TRANSITION INTO MARRIAGE: A QUANTITATIVE TEST OF THE
RELATIONAL TURBULENCE THEORY

BY

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my loving husband. You and the relationship we have built together are what inspires me to study connection, maintenance, and relational health. You give me the hope I need to do this kind of work. Thank you for being such a calm and reassuring presence during this time. Thank you for acknowledging the difference that this scholarship is trying to make. Thank you for loving me well. Being your partner truly is the joy of my life. This is for you, Sage!
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Abstract

This study explores the relationships between cohabitation, relational uncertainty variables, turbulence, construal levels, and dyadic synchrony among participants who have been married for one year or less. Research questions were posed to explore the relationships between cohabitation, relational uncertainty, and turbulence. Additionally, structural equation modeling was used to analyze the mediating effects turbulence has on uncertainty and RTT outcome variables (i.e., negative construals and dyadic synchrony). Two measurement instruments were developed in order to test previously unstudied outcome variables within relational turbulence theory. A survey design was employed to investigate these concepts. In order to capture this specific sample, the online survey was administered ($N = 234$) through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. Results indicated that cohabitation prior to marriage was associated with both higher degrees of relational uncertainty and turbulence. Additionally, SEM results revealed that turbulence mediates the relationships between 1) relational uncertainty and negative construals and 2) relational uncertainty and decreased dyadic synchronization. Sex differences are discussed, implications for transition into marriage are explored, and suggestions for future research are offered.
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

As recent divorce statistics show, maintaining a satisfying romantic relationship is an uphill battle for most couples (Stassen & Bates, 2010). Fortunately, much research has not only given rise to effective therapies for distressed couples (e.g., Baucom, Hahlweg, & Kuschel, 2003; Greenberg & Johnson, 1988; Snyder & Wills, 1989), but also to early prevention strategies for at-risk and pre-marital couples (Guerney, 1977; Markman, Floyd, Stanley, & Storaasli, 1988). Though the aforementioned research is invaluable to the study of relationship enhancement, maintenance, and repair, little is known regarding how life transitions impact the norms and satisfaction of relationships, specifically transition into marriage. As newlyweds make this transition, it is likely that they will experience relational challenges. Further investigation into this area presents a unique opportunity to build on the limited body of research that investigates the dynamics of transitioning couples.

Changes to the relational environment, e.g., transition into marriage, are inevitable in long lasting relationships. According to the relational turbulence theory, transitions prompt feelings of uncertainty that lead to perceptions of the relationship as chaotic or unstable, known as relational turbulence (Solomon, Knobloch, Theiss & McLaren, 2016). As such, these transitions cause shifts in relational norms which are followed by intense reactions to the relationship circumstances (Solomon & Theiss, 2008; Solomon & Weber & Steuber, 2010). Several studies have been conducted applying the relational turbulence model to significant transition periods, including navigating empty-nesting (Nagy & Theiss, 2013), managing infertility (Steuber & Solomon, 2008), coping
with spousal illness (Weber & Solomon, 2008), and the reintegrating of military couples following deployment (Knobloch & Theiss, 2012). Never has research explored, however, relational turbulence and its components within the context of the transition into marriage.

Relational turbulence model (RTM) has now evolved into the relational turbulence theory (RTT; Solomon, Knobloch, Theiss, McLaren, 2016). RTT has extended RTM by identifying relational parameters, underlying theoretical processes, and effects. More specifically, RTT addresses how turbulence can affect the perspective one has for his/her partner and overall relationship by way of construal, or, predictions, contemplations, or imaginations, one has regarding the relationship. RTT also asserts that turbulence can disrupt dyadic synchrony, or coordination, within romantic relationships. These outcomes of turbulence, however, have not yet been operationalized within the context of RTT.

Accordingly, this thesis explored how newlyweds navigate relational uncertainty and turbulence. More specifically, the goals of this thesis were to 1) apply the newly developed relational turbulence theory to a previously unexplored context and 2) develop preliminary instruments to test aspects of the new concepts forwarded by the theory. Thus, this study not only gives specific insight into newlyweds’ experiences of navigating uncertainty and turbulence, but also contributes theoretically by laying a foundation for other scholars to continue developing RTT. To begin, I describe the adjustments and difficulties facing newlyweds in today’s society and then apply relational turbulence theory to the context of newlyweds to examine how couples manage
the potentially turbulent transition to marriage in ways that have implications for relationship satisfaction and wellbeing.
CHAPTER 2

Rationale

Although individuals have been getting married for centuries, the transition to marriage is more complex than ever before. Moreover, in today’s society, there have been many changes in cultural and societal norms surrounding family formation and the trajectories of romantic relationships that add additional challenges for newlyweds. While some couples choose not to cohabit prior to marriage, more couples live together prior to marriage than ever before (Priem, 2012). Accordingly, some aspects of the transition to marriage, such as addressing unrealistic expectations and the need to manage changing identities are constant for all newlyweds. Other aspects of the transition, however, vary based on whether or not couples have lived together prior to marriage or not. For those who do not cohabit prior to marriage they must physically adjust to sharing a space and new daily schedules, and adapt behaviors so that individuals can continue to reach their daily goals. Newlyweds who cohabit prior to marriage may have a unique challenge of coping with unaddressed uncertainty left over from the cohabitation transition. Accordingly, regardless of relationship status prior to marriage, the transition to marriage is a time in which couples must navigate a multitude of adjustments that may create feelings of instability and uncertainty.

One of the issues that newlywed couples face is overly idealistic or unrealistic expectations for what marriage will be like. For example, Hall and Adams (2011) interviewed 21 contemporary couples and found that couples who had been married for less than a year experienced unexpected adjustments to the “little things” or day-to-day elements of being married: competing loyalties with families and friends, letdowns,
serious responsibilities, relationship roles, and sex. In part, couples’ expectations of marriage when compared to what marriage was actually like, gave way to difficulty adjusting to marriage. Additionally, unrealistic/dysfunctional expectations correlate with marital-harming behaviors and dissatisfaction (Baucom et al., 1996; Bradbury & Fincham, 1993). Moreover, when contradictions between real and ideal expectations become apparent in the marital relationship, distress ensues (Huston, et al., 2001).

Another issue that newlyweds face is identity challenges, including shifting how they view themselves as part of the marital dyad and coping with loss of independence as the couple identity is reinforced. Transitional periods, generally, increase exploration of identity and changes in identity (Anthis, 2002). Regarding marriage specifically, Soulsby and Bennett (2015) explored the impact marriage and cohabitation had on individual identities. Following 38 in-depth interviews with married couples ($n = 30$) and cohabitating couples ($n = 8$), participants described an identity shift from “I” to “we” which was “associated with social and personal changes in how they understood themselves” (p. 356). For example, following marriage, participants felt that they had to not only present themselves differently (more refined and respectable) in social settings but also felt that their social networks expected them to socialize differently post-nuptials. Regarding personal changes to identity, participants felt feelings of depersonalization (Lopata, 1973), meaning that they perceive an association between marriage and a loss of self and independence as they feel they are no longer seen as individuals. Taken together, then, the research highlights how the transition to marriage specifically creates new needs to re-evaluate and potential re-define individual and couple identities.
Another potentially problematic aspect of the transition to marriage is adapting to living together or cohabiting (see Priem & Surra, 2012). As non-cohabitating newlyweds enter marriage, each partner adjusts to the other’s way of living. When individuals lived separately they did not have to attend to the needs, schedules, or goals of another; however, when couples move in together, they need to mesh their own needs, schedules, and goals onto those of their partner. Individuals must negotiate bathroom behaviors, hygiene, and cleanliness standards, and navigate schedules. Moreover, they must be content with the joining of two potentially different worldviews, values, and personality characteristics that did not surface prior to marriage. As such, the physical and emotional adjustments for couples who did not previously cohabit create the potential for conflict and feelings of uneasiness or uncertainty that were not present prior to living together (Priem & Solomon, 2015).

