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The Relationship: Partners' Behaviors and Their Impact on Overall Satisfaction

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THE RELATIONSHIP: PARTNERS' BEHAVIORS AND THEIR IMPACT ON OVERALL SATISFACTION

Honors Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Bachelor of Education
In the School of Education
at Salem State University

By

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Commonwealth Honors Program
Salem State University
2016

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Abstract

Relationships are a top priority for many people, perhaps because relationships fulfill an

important human need: love. Relationships tend to be complex and have many predictors related

to whether or not a relationship will be satisfying. It is important that one evaluates how satisfied

he/she is with the relationship in order to decide whether to continue. If one learns early in the

relationship that they are not satisfied, then they can terminate the relationship before it

continues too long. Relationship satisfaction was examined in terms of positive and aversive

behaviors commonly demonstrated in relationships. The positive behaviors analyzed included

support/praise, affection, security, and communication, while the aversive behavior categories

included exclusion, deceit, avoidant behaviors, undesirable actions, and potential competitors. A

survey was administered through surveymonkey, in which participants completed demographic

information, a pre-survey rating of their overall level of relationship satisfaction, questions

regarding the frequency of certain behaviors, and a post-survey rating on their level of

relationship satisfaction. When analyzing the pre and post survey responses, participants were

more satisfied with their relationship after completing the questionnaire. Regarding the pre-

survey satisfaction rating, a stepwise regression procedure indicated exclusion and support/praise

as having the most significance in a relationship, where as the post satisfaction rating was most

closely associated with exclusion, support/praise, deceit, and potential competitors. Therefore,

the clearest correlations appear to be exclusion, deceit, support/praise, and potential competitors.

Another finding is that filling out the survey changed both the satisfaction level and the predictor

variables. It is likely that the behavioral categories tend to produce satisfying relationships

because both people in the relationship are experiencing both generic and idiosyncratic

reinforcement from the significant other. Also, participants' satisfaction ratings appear to

increase as a result of completing the survey. It is not clear why this is the case; however, it may be that "taking stock" of the positive and aversive behaviors may have led this sample to be more satisfied with their current relationship. These findings suggest that reviewing the positive and negative aspects of a relationship can be beneficial, but more research is indicated.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Darlene Crone-Todd for taking on the role of my faculty advisor and spending time working with me to solidify my thesis. Thank you to Dr. Joanna Gonsalves for guidance through thesis requirements and specifications for the Commonwealth Honors Program curriculum and thesis completion, as well as someone who always had the answers when I didn't know them. I would also like to thank Dr. Patrice Miller, as she graciously agreed to be a member of my thesis committee. Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for always encouraging and supporting me throughout the course of my college career, without them I would not be who I am today.

The Relationship: Partners' Behaviors and Their Impact on Overall Satisfaction

Relationships are a top priority for many people, perhaps because relationships fulfill an important human need: love. Life optimizer, Donald Latumahina (2007), believes it is important that these relationships are meaningful and satisfying. The question is: What positive and aversive behaviors comprise a satisfying relationship? Positive behaviors in a relationship tend to be communication, support/praise, affection, and security; whereas the aversive behaviors include undesirable actions, avoidant, exclusion and deceit. If the aversive behaviors outweigh the positive behaviors, then will unsatisfying relationship will result? When unsatisfying relationships unfold, it can lead to couple dissatisfaction which ultimately leads to unhappiness or a termination of relationship (break up or divorce). It is important to define and decide whether or not a relationship is satisfying, and what immediate behaviors are affecting the relationship (either positively or aversively).

Relationships involve many aspects such as interpersonal and verbal communication, undesirable actions, avoidant behavior, support/praise, affection, security, exclusion, and deceit (Gunther, 2010). Each of these aspects takes time to exhibit in a budding relationship. Some people start off as friends and then their friendship tends to turn into a relationship. Other people meet online and build a relationship from there. Sometimes, a relationship is too much to commit to, and a "hook up" culture evolves. Just as there are many ways to begin a relationship, theorists look at relationship characteristics differently. Featured below are two views, one of a social psychologist and one of a behavioral analyst: (a) Mark Knapp, a social psychologist who developed a theoretical model for the enhancement of relationships through the interpersonal development between two people; and (b) Marshall Lev Dermer, a behavior analysist who looks

at relationships in terms of verbal and action based behavior, and how those behaviors either

create or destroy a relationship. Dermer also focuses on how reinforcement is used in terms of

relationship building. Knapp and Dermer each have their theories on which behaviors make a

relationship satisfying. These psychologists have contrasting views on which behaviors comprise

a satisfying relationship and which ones lead to a termination of a relationship.

