs when you and your romantic partner perceive that your goals, values, or needs are opposing or incompatible. Conflict can be both negative and positive. Conflict can include, but is not limited to, discussions, disagreements, problem-solving, arguments, fights, and the silent treatment.

For each conflict, identify the topic and approximate date. Begin by listing your most recent conflict.

	Topic	Date
1.	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____
7.	_____	_____
8.	_____	_____
9.	_____	_____
10.	_____	_____
11.	_____	_____
12.	_____	_____

IMPORTANT: PLEASE READ CAREFULLY

Definition of Conflict Turning Point

The following questions in this survey ask about changes in your current romantic relationship. Specifically, we are interested in how conflict has changed your relationship.

Sometimes, conflicts happen in a couple's relationship that end up being "turning points" in the relationship. That is, after the conflict, one or both members of the couple look back and realize that their relationship is different because of the conflict.

Not every conflict is a turning point. A CONFLICT IS ONLY A TURNING POINT IF YOU BELIEVE THAT YOUR RELATIONSHIP HAS CHANGED OR IS DIFFERENT, AND THAT THESE CHANGES ARE SIGNIFICANT TO YOU PERSONALLY.

Step 1

NOW REVIEW YOUR LIST OF CONFLICTS ON THE PREVIOUS PAGE. **IDENTIFY WHICH, *IF ANY*, CONFLICTS WERE TURNING POINTS BY MARKING A STAR (*) NEXT TO EACH CONFLICT THAT WAS A TURNING POINT IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP.**

Step 2

NEXT, OF THE CONFLICTS THAT YOU JUST STARRED, IDENTIFY THE **MOST RECENT** CONFLICT TURNING POINT ON THE PREVIOUS PAGE AND **CIRCLE IT**. **YOU WILL REPORT ABOUT THIS CONFLICT TURNING POINT IN THE REST OF THE SURVEY.**

*Note: If **none** of your conflicts listed on the previous page were turning points in your relationship, skip to the last two pages of this survey and answer all questions on those pages. If you have any questions, please ask the researcher for assistance.*

PART TWO

1. Please think about the *most recent* conflict turning point that you had with your romantic partner. When did this conflict take place? *(Please be as specific as possible.)*

_____

2. What was this conflict about? *(Please describe in detail.)* _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Which, if any, of the following topics came up during this *most recent* conflict turning point? (Check *all* that apply.)

_____Criticism
_____Finances
_____Household chores
_____Children
_____Employment
_____Time
_____Communication
_____Partner's family
_____Holidays
_____Sex
_____Vacations
_____Crisis
_____Stress
_____Special occasion
_____Other people
_____Partner's behavior
_____Major life changes
_____Daily routines
_____Uncertainty about our relationship
_____Jealousy
_____Partner violated my expectations
_____Personality differences
_____Background differences
_____Other (please specify: _____)

4. If the conflict was about multiple topics, please circle the *main* topic in the list above.

PART THREE

5. Why was the conflict situation a turning point (or a point of transformation) in your relationship? Compared to other conflicts that you and your partner have had, what made this particular conflict one that changed your relationship? *(Provide as much detail as possible.)*

PART FOUR

6. Why do you think this conflict occurred? In other words, what caused this conflict to happen? *(Provide as much detail as possible.)*

Complete the following items about *what led or contributed to your most recent conflict turning point with your romantic partner*. Again, a conflict turning point is defined as a conflict that changed your relationship in ways that are significant to you personally. Use the following scale and write one number before each statement to indicate your feelings.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Undecided	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

_____7. I believe that uncertainty about our relationship contributed to this particular conflict.
_____8. I felt uncertain about how committed our relationship was.
_____9. I was not sure if our relationship would continue.

_____10. I believe that jealousy contributed to this particular conflict.
_____11. I felt jealous about my partner being around others who might be romantically interested in him/her.
_____12. I felt concerned about my partner becoming romantically interested in other people.

_____13. I believe that my partner violated my expectations, which contributed to this particular conflict.
_____14. I noticed that my partner said or did things that I didn't expect.
_____15. My partner sometimes surprised me with his or her behavior.