While couples who cohabit prior to marriage have navigated creating interdependent daily schedules and rules for living together effectively, they also have the potential to experience a unique source of turbulence based on the relational development trajectory they chose. Unlike engagement and marriage, which have clear societal norms for relational commitment, the transition to cohabitation does not have clearly understood or agreed upon meaning for each individual’s commitment to the relationship (Cherlin, 2004, Soons & Kalmijn, 2009). Because the transition doesn’t have an inherent meaning for commitment, unengaged cohabiters may struggle with ambiguity surrounding the commitment and future of the relationship and competing visions for the future, especially when issues of commitment and relationship trajectory are not discussed (Steuber, Priem, Scharp, & Thomas, 2014). Although for some couples, becoming
engaged becomes a sign of commitment to the relationship that resolves uncertainty and differing expectations, research shows that some couples “slide” into cohabitation without discussing what the transition means to the relationship (Priem & Surra, 2012). These couples become susceptible to inertia, wherein they continue to go through the relational development stages of engagement and marriage because the costs of leaving the relationship are too high (i.e. constant commitment) rather than because they truly want to spend their life with their romantic partner (i.e. dedication commitment) (Booth & Brown, 1996). Accordingly, couples who cohabit prior to marriage may have worked out some of the physical transition issues, but may have unique complications based on unresolved uncertainty about the relationship, feelings of coercion, and a lack of dedication traditionally expected in marriage. Thus, the facets of their cohabiting relationship that made it unstable may carry over to the marriage, causing marital challenges at the onset and leading couples on a rocky and unstable path.

**Relational Turbulence Theory and the Transition to Marriage**

To this point, I have argued that regardless of relationship status prior to marriage, newlywed couples must navigate changes that if done effectively will ultimately lead to a stable and satisfying marriage, but if handled ineffectively will lead to an unstable and dissatisfying marriage. Although research has illustrated the myriad adjustments newlyweds must navigate, research to date has not examined theoretical mechanisms that explain how couples can successfully navigate the transition. Accordingly, in the following section, I forward relational turbulence theory as a way of understanding how couples navigate this crucial phase of marital relationships. I conclude the section overviewing the model of relational turbulence in newlyweds that I will test.
The relational turbulence theory is a perspective on communication in personal relationships that highlights how relationship transitions polarize emotions and cognitive appraisals and disrupt the exchange of messages between partners (Solomon and Knobloch, 2004). In general, the theory describes relational turbulence as a component of transitions that polarize emotions and cognitive appraisals and disrupt the exchange of messages between partners (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004). According to the theory, relational turbulence is influenced by two relationship qualities that emerge or are more prominent during times of transition, which complicate communication between partners. Relational uncertainty refers to the uncertainty about the relationship that partners feel as a result of the transition. Influence deals with how partners help or interfere with the completion of daily routines and goals. Influence can occur as interference from a partner, where the accomplishment of goals and routines is made more difficult or hindered by the partner or through facilitation from a partner, where a partner's involvement in activities enhances outcomes (Knobloch & Solomon, 2004). Finally, the theory explains how turbulence can negatively manifest itself in romantic relationships and lead to either relational hardship or relational resilience, making it an ideal theoretical foundation for understanding how newlyweds navigate the transition to marriage. In the following sections, I explore the concepts of relational uncertainty, relational turbulence, and the outcomes of relational turbulence in the context of newlyweds in turn.

**Relational Uncertainty**

Knobloch and Solomon’s construct of relational uncertainty was developed in order to refer to the degree of confidence people have in their perceptions of involvement in close relationships (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). Furthermore, relational uncertainty
encompasses three sources of ambiguity: self uncertainty, partner uncertainty, and relationship uncertainty. Self-uncertainty refers to the doubts people have regarding their own involvement in the relationship; partner uncertainty refers to the doubts people have about their partner’s involvement in the relationship; and relationship uncertainty refers to the uncertainty an individual experiences regarding the overall status of the relationship such as: changing of relational goals and behaviors as a result of the transition (1999). Previous research has shown how relational uncertainty heightens emotional reactivity, therefore sparking more negative emotions such as jealousy, decreased trust, and greater cognitive reactivity (Dainton & Aylor, 2001). This, in turn, makes feelings of irritations more severe, causing greater perceptions of turmoil, and inducing feelings of a disinterested and unsupportive social network, and leads to indirect communication behaviors and avoidance of specific relationship issues (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004; Littlejohn & Foss, 2009).

To the extent that newlyweds have to cope with a multitude of adjustments, it is logical to assume that they would also experience heightened relational uncertainty. Previous research, however, has yet to empirically test the presence of relational uncertainty in newlyweds. Furthermore, it is unclear whether newlyweds who cohabit differ in their experience of relational uncertainty than those who do not cohabit. Accordingly, I forward the following research questions regarding relational uncertainty:

**RQ 1:** Do newlyweds who have not cohabited before marriage experience increased relational uncertainty than do newlyweds who did cohabit before marriage?
Relational Turbulence

Relational uncertainty is theorized to heighten relational turbulence. Turbulence is “the global and persistent evaluation of the relationship as tumultuous, unsteady, fragile, chaotic that arises from the accumulation of specific episodes” (Solomon et al., 2016, p. 12). Consistent perceptions of the relationship as turbulent can lead to negative views of the event and one’s relational partner. Though turbulent events can lead to greater intimacy and closeness between couples, negative emotions, perceptions, and interference are the most common reactions. This is significant because as romantic partners, newlyweds specifically, continue to view the event as turbulent, the more likely the partners will become exhausted with the relationship leading to greater relationship fragility. Likened to how fluctuations in relationship satisfaction lead to relationship instability, as partners continue to reflect on the event as a turbulent experience, they begin to characterize the relationship itself as in flux, chaotic, and tumultuous.

**RQ 2:** Do newlyweds who have not cohabited before marriage experience more relational turbulence than couples who did cohabit before marriage?