Social Psychologist: Mark Knapp

According to Knapp (see Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009), relationships have many different

stages through which they tend to move. These stages include initiating, experimenting,

intensifying, integrating, and bonding. The initiation stage is very short and focuses on making

an impression. During this stage, physical appearance plays a major role in terms of clothing,

perfume, and overall physical appearance. The next stage is the experimentation stage, which

allows for exploration of the person of interest in order to get to know each other well. Here

information is analyzed in order to find common interests. It is at this point where it is decided if

the relationship is to continue or if it should terminate. Should the relationship continue on, it

will intensify and become less formal, and more personal information is revealed or shared. This

process strengthens the interpersonal connection and leads to spending more time together,

giving gifts, asking for dates, and expecting to be in a committed relationship. During the

integration stage, a level of intimacy rises that further develops the relationship. Lastly, the

bonding stage is where a person will announce legally their committed relationship (marriage).

Although marriage rates are generally on the decline, this is one of the most common ways to

legally announce a committed relationship. The only way to break the relationship at this point is

with formal notice, death, or agreements. Within each of these stages, there is a stabilizing period

that a couple must go through in order to move onto the next stage in the relationship. However,

with each step in the relationship there is always room for separation. Knapp defines separation

as occurring in two ways: (a) the couple splits and the relationship becomes nonexistent; or (b)

the partners individuate while still in the relationship. The only stage where this potential

separation level does not occur is during the bonding stage.

        After the bonding stage, a couple who detaches does so by going through the following

stages: differentiating, circumscribing, stagnating, avoiding, and finally terminating. The

differentiating stage deals with external pressures: As a relationship continues to grow

sometimes partners begin to think independently instead of together, or may start to develop their

own hobbies. In problematic relationships, this is when one may see the relationship fade.

Circumscribing occurs when differentiating partners limit their conversation and set boundaries

in terms of communication. According to Kennedy (2015), a gap in communication is not

healthy in some cases. Although not everything has to be shared between partners, when there is

a decline in communication, both spouses are affected by the lack of "we-ness" present in the

relationship. During stagnation the relationship will decline and communication will be even

more limited. However, while partners might not separate due to children or other

responsibilities, once a relationship reaches this stage it is unlikely improve. The avoidance stage

is when partners intentionally avoid each other, become physically detached, and restrict

communication in order to avoid an argument. The final stage of coming apart is known as

termination, when partners will take different paths and live their own lives. With that said, the

stabilizing period can be considered a gray area, in which one person in the relationship may

want to continue on the positive relationship continuum, while the other person wishes to

terminate the relationship. How does one know that their relationship is potentially at an end?

Knapp suggests that measuring one's relationship satisfaction is one potential way to tell whether

or not one is interested in continuing the relationship or if they are ready to move on to

something else. In order to measure one's relationship satisfaction, one must analyze the

behaviors displayed in the current relationship. Of course, the two people in that same

relationship could score it differently.

Behavior Analyst: Marshall Lev Dermer

In his work entitled, "Creating Romantic Love", Dermer (2006) suggests that there are

certain reinforcers that increase one's chances of striking up a romantic relationship with

someone. These reinforcers are broken down into three features of loving. These include features

of passion (fascinating, desiring or experience sexual intimacy, and desiring or experiencing

exclusive relations), features of caring (championing or advocating and giving the upmost), and

features of friendship (enjoying, assisting, confiding, understanding, behaving spontaneously,

accepting, and respecting).

It may be noted that these three features in Dermer's work on loving also relate to

Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love (2006). Sternberg's theory describes three types of love

based relationships: intimacy, passion, and commitment. Intimacy is comprised of the following

demands: liking/friendship, romantic love, companionate love, and consummate love. Passion

includes infatuation, romantic love, fatuous love, and consummate love. Commitment entails

empty love, companionate love, fatuous love, and consummate love. There is some overlap of

elements exhibited in each of these types of love. The key factor in this theory states that a

relationship based on a single element would be less likely to survive than a relationship that is

based on two or more elements. It is also important to note that each element changes over time

as an adult romantic relationship continues to develop. Knowing about these components of love

may help couples avoid pitfalls in their relationship; as well as work on areas that need

improvement. These components may also help couples recognize when it might be time for a

relationship to terminate.

Hills (1968) stated that "evaluative statements and opinions may function as reinforcers

assumes they have functioned as antecedents in discrimination training procedures" (Hills, 1968,

p.460). This is demonstrated and understood as operant behavior. For example, early on in the

relationship track one person in a potential relationship may state that they like hockey, so

talking about and watching hockey with the potential love interest person becomes a reinforcer.

Saying "that 'I like X' may be controlled by the extent X has been a reinforcer" (Hills, 1968, p.

461) and is a way to identify a certain reinforcer. Therefore, the subsequent orientation of people

who generally like the same things as others is based on a "generalization of discriminative

stimulus control" (Hills, 1968, p. 460). This is one way to explain the thought of "love at first

sight". Seeing people who generally like the same things, dress in a similar way, and have the

same perspectives on issues tend to be the people who fall into the "love at first sight" category.