_____16. I believe that personality differences contributed to this particular conflict.
_____17. I felt as though my partner and I were very different people in terms of our personalities.
_____18. I felt as though my partner and I were not similar enough in terms of our personalities.

_____19. I believe that differences in our backgrounds contributed to this particular conflict.
_____20. I felt as though my partner and I were very different people in terms of our past experiences.
_____21. I felt as though my partner and I were not similar enough in terms of our personal histories and upbringings.

22. Please explain how **uncertainty about your relationship** influenced your conflict turning point, *if at all. (Provide as much detail as possible.)*

23. Please explain how **jealousy** influenced your conflict turning point, *if at all. (Provide as much detail as possible.)*

24. Please explain how **violations of expectations** influenced your conflict turning point, *if at all. ("Violations of expectations" refers to any time when your partner said or did something that you did not expect. Provide as much detail as possible.)*

25. Please explain how **personality differences** influenced your conflict turning point, *if at all. (Provide as much detail as possible.)*

26. Please explain how **background differences** influenced your conflict turning point, *if at all. (Provide as much detail as possible.)*

27. How did this conflict turning point affect **you** personally (if at all)? *(Provide as much detail as possible.)*

28. How did this conflict turning point affect **your partner** (if at all)? *(Provide as much detail as possible.)*

29. How did this conflict turning point affect **your relationship** (if at all)? *(Provide as much detail as possible.)*

Complete the following items about *how your most recent conflict turning point impacted or changed your relationship*. Again, a conflict turning point is defined as a conflict that changed your relationship in ways that are significant to you personally. Use the following scale and write one number before each statement to indicate your feelings.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Undecided	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

_____30. This particular conflict led me to clarify my feelings about my partner and relationship.

_____31. After this particular conflict, I better understood how I felt about my partner and relationship.

_____32. After this particular conflict, I felt less certain about the state of our relationship,

_____33. After this particular conflict, my feelings about my partner became more unclear.

_____34. This particular conflict led me to become more aware of my interdependence with my partner.

_____35. This particular conflict made me more aware of the connection between my partner and me.

_____36. After this particular conflict, I realized that my partner and I do not affect each other's lives.

_____37. After this particular conflict, I felt less close to my partner.

_____38. This particular conflict changed the history of our conflicts together.

_____39. This particular conflict introduced (or reintroduced) new points of discussion within our relationship.

_____40. This particular conflict did not change the way we will experience our future conflicts.

_____41. This particular conflict did not mark a change in the way we now approach conflict situations.

42. Please explain how your conflict turning point **clarified your feelings about your partner and relationship**, *if at all*. *(Provide as much detail as possible.)*___

43. Please explain how your conflict turning point**made you become aware of your connection to your partner**, *if at all*. *(Provide as much detail as possible.)*_____

44. Please explain how your conflict turning point **changed the way you and your partner experience conflict together**, *if at all*. *(Provide as much detail as possible.)*

45. *Check one response to indicate your feelings to the following statement.*

This conflict turning point changed my relationship in ways that were…
_____only positive
_____only negative
_____both positive and negative
_____neither positive nor negative

46. Based on your response to the previous question, please describe in detail how your conflict turning point changed your relationship in ways that were only positive, only negative, both positive and negative, or neither positive nor negative.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

PART FIVE

Conflict Scale

Complete the following items about your most recent conflict turning point with your romantic partner (which you reported about in previous questions). Again, a conflict turning point is defined as a conflict that changed your relationship, and these changes are significant to you personally. Use the following scale and write one number before each statement to indicate your feelings.

7 = Strongly agree
6 = Moderately agree
5 = Slightly agree
4 = Undecided
3 = Slightly disagree
2 = Moderately disagree
1 = Strongly disagree

_____1. This conflict turning point was constructive.
_____2. I felt as though this conflict turning point was helpful to our relationship.
_____3. This conflict situation was a turning point because it had a positive influence on our relationship.
_____4. This conflict was quite productive.
_____5. This conflict turning point was destructive.
_____6. I felt as though this conflict turning point was damaging to our relationship.
_____7. This conflict situation was a turning point because it had a negative influence on our relationship.
_____8. This conflict was quite counter-productive.