Construals and Dyadic Synchronization

Some of the most profound additions of relational turbulence theory include specific theoretical processes that explain the effects of relational turbulence on relationships. The first theoretical process is focused on construals or units that index how individuals perceive phenomena (Solomon et al., 2016). Construal level theory (CLT) is an account of how psychological distance influences individuals’ thoughts and behavior. More specifically, Trope, Liberman, and Wakslak, 2007 state that:
CLT assumes that people mentally construe (predict, contemplate, remember or imagine) objects that are psychologically near in terms of low-level, detailed, and contextualized features, whereas at a distance they construe the same objects or events in terms of high-level, abstract, and stable characteristics. Research has shown that different dimensions of psychological distance affect mental construal and that these construals, in turn, guide prediction, evaluation, and behavior. (p. 1)

Psychological distance increases the tendency to conceptualize phenomena in abstract, schematic, and organized ways. “Greater psychological distance is linked to a focus on motives rather than means, more creativity, and less concerns about negative circumstances that might develop in the future” (p.13). It is important to note that though construal level theory is based on psychological distance (present vs. future) at its foundation, CLT is very complex and is characterized by different dimensions and nuanced effects of those dimensions. For the purposes of this study, only the foundational components (present vs. future psychological distance) and their associations with RTT were examined.

In relation to RTT, individuals who see their relationship as turbulent are unable to see through the chaos, which leaves them unable to see past their current circumstances. By constantly focusing on the turbulent relationship, psychological distance is decreased, and therefore, affects cognitive construals. As such, if newlyweds are experiencing turbulence, negative construals of their partner and the situation may prevent them from being able to “see past the horizon” and be optimistic about the future of the relationship. For the purposes of this project, constuals characterized by shortened psychological distance or present thinking, will be labeled as “negative” consturals.
The second process through which relational turbulence affects relational, individual, and social outcomes is dyadic synchrony. Dyadic synchrony refers to the “degree of coordination between individuals engaged in an interaction” (Harrist & Waught, 2002, p. 14). Synchronous interactions between partners include fluid speaking exchanges between partners, maintaining topic coherence, and able adjustment of conversational behaviors (e.g., speech rate, volume, word choice, etc.). Though partners with strong dyadic synchrony may be unaware of the phenomenon, continuous lack of coordination and disruption (i.e. asynchrony) likely affects relational partners in a negative way. In fact, RTT suggests that a global sense of chaos in the relationship (i.e., turbulence) undermines dyadic synchrony and “fractures the very structure of interaction between partners” (Solomon et al., 2016, p.14). As such, construal level, in combination with dyadic asynchrony, may inhibit newlyweds’ ability to offer sensitive and responsive support, and their ability to receive comfort from enacted support. These theoretical process and assumptions, however, have not been tested empirically.

A Model of Relational Turbulence in Newlyweds

As previously discussed, the components of the relational turbulence theory map onto the experience of newlyweds’ transition to marriage in ways that provide a theoretical examination of how couples navigate the transition (see Figure 1). Consistent with the theory, I posit a model in which self and partner uncertainty predict relationship uncertainty, which in turn predicts relational turbulence (H1). Recall that turbulence may leave relational partners unable to see past the current relational chaos and inhibit their ability to coordinate and interact well with each other. Therefore, the model predicts that relational turbulence is associated with more negative construals (H2) and decreased
dyadic synchrony (H3). I tested the hypothesized associations using structural equation modeling, which was conducted separate from the tests of the research questions posed.

Figure 1. Hypothesized Associations between Relational Uncertainty, Turbulence, and Outcome Variables
CHAPTER 3

Method

The investigation is part of a larger study exploring relational turbulence theory within the context of transition into marriage. A survey was administered to a sample of newlyweds who have been married for no longer than one year. The questionnaire asked about shifted norms as a result of marriage, relational uncertainty, turbulence, and relationship satisfaction, construals and dyadic synchronization.

Participants

Amazon's Mechanical Turk website (MTurk; www.mturk.com) was used as a recruitment tool. The sample included 400 respondents; however, participants who submitted incomplete surveys, double responded, and/or failed to pass the control questions (‘If you are a newlywed, please answer this question with 5 ‘Strongly Agree’.) were excluded from the study. After reviewing each applicant against the exclusionary criteria, the final sample included 234 participants (147 males, 86 females, and one unidentified participant) with ages ranging from 19 to 72 years ($M = 31.20, SD = 7.57$). Regarding the ethnic breakdown of the sample, 46% responded as being Caucasian, 31% Asian/Pacific islander, 11% African American, and 9% Hispanic/Latino. Additionally, the sexual orientation breakdown of the sample included: 183 (79%) straight participants, 44 (18%) bisexual participants, and 7 (3%) gay participants.

Furthermore, 179 respondents (77%) reported that they had cohabited with their partner prior to getting married. Finally, 89 participants (38%) had reported that they have one or more children currently living in the home during this first year into their
marriage. Finally, participants were asked 7 questions on a 5 point Likert scale pertaining to relationship satisfaction. Results indicated that on average, respondents have somewhat high relationship satisfaction ($M = 4.02, SD = .69$).

**Procedures**

Following IRB approval, data were collected by means of online self-report questionnaires, hosted by the online survey platform Qualtrics. Qualtrics provided an anonymous link which was then posted onto Amazon’s MTurk. Upon clicking the link, participants first read the informed consent page, assuring anonymity and confidentiality of data processing, explaining participant eligibility and exclusionary criteria, and emphasizing the voluntary nature of participation. Participants were specifically asked not to fill in the questionnaire together with their partner. Once the participant had completed the survey, they were provided with a generated code that would be used to verify their participation to the researcher. Once the researcher reviewed each submission, participants who met exclusionary criteria were compensated with one dollar for completing the survey.

**Measures**

**Relational Uncertainty.** Solomon’s and Brisini’s (2017) updated measure of relational uncertainty was used to assess the participants’ self, partner, and relationship uncertainty ($M = 2.96, SD = 1.52, \alpha = .98$). Participants reported their level of agreement with statements that followed the questions: “I sometimes wonder,” “I am sometimes unsure,” or “I sometimes question… ?” Higher scores indicated a greater tendency to experience relational uncertainty. Responses were recorded on a 6-point Likert-type
scale (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree). Additionally, distinct scales were used to measure partner uncertainty ($M = 2.99, SD = 1.60, \alpha = .97$), self uncertainty ($M = 2.87, SD = 1.53, \alpha = .95$), and relationship uncertainty ($M = 3.01, SD = 1.54, \alpha = .93$) as these concepts not only comprise relational uncertainty but are also seen as distinct.

**Relational Turbulence.** To measure relational turbulence, participants responded to several 7-point semantic differential scales that are based on the self-report items from Knobloch (2007) and used by McLaren et al. (2012). Specially, respondents completed nine questions that asked where their relationship falls along dimensions that indicate turbulence. Scale anchors include: exciting-boring, stable-chaotic, calm–turbulent, exhilarating-mundane, and tumultuous–running smoothly, stimulating-dull, thrilling–uneventful, predictable-unpredictable, and peaceful–stressful. The closer one’s response matches the anchor to the right, the more turbulence is indicated ($M = 2.95, SD = 1.07, \alpha = .80$).

**Construals.** Given that construal levels have never been studied within the context of relational turbulence theory, a self-report measure was developed by the researcher in order to test this new concept within RTT. The 9 item scale included questions such as: “I spend a lot of time thinking about today,” “My mind is filled with things that I need to do today,” “I’m worried about the present,” “I can only focus on what’s happening now,” “I’m excited about the future,” “Even when things are difficult, I am hopeful about the future,” “My spouse and I often talk about our future together,” “Our best conversations are when we talk about today.” Responses were recorded on a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). The closer one’s response was to the right
indicated more negative constuals. Items pertaining to the future were reverse-coded ($M = 3.33$, $SD = .60$, $\alpha = .69$).

