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By

Gary Alan Beck

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The Dissertation Committee for Gary Alan Beck certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

Interpersonal Resilience in Romantic Relationships

Committee:

Anita L. Vangelisti, Supervisor

Rene Dailey

John Daly

Matthew McGlone

Catherine A. Surra

Interpersonal Resilience in Romantic Relationships

by

Gary Alan Beck, B.A., M.A.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my late grandmother Helen Reimondo and my girlfriend Tori Haley, who each contributed in their own way to initially spark and fan the flames of my intellectual curiosity and creative drive. Many thanks go out to both for the love and support that I have received, without which none of this would have been possible.

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Interpersonal Resilience in Romantic Relationships

Gary Alan Beck, Ph.D.

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Supervisor: Anita Vangelisti

The purpose of this research was to examine the characteristics of interaction in romantic relationships that enable partners to effectively deal with significant stressors to their relationship. These characteristics were identified through the development of a measure of interpersonal resilience in romantic relationships. The dissertation consisted of three phases: Phase one solicited from communication experts their perceptions of the communication characteristics that encourage resilient patterns of stress management in romantic relationships. This feedback was evaluated and organized into categories. Phase two sought to identify underlying dimensions of the categories, and to statistically validate the most important characteristics of communication contributing to resilient outcomes. Communication experts were asked to rate forty items addressing the various categories of communication characteristics generated in part one. Their data were factor analyzed, and reduced to a list of twenty-eight items that made up the initial Interpersonal Resilience in Romantic Relationships (IR³) measure. The final part of the this research, phase three, validated the role that IR³ dimensions play mediating the effects of a significant stressor, in this case job loss, on relationship outcomes of quality, satisfaction, and commitment.

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Chapter One

Introduction and Rationale

“What does not destroy me, makes me stronger.”

-Nietzsche, 1888

Although any number of things can go wrong in interpersonal relationships, many partners find ways to deal with these threats. Observation, adaptation, trial and error, careful planning and other techniques help people understand how to best prepare for, react, respond to, and even resist threats to their relationships. It also may be the case that there are people who are just tougher than others. From the recently divorced friend who might be devastated but has instead dealt with the experience in stride, to the family member who finds out his or her partner has cheated and is resolved to salvage the relationship, individuals sometimes tap reservoirs of patience and fortitude when hardship comes their way.

Researchers from many academic disciplines have looked at how individuals in various types of relationships have experienced challenges and managed changes to their relationships. Scholars in management, family studies, psychology, and communication have made substantial contributions to identifying individual characteristics, social behavior, and communication phenomena that are associated with success in navigating difficult circumstances. Successful resistance to potential threats is important to a relationship's survival.

The cross-disciplinary study of resilience is one of many lines of research addressing the way individuals handle negative circumstances. Broadly defined, resilience can be seen as “an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change” (Resilience, 2008). Research on resilience has been conducted specifically to clarify different components of *resilience*: what qualifies as significant stressors, what should be realistic expectations for performing well, and what resources individuals gather to manage or recover from negative experiences.

Conceptualizing Resilience

Resilience is an umbrella term used to characterize patterns of successful stressor management or a combination of personal or social characteristics that allow an individual or a social group to deal with serious stressors in a manageable way. The literature on resilience reflects a variety of opinions about how to conceptualize the construct, even going so far as to say “...to call a person resilient would be improper in diagnostic terminology because resilience is a description of a general pattern, whereas diagnosis occurs when the individual is matched to the pattern (Masten & Powell, 2003, p. 4). Most researchers agree, however, that resilience is evidenced at the very least by (a) a significant risk or adversity to overcome; and (b) a base level of performance, or the idea that an individual is “doing okay” (Masten & Coastworth, 1998).

A significant risk or adversity to overcome, observed currently or in the past, is the first indication relating to the identification of resilience. In the literature, examples of such risk range from the experience of stressful daily events among aged populations in nursing homes (Ong, Bergeman, Wallace, & Bisconti, 2006), to combat or wartime stressors (Baratone, 1999), to physical disability (Preece & Sandburg, 2005), to

ambiguous loss in post-divorce families (Afifi & Keith, 2004). Inherent in categorizing certain experiences as “risk factors” or “stressors” is the idea that these experiences are associated with higher rates of negative outcomes in the lives of those involved.

Researchers evaluating how risk factors contribute to negative outcomes must also consider the possibility of the co-occurrence of risk factors and the subjective or objective appraisal of risk.

Cumulative risk is the terminology used to characterize instances in which certain risk factors co-occur with others. Focusing on one experience of risk, for instance witnessing spousal abuse, would not necessarily provide a valid indicator of resilience when a child also could experience living in poverty, inadequate school systems or after school programs, and/or the presence of drugs in the household. Rutter (1979) suggested that it is not a particular risk factor, but the number of risk factors that leads to a psychiatric disorder: He noted that 10 year-olds with zero to one risk factor had 2% psychiatric risk, but those with four or more had approximately 20% psychiatric risk. Furthermore, Sameroff, Seifer, Barocas, Zax, and Greenspan (1987) found major differences on mental health and intelligence measures between children with few risks and those with many, noting that no preschooler in the zero-risk group had an IQ below 85, while 26% of the high risk group did. In short, the research on cumulative risk suggests that the occurrence of multiple risk factors may have more of an impact on outcomes than one specific occurrence.

Another important consideration for researchers regarding risk has involved who judges the impact and exact nature of risk: the individual experiencing the stressor or the researcher? This tension between objectivity and subjectivity rests upon possible

differences between the individual's interpretation of the risk or adversity experienced and how a researcher evaluates the same risk (Bartlett, 1994). While the difference between these perspectives might present a methodological concern for those conducting research on resilience, researchers also may look at it as an opportunity to explore theoretically important questions. For instance, researchers could select a sample that has experienced a particular stressor (i.e., lack of a father figure in the household). The "objective" impression of a team of researchers might be that this stressor universally has a negative impact. However, there might be a subset of participants from this sample that evaluate this particular stressor as very serious, while another group would evaluate the same stressor as not as pertinent or impactful at all. As Luther, Cicchetti, and Becker (2000) suggest, this second subset of participants would be particularly interesting for identifying factors that might protect against the negative implications of the stressor.

Competence, the second main component related to the identification of resilience, is a measurement of the individual's performance (on any particular chosen task). The measurement of competence is essentially an evaluation that an individual is "doing okay" following the experience of a risk or stressor. Competence refers to behavior within or above the expected range for a normative cohort. Individuals who are characterized as *competent* adaptively use both internal and external resources to enable the successful negotiation of negative circumstances and stressors (Cicchetti & Schneider-Rosen, 1986).¹ The significance of a stressor is hinged upon the measurement of competence: Given a sample's exposure to a stressor, little or no change

¹ This concept is distinct from *communication competence* (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984), a concept familiar to communication researchers as the effectiveness of one's communicative effort in relation to the intention behind the effort.

in competence across the sample would indicate that the stressor would not be associated with negative outcomes and is likely a non-factor.

Initiated at the University of Minnesota in the 1970s, Project Competence was a departure from the medical models at the time that focused on negative outcomes and symptoms that dominated research on psychopathology and risk. The idea that one was “doing okay” was conceptualized as *psychosocial competence*, which was defined as a track record of effective performance in developmental tasks that are salient for a given age, society or context, and historical time (Masten, Coatsworth, Neemann, Gest, Tellegen, & Garmezy, 1995; Masten, Hubbard, Gest, Tellegen, Garmezy, & Ramirez, 1999). Psychosocial competence (or simply *competence*, as termed by modern interdisciplinary researchers), can manifest itself in any number of domains that are more or less salient at any particular time in one’s developmental history. For example, “in American society, it is widely expected that school-age children will achieve in school (academic competence), get along with other children and make friends (social competence), and follow rules of conduct in the home, school, and community (conduct)” (Masten & Powell, 2003, p. 5). When children become older, it is possible to evaluate work or romantic competencies as they become relevant.

Expectations for competent performance are socially and culturally constructed, and the notion of competence is something that is normative and agreed upon as a desirable outcome worth achieving. Masten and Powell (2003) quote Phillips’ 1968 book, *Human Adaptation and Its Failures*, in explaining competence: “The key to the prediction of future effectiveness in society lies in asking: ‘How well has this person met, and how well does he now meet, the expectations implicitly set by society for

individuals of his age and sex group?” (p. 3). This understanding of an expectation or standard has implications for how researchers evaluate not only what specific social groups (versus others) might see as competent performance, but also the subsequent evaluation of risk. For example, families living through the great depression in the 1930s may have evaluated competence in terms of being able to feed, cloth, and shelter their family members. By contrast, convenience sample studies conducted at modern universities involve participants that belong to families that are doing well enough to afford to have a child leave the household and go to college. Competent performance, as defined by individuals in these studies, has likely moved beyond basic survival needs to more specific safety, belonging, and esteem needs (Maslow, 1943).

Competence has been measured in a number of ways depending on the participants being observed, as well as the context within which they are observed. Within health contexts, researchers have examined the competence of those diagnosed with Fibromyalgia as their reported number of health problems and overall functioning (Preece & Sandburg, 2005). The competence of military personnel with wartime experience has been assessed in terms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and depressive disorders (Bartone, 1999). Those studying child development have examined the competence of school children by measuring children’s popularity (Spinrad, Eisenberg, Cumberland, Fabes, Valiente, Shepard, Reiser, Losoya, & Guthrie, 2006) and the competence of young adults in stepfamilies in terms of the presence of maladaptive coping strategies (Afifi & Keith, 2004). Within a professional business context, researchers have even observed competence in human resource consultants as reported billable hours (Maddi, Harvey, Khoshaba, Lu, Persico, & Brow, 2006).

Although the vast majority of research on resilience identifies risk and competence as key components of resilience, it is important to note that a number of studies have found indications of a third component: Protective factors. It is protective factors that serve to buffer against the impact of significant stressors, reducing the negative effects of these stressors on measurements of individual competence. In fact, studies using a wide array of samples and methods suggest that certain personal and social characteristics consistently function as protective factors: They serve to maintain individuals' competence despite the experience of significant stressors.

Researchers, depending on their theoretical orientation and discipline, have derived a number of different ways to categorize protective factors. For example, developmental psychologist Garmezy (1985) identified three categories from his research focused on young children and adolescents: (a) individual attributes (cognitive abilities, self perceptions of competence, worth, confidence), (b) relationships (parenting quality, close relationships with competent adults, connections to pro-social peers) and (c) community resources and opportunities (good schools, connections to pro-social organizations, neighborhood quality, quality of social services and health care). Afifi and Keith (2004), communication researchers examining children of divorce, identified protective features mediating the stress associated with ambiguous loss. Like Garmezy, Afifi and Keith also derived three categories: (a) contextual factors (e.g., economic resources, social support systems, circumstances of the divorce, age and gender of child, length of marriage), (b) individual factors (e.g., perception of control, self-efficacy, locus of control, uncertainty orientation, tolerance for ambiguity, desire for closeness), and (c) family communication factors (e.g., degree of inter-parental conflict/inappropriate

disclosures, feeling caught, amount of contact/quality of communication with noncustodial parent before and after divorce). While it would appear that there are many resources for dealing with stressors, not all may be readily available (or known to be available) in a given situation.

Although the protective factors mentioned above may be associated with positive outcomes, they have the special distinction of working well in conditions with low risk as well as high risk. For instance, self perceptions of competence, worth, and confidence (Garmezy, 1985) are thought of as positive attributions in the performance of random day-to-day activities, but they are also helpful when facing a diagnosis of cancer or in the wake of losing one's job. In other words, researchers who study resilience typically identify protective factors that function both in situations in when things are going as expected as well as in situations when things are not.

Implications for how these protective factors function can be seen in two possible models. The *Additive* model suggests that protective factors accumulate, as if one were stockpiling supplies for a harsh winter, in order to outweigh anticipated or currently experienced stressors. In this circumstance, protective factors would accrue, possibly outnumbering the risk factors in a given situation. By contrast, the *Moderating* model suggests that protective factors have the potential to completely mitigate risks (see Masten, 2001, for a review). Both models present possible ways in which protective factors interact with the other two components of resilience, risk and competence.

Taken as a whole, the literature offers a reasonably consistent impression of the basic terminology used by those who study resilience. However, researchers appear to have parted ways as to the source of resilience and how it is meant to function. There is a

distinction in the literature between resilience being conceptualized as a personality trait (e.g., hardiness, ego or individual resilience) versus as a pattern or process originating from a combination of personal, social, and contextual factors (e.g., risk and resilience). Each perspective has implications for what qualifies as *resilience*.

Trait Resilience: Hardiness and Ego

Trait perspectives on resilience attempt to catalogue the specific attitudes or characteristics of individuals that enhance performance despite negative situations. Researchers who adopt these perspectives aim to identify the segment of the population that is resilient, as evidenced by a trait, and then compare that subgroup to those without the trait on various performance goals. The two traits with the largest support in the literature are hardiness and ego-resilience.

Maddi and colleagues (1999, 2001, 2006) have explored *Hardiness* and what they call the *hardy individual*. Hardiness has been conceptualized as being composed of three dimensions: Control, Commitment, and Challenge (Campbell, Swank, & Vincent, 1991; Kobasa et al., 1982). *Control* involves individuals' struggle to have an influence on outcomes, as opposed to shrinking into powerlessness or passivity. Some researchers have described this dimension as *internal locus of control* (Rotter, 1966). Research on resilience pertaining to children suggests that those who are able to develop flexible coping strategies and a locus of control that allows them to attribute negative experiences to external factors and still value their own strengths and abilities fare better than others (Luthar, 1991; Murphy & Moriarty, 1976; Werner, 1995). *Commitment* is a predisposition to be connected with people, things, and contexts. This characteristic is reflected in individuals' ability to feel actively involved with others and belief in their

own value and importance as well as the value and importance of their experiences. The Commitment dimension is conceptually similar to Antonovsky's (1979) notion of meaningfulness, which suggests that people perceive the value in doing things for others and see life in general as a deeply personal experience. Finally, *Challenge* highlights people's desire to learn from both positive and negative experiences as opposed to playing it safe and avoiding the unknown. This dimension reflects individuals' positive mental attitude toward change and their understanding that they can benefit from failures and successes (Brooks, 1994).

Hardiness has been associated with various aspects of positive well being and health, including low blood pressure (Maddi, 1999) and fewer signs of psychopathology (Maddi & Khoshaba, 1994). Hardiness is also negatively associated with neuroticism, and positively related to openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness, the other four factors in the five factor model (Maddi, Khoshaba, Percio, Lu, Harvey, & Bleeker, 2002). In one study, hardiness, social support, and physical exercise were examined to compare their relative contributions to stress-management. Looking at business managers who were above the sample median in effectiveness, hardiness was roughly twice as likely to decrease the risk of illness as social support or physical exercise. Managers with two stress buffers did better than those with only one, while those with three did even better (Kobasa, Maddi, Pucceti, & Zola, 1986).