_____9. I was secretly hoping that this conflict situation would produce a major change in our relationship.
_____10. I knew that conflict was the only way our relationship was going to change.
_____11. I wanted this conflict situation to intensify into a turning point.
_____12. I wanted some adjustments in our relationship from this conflict.
_____13. Once we were engaged in conflict, I tried to make sure our relationship would be different afterward.
_____14. During the conflict, I made sure that our relationship would not be the same afterward as it was before.
_____15. Based on my behavior in the conflict, I knew that our relationship was going to change.
_____16. In the conflict with my romantic partner, I said and did things that changed our relationship from that point on.

_____17. I tried to avoid conflict so that our relationship would not change.
_____18. The best way to manage a relationship is to try to avoid conflict.
_____19. I planned ahead to make my partner happy so that our relationship would stay smooth.
_____20. I thought in advance about how I could reduce problems for our relationship.
_____21. When it seems as though my partner and I are about to have an argument, I do things to cut it short for the benefit of our relationship.
_____22. When I can tell that my partner is upset, I distract my partner to avoid conflict.
_____23. I sometimes say and do things to avoid conflict so that my relationship will continue the way it is.
_____24. When our relationship is going as planned, I try to prevent conflict from messing it up.

PART SIX

Organizational Communication Conflict Instrument (Revised)

Complete the following items about your most recent conflict turning point with your romantic partner (which you reported about in previous questions). Again, a conflict turning point is defined as a conflict that changed your relationship, and these changes are significant to you personally. Use the following scale and write one number before each statement to indicate your feelings.

7 = Strongly agree
6 = Moderately agree
5 = Slightly agree
4 = Undecided
3 = Slightly disagree
2 = Moderately disagree
1 = Strongly disagree

_____1. I blended my ideas with my romantic partner's to create new alternatives for resolving this conflict.
_____2. I shied away from topics that were sources of disputes.
_____3. I made my opinion known in the disagreement with my romantic partner.
_____4. I suggested solutions which combined a variety of viewpoints.
_____5. I steered clear of the disagreeable situation.
_____6. I gave in a little on my ideas when my romantic partner also gave in.
_____7. I avoided my romantic partner when I suspected that he or she wanted to discuss a disagreement.
_____8. I integrated arguments into a new solution from issues raised in the dispute with my romantic partner.
_____9. I went 50-50 to reach a settlement with my romantic partner.
_____10. I raised my voice when I was trying to get my romantic partner to accept my position.
_____11. I offered creative solutions in discussion of disagreements.
_____12. I kept quiet about my views in order to avoid disagreement.
_____13. I gave in when my romantic partner met me halfway.
_____14. I downplayed the importance of the disagreement.
_____15. I reduced the disagreement by making it seem insignificant.
_____16. I met my romantic partner at a midpoint in our differences.
_____17. I asserted my opinion forcefully.
_____18. I dominated the argument until my romantic partner understood my position.
_____19. I suggested we work together to create solutions to disagreements.
_____20. I tried to use my romantic partner's ideas to generate solutions to problems.
_____21. I offered trade-offs to reach solutions in our disagreement.
_____22. I argued insistently for my stance.

_____23. I withdrew when my romantic partner confronted me about a controversial issue.
_____24. I side-stepped disagreements when they arose.
_____25. I tried to smooth over disagreements by making them appear unimportant.
_____26. I insisted my position be accepted during the disagreement with my romantic partner.
_____27. I made our differences less than serious.
_____28. I held my tongue rather than argue with my romantic partner.
_____29. I eased conflict by claiming that our differences are trivial.
_____30. I stood firm in expressing my viewpoints during the disagreement with my romantic partner.

PART SEVEN

Revised Taking Conflict Personally Scale

Complete the following items about how you experience conflict situations. Use the following scale and write one number before each statement to indicate your feelings.