Additionally, participants were asked to report the percent of time they spent thinking/talking about the future with partner vs things going on in the present. Responses accounted for 100% of time spent. Ex: “Please indicate the percent of time you spend talking about the future with your partner.” “Please indicate the percent of time you spend talking about the present state of your marriage with your partner.” Results showed that, on average, people spend as much time thinking about the present ($M = 49.00$, $SD = 17.68$) as they do thinking about the future ($M = 51.00$, $SD = 17.68$).

**Dyadic Synchrony.** Generally, dyadic synchrony would be observed in conversation but there are no studies measuring dyadic synchrony. When couples are out of sync, they have difficulty conversing and/or conversations seem more difficult. As such, in addition to 9 unique items designed by the researcher, Knobloch and Solomon’s (2005) ease of conversation scale was adapted and used as a proxy ($M = 4.48$, $SD = .81$, $\alpha = .89$). The original 4 scale items included the following: “I feel uncomfortable when having a conversation with my spouse,” “I am not able to express myself fully when I am having conversations with my spouse,” “I find it easy to have conversations with my spouse,” and “I am able to be myself when I am having a conversation with my spouse.”

The 9 additional items focused on ease of interaction. Items include: “Conversations with my spouse don’t flow easily,” “Overall, conversations with my spouse are fluid,” “My spouse and I have difficulty staying on topic during our conversations,” “I tend to talk faster than my spouse during our conversations,” and “Overall, my spouse and I are able to easily take turns speaking during our
conversations,” “The current ease of our conversations is consistent with past conversations,” “The level of difficulty in our conversations has not changed over time,” “I have always felt comfortable when having a conversation with my partner,” “I found it more difficult to be myself when having a conversation with my partner now that we are married.” Responses were recorded on a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree).
CHAPTER 4

Results

Preliminary Results

To test for any potential sex differences, I first conducted a series of independent samples $t$-tests comparing mean scores of male and female participants on self-uncertainty, partner uncertainty, relationship uncertainty, and composite relational uncertainty. Results indicated that men experience more self, partner, relationship, and relational uncertainty than do women (see Table 1). Additionally, results from independent samples $t$-tests also found that women appeared to have slightly greater relationship satisfaction ($M = 4.13, SD = .76$) than did men ($M = 3.94, SD = .63$), $t(231) = -2.44, p = .02, r = .16$). Finally, one of the more interesting results was found regarding the novel variable of dyadic synchrony. Results showed that women perceived slightly greater dyadic synchrony ($M = 4.64, SD = .87$) than did men ($M = 4.39, SD = .76$), $t(231) = -2.32, p = .02, r = .15$). There were no significant sex differences found for turbulence or construals.

Table 1

Results of $t$-test and Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gender</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
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<td>$n$</td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>$t$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Uncertainty</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>4.34***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Uncertainty</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>3.72***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Uncertainty</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>4.06***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Composite Relational Uncertainty  3.27  1.51  147  2.43  1.42  86  4.14***  231
Dyadic Synchrony  4.39  .76  147  4.64  .87  86  -2.32*  231
Relationship Satisfaction  3.94  .63  147  4.13  .76  86  -2.44*  231

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p<.001

Bivariate correlations were used to test for significant relationships among test variables (see Table 2). Strong significant relationships were found among all study variables. Some of the more interesting findings include the relationship between negative construals, dyadic synchrony and their associations with other variables. Results indicate that negative construal level is highly associated with all uncertainty variables and turbulence, while correlating negatively with dyadic synchrony and satisfaction.

Conversely, dyadic synchrony negatively correlates with uncertainty variables and turbulence while maintaining a positive association with relationship satisfaction.

Table 2
Correlations among Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>V1</th>
<th>V2</th>
<th>V3</th>
<th>V4</th>
<th>V5</th>
<th>V6</th>
<th>V7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V1: Negative Construals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V2: Dyadic Synchrony</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.54**</td>
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**p < 0.01
Substantive Analysis

**Cohabitation Research Questions.** RQ1 explored the relationship between cohabitation and relational uncertainty; more specifically, do newlyweds who have not cohabited before marriage experience increased relational uncertainty than do newlyweds who did cohabit before marriage. Independent samples t tests were conducted for each component of relational uncertainty, i.e., self, partner, relationship, as well as the composite relational uncertainty. Results indicated that cohabitation status did influence partner uncertainty (noncohabitors $M = 2.63$, $SD = 1.43$, (cohabitors $M = 3.01$, $SD = 1.64$), $t(231) = 2.04$, $p = .04$, $r = .13$), self uncertainty (noncohabitors $M = 2.45$, $SD = 1.37$, (cohabitors $M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.56$), $t(231) = 2.33$, $p = .01$, $r = .15$), and composite relational uncertainty, (noncohabitors $M = 2.61$, $SD = 1.34$; cohabitors $M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.56$), $t(231) = 2.13$, $p = .04$, $r = .14$). Unlike the other forms of uncertainty, there were no significant differences in relationship uncertainty, specifically, for cohabitors and noncohabitors. As such, results indicated that there is a relationship between cohabitation and increased uncertainty.

RQ2 explored the relationship between cohabitation and turbulence; specifically, do newlyweds who have not cohabited before marriage experience more relational turbulence than couples who did cohabit before marriage? Results from an independent samples t test indicated that couples who choose not to cohabitate before marriage experienced less relational turbulence ($M = 2.54$, $SD$, 1.04) than couples who did ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.56$, $t(231) = 3.36$, $p = .00$, $r = .22$). As such, results indicate that there is a relationship between cohabitation and increased relational turbulence.
**Structural Equation Modeling.** I used structural equation modeling (AMOS 25) to assess the model presented in Figure 2. In specifying this model, I created parcels as single-item indicators of the latent variables and set the error variances of the parcels to \((1 - \alpha)/(\sigma^2)\) to account for the measurement error of our scales (Bollen, 1989). My standards for goodness of fit were \(\chi^2/df\) less than 3.00, comparative fit index (CFI) greater than 0.90, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) less than 0.10, and normed fit index (NFI) greater than 0.90 (as per Browne, & Cudeck, 1993; Kline, 1998).

The original model indices showed that there was room for improvement within the model. Therefore, I followed the modification indices and added paths until arriving at an acceptable model fit. First, I added a path from relational uncertainty to dyadic synchronization: \(\chi^2/df = 24.80, \text{CFI} = .88, \text{RMSEA} = 0.32, \text{NFI} = 0.894\). Second, I added a path from relational uncertainty to negative construals, which produced a model fit that was a good fit for the data, \(\chi^2/df = .00, \text{CFI} =1.00 , \text{RMSEA} = .00 , \text{NFI} = 1.00\).