A practical example of this could be the situation diagramed in Figure 1, in which a boy who

likes hockey is discussing hockey with an attractive girl, and the girl becomes a conditioned

positive reinforcer by being associated with discussing hockey. Discriminative Stimulus Control

works closely with two types of reinforcers. The first is a generic reinforcer (see figure 1). This

means that these reinforcers can usually be effective for everyone within a specific culture. An

idiosyncratic reinforcer is specific to a certain person. These reinforcers tend to be relative to the

recipient's repertoire, social environment, and reinforcement history.

Figure 1:

Encounter Pairs

Figure 1: Discussing hockey is already a positive reinforcer for the boy and the girl becomes a conditioned positive reinforcer because she is paired with the positive reinforcement.

Idiosyncratic reinforcers tend to produce the fascination for, and the desire of exclusive relations with another. These reinforcers include such behaviors as individual preferences for listening, respecting, solving personal problems, physical contact, and changing the topic, etc. Each of these behaviors is very specific to the reciprocating person in the relationship since they are dependent on the social environment. Listening to another person demonstrates being sincere, caring, and understanding. If one is able to listen and respond appropriately instead of punishing another, this will open up free speech in the relationship, which is important for open expression. If one person is able to confide in another, without having to worry about what is said, this is a major factor in successful relationships. Therefore, listening to the significant other talk is a positive behavior if the listener keeps the information confidential and non-judgmental, and there is also no aversive consequence for sharing a confidence. According to Laurenceau and Kleinman (2006) listening is equally as important as "maintaining appropriate responsiveness".

Respecting is another idiosyncratic reinforcer in that it can be demonstrated by being

considerate of the other person by listening to the other's wishes, values, feelings, or wants.

Solving personal problems is another way of displaying idiosyncratic reinforcement. This is

because problems are unique to the individual, and are viewed as aversive. Therefore, the advice

that one gives in terms of a problem becomes reinforcing because of its correlation with the

termination of the aversive stimuli. A final type of idiosyncratic reinforcer is one's ability to

change the topic. This works closely with listening. The only way one is able to successfully

change the topic is if one can specify when the topic needs to be changed and what stimuli will

"evoke the behavior that is incompatible with a public or private problem- related behavior"

(Dermer, 2006, p. 463). It should be noted that since idiosyncratic reinforcement is necessarily

unique to individuals, the types and examples provided here are not exhaustive. However, these

are provided to give us a starting point to evaluate social theories through a behavioral lens.

Social v. Behavioral Theories

Although Knapp, Dermer, and Sternberg are all looking at the formation of relationships,

they have very different views. Knapp's social theory is very easy to follow and uses everyday

language to create a step by step model regarding how relationships enhance or deteriorate

through the interpersonal development between two people. Although relationships do not have

to follow his model exactly to be successful, they do tend to follow the outline suggested by this

model. His theory focuses more on the communication between the two people in the possible

relationship and less on the actions and reinforcements. However, while this model is intuitively

understandable, it does not really explain or address the underlying process or mechanisms by

which these changes occur in a relationship. For example, how does the experimental stage result

in a positive or negative outcome? What is it about common interests that provide "the glue" in a

relationship? For these answers, considering how the behaviors and consequences interchanging

between the relationship partners unfold is a useful way to explain how these stages evolved for

(better or worse) over the course of a relationship. Dermer's behavioral view on relationships

allows us to think of them as involving a system of actions and interactions that involve

contingences such as generic or idiosyncratic forms of positive reinforcement, punishment, and

extinction. Dermer's theory, then, involves analyzing the interlocking set of behaviors and

contingencies between the people and the relationship. These can be positive, negative, or

neutral. As such, the balance of these factors determines the likelihood that either, or both,

partners will remain in love or in the relationship. Idiosyncratic reinforcements include listening,

respecting, solving personal problems, and changing the topic. Each of these behaviors is very

specific to the reciprocating person in the relationship since they are dependent on the history

and social environment. On the other hand, generic reinforcement can be effective for everyone

in a given culture. It should be noted that the theories of Knapp, Dermer, and Sternberg

developed within a prevailing culture and thus are normative. Their theories are large over-

arching theories that describe satisfying relationships in western culture. While these over-

arching theories are helpful, knowing the behaviors that produce a satisfying relationship is very

important.