7 = Strongly agree
6 = Moderately agree
5 = Slightly agree
4 = Undecided
3 = Slightly disagree
2 = Moderately disagree
1 = Strongly disagree

_____1. I usually take criticism personally.
_____2. Conflict can really help a relationship.
_____3. I really hate to argue with people I don't know very well.
_____4. I hate arguments.
_____5. Conflict is a very personal thing for me.
_____6. When my romantic partner criticizes something I say, I don't take it personally.
_____7. Sometimes you can discover admirable features in a person who is arguing strongly.
_____8. It really hurts my feelings to be criticized.
_____9. Conflict can really hurt a relationship.
_____10. In conflict discussions I often feel that my romantic partner is trying very hard to make sure that I lose.
_____11. A deep conflict can really bring people together after it's over.
_____12. I think that my romantic partner really likes to pick on me.
_____13. Conflict is an intensely enjoyable kind of interaction.
_____14. Conflict discussions can really strengthen romantic relationships.
_____15. Conflicts can have a positive impact on a relationship.
_____16. I don't like to be in conflict situations.
_____17. Conflict situations leave me feeling victimized.
_____18. Conflict discussions can really jeopardize romantic relationships.
_____19. Conflict discussion can really strengthen friendships.
_____20. I really hate to argue with my romantic partner.
_____21. Sometimes when there are a lot of conflicts in a week, I feel like I'm getting an ulcer.
_____22. The honesty that often results from a conflict situation can lead to a stronger relationship between romantic partners.
_____23. Conflicts are not stressful for me.
_____24. Stressful discussions make my stomach hurt.
_____25. Conflict discussions can really jeopardize friendships.

_____26. When my romantic partner rejects one of my suggestions, I take it very personally.
_____27. After a stressful meeting, my day is usually ruined.
_____28. To me, it's fun to argue.
_____29. If I make a bad suggestion, my romantic partner thinks I am stupid.
_____30. Arguing is not very stressful to me.
_____31. Conflicts have a negative impact on a relationship.
_____32. It doesn't bother me to be criticized for my ideas.
_____33. A conflict can really wreck the climate in a workplace.
_____34. I often enjoy conflicts.
_____35. Conflict situations make me feel persecuted.
_____36. I have a strong emotional reaction to being criticized.
_____37. I think that my romantic partner often attacks me personally.

PART EIGHT

Mach IV & Allsopp Scales

Complete the following items as honestly as possible. Use the following scale and write one number before each statement to indicate your feelings.

7 = Strongly agree
6 = Moderately agree
5 = Slightly agree
4 = Undecided
3 = Slightly disagree
2 = Moderately disagree
1 = Strongly disagree

_____1. Never tell anyone the real reason you did something unless it is useful to do so.
_____2. The best way to handle people is to tell them what they want to hear.
_____3. One should take action only when sure it is morally right.
_____4. Most people are basically good and kind.
_____5. It is safest to assume that all people have a vicious streak and it will come out when they are given a chance.
_____6. Honesty is the best policy in all cases.
_____7. There is no excuse for lying to someone else.
_____8. Generally speaking, people won't work hard unless they're forced to do so.
_____9. All in all, it is better to be humble and honest than to be important.
_____10. When you ask someone to do something for you, it is best to give the real reason for wanting it rather than giving reasons which carry more weight.
_____11. Most people who get ahead in the world lead clean, moral lives.
_____12. Anyone who completely trusts anyone else is asking for trouble.
_____13. The biggest difference between most criminals and other people is that the criminals are stupid enough to get caught.
_____14. Most people are brave.
_____15. It is wise to flatter important people.
_____16. It is possible to be good in all respects.
_____17. Barnum was wrong when he said that there's a sucker born every minute.
_____18. It is hard to get ahead without cutting corners here and there.
_____19. People suffering from incurable diseases should have the choice of being put painlessly to death.
_____20. Most people forget more easily the death of their parent than the loss of their property.
_____21. I would be prepared to deceive someone completely if it were to my advantage to do so.
_____22. I would be prepared to do a bad turn to someone in order to get something I particularly wanted for myself.

_____23. I often act in a cunning way in order to get what I want.
_____24. I would be prepared to “walk all over people” to get what I want.
_____25. I enjoy manipulating people.
_____26. I tend to do most things with an eye to my own advantage.
_____27. I agree that the most important thing in life is winning.
_____28. I would be prepared to be quite ruthless in order to get ahead in my job.
_____29. I would be prepared to be humble and honest rather than important and dishonest.
_____30. I would like to be very powerful.