As a final step, I compared the model in which path coefficients for men and women were unconstrained to a model in which all of the path coefficients were constrained to be equal. The unconstrained model fit the data better than the constrained model \((\Delta \chi^2 = 15.21, \Delta df = 8, p < .05)\), reinforcing the sex differences found in the preliminary analyses. Based on an evaluation of the differences in path coefficients for men and women, the paths from relational uncertainty to relational turbulence and from turbulence to negative construals. The resulting model fit the data well.

Results indicate that all 5 paths in the model are statistically significant predictors (see Figure 2). As predicted, relational uncertainty predicts relational turbulence. Turbulence was associated with an increase in negative construals, while also, negatively
predicting deceased dyadic synchronization. To review, negative construals suggest that a partner’s psychological distance is shortened and they cannot see past their current circumstances, which are turbulent in this case. Meanwhile, dyadic synchrony refers to the “degree of coordination between individuals engaged in an interaction” (Harrist & Waught, 2002, p. 14). Consistent with the theory, results showed that turbulence not only mediates the relationship between relational uncertainty and fixation on the present but also decreased synchrony between partners. Finally, these results suggest that turbulence is manifest in the intensity of RTT outcome variables but that relational uncertainty can also have a direct effect on construal level and dyadic synchronization.
Figure 2. The associations between uncertainty, turbulence, and RTT outcomes

Note: $N = 234$.

*p < .05, ***p < .001.
CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The goals of this study were to: 1) apply the newly developed relational turbulence theory to a previously unexplored context; 2) develop preliminary instruments to test aspects of the new concepts forwarded by the theory; and 3) conduct a recent investigation of the understudied phenomena of transitioning into marriage. To begin, I conducted a survey via Amazon’s MTurk to capture my desired sample of newlyweds. Then, through tests of difference, I was able to draw conclusions about the effects of cohabiting during the newlywed transition. Additionally, structural equation modeling enabled me to posit previously untested relationships based on my SEM model for how RTT variables interact. The following discussion begins with an exploration of my findings regarding cohabitation in relation to components to RTT, then moves to examining the implications of the associations within my SEM model, and finally addresses study limitations and suggestions for future research.

Cohabitation, Relational Uncertainty, and Relational Turbulence

While some couples choose to live separately before marriage, more couples are living together prior to marriage than ever before (Priem, 2012). Extant research has shown the transition to cohabitation does not have clearly understood or agreed upon meanings for each individual’s commitment to the relationship (Cherlin, 2004, Soons & Kalmijn, 2009). As such, cohabiters may struggle with ambiguity surrounding the commitment and future of the relationship and competing visions for the future, especially when issues of commitment and relationship trajectory are not discussed.
Cohabitation also may present challenges for couples who get engaged post moving in together because of the possibility of inertia, wherein they continue to go through the relational development stages of engagement and marriage because the costs of leaving the relationship are too high (i.e. constant commitment) rather than because they truly want to spend their life with their romantic partner (i.e. dedication commitment; Booth & Brown, 1996).

Accordingly, the likelihood and/or extent of unresolved uncertainty within the relationship were worth exploring given the negative effects relational uncertainty and turbulence can have on a relationship. Moreover, given the extent to which newlyweds have to cope with a multitude of adjustments, it was logical to assume that they would also experience heightened relational uncertainty. Previous research, however, had not yet empirically tested the presence of relational uncertainty in newlyweds. Results (RQ1 and RQ2) revealed that newlyweds who lived together prior to marriage experienced increased relational uncertainty (self, partner, relationship) and turbulence than participants who did not cohabit prior to marriage.

Not only are these findings significant given the lack of research exploring relational uncertainty and turbulence in newlyweds, but more importantly, because they reveal empirical evidence that cohabitation can lead to relational partners feeling more uncertain about themselves, their spouses, and their overall commitment to the marriage. Moreover, it seems that this uncertainty does not dissipate or resolve, rather, it leads to relational turbulence which is consistent with previous findings (see Solomon & Knobloch, 1999, 2004; Knobloch & Solomon, 2002; Solomon, Weber, & Steuber, 2010).
Turbulence can lead partners to negatively view their transitions (i.e. marriage) and their relational partner. As spouses continue to reflect on the event as a turbulent experience, they begin to characterize the relationship itself as in flux, chaotic, and tumultuous, leading to greater relationship instability. Given that cohabitation seems to be a contributor of turbulence and uncertainty, which can lead to relationship dissolution, prospective newlyweds could use this information when weighing the potential long-term costs and rewards of living together before marriage.

A Model of Relational Turbulence in Newlyweds

Some of the most profound additions of relational turbulence theory include specific theoretical processes that explain the effects relational turbulence can have on relationships. At the theoretical level, this study expands previous research on the RTT in several ways. First, by developing an instrument for constual level, the initial groundwork for learning how to operationalize this previously unexplored variable was forwarded. Regarding the alpha score (.69), there is room to improve the accuracy and consistency of the proposed scale. Given that the alpha was still within the acceptable range, however, outcomes resulting from the scale can still be assumed as legitimate (Wrench, Thomas-Maddox, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2016). Second, by combining Knobloch and Solomon’s (2005) ease of conversation scale with 9 new items, I developed an instrument for operationalizing the previously unexplored variable of dyadic synchrony. The high alpha score (α = .89) indicated that the instrument was reliable in being used as a proxy to measure dyadic synchrony.

In addition to constructing new instruments, the model gave insight into how known variables within RTT (relational uncertainty and turbulence) relate to previously
unexplored outcome variables within the model (construals and dyadic synchrony).

Though relationships among these variables were assumed to be theoretically linked, this model was the first to test and confirm these associations. Consistent with the theory, results indicated that relational uncertainty predicts relational turbulence (H1). Given that turbulence can leave relational partners unable to see past the current relational chaos and inhibit their ability to coordinate/interact well with each other, the model predicted that relational turbulence was associated with more negative construals (H2) and decreased dyadic synchrony (H3).

Recall that construals are conceptual units that “index how an individual perceives phenomena” (Solomon et al., 2016, p.14). RTT theorizes that turbulence causes shortened psychological distance resulting in an inability for partners to see past the chaos, i.e., negative construals. Given the study’s findings are consistent with the theory, the newfound relationships between turbulence and negative construals have implications for newlyweds. By constantly focusing on the turbulent relationship, psychological distance is decreased, and therefore, affects cognitive construals. As such, if newlyweds are experiencing turbulence, negative views of their partner and the situation may prevent them from being able to “see past the horizon” and be optimistic about the future of the relationship. This inability to see past the present and feeling “stuck” may lead to conflict, and in turn, threaten relational health and satisfaction, therefore, compromising marital longevity.

The model also predicted that turbulence leads to decreased dyadic synchrony, Recall that dyadic synchrony refers to the “degree of coordination between individuals engaged in an interaction” (Harrist & Waught, 2002, p. 14). Largely unconscious,
synchronous interactions between partners include fluid speaking exchanges between partners, maintaining topic coherence, and able adjustment of conversational behaviors (e.g., speech rate, volume, word choice, etc.). RTT suggests that a global sense of chaos in the relationship (i.e., turbulence) undermines dyadic synchrony and “fractures the very structure of interaction between partners” (Solomon et al., 2016, p.14). Given these assumptions were supported within the model, this is concerning for newlyweds specifically as they are likely trying to engage in present and future-oriented planning. If interaction between partners is already strained and difficult during the onset of marriage, this sets a rocky and unstable precedent for the relationship, thus, potentially perpetuating the cycle of turbulence and asynchrony in the marriage.