Desirable and Undesirable Behaviors

        Relationships involve many positive and aversive behaviors. Randi Gunther, the author

of *Relationship Saboteurs* (2010) suggests that the ten most common emotions and behaviors

that become toxic in relationships include insecurity, needing to control, fear of intimacy,

needing to win, pessimism, needing to be center stage, addictions, martyrdom, defensiveness,

and breaking trust. Couple's distress is another major component that leads to unsatisfactory

relationships. According to behavior therapists, this usually occurs when "there are more

negative than positive interactions or communications in the relationships" (Martin & Pear,

2015, p.293). The largest breakdown tends to take place while communicating. For example, one

partner may make sarcastic or hostile statements in conversation that are then reciprocated by

hostile statements from the other partner, thus leading to a breakdown in communication or

between the two individuals. The treatment for couple's distress supports the hypothesis of this

study. People who are experiencing couple's distress are encouraged to instigate positive

exchanges which may include (a) displaying affection, (b) showing respect, (c) expressing

appreciation, and (d) communication training, in which each person learns to express their

thoughts and feelings in regarding what is liked and appreciated about the other. Another option

is problem-solving training, during which couples use their newly acquired communication skills

to identify and solve problems and conflicts in the relationship. Lastly, programming generality

involved when helping clients learn to monitor their relationships for specific signs of regression,

and to continue using the problem solving techniques that were learned while in therapy. On the

other hand, positive behaviors that promote healthy relationships, according to emotional

psychologist Barton Goldsmith (2006), include being (a) able to laugh at yourselves, (b) open to

new ideas and experiences, (c) willing and able to give all of your attention, and (d)

demonstrative, trustworthy, available, proactive, and kind. When a higher proportion of positive

actions, compared to negative actions, are displayed in relationships, this makes the relationship

more satisfying. These positive and aversive behaviors, then, became the basis of Goldsmith's

questionnaire. The questionnaire is comprised of different actions that inhibit either positive or

aversive behaviors. A previous relationship satisfaction study, completed by Susan Hendrick

(1988) used a five point rating scale to determine the extent to which one is satisfied with their

relationship. The scale is comprised of (A - E, A being the least/never and E the most/always,

with some questions being reverse scored). The seven questions on this questionnaire are very

direct as they include "how well does your partner meet your needs", "how good is your

relationship compared to most", "how often do you wish you had never gotten into this

relationship", "to what extent does your relationship meet your original expectations", "how

many problems are there in your relationship", "how much do you love your partner", "in

general, how satisfied are you with your relationship" (Hendrick, p.94). In order to find out how

satisfying your relationship is, one must assign a number to each of their lettered answers. For

instance, A = 1, B=2, C=3, D=4, and E=5. After completing this questionnaire one adds up the

items and then divide by 7 in order to get a mean score. Although the questions asked cover

many of the most important areas in a relationship, it is not very thorough. Another potential

flaw of this study is that the rating scale does not give a criterion number that indicates the range

in which one should score to be considered in a satisfying relationship compared to an

unsatisfying relationship.

Gunther (2010) as well as Manson (2013) provide insight into the importance of the

following behavior categories: communication, undesirable actions, avoidant, support/praise,

affection, security, exclusion, deceit and other. The survey developed for the purpose of this

study involves multiple questions that have been classified into each of these behavioral

categories. In developing the survey it was assumed that positive and aversive behaviors are very

important elements to identify because they are the deciding factors in terms of whether or not a

relationship will be satisfying (Gunther , 2010). Aversive behaviors such as undesirable actions,

being avoidant, being deceitful and required exclusion of others all are behaviors that constitute

an unsatisfying relationship. Positive behaviors such as communication, support/praise, security,

and affection all promote satisfying relationships.

The Present Study

The goal, then, of this study is to determine which combination of behavioral actions, and

consequences, form a more or less satisfying relationship. It assumed that a higher proportion of

positive actions, compared to negative actions, displayed in a given relationship make it more

satisfying. People with more positive actions in a relationship should find it more satisfying

because they usually have fewer problems and other negative contributing factors, and

experience more positive reinforcement in the context of the relationship. Similarly, it is

predicted that if there are a relatively higher proportion of aversive or negative actions

experienced in a relationship, the less satisfaction there would in that relationship. By completing

this questionnaire, the answers provided will allow for insight into what is most effective in order

to have satisfying relationships. It is hoped that the findings from this research will determine

whether or not the positive and negative types of behaviors commonly found in relationships are

correlated with relationship satisfaction. This study is expected to generate new

information/knowledge about one's satisfaction in terms of relationships. The results should be

helpful in everyday life when people are making decisions about long-term relationships. It is

hoped that this study could be part of a larger investigation that could lead to higher relationship

satisfaction, and lower failure rates.

Method

Participants

Two hundred participants were recruited via the SONA system used in psychology at

Salem State University, email, and social networks (e.g., Facebook or Twitter). Participants

younger than 18 years old and those who did not have first-hand experience with relationships

were excluded from this survey. At the beginning of the questionnaire screening questions were

in place to make sure the participants met the requirements of the study. After administering

constraints, 90 of the recruited participants completed the pre-survey response, and 87 completed

the post-survey response. A total of 85 females and 2 males completed the questionnaire, and

participants ranged from 18 to 48 in age. Ethnicities included White (95%), Hispanic (3%),

African American (1%), and Spanish (1%).