PART NINE

Demographic Questions

1. What is the status of your relationship? (Circle *one.*)

   Dating Engaged Married Separated/Divorced

   Other (*describe*) _____

2. How long have you been romantically involved with your partner?

   _____ years, _____ months

   What month and year did you begin dating your partner?

   _____

3. Was the conflict turning point that you reported your "first big fight?" *(In other words, was this the first conflict that you and your partner had ever experienced?)* (Circle *one*.)

   Yes No

4. Do you and your partner live together (in the same residence)?

   Yes No

5. What is your age? _____

6. What is your class standing (by year)? (Circle *one.*)

   First-year student Sophomore Junior Senior Graduate Student

7. What is your sex? (Circle *one.*)

   Male Female

8. What is your ethnic/cultural background? (Please circle.)

   African American/Black Caucasian/White American Indian

   Latino/Hispanic Asian Other _____

   International Student (*indicate home country* _____)

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, Cronbach's Alphas, and Intercorrelations for Instruments

Instrument	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Rel. uncertainty	11.94	5.82	(.81)						
2. Jealousy	8.57	5.44	.43**	(.79)					
3. Exp. violations	11.55	5.14	.19**	.25**	(.74)				
4. Personality diff.	10.12	5.13	.15**	-.03	.41**	(.81)			
5. Background diff.	10.80	5.47	.11*	-.03	.33**	.62**	(.80)		
6. Clarification	21.72	4.96	-.18**	-.14*	-.31**	-.35**	-.24**	(.61)	
7. Interdependence	21.57	4.36	-.24**	-.18**	-.26**	-.36**	-.24**	.66**	(.52)
8. Thematic conflict	19.43	4.76	.10*	.03	.05	-.03	.01	.22**	.26**
9. Non-confr.	31.22	13.80	.11*	.18**	.03	.18**	.13	-.19**	-.24**
10. Controlling	29.39	9.06	.19**	.18**	.37**	.19**	.17**	-.14*	-.19**
11. Solution-orient.	48.22	11.61	-.04	.02	.02	-.05	.03	.17**	.17**
12. Constr. outcomes	20.86	6.36	-.16**	-.06	-.20**	-.19**	-.15**	.58**	.59**
13. Destr. outcomes	11.09	7.01	.35**	.25**	.30**	.26**	.21**	-.62**	-.69**
14. Direct personal.	30.74	8.31	.15**	.02	.29**	.28**	.19**	-.09	-.10
15. Stress reactions	21.28	6.46	.10	.11*	.14**	.16**	.12*	-.11*	-.15**
16. Persecution feel.	16.89	7.32	.27**	.24**	.28**	.32**	.28**	-.35**	-.41**
17. Mach IV	71.89	12.67	.11*	.18**	.13*	.13*	.09	-.07	-.06
18. Allsopp scale	27.27	10.66	.12*	.13*	.05	.06	.09	-.10	-.11*
19. Achiev. of CTP	3.50	10.84	.37**	.20**	.25**	.23**	.21**	.05	.01
20. Avoid. of CTP	25.67	9.37	.14**	.18**	.08	.17**	.17**	-.10	-.15**

Table 1 (continued)

Means, Standard Deviations, Cronbach's Alphas, and Intercorrelations for Instruments

Instrument	Mean	SD	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
8. Thematic conflict	19.43	4.76	(.56)						
9. Non-confr.	31.22	13.80	-.05	(.90)					
10. Controlling	29.39	9.06	.13*	-.06	(.82)				
11. Solution-orient.	48.22	11.61	.34**	-.12*	-.03	(.84)			
12. Constr, outcomes	20.86	6.36	.25**	-.29**	-.14**	.35**	(.90)		
13. Destr. outcomes	11.09	7.01	-.13*	.27**	.21**	-.24**	-.80**	(.89)	
14. Direct personal.	30.74	8.31	.07	.06	.30**	.06	-.11*	.20**	(.82)
15. Stress reactions	21.28	6.46	.13*	.13*	.04	.09	-.13*	.19**	.42**
16. Persecution feel.	16.89	7.32	-.10	.40**	.23**	-.11*	-.36**	.46**	.39**
17. Mach IV	71.89	12.67	.00	.19**	.02	-.16**	-.08	.15**	.07
18. Allsopp scale	27.27	10.66	-.13*	.22**	.12*	-.12*	-.15**	.20**	-.02
19. Achiev. of CTP	3.50	10.84	.36**	-.05	.41**	.22**	.16**	.07	.26**
20. Avoid. of CTP	25.67	9.37	.08	.64**	.02	.13*	-.15**	.17**	.17**