In a study conducted to further validate the measurement of hardiness, working adults were given pagers and asked whenever the pager went off to report what they were doing, who they were with, and how they felt. Participants were paged at random ten times during each of three consecutive days. Workers high in hardiness reported that

activities they were involved with were more interesting, more enjoyable, and more important compared to those workers who were low in hardiness. Those high in hardiness also reported feeling less imposed upon, being more open to experiences and feeling more support from others than did workers low in hardiness (Maddi, 1999). In short, hardiness seems to promote numerous indicators of positive well being.

Developmental and cognitive psychologists also have examined resilience from a trait perspective, calling it individual, personal, or most commonly ego resilience (Block & Block, 1980). The research conducted by these scholars, similar to that on hardiness, suggests that individual differences in resilience may explain the adaptive ways in which stressors are approached and handled. Cicchetti, Rogosch, Lynch, and Holt (1993) found that ego-resilience served as a protective factor in maltreated children. In addition to promoting resistance to stress, recent work has suggested that individual differences in resilience predict accelerated recovery from stressful situations. Specifically, in different studies, those with higher trait resilience exhibited faster physiological emotional recovery from stress, and the effect of trait resilience on duration of cardiovascular reactivity and depressive symptoms was mediated by subjective reports of positive emotion (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Ego resilience seems to be associated with resistance to significant life stressors based on the individual's cognitive resources.

While research on hardiness and ego resilience provides an explanation of how resilience can be understood within individuals, it also suggests the relationship between stressors and performance may be best conceived by a mediational model. To illustrate, hardiness could affect individuals' appraisals of stressors, such that individuals' levels of

distress is reduced and negative outcomes minimized. Similarly, people who are characterized as hardy may have an adaptive way to cope once they encounter stress, suggesting that they cognitively transform negative events into events “to grow from.” These individuals also may engage in problem-focused, active, and support-seeking coping strategies (Pollock, 1989; Williams, Wiebe, & Smith, 1992) that enable them to minimize the negative outcomes they experience.

The capacity to cognitively adapt in positive ways to negative events is particularly interesting when considering how resilience works in concert with other protective factors. By looking at situations in which a stressor is encountered and actively dealt with, researchers can gain a more specific account of the individual, interactive, and social factors that contribute to the management of said stressor.

Pattern Resilience: Risk and Resilience

The concept of pattern resilience has emerged from research focused on specific issues that families or children within a developmental context deal with, looking for evidence of positive adaptation to challenges to competence. Researchers who have been interested in how certain individuals are able to overcome circumstances conventionally regarded as negative (i.e., child abuse, domestic violence, inadequate healthcare or education) operate from a perspective that suggests that evidence of adversity is necessary in order to evaluate resilience. This point is important, as it distinguishes pattern from trait perspectives: Trait perspectives see individuals as having resilient characteristics (or not), regardless of whether a significant stressor eventually comes along, whereas pattern perspectives see the stressor as being just as important to resilience as the protective features typically associated with successful coping.

Longitudinal research conducted by developmental psychologists has been especially attentive to how, in the face of risks or adversities, certain children perform as competently and capably as their peers who experience relatively few, if any, challenges (Garmezy, 1974; Murphy & Moriarty, 1976; Rutter, 1979; Sameroff & Seifer, 1983; Werner & Smith, 1992). Researchers working with these longitudinal data have called this perspective *Risk and Resilience*; these studies typically involve catalogues of various risk factors and measurements over time of performance or well being, with the goal of identifying resources employed by those who thrive.

Another way researchers have conceptualized a resilient pattern is as if it were the product of a *coping strategy* (Gowan, Riordan, & Gatewood, 1999). Conceptualizing resilience as a coping strategy suggests that resilience operates as a buffer, limiting the impact that the stressor would have on one's life. In this sense resilience would play a mediating role, like a thick down comforter, thrown on the bed on colder nights, employed when necessary, with the users who are always aware that it is there if needed.

Researchers also have conceived of resilience as a *coping resource* (which is more in line with a trait perspective of resilience). This perspective suggests that resilience functions as if various resources are stockpiled like firewood, in anticipation a long and cold winter: If the winter is bad, those who are resilient have the firewood to handle the winter once the cold weather kicks in; alternatively, if the winter is less severe, and a limited amount of firewood is needed, any surplus is merely a nice thing to have. In this capacity, interpersonal resilience and other personal and social resources add up, helping to lessen the blow of the impact of job loss on individuals' well being, and ultimately, their relationship.

While most research based on pattern perspectives has been set in the context of the family, one study specifically examined resilience as it relates to romantic relationships. Jordan (2006), in a largely qualitative and exploratory study, conducted interviews with young women regarding their decisions in developing friendships and romantic relationships. Central to her conception of resilience, Jordan advanced the Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) of development and resilience. This theory posits that people experience individual growth through and toward connection, and that wanting to participate in a relationship that fosters such growth is the core motivation in life (Jordan, 1997; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Miller & Stiver, 1997). Jordan and colleagues clarify *growth fostering connections* as those characterized by mutual empathy, mutual empowerment, feelings of zest, a sense of worth, productivity, clarity, and desire for more connection (Miller & Stiver, 1997). Relational practices, rather than internal traits, were identified as contributing to the resilience of African American mothers on welfare (Sparks, 1999). It is these qualities, Jordan maintains, that enable a greater propensity to “bounce back from adversity, manage stress effectively, and to withstand physical or psychological pressures” (p. 79).

Jordan’s suggestion that resilience comes from the connections we create highlights specific characteristics of interaction capable of contributing to resilience (i.e., supported vulnerability, empathic involvement, relational confidence, empowerment that encourages mutual growth, and relational awareness). This contribution to understanding the sources of resilience suggests that partner interactions within a

relationship have an important bearing on how not only individuals, but relationships, bear the brunt of significant threats to their survival.

Alternative Theoretical Perspectives on Resilience

While theories describing trait and pattern resilience have been successful in helping to explain the ways individuals in different contexts deal with a variety of stressors, other theoretical perspectives have attempted to explain positive adaptation to negative circumstances as well. Two in particular, Accommodation and Relationship Maintenance, have been used by researchers attempting to account for specific interactions or behaviors that people use to keep a relationship functioning.

Accommodation. Research on accommodation has examined patterns of communication in which people in a romantic relationship resist responding in a similar fashion to their relational partner's negative actions. Based on work done in organizations (Hirschman, 1970), Rusbult and colleagues examined individuals' responses to their partner's expression of anger or criticism, and characterized responses using a four category model: (a) Exit, leaving or threatening to leave the situation; (b) Voice, discussing problems, suggesting solutions, changing oneself, urging your partner to change; (c) Loyalty, waiting for things to improve or supporting the partner in the wake of criticism; or (d) Neglect, ignoring the partner, spending less time, treating the partner poorly, or just letting things fall apart (Rusbult, Zembrodt, & Gunn, 1982).

Accommodation theory suggests that individuals' responses to dissatisfaction fall along two dimensions: constructiveness versus destructiveness, and activity versus passivity. For instance, an exit strategy would be characterized as destructive and active, whereas a loyalty choice would be characterized as passive and constructive. This

research ultimately found that avoiding response choices that involved reacting destructively was more important for couple functioning in general than reacting constructively: This has been called the “good-manners” model (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik & Lipkus, 1991). Tendencies to avoid reacting counterproductively to a partner’s negativity seem consistent with hardy individuals’ tendency to assume a more positive outlook and see negative circumstances as opportunities to grow.

Distinguishing accommodation from resilience. Comparisons between Accommodation and Resilience can be best made when considering how each manifests in ongoing romantic relationships. Rusbult’s Accommodation theory examines responses to partners’ negative behaviors and dissatisfaction. People are more likely to use constructive responses (voice and loyalty) than destructive responses (neglect or exit) when their relationship is satisfying and their investments are relatively high (Rusbult, Zembrodt, & Gunn, 1982). Simply said, individuals tend to be happier when they are able to cope constructively with relatively infrequent provocations from their partner.

The pattern perspective of resilience differs from accommodation theory in two ways. First, accommodation theory limits what may be termed as stressors to just the negative behavior of partners. The pattern perspective, by contrast, includes a wider range of stressors that may or may not originate from the partner. A partnership may experience any number of stressors to the relationship, both internal (i.e., domestic abuse, the experience of serious illness) and external (i.e., death of a family member, losing a job), all of which may be theoretically accounted for by the pattern perspective.

Second, accommodation theory suggests that relational qualities, including satisfaction and investment, influence people’s tendency to engage in constructive

responses to dissatisfaction. However, the pattern perspective identifies a range of reinforcing, protective factors that contribute to the successful management of stressors. According to the pattern perspective, the successful management of stressors should then have an effect on improving relationship outcomes, but the connection to constructive behaviors is indirect and somewhat tentative. Overall, examining interpersonal resilience through the pattern perspective would provide a more inclusive view of the impact of negative experiences and the means by which people try to minimize these effects.

Relationship maintenance. Scholarship on relationship maintenance has focused on actions and activities used to sustain desired relational definitions (Canary & Stafford, 1992, 1993; Stafford & Canary, 1991). Braiker and Kelley (1979) saw maintenance as evidenced by direct discussions about the relationship. Ayres (1983) conceptualized maintenance activities as actions taken to keep a relationship at a satisfactory level once patterns of exchange within the relationship have stabilized. Dindia and Baxter (1987) conceptualized maintenance and relational repair as similar processes, but distinguished between the two: Maintenance strategies prevent trouble from occurring and repair strategies restore (or at least attempt to restore) the relationship to a previous satisfactory state. While there have been various perspectives on what qualifies as maintenance, a review of the literature conducted by Dindia and Canary (1993) yielded four categories that most maintenance definitions could fit into. According to their findings, maintenance is defined as the process of keeping a relationship: (a) in existence, (b) in a specified state or condition, (c) in satisfactory condition, or (d) in repair.

Canary and Stafford (1994) identified six overarching propositions from the theoretical commitments and research assumptions of previous relationship maintenance research, three of which are pertinent to the discussion of resilience: (a) Maintenance activities vary according to the development and type of relationships; (b) Maintenance behaviors may be used in isolation or in combination with other maintenance behaviors to variously affect the nature of the relationship; and (c) Maintenance behaviors are further distinguished into strategic and routine categories.

First, it is suggested that *maintenance activities vary according to the development and type of relationship*. Similarly, research suggests that resilience “activities,” manifested in the form of protective factors, vary according to the resources available to individuals and the social context in which individuals immersed. An impoverished child, growing up without the guidance of a father or proper health care, might do particularly well if his or her family was involved in a local religious community, benefiting from the resources afforded by the members of the congregation. On the other hand, the same child’s relationship with his or her school and the people that serve as the primary educators for the child could be expected to provide different guidance or services, based on a different set of criteria.

Second, the suggestion that maintenance behavior *may be used in isolation or in combination with other maintenance behaviors to variously affect the nature of the relationship* is consistent with the notion of cumulative protective factors or risk within the resilience literature. The co-occurrence of protective or risk factors has been examined by researchers who have studied the lives of children over time (Garmezy & Masten, 1994; Rolf, Masten, Cicchetti, Nuechterlein, & Weintraub, 1990; Rutter, 1979;

Sameroff & Chandler, 1975; Sameroff & Seifer, 1983). For example, this research suggests that the co-presence of risk factors such as lack of a father figure and poor education will result in more negative outcomes than if just one is present but to a higher degree. The combined efforts of two unique stressors seem to carry added complications to the resistance process, making both more difficult for individuals to manage than just one stressor. Cumulative protective factors work in a similar form, but to greater benefit.

Finally, implying that *maintenance behaviors are further distinguished into strategic and routine categories* carries interesting implications for the study of resilience. Duck (1988) has argued that routine behaviors contribute as much as deliberate strategies to keep relationships going. While some protective factors may serve to help repair damage caused by significant stressors (i.e., therapy, women's shelters) others may do more to help buffer the effects of impending difficulties (i.e., a positive mental attitude towards an upcoming extended separation, a sense of humor during stressful times). This distinction might highlight the need for not only multiple protective factors, but different types as well.

Distinguishing maintenance from resilience. While there is clearly some overlap in the literatures between maintenance and resilience, there are also key theoretical and methodological differences. For instance, maintenance is often seen as a stage of relationship development, following escalation and preceding de-escalation (Dindia, 1994). While components of successful resilience patterns may be a part of an established relationship, an established relationship is not necessary for the observation of resilience. Indeed, maintenance behaviors may seem inappropriate in the early stages of

a romantic relationship, while resilience may be observed across different stages of relationship development.

Reviewing relationship maintenance literature, there also is an emphasis on *sustaining* relationships, particularly in regard to achieving relational *stability*. Researchers have reviewed various cognitive, behavioral, social and cultural contributions to keeping relationships functioning (Canary & Dainton, 2006). Resilience literature similarly examines each of these contributing areas as potential sources of protective factors, but the desired outcomes are different. Researchers interested in resilience seem to accept the notion that one or multiple stressors may create an unstable environment, their goal is to identify protective factors that allow for positive outcomes despite that instability.

Finally, in a practical sense, while maintenance activities in an ongoing romantic relationship serve to keep a relationship functioning and “in repair,” resilience has more to do with the capacity of a relationship to withstand the “big hits.” The repair or disrepair of a relationship and its ability to withstand serious stressors should operate relatively independent of each other. For instance, partners could maintain their relationship competently and have superb conflict resolution strategies, but when an extremely negative circumstance occurs their relationship may come apart (like a well-kept and appointed house that goes through an earthquake, only for its owners to find out it wasn’t built to handle it). An alternative example would be partners who don’t maintain their relationship well, and who generally annoy each other, rally together to make it through a difficult circumstance. While we might say that the later example is

less frequent than the former, both bring to light how resilience and maintenance may function in distinct ways.

Building Consensus: Interpersonal Resilience

The extensive work done by scholars touting the trait and pattern perspectives on resilience and the limited exploration of resilience within the context of romantic relationships, suggests that pushing forward with a conceptualization of resilience in romantic relationships would be a theoretically useful enterprise. While trait perspectives offer a concise picture of the individual characteristics that make people tough, pattern perspectives do a more thorough job of describing and accounting for the interactive resources that individuals employ when they encounter stressors. Drawing from Jordan's (2006) emphasis on the interpersonal connections formed by partners, resilience in romantic relationships should focus on the specific characteristics of a couple's interaction that seem essential to the survival as well as the well being of their interpersonal relationship.