Materials and Instruments

Participants submitted the questionnaire and rating scales through the surveymonkey.com

website. Data were gathered from participants after having them complete the online

questionnaire about their relationship experiences. The questions asked were based on the

frequency with which each behavior was self-reported as occurring in their relationship. Each

question was answered on a scale consisting of choices such as never, rarely, sometimes, most of

the time, and always. Participants were asked questions from the following categories:

communication, support/praise, avoidant behaviors, undesirable actions, deceit, security,

affection, exclusion, and potential competitors. The survey can be found in Appendix A, and the

questions organized by category are displayed in appendix B.

Design, Procedures, and Variables

The methodology for this experiment required each participant to fill out a questionnaire

on either their current or most recent (within the past 6 months), relationship. The survey was

administered online via surveymonkey.com, thus making it completely anonymous. Participants

had as long as they need to complete the questionnaire, but it generally took 10 - 20 minutes to

complete. Participants completed an informed consent form on the first page of the survey

before partaking in the questionnaire. At the end of that page, participants were asked to click on

"agree" or "disagree" to provide consent to complete the survey. Participants were invited to

complete the questionnaire, including demographic questions, and a rating scale for behaviors

encountered in the relationship that ranges from never to always, as well as a pre and post survey

relationship satisfaction scale. The questions targeted positive, negative, and neutral behaviors

that are commonly found in relationships. Participants were asked basic non-identifying

demographic questions such as gender, age, ethnicity, relationship status, kind of relationship,

and length of relationship. Once participants completed the questionnaire they were brought to a

"thank you for participating" page. The dependent variables used in this study are the ratings

from the pre and post satisfaction responses. The independent variables in this study included

ratings related to communication, support/praise, affection, security, avoidant behaviors,

undesirable actions, deceit, exclusion, and potential competitors categories.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed by a stepwise regression to determine which behavioral categories

are related to relationship satisfaction. It is hypothesized that a higher proportion of the more

positive actions, compared to negative actions, displayed in relationships make them more

satisfying. People with more positive actions in a relationship tend to find it more satisfying

because they usually have fewer problems and other outlying contributing factors, and

experience more positive reinforcement in the context of the relationship. It is similarly predicted

that if there are a relatively higher proportion of aversive or negative actions experienced in a

relationship, the less satisfaction there would in that relationship, and the more problems a

couple would tend to experience. The data were also analyzed through indicators, with

behavioral categories ordered and tallied in order to determine which behaviors produce the most

satisfying relationships.

Results

A total of (N=90) participants completed the pre-satisfaction portion of the survey and

(N= 87) completed the post-satisfaction portion. There was an increase in relationship

satisfaction after the post-satisfaction evaluation was completed. In this component, participants

were asked to rate their relationships in terms of being very satisfied, satisfied, neutral,

unsatisfied, and very unsatisfied. The satisfaction participant break down is included in Table 1.

It is clear that almost half of the participants were very satisfied in terms of their relationship,

and just over 30% of responses were satisfied or very satisfied whereas only 3.37% of the total

participants seemed to be very unsatisfied, and just over 12% unsatisfied or very unsatisfied. At

the end of the survey, participants were asked to re-evaluate their level of satisfaction with their

relationship. Of the total number of participants who completed the survey (N= 87), the post

satisfaction participant break down can be seen in Table 1. On this post-measure there appears to

be an increase in satisfaction. More than half of the participants rated their satisfaction level at

the very satisfied category. Furthermore, this post satisfaction survey also increased in the very

unsatisfied category with 77.3% satisfied or very satisfied. Furthermore, there were no "very

unsatisfied" responses, and unsatisfied also reduced. Therefore, 0% of participants claimed to be

very unsatisfied where only 5.75% of participants reported being unsatisfied compared to the

8.99% pre-survey response. The neutrality response rate also reduced from its original responses.

Originally 8.99% of participants responded neutral in terms of satisfaction, whereas the post-

survey satisfaction level reduced this percentage to 6.90%. Note the 95% confidence interval of

the difference between pre and post survey satisfaction ratings is significant (see Table 2).

In order to analyze the data, two step wise regressions were completed. The first

regression was completed with the pre-survey responses with the dependent variable of the rank

of relationship satisfaction. The predictors entered included all of the relationship behaviors

computed: communication, undesirable actions, avoidant behaviors, support and praise,

affection, security, exclusion, deceit, and potential competitors. The first behavior controlled for

in this study is exclusion, which was the most significant predictor. It proved to be the most

significant predictor with the rate of regression (R=.279). After exclusion was controlled for,

support/praise was found to be significant (R= -.256), but no other categories were significantly

related to pre-survey satisfaction. The second step wise regression was completed with the post

survey response. After analyzing the data, a number of variables were controlled for, and found

to correlate with satisfaction. These included exclusion (R=.154), potential competitors

(R=.115), support/praise (R= -.204), and deceit (R=.099). Communication, undesirable actions,

avoidant behaviors, affection, and security were not significant predictors. The beta levels and

significance for the pre and post survey responses can be viewed in Tables 3 and 4. Note that, the

more aversive categories are negatively correlated with satisfaction, whereas the more positive

interaction categories are positively correlated with satisfaction.