Table 1 (continued)

Means, Standard Deviations, Cronbach's Alphas, and Intercorrelations for Instruments

Instrument	Mean	SD	15	16	17	18	19	20
15. Stress reactions	21.28	6.46	(.72)					
16. Persecution feel.	16.89	7.32	.28**	(.80)				
17. Mach IV	71.89	12.67	-.01	.28**	(.67)			
18. Allsopp scale	27.27	10.66	-.23**	.26**	.49**	(.86)		
19. Achiev. of CTP	3.50	10.84	.05	.22**	.01	.08	(.85)	
20. Avoid. of CTP	25.67	9.37	.14*	.42**	.13*	.18**	.12*	(.80)

Note. $N = 284$. Reliability coefficients appear in parentheses along the diagonal.

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

Table 2

Frequencies of Reported Topics of Conflict

	Percent reported as the main topic	Percent reported as a topic
Uncertainty about the relationship	16.3	44.0
Time	14.5	50.0
Partner's behavior	7.8	53.9
Communication	7.4	52.5
Other people	7.1	36.6
Major life changes	6.4	21.1
Finances	5.7	18.0
Jealousy	5.0	22.9
Other	4.5	6.7
Sex	3.9	24.6
Personality differences	3.2	26.8
Partner violated expectations	2.5	13.0
Stress	2.1	39.4
Criticism	2.1	37.0
Employment	2.1	18.7
Background differences	2.1	14.8
Special occasion	2.1	6.7
Children	1.4	7.7
Daily routines	1.1	25.0
Partner's family	1.1	10.6

Table 2 (continued)

Frequencies of Reported Topics of Conflict

	Percent reported as the main topic	Percent reported as a topic
Holidays	0.7	8.8
Household chores	0.7	5.3
Crisis	0.4	3.9
Vacations	0.0	7.4

Table 3

Features of Conflict Turning Points Pertaining to the Conflict Interaction

New Realizations
Open Discussion with the Partner
(Co)construction and Interpretation of Feelings about the Partner and Relationship
(Co)construction and Interpretation of Perceptions about the Partner and Relationship
Changes in Interaction Patterns
Order of the Conflict and Newness of the Topic
Importance of the Conflict Topic
Changes in Communication and Action (both Participant and Partner)
Changes in the Comfort Level of the Conflict Interaction
Interference of Third Parties

Table 4

Features of Conflict Turning Points Pertaining to Outcomes of the Conflict Interaction

Global Evaluation of the Outcome
(Re)definition of the Relationship
Commitment
Closeness
Trust
Certainty
Importance
Change in Subsequent Interactions
Efforts to Change in Subsequent Interactions
Comfort Level of Subsequent Interactions
Development/Execution of a Plan or Agreement for Future Interaction

Table 5

Moderated Multiple Regression Results

	Turning Point Perception Score
	β =
Step 1	
Mach IV	.00
Taking conflict personally	.00
Non-confrontational conflict style	.01
R^2	.003
Step 2	
Mach IV	.00
Taking conflict personally	-.01
Non-confrontational conflict style	-.01
Mach IV x TCP	.00
Mach IV x Non-confrontational	.00
TCP x Non-confrontational	.00
R^2	.007
ΔR^2	.004

Table 5 (continued)

Moderated Multiple Regression Results

	Turning Point Perception Score
	β =
Step 3	
Mach IV	.00
Taking conflict personally	.00
Non-confrontational conflict style	.03
Mach IV x TCP	.00
Mach IV x Non-confrontational	.00
TCP x Non-confrontational	-.01
Mach IV x TCP x Non-confrontational	.00
R^2	.007
ΔR^2	.000