Previous work that has accounted for interactive components of resilience has either attempted to characterize typical communication tendencies (Afifi & Keith, 2004), or specific qualities of the communication environment (i.e., warmth, cohesion, involvement) (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Werner, 2000). To the author's knowledge, only one study has examined resilience within the context of heterosexual relationships and this investigation was limited by using a completely female sample (Jordan, 2006). Additionally, insight into stressors experienced by a couple could be uniquely the result of the relationship itself (i.e., cheating, the loss of a child, problems

with drinking), requiring specific inquiry into resilience within the context of relationships.

Although, theoretically, there is space in the pattern model for further exploration of communicative contributions to resilience in romantic relationships, such research has not been forthcoming. Scholars who study resilience have yet to examine romantic relationships and what communication between romantic partners adds to the observation of a resilient pattern of stressor management. In the current study, and as a starting point, interpersonal resilience in romantic relationships will be described as the characteristics of dyadic interaction that increase a romantic couple's capacity to endure or handle significant stressors or adversity. It is the aim of this research to identify these characteristics, and weave them into a larger framework on resilience.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Scholars addressing the impact of resilience on the experience of a significant stressor have dealt with problems associated with variations in how the construct is identified and measured. Leading researchers in the area (see Luthar et al., 2000) have called for consensus on what qualifies as resilience, as well as clarity as to who evaluates and measures risks or adversity. These initiatives point toward important considerations that should be made in advancing the pattern perspective: (a) Resilience involves a significant stressor, and is influenced by the context in which it is observed; (b) Competence, or the measurement of *doing well* following the experience of a stressor, is measured according to expectations for a normative peer group; (c) Protective Factors, those aspects that contribute to buffering of the effects of significant negative experiences, need to be identified for researchers to effectively participate in

conversations regarding the successful management of stressors and threats to the well being of relationships; and (d) Resilience, a dynamic process, not just a trait, is evidenced by a pattern that emerges as the result of a significant adversity or challenge.

It is apparent that if resilience researchers are attempting to identify how individuals can thrive when faced with challenges or stressors, they should have a firm grasp on the stressor that is the subject of their inquiry. How this stressor is anticipated, managed, and subsequently dealt with are important parts of the process that contribute to evaluating a resilient pattern. Additionally, how researchers evaluate outcomes should be compared to the outcomes that would be expected for similar peers who did not experience the negative effects of the stressor.

The current study explored resilience in the relatively untested context of romantic relationships. Research examining how couples grapple with significant detrimental experiences or negative communication practices had thus far focused on specific interactive phenomena (Accommodation) or a set of behaviors that people enact to keep their relationship functioning (Maintenance). Identifying characteristics associated with resilience in romantic relationships goes beyond both of these perspectives by looking at a specific stressor, in the context of romantic relationships, and then indentifying what interactive characteristics couples possess that enable them to best deal with the negative repercussions associated with that stressor. These contributions are part of what the concept of interpersonal resilience in romantic relationships captures:

RQ: What are the characteristics of couples' interactions that help romantic relationship partners do well in spite of stressors?

Identifying the characteristics of interactions within relationships that contribute to partners successfully handling stressful experiences is the first step in attempting to account for resilience within relationships. Next, a baseline for competence was selected for the particular context of romantic relationships. Raising this issue essentially asks the question: How does the current research operationalize “doing well” in romantic relationships? Historically, romantic relationships have most commonly been evaluated by two dependent variables: relational satisfaction and relationship quality.

Satisfaction, in terms of romantic relationships, refers to evaluative perceptions of the partner and relationship, and has been characterized by affection, warmth, and less hostility in research on established marriage relationships (for an overview, see Huston & Vangelisti, 1991). Low satisfaction is regarded as leading to breakdown of romantic relationships (Jacobsen, 1985). The measure of satisfaction used in the current study is based on Huston, McHale, and Crouter’s (1986) Marital Opinion Questionnaire, adjusted to account for the change in context from marital relationships to pre-marital relationships. The instructions were changed to ask participants to think about their ongoing romantic relationship over the last three months, rather than their marriage relationship.

Another popular measure for evaluating relationship quality was developed by Braiker and Kelley (1979). With this measure, individuals’ perception of relationship quality is composed of four dimensions: love, maintenance, conflict, and ambivalence. We would expect that relationships that demonstrate patterns of resilience will show higher overall perceptions of relationship quality in comparison to those that do not:

H1a: Interpersonal resilience will be positively correlated with satisfaction.

H1b: Interpersonal resilience will be positively correlated with the relationship quality dimensions of maintenance and love.

H1c: Interpersonal resilience will be inversely correlated with the relationship quality dimensions of conflict and ambivalence.

In order to test the pattern perspective within the context of romantic relationships, a set of predictions regarding the role that interpersonal resilience plays in mediating the association between stressors and relationship outcomes was warranted. Following the logic set forth by the pattern model, a significant stressor needs to have a negative effect on some outcome measure. Additionally, interpersonal resilience would need to be associated with both the impact of the stressor and the variables being used as the outcome measure. Finally the effect of the stressor on the outcome variable, controlling for interpersonal resilience, should be zero for a mediation effect to be evidenced. Demonstrating mediation would suggest that resilience operates as a buffer, additionally suggesting it functions more as a *coping strategy* than as a *coping resource*.

H2a: Impact of Stressor(s) will be inversely correlated with relationship satisfaction.

H2b: Impact of Stressor(s) will be positively correlated with relationship quality dimensions of conflict and ambivalence.

H2c: Impact of Stressor(s) will be inversely correlated with relationship quality dimensions of love and maintenance.

H2d: Impact of Stressor(s) will be inversely correlated with interpersonal resilience.

H2e: Interpersonal resilience will mediate the relationship between Impact of Stressor and Relationship Satisfaction.

H2f: Interpersonal resilience will mediate the relationship between Impact of Stressor and relationship quality dimensions of maintenance, conflict, love, and ambivalence.

Chapter Two

Phase One: Resilience Through Open-ended Response

Because romantic relationships are a relatively unexplored context for the resilience pattern, the current study will be segmented into three phases. For the first, open-ended questions were employed to identify characteristics of interaction that contribute to resilient outcomes in romantic relationships. In the second phase, these characteristics were used to create items for a measure of *Interpersonal Resilience in Romantic Relationships* (IR³). This measure was evaluated by the same sampling population as the first phase to assess the accuracy of the items and to determine if there are underlying aspects of IR³ that are important to the measurement of the concept. The third phase of the study examined the extent to which communication characteristics represented by the IR³ help to buffer the effects of a stressor on relationship outcome variables, such as quality and satisfaction. In this final phase, individuals currently involved in a romantic relationship completed assessments of their relationship quality, relational satisfaction, and various aspects of a stressor they are experiencing. They also completed the newly devised IR³ measure.

Participants

In order to identify specific characteristics of a romantic couple's communication that would contribute to resilient outcomes in the face of serious life stressors, experts in interpersonal communication were selected as participants. To qualify as experts, participants needed to have received a terminal degree (i.e., Ph.D.) in interpersonal communication or a related field, and be employed at an institution in which they would

be demonstrating and actively involved with such knowledge. Participants were recruited through the National Communication Website's Member directory by selecting all of those who were members of the Interpersonal Communication Division. This list of members of the Interpersonal Communication Division was downloaded and culled, removing those who had not yet received a terminal degree. This excluded group consisted of graduate students, industry professionals, and those who had stopped their professional development after attaining a master's degree.

Individuals on the reduced list ($N = 513$) of the membership of the Interpersonal Communication Division were sent personalized emails asking for participation in phase one of this dissertation research. The solicitation email [see Appendix A] included a link to phase one of the study. The format for phase one's survey was created using *Qualtrics* online survey construction software. A follow-up email was sent approximately three weeks later, to serve as a reminder.

Phase one data collection was closed approximately one month after data collection was started. There were more participants that had viewed or partially completed the study ($N = 200$), than had actually completed it ($N = 141$). Ninety-one percent of those who had partially completed the study made it through the demographics page, but only 69% completed the entire survey.

Only the data of participants who completed the phase one data collection survey were used in the analysis. This group ($N = 141$) was made up of more females than males ($n = 80, 56.7\%$), and was mostly European American ("White") in ethnicity ($n = 130, 92.2\%$) and heterosexual ($n = 130, 92.2\%$). These participants represented different

levels of academic status: Assistant professors ($n = 35$, 24.8%), Associate professors ($n = 35$, 24.8%), and Full professors ($n = 65$, 46.1%).

The participants varied in specialization in their field. Participants were offered the opportunity to indicate multiple areas of specialization. In order of most to least chosen, the specialties provided were: Interpersonal Communication ($n = 123$, 87.2%), Relational Communication ($n = 52$, 36.9%), Health Communication ($n = 35$, 24.8%), Family Communication ($n = 37$, 26.2%), Other area/discipline ($n = 35$, 24.8%), Language and Social Interaction ($n = 16$, 11.3%), Organizational Communication ($n = 14$, 9.9%), Intercultural Communication ($n = 12$, 8.5%), Instructional Communication ($n = 11$, 7.8%), and Professional Communication ($n = 7$, 5%). The most commonly listed specializations culled from an “Other area/discipline” option were Small Group ($n = 5$), Social Influence ($n = 4$) and Gender Communication ($n = 3$). This question served as an important participant check regarding the specific knowledge and training participants had.

Procedure

Phase one procedures were designed to solicit ideas from interpersonal communication experts regarding communication characteristics that contribute to resilience in romantic relationships. *Qualtrics* online survey software (www.qualtrics.com) was used to conduct the data collection. Participants followed a web address link that they received by email to gain access to the survey. There were a few participants ($n = 4$) who indicated they had difficulty using *Qualtrics* on their computer, but issues were resolved upon correspondence with the dissertation author.

The online survey was composed of six pages. The initial page greeted participants, indicating that they had in fact followed the link in the participation email correctly. This page also provided a brief overview of what participation would entail, and indicated that the survey would not require more than fifteen-minutes of participants' time.

The second page of the survey was an Institutional Review Board (IRB) informed consent document. The goal of this standard form is to make participants aware of the intent of the research they are about to participate in, clarify risks and benefits, and provide contacts in case there are any questions or concerns regarding the research. Upon reading this information, participants who continued with the research were interpreted as providing their informed consent.

Following the consent form were the portions of the survey meant to address the goals of phase one of the current research. First, participants were asked to report their age, sexual orientation, ethnic background, academic rank, and specialty. Next, participants were provided a brief description of resilience as it might relate to interpersonal relationships. This brief consisted of three paragraphs, intended to introduce and frame thinking around the central ideas pertaining to resilience [See Appendix B].

Following the resilience brief, two prompts were provided, designed to solicit ideas concerning the communication characteristics that couples use to develop resilient outcomes to serious life stressors. The first prompt was as follows: "From your experiences and expertise, what do you feel are *characteristics of typical interaction* that help individuals in romantic relationships do well in spite of diverse stressors in their lives?" This question was developed to allow participants to comment on different types

of general, broad communication tendencies. The second prompt was provided afterwards: “From your experiences and expertise, what do you feel are *communication behaviors* that help individuals in romantic relationships do well in spite of diverse stressors in their lives?” This question was included in the questionnaire to isolate specific communication actions that participants’ felt help promote resilient outcomes.

Analysis

Data generated by the first prompt regarding communication characteristics were content analyzed. Responses to the second question regarding specific communication behaviors were employed to clarify responses to the first question, if needed. Two coders were recruited to aid in coding. These coders were selected based on the level of their education (both were pursuing doctoral degrees) as well as the topic area of their research (both studied interpersonal communication, with their specific areas of focus being conflict communication and health communication). Both coders were male and in their late twenties. Several meetings were held to discuss the data analysis plan: the process of unitizing the data, developing unitizing reliability between coders, developing a coding scheme, coding the data based on this scheme, and then finally developing items for eventual use in a scale.

The coders selected the *thought unit* as the unit of analysis to unitize the data. A thought unit is commonly regarded as a “single complete thought or idea.” (Hirokawa, 1988, pp. 233-234) Prior to unitizing the data, coders were instructed that there could be multiple thought units in one sentence, sometimes representing different ideas. Coders were instructed to put a slash “ / ” in between thought units, and to strike out text regarded as not related to the question prompt (i.e., “I’ve thought about this for quite

some time, and I'm glad you've asked. The answer is _____."). To facilitate the unitizing process, all phase one responses were downloaded from the *Qualtrics* online program and provided to each coder in a word document.

To assess unitizing reliability between coders, each coder was asked to unitize the same 25% of the data. After approximately one week, coders and the dissertation author reconvened to determine intercoder unitizing reliability. Using the process for determining unitizing reliability described by Baxter and Babbie (2004), the coefficient of reliability was determined to be .9569, or 95.7%. In short, unitizing was reliable, with the coefficient being higher than the minimum acceptable standard of .70. As a result of this meeting, coders were then each provided with one-half of the remaining data set, with instructions to unitize the remaining responses.

With the data set unitized, the dissertation researcher and coders discussed the content of the thought units, identifying emergent common themes in the answers. A large list of initial themes was reduced to twelve categories. After initial thematic coding efforts returned low intercoder reliability, discrepancies between coding decisions were discussed. As a result of this discussion, a revised thirteen-category scheme emerged. These categories were: *Politeness* (Respect, Civility), *Sense of Humor* (enjoyment, joking, laughing, making light of things), *"We" Orientation* (having or arriving at a shared perspective, team mentality, having mutual understanding, sense of commitment), *Conflict Management* (strategies or planning, problem solving, openness to options, the act of taking another's perspective), *Honesty* (sincerity, varying degrees of truthfulness, being genuine), *Silence/Patience* (knowing or discerning when to communicate and when to be quiet), *Bolstering/Boosting* (confirmation, positivity, unconditional support or love,

physical affection, types of physical intimacy), *Social Network* (involvement vs. discretion), *Willingness to Communicate* (disclosure, forthcomingness, listening, empathy, openness with communication, and providing a nonjudgmental sounding board), *Sense of the Big Picture* (sense past and future, learning from past mistakes or experience, goals, faith, sense of normalcy), *Avoiding Hurt* (expressed through unchecked aggression, hurtful messages), *Un-categorizable* (usually trait or individual characteristics), and *Un-codable* (undecipherable, misspelled thought). To assess the reliability of these thirteen categories, 25% of the data were coded by both coders and the dissertation author. Using Cohen's kappa test of intercoder reliability, the revised category scheme yielded the following levels of coder agreement, corrected for chance: Diss. Author vs. Coder #1, .87; Diss. Author vs. Coder #2, .89; Coder #1 vs. Coder #2, .88. Given the higher rate of intercoder reliability across all three coders, the coders and the dissertation author each proceeded to individually code one third of the data set. Only 9.1 % of the thought units fell into the categories un-codeable ($n = 52$, 6.4%) or uncategorizable ($n = 22$, 2.7%).