Discussion

The primary goal of the current study is to discover which positive and aversive

behaviors promote a satisfying relationship. The positive behaviors that were looked at in this

study include communication, support and praise, security, and affection. In this study, the

clearest correlations following completion of the survey appear to be exclusion, deceit,

support/praise, and potential competitors. It seems clear that the absence of certain aversive

behaviors is a major factor in terms of whether a relationship will prove to be satisfying. The

findings of this study suggest that more of the predictive factors are negative, rather than

positive. Therefore, the participants suggested that if aversive predictors are present, then the

relationship will not be satisfying and that those who are most satisfied rarely experience these

events in their relationship. These predictors are most salient with satisfaction because if one is

being excluded from friends or family then that aversive behavior proves to terminate many

relationships. Deceit as an aversive behavior has an effect on making unsatisfying relationships

occur: If one is constantly being lied to or is hiding information from the other that proves to

enable a toxic environment which in return allows for an unsatisfactory relationship. The

potential competitor category in this study included questions such as "Does your partner know

about your other relationship?", "Do you have an intimate relationship other than with your

partner?", "Does the other person know more about you than your partner?", and "Does your

partner speak to other romantic competitors at work or in a social setting?" This category is also

classified as aversive, and can lead to unsatisfying relationships. The behaviors of support and

praise prove to be the most beneficial behaviors in terms of having a satisfying relationship,

which is consistent with all three theorists.

It is likely that these behaviors tend to produce satisfying relationships because both

people in the relationship are receiving both generic and idiosyncratic reinforcement from the

significant other (Dermer, 2006). The two reinforcers coincide with Dermer's three features of

loving: passion, caring, and friendship. Dermer's views are similar to Sternberg's Triangular

Theory of Love , which suggests that a satisfying relationship should include at least two

Features of Loving: intimacy, passion, and commitment. If a relationship only has one of these

features, there is a strong chance that the relationship will terminate. Mark Knapp's view,

however, would suggest that a relationship grows as it moves through different stages. These

stages must obviously involve both positive and negative behaviors in the relationship. What

Knapp's theory provides is a description of how the aversive events can lead up to the

terminating stages of a relationship.

Although each of these psychologists has their own theory, there is a crossover among

the three. Dermer's theory contains the element of friendship which connects to Knapp's

initiating stage. His theory also includes a caring component which has a relation to Knapp's

experimenting stage. Sternberg's theory contains an element of intimacy that corresponds to

Knapp's intensifying stage. Both Dermer and Sternberg state that there is an element of passion

in every relationship. This element would connect to the integrating stage of Knapp's theory. At

each of these stages and elements Knapp suggests that there is room for the termination of the

relationship at hand, until the bonding stage occurs. Lastly, Sternberg states that commitment is a

key feature in his Three Features of Loving. The commitment component corresponds to the

bonding stage in Knapp's theory. During this stage, there is a clear commitment between the two

individuals in the relationship in which the likelihood for termination is almost absent. It is

interesting to see how little of an effect communication plays on relationships. When thinking of

relationships one would think that people who talk with each other a lot tend to have a more

satisfying relationship because there are "no secrets". These processes only occur, however, if

there are available reinforcers and lack of aversives to increase desirable behavior on the part of

both people in the relationship.

The behaviors analyzed in this study can be integrated into each of the three theories. The

positive behaviors: support/praise, affection, and security are addressed in each of the theories.

On the other hand, the aversive behaviors: exclusion, deceit, potential competitors, avoidant

behaviors, and undesirable actions can be seen in Dermer's Theory. Dermer's theory discusses

the progressive stages and termination stages of a relationship. Although each of these theories

are normative and solely describe over-arching theories for satisfying relationships, the behaviors

exemplified in a relationship determine whether or not certain actions have an effect on the level

of satisfaction.

It also appears that after taking stock of one's relationship, that there is an increased

number of participants who rated themselves as more satisfied with their relationships. Thus it is

possible that when asked to think about each exhibited behavior in detail, as opposed to rating

their relationship without much thought, that they consider all of these factors in a more

deliberate way. One possible limitation of this study was a lack of "downtime" after the

questionnaire before the participants were allowed to re-evaluate their relationship for the post-

survey response. After being asked each of the targeted behavior questions, the participants may

have a new outlook on their relationship satisfaction, which may be the result of reactivity. In

order to determine whether that changed evaluation persists, future studies might have

participants complete a different performance task, such as a set of simple math problems, before

answering the post-survey satisfaction response.