Finally, in addition to the complications resulting from negative construals and dyadic asynchrony, taken together, these variables may inhibit newlyweds’ ability to offer and receive support. “For an interaction to be supportive, a person in distress must disclose to a partner, the partner must convey comforting messages, and the support recipient must respond to the support provision. For people in turbulent relationships, all aspects of the supportive communication process are threatened” (Solomon, 2016, et al., p. 20). Because turbulence can inhibit partners’ ability to articulate their distress (i.e., dyadic asynchrony), as well as their ability to see past the present distress (negative construals), effective supportive communication is neither offered nor accepted. As such, not only are newlyweds feeling turbulent about their marriages, they are unable to see past the chaotic situation which ultimately damages their ability to interact with each other. These sentiments may be felt both individually and relationally; however, partners are less likely to effectively seek, as well as, provide support.
Limitations and Future Directions

The conclusions drawn from the study are contextualized by the study’s strengths and weaknesses. One of the weaknesses of the study was the alpha reliability score (i.e., $\alpha = .69$) of the construal instrument. Though this score is technically considered valid (Wench et al., 2016), it could be improved. In order for the instrument to be improved, however, future researchers of RTT should continue refining and conceptualizing the variable as it relates to relational turbulence theory specifically. One of the more challenging aspects of creating a construal scale was having to primarily rely on RTT’s explanation of the variable in order to align with the context/perspective of the theory. Recall that RTT defines construal as “units that index how individuals perceive phenomena” (Solomon et al., 2016, p.13). Without much context, the authors then go on to give a brief description of how “psychological distance increases the tendency to conceptualize phenomena in abstract, schematic, and organized ways” (p.13). Conversely, after referencing Trope, Liberman, and Wakslak’s (2007) development of construal level theory, the original definition is more robust and complex than described in the RTT (Solomon et al., 2016) article:

Past and future events, events that are spatially remote, the experiences of other people and hypothetical alternatives to reality are beyond our perception, but they may be construed, that is, predicted, contemplated, remembered or imagined. (p.1)

The original article continues to explain how psychological distance is reflected in different dimensions and the psychological outcomes/consequence of those dimensions. Essentially, construal level theory appears to be much more complex than how it is presented in RTT.
By providing more foundational and clarifying information, future researchers may be able to better conceptualize, and by extension, operationalize construals in the future.

Another area of improvement within the study concerns the lack of variance within the sample regarding relational uncertainty. Uncertainty variables were measured on a 6 point scale with responses falling between $M = 2.31$ and $M = 3.31$ respectively. Though this is not a cause for concern, a larger variety in uncertainty levels would have been interesting to explore. A reason for this limited variance could be due to the nature of the study; participants who are feeling uncertain about their marriage, especially in the beginning stages, are probably unwilling to volunteer to participate in a study on relationships. Future researchers could address this challenge in a number of ways: recruiting a larger sample size, choosing a more strategic time to survey applicants (e.g., after a conflict episode), providing a prompt for participants to respond to before administering the instrument, etc. Additionally, all uncertainty variables were highly correlated (see results section). It is possible that the extremely strong associations could were due to potential multicolinearity. Though RTT posits that relational uncertainty has three dimensions (self, partner, relationship), future research should continue to investigate how and if these dimensions are truly distinct from one another.

Finally, another addition I would make to the study would be to incorporate a qualitative component. A goal of this study was to learn more about the experiences of newlyweds as they transition into marriage. Through use of both individual and dyadic interviews, exploring RTT in this way would give a more comprehensive picture of what this experience looks like from personal and relational perspective. Additionally, qualitative methods could lend themselves towards more translational benefits individually
and dyadically by providing a space for those feelings/thoughts to be shared, processed, and understood. Insights from qualitative data could also be used in not only the development of RTT but also to inform pre-marital and marital counseling research.

**Conclusion**

Within the context of the study’s limitations, the results highlight the impact relational uncertainty and turbulence can have on newlyweds. Though shifts in the relational environment (i.e., marriage), and subsequent turbulence and uncertainty are inevitable in romantic relationships, navigating this process can lead to negative emotions and perceptions, thus fracturing coordination within the relationship (Solomon et al., 2016). Findings within this study confirmed previously untested theorizations posited by RTT founders. There is now greater insight into how turbulence mediates the relationship between relational uncertainty and construal level, and how this uncertainty, which leads to turbulence, inhibits newlyweds’ abilities to see past the chaotic situation. Results also confirmed that, mediated by turbulence, relational uncertainty leads to decreased and fractured interaction between partners.

In addition to the theoretical contributions, this study made methodological advancements by forwarding two new instruments through which previously unobserved variables could be tested. Using an actual sample of newlyweds, these instruments were fruitful in providing an avenue through which preliminary insights were gained. Excitingly, analyses yielded significant results in almost all cases. I am hopeful that these instruments will be refined in order to better capture the uncovered mysteries within RTT.
Analyses revealed significant associations between cohabitation, turbulence, and uncertainty variables. Specifically, cohabiting couples experienced more uncertainty and turbulence than did couples who chose not to live together before marriage (see results section). Regardless, however, whether or not couples cohabited before marriage, turbulence and uncertainty were still present for all newlyweds. Though people are still choosing to get married, divorce statistics show that transition into marriage is not easy for everyone. My hope is that this research not only contributes theoretically but more importantly, has translational value as well. More specifically, I hope the findings of this study are ultimately used to help newlyweds understand, navigate, and become even more connected as they transition.
References


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Appendix

Informed Consent & Survey

Informed Consent:

Project Title: Transition into Marriage: A Quantitative Test of Relational Turbulence Theory

Study Description
You are invited to participate in a research study exploring newlyweds’ experiences of transitioning into marriage. The study will touch on topics such as relational uncertainty, relational turbulence, and relationship satisfaction. The purpose of the study is to see if gain insight into how newlyweds navigate this transition and the effects it has on the individual and the individual’s perceptions of the relationship.

In this study, you will be asked to complete a brief survey. The survey will be collected online through a program called Qualtrics. Each survey will ask personal questions about your experiences transitioning into marriage. The survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may discontinue your participation at any time. Please note, however, that if you choose to discontinue your participation, submit an incomplete survey, and/or fail to respond accurately to attention check questions, you will not receive compensation.

Eligibility Criteria
In order to be eligible for this study, you must have been legally married for one year or less. Additionally, you must be 18 years of age or older. The researcher also requests that each participant take the survey individually and not with their spouse present.

Possible risks and benefits
We do not anticipate any risk in your participating; however, because the surveys ask you about personal aspects of your marriage, you may feel uncomfortable. The risks from participating in this study are not more than would be encountered in everyday life. The researcher will provide you with contact information for herself should you feel uncomfortable.

Not only will the information gathered shed light onto previously unexplored aspects of transitioning into marriage, but also, participants who submit a complete survey and respond accurately to the attention check questions will be compensated $1.00 for their time.