Results

After the coding process was completed, the resulting data set included thought units ($N = 808$) organized across 11 categories. Open-ended responses to the prompt "From your experiences and expertise, what do you feel are *characteristics of typical interaction* that help individuals in romantic relationships do well in spite of diverse stressors in their lives?" yielded answers from participants that contained an average of 5.75 ($N = 141$, $SD = 3.57$) thought units. Participant answers represented an average of

3.56 ($N = 141$, $SD = 1.49$) different categories, illustrating some variety in the types of thought units received.

The 11 categories that emerged can be seen with examples in Table 1. Among these categories, the most frequent responses were *Willingness to Communicate* ($n = 156$, 19.3%), *Conflict Management* ($n = 116$, 14.4%), *We Orientation* ($n = 102$, 12.6%), and *Big Picture* ($n = 95$, 11.7%). Categories with the least responses included *Politeness/Civility* ($n = 25$, 3%), *Honesty/Sincerity* ($n = 21$, 2.5%), and *Involvement of Social Network* ($n = 16$, 1.9%).

Discussion

The purpose of this phase of the dissertation research was to solicit ideas generated by interpersonal communication experts regarding characteristics of communication that could contribute to resilient outcomes in romantic relationships. The results indicate a broad array of communication choices available to those who experience a stressor in their ongoing romantic relationship. The following discussion focuses on the theoretical implications of these findings as well as a comparison between resilience promoting communication characteristics and other similar constructs.

Theoretical implications. The list of communication characteristics generated in this analysis provides a unique perspective on what may help when those in romantic relationships encounter serious stressors. There is some overlap with communication concepts in related research, such as supportive communication or relationship maintenance specifically designed to repair miscues. The list of characteristics also occasionally highlights behaviors to not engage in, which is consistent with relationship research suggesting some behaviors should be avoided (e.g., Gottman's four horseman of

the apocalypse). The characteristics also add some variety to previously examined aspects of resilience that have been associated with communication behaviors (i.e., amount, warmth of communication).

Examining the categories yielded a complex array of communication behaviors that potentially contribute to resilient outcomes. Specifically, 808 different thought units were narrowed down to thirteen categories; of the eleven content categories, each initially appeared to be different concepts. Each category contained a rich array of specific communication characteristics. For example, in the *Conflict Management* dimension participant suggestions included “Jointly constructed problem solving efforts,” as well as “Using ‘I’ instead of ‘you’ language.” This level of specificity, reflected in each category, helped to clarify the distinctions between similar sounding categories.

Comparisons to similar concepts. While the categories that emerged initially seem to be distinct from each other, they also overlapped with different research in the conceptually related literature. Results indicated that participants felt that dealing with significant stressors successfully hinged most upon a willingness to communicate with your partner, viewing the stressor and the relationship from the perspective of the partnership, and carefully managing the conflict. *Willingness to Communicate*, or a desire to interact with one’s partner, has been described as openness (Stafford & Canary, 1991), and can be viewed on the individual level as the Big Six personality trait extraversion, defined by sociability and liveliness. The *We Orientation* category included thoughts regarding teamwork and partnership. This category has been reflected in relationship development literature as a state in which partners become more integrated and interdependent as a couple. Physical manifestations of this sense of partnership have

been examined in terms of shared tasks in relationships (Stafford & Canary, 1991) and as joint activities (Canary & Stafford, 1993). These overlaps between the emerging resilience categories and the body of relationship literature suggest that others have studied these specific communication characteristics individually, or in parts. The collection of these parts, used appropriately, might allow individuals within romantic relationships to demonstrate resilience.

Finally, there is an intuitive connection between encountering a stressor and the management of conflict. Research has emphasized the importance of how couples handle conflict as opposed to the sheer amount of conflict they experience (Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley, & Clements, 1993). Responses in the *Conflict Management* category suggest specific ways of handling conflict (i.e., being patient with responses, perspective-taking) that involve a more accommodating and compromising approach. This might be particularly useful for couples when encountering a stressor that is not typically dealt with in a single encounter, such as serious illness or job loss. Given that serious stressors might not be resolved after one discussion, the potential for repeated episodes of conflict further validate the place *Conflict Management* has in this initial overall picture of resilience.

Interestingly, several common ideas about how to best handle serious stressors were relatively uncommon in participants' responses (e.g., lower frequency of mentions per category). For instance, conventional wisdom suggests that couples should learn how to handle negative emotions in productive ways, such as finding constructive ways to discuss unavoidable conflicts (Halford, Markman, Kline, & Stanley, 2003; Markman, Stanley, Blumberg, Jenkins, & Whiteley, 2004). Handling negative emotions in

productive ways was represented relatively infrequently in the data set by the concept of politeness, the act of giving your partner space, and the importance of resisting the urge to lash out in frustration and say something particularly hurtful. *Politeness* alludes to having a positive, respectful interaction style with your partner (Fehr, 1993; Parks & Floyd, 1996), something that Kouneski and Olsen (2004) refer to as “listening to your partner’s needs and concerns, to understand and validate them” (p. 121).

Silence/Patience suggests that while one might want a responsive partner, sometimes giving a partner space and resisting the urge to engage in conflict might be a better way to demonstrate responsiveness. These findings (behaviors that are worth mention, but not frequent mentioned) suggest several possible implications for resilience: (a) that the characteristics these categories represent are important for producing resilient outcomes but have limited importance (in comparison to other frequently mentioned characteristics), (b) that the characteristics are only useful in particular situations or dealing with specific stressors (and the participants who suggested them had those situations or stressors in mind), or (c) that more research is needed to either eliminate said categories as functionally irrelevant or merge them with other existing categories.

Limitations. There were a few limitations to this phase of the current research. A limited number of participants had difficulty with the concept of resilience even after the briefing. As expected, due to a relative lack of coverage of resilience in communication scholarship, some of the recruited experts were not very familiar with the concept. The brief was an attempt to bridge that knowledge gap, but a longer brief or one that was more detailed may have been helpful to some participants. Further, the findings of this

first phase are limited in that they do not clarify distinctions between the categories empirically.

Chapter Three

Phase Two: Underlying Categories Through Factor Analysis

The results of phase one provided a rich array of possible communication characteristics that contribute to resilient outcomes for romantic couples in the face of a serious life stressor. The utility of the information in this form is limited however: Although the eleven thematic categories derived from participant responses appear distinct, the difference between them has not been empirically demonstrated. It could be a few underlying factors that are responsible for communicative contributions to resilience. Furthermore, the categories that were derived from phase one participant responses may or may not represent important theoretical distinctions, a conclusion suggested in part by low frequency and the variety of responses within some of the categories.

Phase two was designed to address these concerns. In order to explore underlying factors of importance to resilience across categories, individual items were derived from the phase one thematic categories. These items then were evaluated by the sampling group used in phase one.

Participants

To explore underlying factors associated with the thematic categories that emerged in phase one, participants were recruited again based on their expertise in interpersonal communication. The same criteria were used for determining who qualified as an expert, and the same revised list was used in phase one. The recruitment list ($N = 513$) of the membership of the Interpersonal Communication Division of the National

Communication Association was used to send personalized emails to individuals asking for their participation. The solicitation email [see Appendix C] contained a link to phase two of the online *Qualtrics* survey. A follow up email was sent ten days later to serve as a friendly reminder.

Phase two data collection was closed one month after the initial solicitation. This section of the paper will discuss the data of participants who completed the entire phase two data collection survey. This group ($N = 161$) was fairly evenly split in gender (men, $n = 84$, 52.2%), mostly European American (“White”) in ethnicity ($n = 144$, 89.4%), and heterosexual ($n = 152$, 94.4%). These participants represented different levels of academic status, consisting of Assistant professors ($n = 38$, 23.6%), Associate professors ($n = 39$, 24.2%), and Full professors ($n = 75$, 46.5%). These demographic statistics described a sample that was very consistent with that from phase one.

The participants varied with regard to their academic specialty. In order of most to least chosen, the specialties reported were: Interpersonal Communication ($n = 135$, 83.8%), Relational Communication ($n = 65$, 40.3%), Communication Theory ($n = 45$, 27.9%), Family Communication ($n = 40$, 24.8%), Other area/discipline ($n = 37$, 22.9%), Health Communication ($n = 32$, 19.8%), Nonverbal Communication ($n = 24$, 14.9%), Social Influence ($n = 23$, 14.2%), Organizational Communication ($n = 22$, 13.7%), Small Group Communication ($n = 20$, 12.4%), Intercultural Communication ($n = 20$, 12.4%), Language and Social Interaction ($n = 17$, 10.6%), Instructional Communication ($n = 14$, 8.7%), and Professional Communication ($n = 3$, 1.8 %). The most commonly listed specializations provided when individuals checked the “Other area/discipline” option were Conflict/Conflict Management ($n = 3$), and Communication Methods ($n = 3$).

Procedure

Phase two was designed with the intention of refining ideas regarding the characteristics of communication in romantic relationships that contribute to resilient outcomes. The purpose of this portion of the research was to identify underlying dimensions within the data. *Qualtrics* online survey software (www.qualtrics.com) was used as a medium for conducting the data collection. The online survey provided a greeting page, with an overview of the goals and purpose of the survey, as well a few directions designed to help participants navigate through the survey. Two participants during this phase were unable to access the survey online, and were provided email versions.

The initial welcome page greeted participants, provided a brief overview of what their participation would entail, and indicated that the survey was intended to require no more than fifteen minutes of their time. Following the first page, participants were next provided with a standard Institutional Review Board (IRB) informed consent document. Upon reading the IRB form and providing their informed consent, participants were then instructed to click a forward arrow button and proceed with the research.

After providing informed consent, participants were lead by the program to several survey pages designed to answer the specific goals of this phase of this research. First, a basic demographics page asked participants standard questions regarding their age, sexual orientation, ethnic background, academic rank, academic specialty, and provided an open ended response opportunity for more information about their research focus. Following this, participants were provided with the exact copy of the resilience brief employed in phase one. In addition to the original document and formatting, the

following message was displayed (in all caps): “Note: If you participated in the earlier phase of this research, this page should only serve as a reminder. If this is your first involvement, please read this brief summary of the research topic.” After reading this statement and (if necessary) the resilience brief, participants were directed to the last page of the survey.

Finally, the last page of the survey consisted of a measure of the communication characteristics that contribute to interpersonal resilience generated during phase one. In order to assess any underlying categories associated with these categories, three to four individual items were developed per phase one category. Participants were asked to report the degree to which they agreed that each item represented a characteristic that would contribute to resilient outcomes for a romantic couple when encountering a significant stressor. This agreement was measured for each item on a 7-point, Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree).

Results

A principle axis exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation was used to discover the underlying factors associated with participants’ ideas regarding communicative contributions to resilience in romantic relationships. The scree plot and eigenvalues above 1.0 were used as criteria to determine the optimal factor solution. A value of .30 was used as the cutoff point factor loadings, and double loadings within .20 were generally removed. Of the original 40 items, 15 were dropped in the final analysis due to low or multiple loadings. The analysis suggested that a seven-factor solution best fit the data (see Table 2). Three items were kept that double loaded because they fit, conceptually, with the relevant factors. The factors that emerged were labeled: *Conflict*

Management, Respect/Harmony, Partnership, Civility, Tension Release, Restraint, and Discretion.

The first factor, *Conflict Management*, included items suggesting a patient and focused approach to handling difficult circumstances. Items suggest that partners “take time before speaking,” and that they have “a sense of when to give each other space.” *Respect/Harmony*, the second factor, was composed of reverse worded items, with responses ultimately suggesting that individuals have “respect for my partner’s opinions” and that they should avoid feeling like “problems seem to take over our whole lives until we can find a way to deal with them.” This factor seemed to emphasize the importance of having a fundamental level of understanding between partners, in addition to a willingness to preserve respect even in light of the most turbulent of situations. Factor three, *Partnership*, suggests that individuals in romantic relationships could overcome life challenges together and that they appreciate the unconditional support that the other provides. Also addressed here are commitment to one’s partner and the importance of a “shared belief system.” *Civility*, the fourth factor, suggests the importance of maintaining a polite interaction style with one’s partner, and limiting negativity. According to this factor, partners should be “very careful to not say hurtful things to each other,” and they should “stay positive.” The fifth factor, *Tension Release*, implies that encountering life’s difficulties is unavoidable, and that relieving the resulting strain is important. Partners here “find ways to make light of stressful events” and “use humor to break up tension when it is appropriate.” A sense of appropriateness is vital to the sixth factor, *Restraint*, which suggests that in light of encountering a serious stressor, couples need to hold back. To avoid causing additional unnecessary damage, partners should avoid “pushing the

issue no matter what”, and be careful when “expressing our frustrations, no matter how intense the conversation becomes.” Finally, the seventh factor, *Discretion*, suggests that partners have an understanding of when and how much to involve important others in the romantic partners’ drama. It may be “helpful to have trusted others to confide in,” but having the sense of when to bring others in to help resolve an issue can be crucial. The alpha reliabilities for the summed measures derived from each of these factors are reported in Table 2 and the correlations between them are presented in Table 3.

Discussion

The second phase of this dissertation research was designed to evaluate the original eleven categories derived from phase one regarding communicative contributions to romantic couples’ ability to resiliently deal with significant stressors. Seven factors emerged from the analysis, each representing aspects of communication that may influence the way partners manage a significant stressor. Most importantly these categories suggest: (a) dimensions for how communication functions in couples’ management of serious stressors, (b) the importance of a mutually understood and appreciated positive and respectful communication climate (reflected by four related, but conceptually distinct, factors), and (c) the balance of connectedness and individuality as a dialectical tension that is played out in the different ways a couple handles communication surrounding the stressor and the relationship in general.

Communication dimensions. Seven communication dimensions (*Conflict Management, Respect/Harmony, Partnership, Civility, Tension Release, Restraint, and Discretion*) emerged as contributing to romantic couples’ ability to deal with a serious stressor. The dimensions featured very few double loading items, and moderate to strong

correlations between six of the seven variables. The factors can be characterized by couples' emphasis on a patient conflict management style, as reflected by the *Conflict Management* dimension, a willingness to maintain polite interaction as expressed by the *Civility* and *Restraint* dimensions, an emphasis on completing tasks with each other and finding ways to enjoy the partnership (with *Partnership* and *Tension Release*), a fundamental respect and willingness to communicate with each other in the *Respect/Harmony* dimension, and finally an awareness of when to involve others in the couple's problems as suggested by *Discretion*. Together, these dimensions suggest various ways in which partners may demonstrate resilience promoting communication behaviors.