It is also interesting to examine the three participants who did not complete the post-

survey satisfaction question. Although the demographics of these participants would not have

changed the outcome of this study, it is important to acknowledge that they did not complete the

entire questionnaire. The three participants were all female, ages 18, 26, and 48. Two of these

participants were white and the other was African American.

Although the purpose of this study is to study the behaviors experienced in a romantic

relationship, the findings can be applied to a variety of relationships. For example, a relationship

between two friends would not be successful or satisfying if one was excluding friend A from

seeing one of her childhood best friends. On the other hand, if the friend is very supportive and

encourages achievements and decisions that were made, then that friend relationship will likely

continue to grow and be successfully satisfying.

Also, this study allowed participants to think about their relationship from the views of

each of the behaviors: support and praise, communication, security, affection, deceit, exclusion,

undesirable actions, avoidant behaviors and potential competitors. When participants were asked

for their pre-survey satisfaction level, there is much grey area that could have skewed the results.

Therefore, it is possible that they don't consider all of the variables involved in relationships.

Instead they are centering on the current history which can affect how you feel, versus weighing

all of the pros and cons. If a couple had a major fight and then one of them took the survey, that

can sway their satisfaction level in that moment instead of looking at the relationship overall, the

participant may evaluate it based on the most recent experience. There is also the possibility that

completing this survey may increase the number of positive statements one makes about their

romantic partner, as well as lead to statements like "They aren't so bad after all" when they rate

the relationship as low on aversive categories. That being said, it would be interesting to give

participants the option to also write in the behaviors they think are the most important in assuring

a satisfying relationship.

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Table 1:

Pre and Post Survey Satisfaction Levels

Level of Satisfaction	Pre-Survey Satisfaction		Post-Survey Satisfaction	
Very Satisfied	43	(48.3%)	51	(58.6%)
Satisfied	28	(30.3%)	25	(28.7%)
Neutral	8	(8.99%)	6	(6.90%)
Unsatisfied	8	(8.99%)	5	(5.75%)
Very Unsatisfied	3	(3.37%)	0	(0%)
Total:	90		87	

Note: This table depicts the levels of relationship satisfaction and how it has increased from pre-test to a post test.

Table 2:

Pre and Post Survey Satisfaction Ratings

Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
	Lower	Upper	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
.27907	.06179	.49635	85	.012

Note: This table depicts the the paired samples t-test.

Table 3: Stepwise-Regression Results from a study predicting Relationship Satisfaction

Pre-Survey Response

Criterion (dependent) variable: Relationship Satisfaction	Beta	Sig	R Square
Predictor (independent) variables:			
Exclusion	.279	.071	.233
Support/Praise	-.256	.050	.376
Deceit	.145	.332	
Communication	.138	.255	
Undesirable Actions	.049	.675	
Avoidant	-.010	.933	
Affection	-.095	.391	
Security	-.154	.223	
Potential Competitors	.046	.696	

Note: This table displays regression and significant values from the pre-survey relationship satisfaction response.

Table 4: Stepwise-Regression Results from a study predicting Relationship Satisfaction

Post-Survey Response

Criterion (dependent) variable:

Relationship Satisfaction	Beta	Sig	R Squared
Predictor (independent) variables:			
Exclusion	.154	.002	.495
Potential Competitors	.115	.010	.608
Support/Praise	-.204	.006	.653
Deceit	.099	.009	.693
Communication	.040	.850	
Undesirable Actions	.111	.834	
Avoidant	-.033	.742	
Affection	-.077	.875	
Security	-.049	.673	

Note: This table displays regressions and significant values from the post-survey relationship satisfaction response.

Appendix A

Survey Questions

1. Do you agree to participate in this study?
   Yes, I agree to participate in this study
   No, I will not participate in this study
2. Gender
3. What is your age?
4. Ethnicity
5. Relationship Status
6. What type of relationship are you currently, or were involved, in during the past 6 months?
   In person (face to face)
   Online
   None
   Other (please specify)
7. How long has it been since your last relationship?
8. Please rate how often you engage in each of the following activities

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always
You and your partner text					
You and your partner talk on the phone How often is eye contact used?					
How often do you kiss in public?					
How often do you hold hands in public?					
How often do you cuddle in public (e.g. movies, park)?					

9. Please rate approximately how often you engage in the following activities

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the Time	Always
You compliment your partner					
You feel you speak with voice inflection					
Your partner uses a monotone voice					
You nod in conversation to let your partner know that you are listening					
Funny jokes between the two of you are made					
Mean or nasty jokes are made at the expensive of someone else					

10. Please rate approximately how often each of the following statements applies to your relationship

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the Time	Always

You
generally feel
physically
relaxed when
you are with
your partner

Your partner
is dependable

You are
dependable

Your partner
is on time or
appropriately
(for the
relationship
culture)
fashionably
late?