Confidentiality/Anonymity
All information gathered as part of this study will be kept anonymous. Accordingly, your
responses to the survey questions cannot be linked back to any identifying information about you. Contact Dr. Jennifer S. Priem at priemjs@wfu.edu or Jamie Stewart at stewjr16@wfu.edu with questions, complaints, or concerns about this research.

By proceeding to the next page, you are agreeing to the terms of this form and are consenting to participate in this study.

Thank you for your involvement,

Jamie Blalock

Q2 I have been married to my current spouse for 1 year or less

  ○ Yes (1)
  ○ No (2)

End of Block: Block 1

Start of Block: Block 2

Q4 What is your sex?

  ○ Male (1)
  ○ Female (2)

Q5 What is your ethnicity?

  ○ African American (1)
  ○ White (2)
  ○ Hispanic/Latino (3)
  ○ Asian/Pacific Islander (4)
  ○ Other (5) ________________________________
Q18 What is your age?

Q9 What is your highest completed degree?

- High School Diploma (1)
- Trade/Technical/Vocational Training (2)
- Associates Degree (3)
- Bachelor's Degree (4)
- Master's Degree (5)
- Doctorate Degree (6)

Q6 Did you and your spouse live together prior to getting married?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q7 Have you been married previously?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
Q8 If yes, how many times have you been previously married?

- N/A (1)
- 1 (2)
- 2 (3)
- 3 (4)
- 4 (5)
- 5 (6)

Q78 Are there children living in the home?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q71 What sexual orientation do you most closely identify with?

- Straight (1)
- Gay (2)
- Bisexual (3)
- Pansexual (4)
- Polysexual (5)
- Other (6)
Q73 How long have you been in a relationship with your partner? Please enter information in each box to reflect your total relationship length; do not translate years into months or vice versa to provide redundant information. For example, if you have been together for 1 year, enter 0 months, 1 year. If you have been together for a year and a half, enter 6 months, 1 year. If you have been together for less than a year, enter 0 for years.

- Months (1) ________________________________
- Years (2) ________________________________

Q10 The next 7 questions ask you about the general level of satisfaction in your marriage. Please answer each question to the best of your ability.

How well does your partner meet your needs?

- Low (1)
- Somewhat Low (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Somewhat High (4)
- High (5)
Q11 In general, how satisfied are you with your marriage?

- Low (1)
- Somewhat Low (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Somewhat High (4)
- High (5)

Q12 How good is your marriage compared to most?

- Low (1)
- Somewhat Low (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Somewhat High (4)
- High (5)
Q13 How often do you wish you hadn't gotten into this marriage?

- Low (1)
- Somewhat Low (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Somewhat High (4)
- High (5)

Q14 To what extent has your marriage met your original expectations

- Low (1)
- Somewhat Low (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Somewhat High (4)
- High (5)
Q15 How much do you love your spouse?

- Low (1)
- Somewhat Low (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Somewhat High (4)
- High (5)

Q16 How many problems are there in your marriage?

- Low (1)
- Somewhat Low (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Somewhat High (4)
- High (5)

Q17 For the next set of questions, we would like you to think about your marriage and use the following words and phrases to describe it. For example, if you think that your relationship during the last two weeks has been very exciting, put an X in the space right next to the word "exciting." If you think it has been very boring, put an X in the space right next to "boring." If you think it has been somewhere in between, put an X where you think it belongs.
At the present time, this relationship is... write the question text

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Q22
This next set of questions asks you about how certain you are about various aspects of your marriage. Please answer each question as accurately and honestly as possible.
I sometimes wonder whether or not I want the marriage to work out in the long run

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q23 I am sometimes unsure whether or not I want the relationship to last

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)
Q24 If you have been married for one year or less, please respond with "somewhat agree" to this question

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q25 I sometimes wonder how much I like my spouse as a person

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Agree (3)
- Somewhat Disagree (4)
- Disagree (5)
- Strongly Disagree (6)
Q26 I am sometimes unsure how important my marriage is to me

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q74 Choose "agree" below

- Strongly disagree (21)
- Disagree (22)
- Somewhat Disagree (23)
- Somewhat Agree (20)
- Agree (24)
- Strongly agree (25)
Q28 I sometimes wonder whether or not I am committed to my spouse

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

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Q76 Answer "Strongly Disagree" to this question.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly Agree (7)

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Q27 I sometimes question how much I am sexually or romantically interested in my spouse

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q29 I sometimes wonder whether or not my spouse wants the marriage to work out in the long run

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)
Q30 I am sometimes unsure whether or not my spouse wants the relationship to last

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q31 I sometimes wonder how much my spouse likes me as a person

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)
Q32 I am sometimes unsure how important the marriage is to my spouse

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q33 I sometimes question how much my spouse is sexually or romantically interested in me

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)
Q34 I sometimes wonder whether or not my spouse is strongly committed to me

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q35 I am sometimes unsure about whether or not my spouse and I feel the same way about each other

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)
Q36 I sometimes wonder whether or not my spouse and I will stay together

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q37 I sometimes question whether or not my relationship is a romantic one

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)
Q38
I am sometimes unsure about the boundaries for appropriate and/or inappropriate behavior in the relationship*

- Somewhat Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q39 I sometimes wonder whether or not my spouse loves me as much as I love him/her

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)
Q40 I sometimes question how I should or should not behave around my spouse

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q41 If you have been married for one year or less, please respond "agree" to this question

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)
Q77 Answer "Agree" to this question.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly Agree (7)

End of Block: Block 5

Start of Block: Directness of communication about irritations

Q42 The next couple of questions ask you about the directness of communication you have with your partner. Please answer as accurately and honestly as possible.

I have explicitly told my partner about behaviors that irritate me

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly agree (6)
Q69 I have had a direct conversation with my partner about my irritations

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly agree (6)

Q43 The next set of questions asks you about the ease with which you interact with your partner. Please respond as accurately and honestly as possible.

I feel comfortable when having conversations with my spouse

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)
Q73 Choose "Disagree" for this question

- Strongly Disagree (8)
- Disagree (9)
- Somewhat Disagree (10)
- Somewhat Agree (12)
- Agree (13)
- Strongly Agree (14)

Q44 I am not able to express myself fully when I am having conversations with my spouse

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)
Q45 I find it easy to have conversations with my spouse

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q46 I am able to be myself when I am having a conversation with my spouse

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)
Q47 Conversations with my spouse don't flow easily

○Strongly Disagree (1)
○Disagree (2)
○Somewhat Disagree (3)
○Somewhat Agree (4)
○Agree (5)
○Strongly Agree (6)

Q48 Overall, conversations with my spouse are fluid

○Strongly Disagree (1)
○Disagree (2)
○Somewhat Disagree (3)
○Somewhat Agree (4)
○Agree (5)
○Strongly Agree (6)
Q49 My spouse and I have difficulty staying on topic during our conversations

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q50 I tend to talk faster than my spouse during our conversations

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)
Q51 Overall, my spouse and I are able to easily take turns speaking during our conversations

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q52 The current ease of our conversations is consistent with past conversations

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)
Q53 The level of difficulty in our conversations has not changed over time

○ Strongly Disagree (1)
○ Disagree (2)
○ Somewhat Disagree (3)
○ Somewhat Agree (4)
○ Agree (5)
○ Strongly Agree (6)