Additionally, the seven distinct dimensions suggest that there is a certain amount of skill and knowledge that goes into being a "resilience-promoting communicator." It would be difficult to discover a communicator who could, all within a few utterances, naturally demonstrate the communication characteristics of *Conflict Management*, *Respect/Harmony*, *Partnership*, *Civility*, *Tension release*, *Restraint*, and *Discretion*. While the moderate to strong positive correlations between six of the seven dimensions suggest that it would be possible to hit a few dimensions pretty seamlessly, juggling the priorities of each dimension would require an aptitude and awareness of what communicative decisions are important when. Most importantly, each dimension may or may not be appropriate given the circumstances or audience, requiring an awareness of the situation and a working understanding of one's partner.

Importance of positive communication climate. Four of the seven dimensions of communication characteristics that emerged from phase two analysis represent positive

or affinity-generating behaviors: *Respect/Harmony*, *Civility*, *Tension Release*, and *Restraint*. The presence of these communication characteristics reaffirms the importance of communication that encourages involvement, pushes relationships towards stronger connections, and encourages goodwill and trust.

Interestingly, these characteristics that reinforce a positive communication climate emerged as four different dimensions, as opposed to one. These dimensions may serve a similar higher purpose, but they each represent different avenues for approaching a general idea (i.e., a respectful, harmonious communication environment). One reason the different dimensions emerged might be that each of the four dimensions represents different proverbial tools in a toolbox. As with tools, each may serve a different function, but all may be needed to complete a complex process such as building a piece of furniture, or in the current case, dealing with a significant relationship stressor.

If not the toolbox metaphor, another possible explanation might be that the different communication dimensions operate with a cumulative effect, each adding to the contributions of the others. One dimension may combine with similar others to yield a higher degree of resilience. For example, a couple that cultivates a polite and respectful style of interaction with each other (represented by *Civility*) and holds back from saying hurtful things (represented by the *Restraint* dimension) might experience an important break-through from a period of dysfunction. The combination represents something together than either aspect alone would not have been able to accomplish.

It is also possible that each dimension might be relevant to different relationship types. For example, *Restraint* (i.e., not freaking out or being hurtful in light of something unexpected) might be particularly relevant for less committed, less rule-laden romantic

couples (e.g., friends-with-benefits relationships). In order to keep such exciting and somewhat unpredictable relationships intact, developing a tolerance or “thick skin” for persistent external relationship threats and lower commitment and companionship from a partner may be particularly important. On the other hand, a couple with a newborn may need to remind themselves to have fun and enjoy the relationship (*Tension Release*). With one or more partners working fulltime, they might lose sight of the fun times that initially characterized the formation of their union.

Still other relationships may go through phases, as with on-again/off again couples. *Respect/Harmony*, *Civility*, and *Restraint* scores for an on-again/off-again couple may be higher all the way up until the second breakup, when uncertainty about the future of the relationship sours expectations and mutual respect (Dailey, Jin, Pfiester, & Beck, in publication). For these couples, this second breakup may indicate a point of no return, where future attempts at positive communication (represented by the four dimensions of *Respect/Harmony*, *Civility*, *Tension Release*, and *Restraint*) are seen as a waste of time.

Connectedness versus individuality dialectic. The phase two analyses suggested the importance of a balance between conflicting relational themes. Opposing dialectical tensions (e.g., Baxter & Montgomery, 1996), specifically connectedness and individuality, could be observed as an underlying element in several of the IR³ dimensions: *Conflict Management*, *Discretion*, and *Partnership*.

The dimensions of *Conflict Management* and *Discretion* both emphasize what relationship partners do to deal with tendencies toward individuality. *Conflict management* was born out of a merging of items in the phase one thematic categories of

Silence/Patience (3 items), *Willingness to Communicate* (2 items), and *Conflict management* (1 item). The items that make up this factor suggest aspects of communication that help address differences in opinion, promoting patience and openness about sharing different ideas. In particular two items, “My partner and I set uninterrupted time aside to discuss important matters with each other” and “My partner and I feel that sometimes it is important to take time to think before speaking” suggest the importance in cultivating an environment that acknowledges the different individual viewpoints of each partner.

The dimension *Discretion* addresses individuality by emphasizing decisions about sharing information pertaining to a stressor with others. Items in this category specifically call attention to “knowing when to involve others” and how it is “helpful to have trusted others to confide in.” When partners discover they are at a point in dealing with a stressor where progress is difficult or at a stand still, they individually may need additional assistance from outside their partnership. Either partner or both may seek out assistance from others, such as therapists, relationship coaches, family members, friends, or co-workers. The important factor here is individuals knowing when to involve others in dealing with their issues and the potential (positive or negative) impact of those issues on the relationship.

On the opposite end of the dialectic, the dimension *Partnership* emphasized ideas of seeking understanding and cooperation with one’s partner. Reinforcing the ideas of connectedness, items expressed how “approaching challenges with my partner as opposed to individually makes life easier” and how commitment “helps us feel that we can take on life’s challenges together.” An emphasis on the combined strength and

efforts of each partner in resolving difficulties provides the basis for gaining something above and beyond what each could accomplish on their own.

The possibility that some of the dimensions of the IR³ reflect the connectedness-individuality relational dialectic not only reinforces existing relational theory, but emphasize the complexity of handling a serious stressor within the context of an ongoing relationship. Partners bring to their relationship their own perspectives and ideas on how to handle both the stressor and the relationship. While there is bound to be overlap between each partner, resolving differences may require a balance between completely cooperating and operating differently but in corresponding or accommodating ways. How these dimensions function within the context of ongoing romantic relationships experiencing a serious stressor remains to be tested.

Limitations. Although the results of phase two yielded a factor solution that was theoretically and empirically interesting, the findings are limited in several ways. The most pertinent of these limitations are that (a) the final three factors consisted of substandard alpha reliabilities (< .70) and loaded with only two items each, and (b) there is a potential level of measurement issue inherent in each of the items that could limit the measurement validity of the IR³.

As seen in Table 2, the final principle axis factor analysis revealed seven factors, verified by the scree plot and eigenvalues. Some items loaded on their respective factors at less than the ideal threshold of .50, although some methodologists argue that such a plateau is not as important in exploratory phases with real life data (Raubenheimer, 2004). Additionally, a few items loaded on a secondary factor slightly within the .20 threshold. For example “My partner and I feel comfortable sharing our feelings with

each other even if the conversation is unexpected” loaded on *Conflict Management* (.54) as well as *Respect/Harmony* (.35). Future research would do well to clarify language within each item to better-fit dimension definitions.

The decision to use “my partner and I” as the subject of the items, as opposed to separating out the items for responses for each individual’s behavior presents itself as a potential issue for subsequent analysis. For instance, for the item “Even when we disagree my partner and I make sure to keep our discussion civil,” two corresponding items could be created that read “Even when we disagree I make sure to keep our discussion civil” and “Even when we disagree my partner makes sure to keep our discussion civil.” While this raises questions regarding the level of communication that is being measured, the focus of the current research was on the communication patterns that characterized the relationship between partners as evaluated by one partner in particular.

Chapter Four

Phase Three: Validation of the IR³ Scale

While phase one and two of this research assessed the fundamental characteristics of interpersonal resilience in romantic relationships, neither phase demonstrated the ability of interpersonal resilience to buffer the influence of a stressor on relationship outcomes. Phase three of this research was conducted to assess the value that IR³ has as a protective factor in the resilience pattern model, mediating the relationship between a significant stressor and several outcome measures.

The stressor that was selected for this phase of the research was the experience of job loss. Due to the state of the economy when this dissertation was being completed and the large portion of the American workforce that lost employment as a result, examination of this stressor was timely and relevant. Even though there are potential issues concerning generalizability for this research, with data collection during a period of high unemployment, there are also reasons to believe the timing will contribute a broader sample represented and clearer picture of how to deal with the experience.

This dissertation research was conducted during a time period that had been labeled by popular media as the “Great Recession,” with economists generally in agreement that the period from 2007-2010 was marked by “the worst economic downturn since the great depression” (Money.cnn.com, 2009). One of the many repercussions of a shrinking economy can be seen in the number of its working-age adults that are unemployed. At the time that this dissertation was written, unemployment was at 9.7%, with 14.9 million people unemployed nationwide. Approximately 10% of adult men, 8%

of adult women, 8.8% of whites, 15.8% of blacks, 12.4% of Hispanics, 8.4% of Asians, and 25% of teenagers were unemployed (United States Department of Labor, February, 2010). Part-time involuntary workers, or those who are employed part time for economic reasons, numbered at 8.8 million people. Marginally attached, discouraged workers numbered 1.2 million, a figure which had increased by 473,000 from a year earlier. As staggering as these numbers are, the unemployment rate reached 10.1% in October 2009, which Lakshman Achuthan, managing director at the Economic Cycle Research Institute in New York, claimed was the peak of the recession and highest unemployment rate since 1983 (Businessweek.com, 2010).

With especially high national unemployment figures lingering around 10%, jobless Americans faced many personal and social consequences. Employment literature has come to several universal conclusions concerning the effects of job loss: Job loss, especially extended unemployment, has negative effects on personal well-being and life-satisfaction, and increases the chances of for poor mental health (Caplan, Vinokur, Price, & van Ryn, 1989; Cobb & Kasl, 1977; Vinokur, Caplan, & Williams, 1987). Correspondingly, those who manage to find satisfactory reemployment show significantly improved levels of overall well-being (Caplan et al., 1989; Feather & O'Brien, 1986).

The experience of losing a job is of primary concern to people who have become unemployed. Beyond this, there are secondary implications and stressors that have an effect on unemployed individuals' romantic partner and dependent family members. The most salient effect would be that of a change in financial status: Family savings may be drained as a result of months with limited income, family budget for bills and expenses is

constricted, and standard of living, in general, is reduced or significantly altered.

Additional secondary implications include the negative impact on the communication climate and mood of those in the household. The following review examines both the implications of job loss on the individual and those indirectly effected.

Losing a job can threaten unemployed individuals' self esteem and worth, especially if these persons' identity is tied to work (Price, Friedland, & Vinokur, 1998). Low self-esteem can be a significant barrier to people's efforts to return to work (Feather & O'Brien, 1986), because it makes them feel they are not worthy of finding work or capable of performing well enough to be employed. The situation can become even worse if the period of unemployment becomes prolonged and is accompanied by successive failure to find a job, resulting in a generalized sense of helplessness (Wortman & Brehm, 1975).

Those caught in this downward spiral of helplessness and frustration have been provided a specific category in United States Department of Labor research, labeled *discouraged workers* (United States Department of Labor, February, 2010). These individuals have been characterized as those who have "given up on the search for work," and more specifically attribute their lack of employment either to factors relating to the job market (lack of openings, lack of interview requests) or to personal situations (age, skill set, personal handicaps) (Flaim, 1984). Regardless of reason, the more time that passes from the last date of employment for discouraged workers, the less likely it is that they will find meaningful employment.

The majority of the employment literature that has examined individuals' experience of job loss has been concerned with reemployment. Job-seeking behaviors

have been investigated as problem-focused coping strategies aimed at achieving the goal of reemployment (Kinicki & Latack, 1990). While attempting to find a job may help remedy people's employment status, highly involved and motivated individuals may be more at risk for serious downfalls than those who are less involved and motivated (Feather & Davenport, 1981; Vinokur & Caplan, 1987). In concert with the recessed economy and a changing marketplace looking for workers with new training and abilities, workers might not find a place for their particular skill set.

Few studies have examined the effect of job loss on the family or the couple (Dew, Bronet, & Schulberg, 1987; Liem & Liem, 1988). While the impact of losing a family's primary income or one half of a dual-income family's contributions towards financial viability may be readily apparent, researchers have explored several ways in which the experience of job loss effects people's romantic relationship and family functioning. Two explanations, the *Common Stressors Model* and the *Relationship Disruption Model* are described below.

The *Common Stressors Model* (Price et al., 1998) suggests that while individuals who have lost their employment experience the direct psychological effects of losing their job, there are other people who rely on the mental health and financial earnings of those who are unemployed. Maintaining the division of household duties, financial contributions to the family's monthly budget, and even the harmony and equilibrium established by the roles that family members normally play can all be thrown off with a major disruption like job loss. Several factors related to family functioning and planning may diminish the impact that job loss has on the family system. These include the individual or family's resourcefulness and financial standing (Vinokur, Price, & Caplan,

1996) and re-employment capacity (e.g., social capital, education level, relevant training) (Sobel, 2002). The Common Stressors Model provides explanations for some of the associated negative “aftershocks” attributed to a family member’s experience with job loss.

Using a *Relationship Disruption Model* (Howe, Caplan, Foster, Lockshin, & McGrath, 1995; Vinokur, 1996), the effect of job loss can be seen in terms of how it interferes with normal relationship functioning. The model suggests that if a stressor interrupts normal relationship behavior for an extended period of time, it will have an effect on how the couples experience normal conflicts and disagreements. If the experience of job loss and inability to find re-employment within a reasonable amount of time compromises the ability of couples to deal with minor problem as they arise, job loss can be seen as having an amplification effect on the dysfunctional communication behaviors that couples already may possess. This aggravation would logically lead to a decline in quality or overall satisfaction with the relationship.

Whether the experience of job loss is examined through a model based on *Common Stressors* or a *Relationship Disruption*, the resounding consensus is that job loss has consequences that go far beyond just the inconvenience of having to leave a steady paycheck and find new employment somewhere else. When considering additional complications regarding a recessed job market and pre-existing communication issues within a partnership and/or household, job loss can be perceived as a dangerous catalyst for increasingly more negative outcomes.

Despite the damage that job loss can cause, there are aspects of relationships that can contribute in a positive way toward lessening this damage. Financial advisors

suggest a six-month reservoir of saving for unanticipated emergencies. Educational experiences and training can add to the social capital that individuals bring to their hireability, thus increasing their chances for re-employment (Gatewood & Field, 1998). Additionally, fostering a communication environment within a partnership or household that features open communication and mutual support may help to manage and contain negative experiences.

The model for how interpersonal resilience factors into the relationship between the experience of job loss and various ways that it manifests itself in romantic relationships can be explained in two different ways, each relating to how resilience is theorized to function. One way is the *Coping Resource* model [See Figure 1], and the other is the *Coping Strategy* model [See Figure 2] (Gowan, Riordan, & Gatewood, 1999). It is the goal of the current phase of this study was to not only validate the scale developed in phases one and two, but to determine the role that interpersonal resilience plays in the overall resilience process.

The differences between the *Coping Resource* and *Coping Strategy* models can be summarized by two questions: Does interpersonal resilience function as a resource and thus it has an effect on the stressor before people need to make decisions about how to deal with the stressor? Or does interpersonal resilience come into play more when people really need it, functioning on the spot as a tool? In this case resilience would play a mitigating role between the experience of the stressor and relationship outcomes. These questions were addressed with an analysis of pertinent variables and their fit to either *Coping Resource* or *Coping Strategy* models.