11. Please rate approximately how often you engage in each of the following activities

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the Time	Always
Hostile statements are made by you					
Hostile statements are made by your partner					
Screaming occurs in arguments					
Stalemates about solving problems/issues occur in your relationship					

Storming off
during
arguments

Hiding
information

How often do
you argue with
your partner

12. Please rate approximately how often you engage in each of the following activities

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the Time	Always
To what extent do you clear up a problem with your partner?					
How quickly do you usually resolve the problem					
Are you comfortable with ambiguous or unresolved outcomes?					
Do you speak calmly when situations arise?					

13. Please rate approximately how often you engage in each of the following activities.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the Time	Always
Responding is greater or more intense than what the situation requires					
Past events or situations that have already been solved are brought up					
You always have to be right when situations arise					
How often are you wrong when situations arise					
Are you kindly assertive?					
Do you deal with problems or head them off as they arise					

14. Please rate approximately how often you engage in each of the following activities.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the Time	Always
Sarcastic comments are made regardless of the situation					
Your partner impulsively interrupts you					
I am avoidant in certain relationship situations					
How often do you use substances (i.e. drugs or alcohol) to increase confidence in possible sexual encounters?					

15. Please rate approximately how often you engage in each of the following activities

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the Time	Always
How often does your partner speak to other perceived romantic competitors in a social setting?					
How often does your partner speak to other perceived romantic competitors in a work setting?					

16. Are you ever jealous of these situations?
    Yes
    No

17. Please rate approximately how often you engage in the following activities

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the Time	Always
To what extent does your partner keep you away from friends or family?					
Do you feel unsupported by your partner in the decisions that you have made?					
To what extent do you think your partner actively deceives you?					
Does your partner ever belittle you due to your achievements?					
Does your partner ever ignore you because of your achievements?					
Does your partner					

celebrate your
achievements?

Do you ever
secretly keep
"data" or log
information to
use later in an
argument?

18. Please rate approximately how often you engage in each of the following activities

	Yes	No
Do you have an intimate relationship with someone other than your romantic partner?		
Do you tell this person things you wouldn't tell your romantic partner?		
Does your partner know about this relationship?		

19. Does your partner's behavior change dramatically when they:

	Yes	No	Not Applicable
Drink alcohol			
Use any other legal or illegal drugs			

Appendix B

Survey Questions Organized by Behavior Category

Communication

You and your partner text
You and your partner talk on the phone
How often is eye contact used
You compliment your partner
You feel you speak with voice inflection
Your partner uses a monotone voice
You nod in conversation to let your partner know that you are listening
Funny jokes between the two of you are made
Mean or nasty jokes are made at the expense of someone else
To what extent do you clear up a problem with your partner?
How quickly do you usually resolve the problem?
Do you speak calmly when situations arise?
Are you kindly assertive?
Do you deal with problems or head them off as they arise?
Sarcastic comments are made regardless of the situation

Affection

How often do you kiss in public?
How often do you hug in public?
How often do you hold hands in public?
How often do you cuddle in public (e.g. movies, park)?

Avoidant

I am avoidant in certain relationship situations
Are you comfortable with ambiguous or not resolved problems?

Security

You generally feel physically relaxed when you are with your partner?
Your partner is dependable
You are dependable
Your partner is on time or appropriately (for the relationship culture) fashionably late?

Potential Competitors

How often does your partner speak to other perceived romantic competitors in a work setting?
How often does your partner speak to other perceived romantic competitors in a social setting?
Are you ever jealous of these situations?
Do you have an intimate relationship with someone other than your romantic partner?
Do you tell this person things you wouldn't tell your romantic partner?
Does your partner know about this relationship?

Exclusion

To what extent does your partner keep you away from your friends or family?
Do you feel unsupported by your partner in the decisions that you have made?
Does your partner ever ignore you because of certain achievements?

Deceit

To what extent do you think your partner actively deceives you?
To what extent do you think your partner passively deceives you?
Does your partner ever belittle you due to your achievements?
Do you ever secretly keep "data" or log information to use later in an argument?

Support/Praise

Does your partner celebrate your achievements?

Undesirable Actions

Hostile statements are made by you
Hostile statements are made by your partner
Screaming occurs in arguments
Stalemates about solving problems/issues occur in your relationship
Storming off during arguments
Hiding information
How often do you argue with your partner?
Responding is greater, or more intense, than what a situation requires
Past events or situations that have already been solved are brought up?
You always have to be right when situations arise?
How often are you wrong when situations arise?
Your partner impulsively interrupts you
How often do you use substances (e.g. alcohol) to increase confidence in possible sexual encounters?
Does your partner's behavior change dramatically when they drink alcohol?

Does your partner's behavior change dramatically when they use any other legal or illegal drugs?