Q54 I have always felt comfortable when having a conversation with my partner

○ Strongly Disagree (1)
○ Disagree (2)
○ Somewhat Disagree (3)
○ Somewhat Agree (4)
○ Agree (5)
○ Strongly Agree (6)
Q74 Choose "Somewhat Agree" to this question.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly Agree (7)

Q55 I find it more difficult to be myself when having a conversation with my partner now that we are married

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q56 This next set of questions asks you to report on how much time you spend thinking about circumstances regarding your partner and marriage during the present vs. what the future will look like. As you answer the questions, think about them within the context of your marriage. Please answer each question as honestly and accurately as possible.
I spend a lot of time thinking about today

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q57 I don't spend time thinking about today

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)
Q58 My mind is filled with things I need to do today

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q75 Choose "Agree" for this question.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly Agree (7)
Q59 I am worried about the present

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly agree (6)

Q60 I can only focus on what's happening now

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)
Q61 I am excited for the future

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Agree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q62 Even when things are difficult, I am hopeful for the future

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)
Q63 If you have been married for no longer than a year, respond "strongly agree" to this question

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q64 My spouse and I often talk about our future together

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)
Q65 Our best conversations are when we talk about the future

☐ Strongly Disagree (1)
☐ Disagree (2)
☐ Somewhat Degree (3)
☐ Somewhat Agree (4)
☐ Agree (5)
☐ Strongly Agree (6)

Q66 Our best conversations are when we talk about today

☐ Strongly Disagree (1)
☐ Disagree (2)
☐ Somewhat Agree (3)
☐ Somewhat Agree (4)
☐ Agree (5)
☐ Strongly Agree (6)
Q79 Choose "Disagree" from the options below.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly Agree (7)

Q67 When times are hard in my marriage, I cannot see past the current circumstances

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly Agree (6)

Q68 Please report the amount of time you spend thinking/talking about the future with your spouse vs things going on in the present. Combined responses should add up to 100%. Please answer the questions as accurately and honestly as possible.

Please indicate the percent of time you spend talking about the future with your spouse: ________ (1)

Please indicate the percent of time you spend talking about the present state of your marriage with your partner: ________ (2)

Total: ________
Profile

- Advanced knowledge of interpersonal communication with specialized focuses in strategic support messages, conflict/resolution strategies, relational maintenance/repair techniques, and navigation of relational turbulence/uncertainty.
- Proficient in business and professional communication including project management/development, group facilitation, collaboration, and technical writing.
- Efficient researcher experienced with quantitative methodologies (experiments and surveys) and analysis of subsequent data with appropriate statistical testing.
- Exceptional writer specializing in the composition of social scientific documents such as proposals, promotions, research reports, and academic analyses.
- Skills: Proficient with Microsoft Office Suite; Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Research Electronic Data Capture (RedCap); **Certifications:** Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI)

Education

Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC
May 2018
*Master of Arts in Communication*
*Thesis title: Transition into Marriage: A Quantitative Test of Relational Turbulence Theory*

East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN
May 2016
*Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies with a minor in English, Summa Cum Laude*

Related Experience

Graduate Assistant
Department of Housing & Residence Life, Wake Forest University
August 2017-Present
- Assist with the coordination and implementation of various departmental programmatic initiatives.
- Participate in graduate and undergraduate staff selection and placement processes.
- Oversee advising and programming of Housing & Residence Life affiliated student organizations.
- Support student conference preparation efforts.

Intern
Office of Women in Medicine and Science, Wake Forest School of Medicine
Summer 2017
- Computed and analyzed quantitative data evaluating a career development program for early-women faculty in academic medicine.
- Applied social scientific writing skills and academic portfolio as a co-investigator for a scholarly piece that has been presented at an academic conference and is under review for publication.
- Co-managed development and coordination of various events focusing on faculty appreciation, mentoring and career development including seminars, workshops, mentoring events and philanthropy initiatives.

**Teaching Assistant**
Department of Communication, Wake Forest University
**August 2016-Present**
- Provide opportunities for students to engage lecture material through individual and collaborative activities by instructing and facilitating weekly lab sessions in addition to office hours, study sessions and make-up labs.
- Assist supervising professor in development of exams and lecture material.
- Analyze, grade and keep record of all submitted assignments.

**Student Employee**
East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN
**August 2013-May 2016**
- Applied technical and professional writing skills by editing drafts of proposals, exams and meeting minutes.
- Managed office responsibilities including inventory organization, data management, and transcription.
- Led onboarding and training of new student workers.

**Research Experience**

**Mindfulness’ Effect on Relational Uncertainty and Satisfaction**
Department of Communication, Wake Forest University
**January 2016 – May 2016**
- Conducted a study as the primary investigator wherein the effects of mindfulness on relational uncertainty and relationship satisfaction were investigated. Preliminary findings suggest that there is a negative relationship between mindfulness behaviors and relational uncertainty. Study was accepted by a national conference.

**It’s Not You, It’s Me: Investigation of How Personality Affects Willingness to Communicate in Relationships**
Department of Communication, East Tennessee State University
**October 2015 – May 2016**
- Investigated how personality traits influence our willingness to communicate with our romantic partners. Findings reveal that the personality trait extroversion, predicts a greater willingness to communicate with romantic partners. Conversely, introversion predicts less willingness to communicate with significant others.

**Consequences & Prevention of Childhood Obesity: Online Peer Education Program**
Department of Communication, East Tennessee State University
**January 2015 – May 2015**
- Developed, along with co-investigators, an award winning online peer education program highlighting both the consequences and accessible prevention strategies regarding
childhood obesity. A series or videos were developed with each video featuring different aspects of prevention methods for childhood obesity.

**Leadership Activities**

*Graduate Student Representative*
Department of Communication, Wake Forest University  
**August 2017- Present**
- Nominated by fellow cohort members to represent and communicate graduate student needs to faculty.
- Attend monthly faculty meetings to present community, productivity, and overall satisfaction within the first and second year cohorts.
- Provide recommendations for improvement to faculty based on student needs.

*Honors-In-Discipline Scholar*
Department of Communication, East Tennessee State University  
**August 2013-May 2016**
- Responsible for completing 18 hours of advanced course work in addition to regular course load.
- Facilitate class discussion by developing interactional group activities and presenting relevant, supplemental research.
- Required to completed an independent, undergraduate thesis by submitting an IRB approved proposal, recruited eligible participants, analyzed data and finally suggested future research ideas based on findings. Thesis was presented regional and national level conferences.

*Community Group Leader*
Well Campus Ministries, Johnson City, TN  
**August 2014– May 2016**
- Facilitated college Bible study through a campus ministry.

**Honors**

*East Tennessee State University*, Johnson City, TN  
- *Faculty Award* - given to the student who is judged by faculty to be the most outstanding student in the department, May 2016.
- *Outstanding Student Scholarship Award for Childhood Obesity Peer Intervention Program*, given to the student(s) who has conducted exceptional research during the academic year, May 2015.
- *Paul Walwick Emerging Scholar Award*; presented to the student who, through research, leadership, and coursework has shown excellence in the department, May 2015.