Participants

Recruitment was based upon several criteria designed to assess the research questions and hypotheses: (a) participants must have lost their full time employment within the last twenty-four months; (b) participants must have been in a romantic relationship (i.e. dating, married, partnered) when they lost full time employment and must still be with their partner (at the time of data collection); and finally (c) participants must be currently seeking fulltime employment (at the time of data collection).

The recruitment process involved several different strategies. The main sampling strategy used was snowball sampling, a technique in which the researcher contacts others to participate, who then contact others, and so on. Snowball sampling was used to reach potential participants within the researcher's personal, campus, church, and citywide networks. The dissertation author also made physical visits providing recruitment materials to various community centers, educational, and business sites around Austin, including employment agencies, YMCAs, community colleges, and coffee shops. Finally, a short advertisement was placed on nationwide free classified outlets, such as craigslist, regional community online newspapers, and online classifieds. The recruitment period lasted approximately three months.

Phase three involved 194 participants, 111 of which (42.3% male, 57.7% female, $M = 39.4$ years old, $SD = 13.05$) completed the majority of the survey and met all of the criteria. These participants were mostly European American "white" ($n = 84$, 75.7%), heterosexual ($n = 91$, 82%), and had completed college, some college, or technical or vocational school ($n = 37$, 33.3%). Approximately half (52%) described their religious choice as a Christian denomination: Catholic ($n = 22$, 19.8%), non-denominational Christian ($n = 7$, 17%), or Protestant ($n = 6$, 15.3%). When asked "how religious" they

were, a mean religiosity score suggested most participants were somewhere between “slightly religious” and “moderately religious” ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 1.13$)

Considering the nature of the data collection (i.e., snowball sampling, advertisements in online news outlets and classifieds), recruitment yielded a geographically broad population. Participants represented thirteen states, indicating their location by providing the zip code of their permanent address. Most participation came from the following states: Texas ($n = 51$, 45.9%), Washington ($n = 14$, 12.6%), and Colorado ($n = 10$, 9.0%). The most frequent cities in which participants dwelled were Austin, TX ($n = 24$, 21.6%), Seattle, WA ($n = 8$, 7.2%), and Las Vegas, NV ($n = 5$, 4.5%). A few participants did not provide a zip code or provided less than the required five digits ($n = 6$, 5.4%).

Given this phase’s focus on participants in romantic relationships, several additional questions were asked regarding characteristics of their relationships. Of the 111 participants, 54 (48.6%) were married, and 34 (30.6%) were “seriously dating (considering long term commitment).” The average length of their relationship for the whole sample was 11 years, 3 months, ($SD = 11$ years, 11 months). The average length of time participants have been without full time employment was 6 months ($SD = 5$ months). Participants responded to a question about their living arrangements, with a majority ($n = 79$, 71.2%) living in the same residence. The majority of participants ($n = 67$, 60.4%) did not have children that either partner contributed to financially. Seven participants (6.3%) responded that they were “dating or seeing” someone else in addition to their current partner.

Procedure

Participants were provided with a web address that led them to the online survey “Learning About Job Loss.” While using an internet protocol (IP) address block out was considered for this phase, it was decided that more than a few participants might use the computers made available to them in public places, such as libraries or universities. Enabling an IP block out might inadvertently prevent interested participants from having access to the survey; thus IP block-out was not enabled. A list of IP addresses generated when the individual logged into the survey were compared and determined to be distinct. The online survey consisted of a welcome page, a standard IRB consent form, and eight pages of survey materials used to assess the primary variables.

Stressor. The way job-loss research has measured the stress associated with involuntary job loss has been to evaluate *unemployment affect*. This one-item indicator of depressive affect has been used to measure the experience of job loss in multiple studies (Feather & Davenport, 1981; Prussia, Kinicki, & Bracker, 1993). Specifically, the measure required participants to respond to the question: “When you think about becoming unemployed, how does it make you feel?” Answer choices range from (1) *really glad* to (5) *really depressed*. Two similar questions were added to this measure in an effort to accurately assess feelings surrounding the experience of being unemployed while being in a romantic relationship. These questions were worded to assess the effect of unemployment on participants’ family and their future. The three items together had an alpha reliability of .85, and the combined measure had a mean of 4.08 ($SD = .17$).

IR³. The scale created as a result of phase one and two was used to assess interpersonal resilience in the participants’ romantic relationship. Twenty-seven items addressed the areas of *Conflict Management* ($M = 3.53$, $SD = .98$, $alpha = .83$),

Respect/Harmony ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 2.57$, $\alpha = .82$), *Partnership* ($M = 3.80$, $SD = .43$, $\alpha = .90$), *Civility* ($M = 3.46$, $SD = .32$, $\alpha = .85$), *Tension Release* ($M = 3.83$, $SD = .41$, $\alpha = .89$), and *Restraint* ($M = 2.84$, $SD = .73$, $\alpha = .70$). Participants rated each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, and 5 = Strongly Agree).

Coping resources. Aside from one's own cognitive and emotional evaluation of how they individually feel as a result of their job loss experience, empirical evidence and rational thinking points to a host of variables that can account for variation in coping resources measurement. For this study, these variables were also accounted for: education level, financial resources, and social support.

Education. In an economic climate in which jobs are scarce, those who have more skills, education, and experience tend to do better. Highly qualified individuals in terms of education could be seen as less affected than those with less educational experience (Kaufman, 1982). A single item was used to address Education: "What is the highest level of education you have completed: (a) Elementary School/Middle School/Some High School, (b) GED/High School Diploma, (c) Some Technical or Vocational School, or Some College; (d) College Degree, (e) Some Graduate School, (f) Graduate degree, (g) Not listed. Participants' education level were listed by frequency: College Degree ($n = 37$, 33.3%), Some Technical or Vocational School, or Some College ($n = 33$, 29.7%), Graduate Degree ($n = 26$, 23.4%), Some Graduate School ($n = 9$, 8.1%), GED/High School Diploma ($n = 5$, 4.5%), Elementary School/Middle School, Some High School ($n = 1$, .9%).

Financial resources. Those with more financial resources would feel less upset with the prospect of losing a job, simply because they have more of a financial cushion to

grapple with the loss of a job. Pearlin, Liebman, Menaghan, and Mullen's (1981) economic strain model was used to develop the financial resources variable. Items include: "How much difficulty do you have paying your bills?" (1) Great deal, to (4) No difficulty; "At the end of the month, do you end up with: (1) Some money left over, (2) Just enough money to make ends meet, (3) Not enough to make ends meet; "Total household assets in checking accounts, savings accounts, investments, etc. (1) \$0-1000, to (5) over \$50,000; and "Using your best idea, what is your family's total current monthly income at this time?" All answers were standardized and combined to yield a composite financial resources score ($M = 0$, $SD = 2.94$, $alpha = .81$).

Social support. The level of social support provided by friends and family contributes to people's ability to manage life stressors. Previous studies have used a modified Social Support Scale (Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison, & Panneau, 1975; Gowan, Riordan, & Gatewood, 1999) to address job loss concerns. The Social Support Questionnaire 3 (SSQ3), a three-item measure of social support, was used in the current study. Items included: (a) Who accepts you totally, including both your worst and best points?; (b) Whom can you really count on to tell you, in a thoughtful manner, when you need to improve in some way?; and (c) Whom do you feel truly loves you deeply? Participants answered each question by providing the initials of up to nine people that they could think of whom fit the question's prompt. After each pair of initials, participants provided the role of the person in their life (i.e., T.B. (father)). Following each item, participants were asked how satisfied they were with the support they listed, indicated on a six-point Likert-type scale (1 = Very Dissatisfied, to 6 = Very Satisfied). The total number of people participants named was computed as the *Perceived*

Availability Score. Combining and standardizing the satisfaction ratings for each of the three questions resulted in the *Satisfaction with Support* variable ($M = 0$, $SD = 1.0$, $alpha = .74$).

Coping strategy: Job search. A direct way of coping with job loss is engaging in job search activities. Given that people employ various techniques to find jobs, questions were developed to assess the depth and breadth of participants' search methods. Three questions were asked to assess how much time, effort, and emotion participants devoted to their job search. The items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = Very Little, to 5 = Extreme). The alpha reliability was .89 for the Depth of Job Search scale ($M = 3.55$, $SD = .20$). Another question asked where job search activities were focused: employment agencies, family/friends, previous co-workers, previous supervisors, online search (google, yahoo), online classifieds (craig's list), and social networking websites (facebook, myspace, linkedin). For each potential job source, participants indicated an answer on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = Don't use this source, to 5 = Always use this source). The alpha reliability was .64 for the *Breadth of Job Search* scale ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 1.72$).

Relationship satisfaction and quality. Relationship quality and satisfaction were assessed as dependent variables. For relationship quality, respondents completed Braiker and Kelley's (1979) *Relationship Quality Questionnaire*. Participants completed items measuring conflict-negativity, maintenance, love, and ambivalence by rating each on a scale of 1 to 9 (Braiker & Kelley, 1979). Examples of items: for love, "To what extent do you love your partner at the present time?"; for maintenance, "How much time do you and your partner spend discussing and trying to work out problems between you?"; and

for conflict-negativity, “When you and your partner argue, how serious are the problems or arguments?” A complete version of this measure is provided in Appendix C. The reliability for each dimension of relationship quality is as follows: love ($M = 7.14$, $SD = 2.17$, $alpha = .88$), maintenance ($M = 5.87$, $SD = 2.3$, $alpha = .72$), ambivalence ($M = 2.89$, $SD = .94$, $alpha = .83$), and conflict/negativity ($M = 3.94$, $SD = .78$, $alpha = .69$). With ambivalence and conflict/negativity reverse-scored, and then all four dimensions standardized, a composite relationship quality score was created ($alpha = .77$).

To measure perception of relationship satisfaction, participants completed a modified version of Huston, McHale, and Crouters’ Marital Opinion Questionnaire (1986). Wording in the survey was changed to reflect a general romantic relationship perspective rather than one of marriage. Participants rated eleven bipolar adjectives items (e.g., empty - full) and a 1-item measure of satisfaction on 7-point scales (Huston, McHale, & Crouter, 1986). Items include: miserable-enjoyable, hopeful-discouraging, free-tied down, empty-full, interesting-boring, rewarding-disappointing, doesn’t give me much chance-brings out the best in me, lonely-friendly, hard-easy, worthwhile-useless, and completely satisfied-completely dissatisfied. In line with Huston, McHale and Crouter (1986), two items were used as filler items and thus dropped. The remaining items were summed ($M = 5.05$, $SD = 1.06$, $alpha = .96$), which was moderately positively correlated with the last item, global assessment of overall relationship satisfaction. A complete version of this measure is provided in Appendix G.

Commitment. Commitment was assessed as a final relationship outcome variable. Rusbult’s (1980, 1983) commitment scale was used. Participants completed six items. One of these items assessed how long participants wanted their relationships to

last (1 = A month or less, 5 = Ten years or more). The other five items assessed commitment to the relationship in a variety of ways. Participant responses for each item were normalized and totaled ($\alpha = .92$)

Results

Analysis of the Measurement Model. Both confirmatory factor analysis and reliability assessments were employed to evaluate the variables to be used in the structural equation modeling test of the proposed models of resilience. Correlations among the various dimensions of the IR³ measure are provided in Table 3. In order to assess the validity of the current proposed structure of the IR³ and its subscales, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. An initial model was entered into AMOS structural equation modeling software, with all items and latent variables as the initial factor analysis in phase two suggested. The goodness-of-fit for this confirmatory factor analysis was based on a 3:1 chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio threshold, a comparative fit index (CFI) greater than .90, and a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of .08 or less. (Hu & Bentler, 1999). This initial model revealed relatively adequate fit ($X^2 = 595.80$, $df = 34$, $p = .00$, $CFI = .85$, $RMSEA = .08$).

All dimensions of the initial IR³ structure held up well, except for the final dimension, *Discretion*. An extra item was added after phase two to strengthen the dimension. However even with the addition, the factor did not yield a good or dramatically improved alpha reliability ($\alpha = .56$). Modification indices, which are suggested improvements to the overall model fit provided by the AMOS structural equation modeling software, indicated that items within the *Discretion* dimension better fit with other dimensions. Specifically, “Knowing when to involve others in our

problems is important to the way my partner and I resolve our problems fit better with *Conflict Management*, and “The issues that my partner and I have are often shared with anyone and everyone” was a better fit with *Respect/Harmony*. Additionally, the analysis indicated that *Discretion* was independent of the overall model structure. Given these findings, a new revised model was created by removing the latent variable *Discretion* as well as the item “When my partner and I have problems, it’s helpful to have trusted others to confide in.” The remaining items from *Discretion*, mentioned above, were added to the aforementioned preferred dimensions. Correlations among the various dimensions of the revised IR³ measure are provided in Table 4. The resulting model (Figure 3) demonstrated improved fit in comparison to the previous model ($X^2 = 504.34$, $df = 308$, $p = .00$, $CFI = .88$, $RMSEA = .08$). With CFI near a preferred .90 and an RMSEA meeting the minimum criteria of .08, this model was chosen as the final measure of IR³ for this dissertation research.

Correlations Between IVs and DVs. Correlations between coping resources (education, financial resources, social support) and the stressor (unemployment affect) are provided in Table 5. Additionally correlations between the stressor, the coping strategy (job search strategies) and outcome variables (relationship satisfaction, relationship quality, and commitment) are provided in Table 6.

Hypothesis 1a. Hypothesis 1a predicted that IR³ would be positively correlated with satisfaction. Five IR³ dimensions were positively correlated with satisfaction: *Conflict Management* ($r = .66$, $p < .001$), *Respect/Harmony* ($r = .73$, $p < .001$), *Partnership* ($r = .77$, $p < .001$), *Civility* ($r = .49$, $p < .001$), and *Tension Release* ($r =$

.59, $p < .001$). *Restraint* was not significantly correlated with satisfaction ($r = -.16, p = .08$). Therefore Hypothesis 1a was partially supported.

Hypothesis 1b. Hypothesis 1b predicted that IR³ would be positively correlated with the relationship quality dimensions of maintenance and love. Five IR³ dimensions were positively correlated with maintenance: *Conflict Management* ($r = .63, p < .001$), *Respect/Harmony* ($r = .49, p < .001$), *Partnership* ($r = .60, p < .001$), *Civility* ($r = .45, p < .001$), and *Tension Release* ($r = .45, p < .001$). *Restraint* was negatively correlated with maintenance ($r = -.34, p < .001$). Similarly, five IR³ dimensions were positively associated with love: *Conflict Management* ($r = .62, p < .001$), *Respect/Harmony* ($r = .64, p < .001$), *Partnership* ($r = .78, p < .001$), *Civility* ($r = .46, p < .001$), and *Tension Release* ($r = .53, p < .001$). *Restraint* was not significantly correlated with love ($r = -.18, p = .06$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1b was partially supported.

Hypothesis 1c. Hypothesis 1c predicted that IR³ would be inversely correlated with the relationship quality dimensions of conflict and ambivalence. Five of the IR³ dimensions negatively correlated with conflict: *Conflict Management* ($r = -.33, p < .001$), *Respect/Harmony* ($r = -.53, p < .001$), *Partnership* ($r = -.37, p < .001$), *Civility* ($r = -.33, p < .001$), and *Tension Release* ($r = .28, p < .001$). *Restraint* was not significantly correlated with conflict ($r = -.15, p = .12$). As for ambivalence, five IR³ dimensions indicated significant negative correlations: *Conflict Management* ($r = -.31, p < .001$), *Respect/Harmony* ($r = -.64, p < .001$), *Partnership* ($r = -.53, p < .001$), *Civility* ($r = -.18, p < .05$), and *Tension Release* ($r = .19, p < .05$). *Restraint* was not significantly correlated with ambivalence ($r = -.05, p = .61$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1c was partially supported.

Proposed Models: Coping Resource or Coping Strategy. Path analyses for the two models testing the role the IR³ dimensions play in the experience of job loss were conducted. A full, saturated model was derived from all variables in each model, and non-significant paths were removed one-by-one to create the improved, reduced final models. The *Coping Strategy* model (Figure 4a), which suggested the IR³ dimensions play a mediating role, demonstrated great fit ($X^2 = 80.99$, $df = 66$, $p = .101$, $CFI = .98$, $TLI = .97$, $RMSEA = .045$); the *Coping Resource* model (Figure 5), demonstrated good, but comparably worse fit ($X^2 = 92.89$, $df = 71$, $p = .042$, $CFI = .97$, $TLI = .96$, $RMSEA = .053$). According to structural equation modeling goodness of fit standards (described earlier), the model representing the IR³ as a coping strategy demonstrated an overall better fit to the data.

Mediation effect. Several hypotheses tested a possible mediation by IR³ of the association between the stressor and the relationship outcome variables (as seen in the *Coping Strategy* model). According to Kenny, Korchmaros, and Bolger (2003), there are four steps to establish mediation. First, in the case of the current model, unemployment affect must be correlated with the outcome variable (either relationship satisfaction or quality, depending on which hypothesis being examined) to establish that there is an effect that can be mediated. Second, the unemployment affect variable would need to be correlated with the mediator, dimensions of the IR³ scale. Third, an analysis would need to show that the mediator is associated with the outcome variable. Finally the influence of unemployment affect on the outcome, controlling for the mediator variable, should be zero. With all steps met, the data would suggest that a mediation effect is present, while only the first three steps met would indicate a partial mediation. The mediation was

chosen to investigate these relationships, given that it fit the data better than the *Coping Resource* model.

Hypothesis 2a. Hypothesis 2a predicted that the impact of the stressor, assessed by unemployment affect, would be inversely correlated with relationship satisfaction. Unemployment affect was significantly and negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction ($r = -.27, p < .01$). Therefore, Hypothesis 2a was supported.

Hypothesis 2b. Hypothesis 2b predicted that the impact of the stressor, assessed by unemployment affect, would be positively correlated with the relationship quality dimensions of conflict/negativity, and ambivalence. Unemployment affect was significantly correlated with ambivalence ($r = .20, p < .05$), but not significantly correlated with conflict/negativity ($r = .08, p = .417$). Therefore, Hypothesis 2b was partially supported.

Hypothesis 2c. Hypotheses 2c suggested that the impact of the stressor would be inversely correlated with the relationship quality dimensions of love and maintenance. Unemployment affect did not significantly correlate with either love ($r = -.167, p = .08$) or maintenance ($r = -.177, p = .06$). Therefore, Hypothesis 2c was rejected.

Hypothesis 2d. Hypothesis 2d suggested that the impact of the stressor would be inversely correlated with IR³. Several IR³ dimensions were significantly and negatively correlated with unemployment affect: *Partnership* ($r = -.25, p < .01$), *Civility* ($r = -.20, p < .05$), *Tension Release* ($r = .27, p < .01$). The remaining IR³ dimensions were not significantly correlated with unemployment affect: *Conflict Management* ($r = -.16, p = .09$), *Respect/Harmony* ($r = -.19, p = .05$), and *Restraint* ($r = .03, p = .78$). Therefore, Hypothesis 2d was partially supported.

Hypotheses 2e & 2f. Hypothesis 2e and 2f suggested that IR³ would mediate the association between the impact of the stressor and relationship satisfaction as well as the link between the impact of stressor and the relationship quality dimensions of maintenance, conflict, love, and ambivalence. In order to test these hypotheses, two versions of the *Coping Strategy* model were used. First, a model was created without the IR³ variables included (figure 4b). This model showed good fit with the data ($X^2 = 27.3$, $df = 21$, $p = .161$, $IFI = .98$, $CFI = .98$, $RMSEA = .05$). All paths were significant. In figure 4b, without IR³ to serve as a mediating variable, significant associations existed between unemployment affect and relationship quality ($B = -.09$, $S.E. = .04$, $p < .05$), unemployment affect and relationship satisfaction ($B = -1.98$, $S.E. = .61$, $p < .001$), as well as unemployment affect and commitment ($B = -.78$, $S.E. = .34$, $p < .05$).

Adding the IR³ dimensions to the model as mediating variables changed the association between unemployment affect and each of the aforementioned relationship outcome variables. All three associations between unemployment affect and relationship quality, relationship satisfaction, and commitment became non-significant. Sobel tests were conducted to confirm these effects. The *Partnership* dimension served as a significant mediator between unemployment affect and relationship quality ($z = -2.67$, $p < .01$), unemployment affect and satisfaction ($z = -2.45$, $p < .01$) and unemployment affect and commitment ($z = -2.63$, $p < .01$). The IR³ dimension *Respect/Harmony* served as a significant mediator between unemployment affect and relationship quality ($z = -1.89$, $p < .05$), unemployment affect and satisfaction ($z = -1.85$, $p < .05$) and approached significance on unemployment affect and commitment ($z = -1.61$, $p = .05$). The IR³ dimension of *Tension Release* ($z = -2.37$, $p < .01$) served as a significant mediator

between unemployment affect and satisfaction. Finally, *Civility* approached significance as a mediator between unemployment affect and satisfaction ($z = 1.57, p = .06$). The new model accounting for the IR³ dimensions (Figure 4a) showed great fit ($X^2 = 80.99, df = 66, p = .41, IFI = .98, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .05$). Therefore, feelings tied to losing one's job operate through interpersonal resilience dimensions of *Partnership*, *Respect/Harmony*, and *Tension Release* to independently contribute in different ways to the outcome variables of relationship quality, relationship satisfaction, and commitment.

Discussion

Phase three of this research was designed to assess the usefulness of interpersonal resilience in describing relational partners' ability to deal with a serious life stressor. The stressor examined was one partner losing full time employment, and being unemployed at the time of the study. Results from the analysis of the measurement scale suggested that the structure of the IR³ was largely sound. Dropping one dimension entirely, and then distributing two of its three items into two other dimensions improved the overall measure. Finally, several IR³ dimensions stood out as mediators between the experience of the stressor and relationship outcome variables.

When the IR³ was used to examine individuals' ability to deal with a serious stressor, all three initial hypotheses were supported. Finding significant correlations between the communication characteristics of the IR³ scale and relationship outcomes was a necessary first step in establishing the importance of resilience in promoting positive relationship outcomes.

Through structural equation modeling, the IR³ demonstrated a better fit to the data as a mediator than as an additive resource. This result provides clarification regarding

the role that communication plays in the encounter and experience of a stressor: Rather than directly diminish negative feelings regarding the loss of employment, some of the communication characteristics represented by the IR³ dimensions buffer these feelings from directly affecting relationship outcomes. Thus, couples that can demonstrate behaviors consistent with these communication characteristics can feasibly set themselves up to successfully manage the stress caused by job loss.

The coping strategy model demonstrated that several of the IR³ dimensions mediated the link between the stressor and the three relationship outcome variables. The IR³ dimension *Partnership* mediated the relationship between the stressor and relationship quality, satisfaction, and commitment. *Respect/Harmony* mediated only two outcomes (relationship quality and satisfaction) and approached significance on the third (commitment). Two other dimensions (*Civility* and *Tension Release*), mediated the relationship between the stressor and relationship satisfaction. Surprisingly *Conflict Mediation* and *Restraint* did not show a significant association with the stressor, which removed these dimensions from consideration as mediators. These results suggest the important role that four of the six dimensions may play in buffering romantic relationships from the negativity associated with losing full-time employment.

Interpersonal resilience and the communication characteristics it represents also were more important as coping strategies for the relationship than engaging in job search activities. Neither the number of job search outlets used (i.e., job search breadth) nor the intensity of searching (i.e., job search depth) were significantly associated with the three relationship outcome variables examined in the current study. While unemployment affect did appear to have a modest effect on how intensely people searched for a job (*beta*

= .18), ultimately the data suggested that how people communicate with their partner throughout the experience of being unemployed was more important. These findings support the idea that relationship difficulties may not be due primarily to the stress of job loss and efficacy of job search efforts on the individual level, but instead may be due to the resultant deteriorated communication between partners.

This contrast between interpersonal resilience and job search activities as effective coping strategies still does not explain why job search behaviors did not act as predictors of the relationship outcome variables previous modeling had suggested (Gowan, Riordan, & Gatewood, 1999). It might stand to reason that partners' "getting back out there" after job loss and giving reemployment their best shot would be a clear solution to the stressor. Alternatively, a possible reason for these results may be the uncertainty associated with this particular stressor: Job search behaviors do not automatically equal another job within any set period of time. Especially during the economic period during which these data were collected, finding jobs that matched individuals' skill sets or training could be very difficult, and being interviewed and selected could be even more difficult. Being in a career rut as a result of unemployment may not translate to discernable relationship outcomes.

Limitations. The N was relatively small for the type of analysis that was conducted in the current phase of the study. Some literature (for a review, see Schreiber, Stage, King, Nora, & Barlow, 2008) has suggested 10 participants per every parameter being accounted for in a SEM model as an acceptable threshold, with 5 participants as an absolute minimum. To account for this, some variables (i.e., relationship quality, social support) were collapsed or combined to reduce the number of overall paths in the model.

Path models created to test whether the IR³ served as a mediator were within the reasonable threshold (17 paths for coping resource, 15 paths for coping strategy). The CFA however, featured 44 paths, suggesting that at least 220 participants would be required to achieve a stable structure. Even considering a less than a desirable participant to parameter ratio, both the SEM models and CFA displayed adequate to good fit indicators, suggesting valid modeling. Additional subjects would be helpful to further validate the path models.

Chapter Five

Overall Discussion

Overview

Clarifying relational communication's role in the experience of serious life stressors, specifically job loss, was the primary goal of this research. Current research on resilience (e.g., Afifi & Keith, 2004; Bartone, 1999; Jordan, 2006; Luther, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Maddi, 1999) has identified personal traits and social resources that contribute to people's successful management of such stressors. However, there has been a relative lack of attention in this literature to the ways communication helps relational partners resiliently manage major life stressors.

This dissertation research represents an attempt to account for communication characteristics that contribute to resilience. As a result of this research, interpersonal resilience is defined as communication characteristics that partners in a romantic relationship invoke to respond competently to the onset and experience of a serious stressor. In order account for these communication characteristics, couples reported on their communication while experiencing a serious life stressor: job loss. Involuntary job loss often places severe financial and emotion strain on romantic relationships and extended family, especially if sustained (Caplan, Vinokur, Price, & van Ryn, 1989). The time during which data collection occurred was marked by the highest rate of unemployment since the great depression (BusinessWeek.com, 2010) and was for a prolonged period (2007-2010).

The measure of interpersonal resilience in romantic relationships (IR³) created as a result of this dissertation attempted to account for the characteristics of communication between romantic relationship partners that are particularly important to resilient outcomes. Phases one and two were used to generate a pool of communication characteristics, organize these characteristics into meaningful categories, and verify the categories, theoretically and empirically. Taken as a whole, the seven categories generated from these initial phases (*Conflict Management, Respect/Harmony, Partnership, Civility, Tension Release, Restraint, and Discretion*) represent dimensions of relational communication that matter in the experience of life stressors. The emergence of the *Discretion* dimension was originally compelling, but empirically didn't hold up as distinct and its items were either merged with other dimensions or removed from the measure.

In order to verify the utility of the IR³ dimensions generated from phase one and phase two, a *field test* was necessary. Romantically involved people who had experienced job loss and were still looking for full time employment were recruited to complete a survey designed to examine their experience. The survey was developed to address aspects of a resilient pattern: the stressor (the participants' enduring reaction to losing their job), the outcomes (relationship satisfaction, various dimensions of relational quality, and commitment), and protective factors (coping resources, such as education, financial resources, and social support; and coping strategies, such as job search efforts). The IR³ was predicted to serve as a protective factor in this pattern, but its function as either a *coping resource* or a *coping strategy* was an important sub-question.

The multi-dimensional IR³ measure mediated the relationship between the experience of the job stressor and three different relationship outcome variables. This mediated relationship indicates that the association between the experience of job loss and important relationship outcomes is influenced by the characteristics represented by the IR³. When partners lose employment, the fate of their relationship does not seem to rest completely on the individuals' experience, but on several key aspects of communication (e.g., "I didn't leave him because he lost his job, I left him because he became an asshole"). Despite the different consequences of losing one's job (i.e., a lesser standard of living, having to relocate, selling property, spouse having to work or pick up a second job), how partners communicate throughout these difficulties is important to the overall positive or negative experience of the relationship. Three areas are discussed concerning the contribution of the IR³ to the literature: Its role and function as a mediator, its place within the contemporary resilience literature, and a comparison to the coping strategy of job searching.

IR³'s Role and Function as a Mediator

One of the most central questions of this research was to determine if the IR³ mediates the relationship between the experience of stress and relational outcome variables. Two of the final six IR³ dimensions, *Respect/Harmony* and *Partnership*, served as mediators between the stressor and all three outcome variables (i.e., relationship satisfaction, commitment, and relationship quality). The dimension of *Tension release* served as a mediator in the relationship between unemployment affect and satisfaction. *Civility* approached significance as a mediator between unemployment

affect and satisfaction. Both the dimensions of *Conflict Management* and *Restraint* failed to demonstrate a significant association with the experience of the stressor.

The findings pertaining to the dimensions of *Respect/Harmony* and *Partnership* echo a growing interest in the literature on discovering the effects of positive communication on relationships. Research on positive psychology and positive communication (see Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005; Socha, 2006, 2007) calls attention to “the scientific study of what goes right in life” (Peterson, 2006, p. 4). This research contrasts with long standing traditions within psychology, focusing on dysfunction and on discovering fixes to what is wrong about human functioning and socialization. Peterson and Seligman (2004) have recently identified and classified positive traits and virtues, such as creativity, bravery, kindness, forgiveness, gratitude, and positive thinking. According to Socha (2006), positive communication enhances and sustains positive relationships, and has even been related to oxytocin levels and wound healing (Gouin, Carter, Pournajafi-Nazarloo, Glaser, Malarkey, Loving, Stowell, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2010).

The items created to represent the IR³ dimensions of *Respect/Harmony* and *Partnership* are consistent with this emphasis on positive communication. Within the *Respect/Harmony* dimension, high ratings on items such as “respect for my partner’s opinions” can be seen as consistent with communication that enhances and sustains relationships (Socha, 2006). Other *Respect/Harmony* items such as a reluctance to let problems “take over our whole lives until we can find a way to deal with them” as well as the ability to “enjoy each other’s company...given life’s difficulties” seem to suggest an ability to prioritize the relationship over the problem. In similar fashion, in relationships

between care-giving spouses and partners suffering from dementia, positive communication from husbands was associated with less caregiver depression and distress (Bruan, Mura, Peter-Wight, Hornung, & Scholz, 2010).

With the *Partnership* dimension, high ratings on items that describe collaboration are similarly consistent with “what goes right in life.” The item that suggests “approaching challenges with my partner makes things easier” emphasizes feeling connected with a partner. Drawing “strength from our shared belief system” would be a boon to challenges perceived too difficult to manage alone. When a partner is constantly away pursuing jobs, couples may have limited opportunities to communicate and may benefit from adopting positive communication styles, as found with long distance dating relationships (Stafford, 2010). Given the diminished interaction in long-distance relationships, feelings of partnership and demonstrations of focusing on the partner and relationship may be especially important. High ratings on other IR³ *Partnership* items, which mention “unconditional support” and unwillingness to let the partnership be disrupted by saying “hurtful things to each other,” could indicate a mutual belief that each partner has the best interests of the other in mind.

While positive psychology and positive communication research resonated with the importance of positive communication in the IR³ mediation model, it was surprising to not see the *Conflict Management* dimension play a mediating role. Research supports the importance of effective conflict management in personal relationships (Kurdek, 1994). However studies also reveal that during times of economic hardship attempts to resolve relational conflicts can become more hostile and less warm (Conger, Elder, Lorenz, Conger, Simons, Whitbeck, Huck, & Melby, 1990) or even socially undermining

(Vinokur, Price, & Caplan, 1996). *Conflict Management* might not have served as a mediator between the stressor and relationship outcomes because during these trying economic times it may not reliably help partners “manage the conflict” that emerges while they deal with job loss. The items representing the IR³ *Conflict Management* dimension could be seen as consistent with a patient, accommodating approach to conflict management, a luxury that serious financial circumstances might not afford. It is also possible that the items in the category represent a concept other than conflict strategies, which warrants further study.

Additionally, the *Conflict Management* dimension may not have served as a mediator due to the specific nature of the stressor. The SEM analysis indicated that unemployment affect was not significantly associated with conflict management. Given that the pressure of job loss creates conflict in many romantic relationships, this lack of association may illustrate disconnect between feelings related to job loss and the type of conflict management the measure accounts for. For instance, job loss and the ensuing conflict may result in partners withdrawing, either emotionally or physically (as in off to another room or place to stay). The items that make up the *Conflict Management* dimension do not account for this style of conflict management (nor aggressive styles like coercion, or more submissive forms).

IR³ Contextualized within Resilience Research

The findings of the current study fit into literature on resilience by emphasizing a pattern as opposed to trait perspective, as well as by expanding what we know of interaction resources. Additionally, the mediation indicated by the IR³ dimensions of

Partnership and Respect/Harmony is consistent with the limited research that has been done on relational resilience (Jordan, 2006).

Emphasizing pattern over trait resilience is consistent with recent research touting the pattern perspective as the most effective way to evaluate resilience in a variety of social and developmental contexts. If resilience can be thought of as “a pattern of positive adaptation in the context of past or present adversity, and an example can be a high-achieving, well-liked and well behaved, child who has endured serious neglect and maltreatment” (O’Dougherty & Masten, 2006, p. 19), the relational equivalent might be a high functioning, happy, and committed relationship which has endured a serious life stressor (or possibly more than one). By deemphasizing individuals’ toughness, courage, and resourcefulness (which might be considered a trait perspective), the pattern perspective shifts attention to other resources. As it pertains to this research, couples create some of these other resources by their ability to respond in positive, constructive ways to adversity with the goal of resilient outcomes. This relational contribution is both distinctly communicative and interactive.

The presence of mediation effects clarifies IR³ as being an important resource within the pattern perspective of resilience. Literature on the resilience pattern (Benson, Scales, Leffert, & Roehlkepartian, 1999; Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984; Masten et al., 1999; Sameroff, 1999) had made distinctions about resources as being either assets or protective factors. Assets, also called compensatory or promotive factors, are generally associated with better results at all levels of risk. An example of assets is IQ scores. Protective factors moderate the impact of adversity on adaptation. O’Dougherty and

Masten (2006) have described protective factors as functioning like airbags in automobiles or antibodies to specific diseases.

The distinction between assets and protective factors is interesting considering the communicative nature of the IR³. It would be easy at first glance to classify *Respect/Harmony* and *Partnership* purely as assets, in the sense that they could be associated with better relational outcomes in both times of high and low risk. However, consider the example of one particular couple: In the matter of a year they experience periods of both low and high risk (due to the onset of some stressor). In their relationship, IR³ dimensions would serve as assets if they were demonstrating these behaviors during both low and high-risk periods. Conversely, if these communicative resources, such as being available for each other, leaning on each other for support, and respecting one another's opinion were only activated during high-risk periods (perhaps only enacted as last ditch effort for the survival of the relationship) they instead would qualify as protective factors. Given that this research did not ask phase three participants for information about how they typically communicated with their partner before they experienced job loss, it is difficult to make a determination regarding whether IR³ serves as an asset or protective factor (and if the role it serves actually varies by couple). Regardless of whether these characteristics are present in a relationship before the onset of a stressor (thus, asset or protective factor), the mediation effect demonstrates the importance of *Respect/Harmony* and *Partnership* given the experience of a particular stressor (i.e., job loss).

The mediation further clarifies the findings of initial qualitative research done by Judith Jordan and colleagues (1991, 1997, 2006). There is a direct overlap between the

mediating dimensions of *Respect/Harmony* and *Partnership*, and the “growth-fostering connections” that Jordan (2006) emphasized as central to her resilience-based *relational-cultural theory* (RCT). Growth fostering connections (Miller & Stiver, 1997) benefit relationships by producing zest, productivity, and a desire for more connection.

Respect/harmony emphasizes the importance of respecting partner opinions and “expressing oneself,” both of which would promote the positive affect necessary for more connection. The idea of connection is inherent to the dimension of *Partnership*, calling attention to the benefits of shared interest, combined effort, and unconditional support. Both of the dimensions of *Respect/Harmony* and *Partnership* suggest consistency with the RCT, and provide further articulation into what couples’ communication could look like.

IR³ versus Job Search Decisions

Contrary to expectations, job search intensity (characterized by two dimensions, breadth and depth) was not associated with the stressor, unemployment affect, or any of the outcome variables. The lack of association between job search and outcomes could be due to a number of reasons, including a multitude of intervening variables or the nature of the job search process. The lack of association between unemployment affect and job search activities is a bit more difficult to explain, as it would be logical to assume that someone who has lost his or her job and feels badly about the loss would engage in some degree of job search as a result. The varying reactions to losing one’s job (some may feel great loss and be very motivated while others may retreat and mourn), may have contributed to muddling this association.

The specific nature of the job search process, regarded as a strategy for coping with job loss, may have had an effect on the lack of association between job search intensity and relationship outcomes. The job search process is necessary to get out of the depreciated status partners endure as a result of lost income. However, the amount of time invested into this process does not correspond with a better or more desirable job. Especially in the economic situation at the time of this research, lost employment could involve months or years of being unemployed and searching for jobs. Due to the indeterminate relationship in the job hunt process between effort, time, and results, many couples may have had no choice but to adjust to new standards of living and “make the best of it.”

Limitations

Although the current study made interesting contributions to current research, it is limited in several ways. For instance, the IR³ measure identified specific communication characteristics that generalized to an evaluation of something participants may or may not have been doing. That is, participants provided a cumulative evaluation of communication tendencies demonstrated by each member in their partnership. While soliciting this individual perspective was consistent with the other measures in the survey (i.e., relationship satisfaction, relationship quality), it potentially excludes important partner impressions of the stressor and relationship.

This limitation is relevant to this study as well as those attempting to account for communication characteristics that contribute to resilience for two reasons: (a) The individuals who experienced job loss might have seen things in general from a more negative view, and the perspective of their partner would help to provide a more

complete perspective of typical dyadic exchanges; and (b) Partners were asked to characterize “typical communication in the relationship” which is not only cumulative across partners but across a period of time from which they are generalizing. Both points raise questions regarding how valid the measure might be.

Although samples in each of the three phases represented people from across the country, the participants were mainly white, Christian (or a denomination thereof), and heterosexual. This relative homogeneity could be due to the use of snowball sampling, or the fact that the participants in the third phase needed to use computers (which suggests financial resources sufficient for ownership, or communities with reasonable access to such technology). The proportion of lower income people involved in the study likely was underrepresented (compared to the general population), and might not speak clearly enough about the people most affected by unemployment.

In retrospect, to more aptly address varying aspects of the stressor, and thus perhaps more accurately assess which IR³ dimensions are most relevant to the mediation test, more questions could have been asked about the stressor. An attempt was made to account for what employment literature suggested were the most important variables: how long participants were unemployed, how participants felt about their unemployment, and how adequately have they prepared themselves and their family for this situation. However, more questions could have been asked addressing how the partnership helped with or hindered the job loss experience.

Finally, at no point were questions asked regarding whether or not and how participants generated money to replace lost income. As a byproduct of losing one’s job, the act of borrowing money, placing mortgages or other bills on credit, or failing to make

payments is additional source of distress and humiliation. Collecting data on these variables might have painted a more accurate picture of job loss and its secondary effects.

Directions for Future Research

Resilience research has a promising future within the communication discipline. The identification of communication characteristics that play a role in mediating the association between stressors and relationship outcomes highlights the importance of communication in the experience of relationship-challenging circumstances. Following the process of indentifying these characteristics, highlighted directions for further research include the items and the dimensions of the IR³ themselves, opportunities for a dyadic view of interpersonal resilience, the relationship types being recruited and thus examined, treatment of the stressor, and finally a deeper look into the experience of the stressor.

Articulation of IR³ dimensions. Despite the identification of dimensions and items representing communicative contributions to resilience, at best this dissertation represents an important early pass at the concept. The phase two exploratory factor analysis and follow up confirmatory factor analysis conducted during phase three were acceptable by most standards, but indicated room for improvement. The development of the IR³ measure might most benefit from subsequent analysis that involves clearer definitions for each category, as well as new items derived from those definitions. The recruitment of a large N for these studies, at least while the measure is still in the early stages of refinement, would be important.

Dyadic perspectives on interpersonal resilience. Efforts to improve the quality of the measure might take into account the perspective of the partner as well. The

approach taken in the current research was to examine the perspective of individuals who had lost their employment, consider their evaluation of communication with their partner, as well their satisfaction and commitment to their partner. While such information was designed to provide an individual appraisal of the resources that one has to effectively (or ineffectively) deal with the challenges associated with losing one's employment, it provides a limited portrayal of the experience.

Future research could solicit individual evaluations of IR³ from each relational partner. One possible finding from this extra step could be a *discrepancy effect*: A significant difference between how the partners are accounting for the presence of resilience promoting communication, satisfaction, commitment, or quality. The experience of stressors, especially if they are unexpected, constitute changes in how things may typically function for the couple. For instance, individuals who experience job loss may see themselves as the origin of such changes and may try to change their behavior toward their partner to compensate for the effect of losing employment. As a result, either partner may have to rely on the other more than they are accustomed to or communicate in a way that is uncomfortable or unfamiliar. Examining both the difference between partner perceptions of the stressor and relationship outcomes as well as how different this communication during the stressor is from typical functioning would serve as interesting follow up research.

Resilience and relationship types. Recruitment for phase three was designed to examine those who had lost their fulltime employment, and had been with their current partner for longer than that. In addition, the partner subject to job loss needed to be currently searching for fulltime employment in order to be eligible for participation.

Given that these were the main criteria, additional factors, including those pertaining to relationship type were not made a priority in recruitment. For instance, Dailey and colleagues' research (2009, in press) pertaining to on-and-off couples, or research addressing couples experiencing relationship turbulence (Theiss & Solomon, 2006) has logical overlap with the experience of stressors and the desire for resilient outcomes. Considering that resilience is conceptualized as resources and protective factors that enable successful adaptation to serious stressors, causes for turbulence or cycling on and off might be exaggerated or aggravated by a lack of IR³ characteristics. Future research should consider examining samples that can address whether this is the case.

More nuanced approach to the stressor. While the current approach to evaluating the stressor yielded significant results, important information may have been omitted. In particular, future research could take a more complex approach to addressing the stressor. Specifically, it may be useful to examine the way partners deal with the stressor at different points in time. For example, job loss may be immediately followed by denial and reassurance that an immediate replacement can be found, then a period of anger and frustration that looking is even necessary after initial leads go cold, and then eventual depression and diminished feelings of self-worth (characterized by periods of inactivity and lessened job search efforts). Different phases of experiencing the stressor might have corresponding negative effects, calling forward different dimensions of IR³ as appropriate. This may be true with searching for a job while dealing with the experience of being unemployed, or perhaps with the diagnosis and treatment of a partner's serious illness. Taking a more complete, developmental approach to a stressor would suggest that there are multiple steps to understanding and recovering from a serious issue (as in

the 12-step program from Alcoholic's Anonymous). Given this possibility, it might be worthwhile for future research to take a longitudinal approach, measuring the dynamic role of individual dimensions of the IR³ along the way.

Lack of a trait resilience comparison variable. Finally, this study originally was designed to examine the IR³ measure in relation to hardiness, one of the key trait resilience variables. Hardiness scores collected in the phase three research could only be evaluated by the Hardiness Institute, which holds the evaluation key for interpreting the data. Unfortunately although the evaluation was arranged with a representative from the Institute, communication broke down. Despite numerous attempts to reinstate, there was no response. Future decisions to incorporate a trait perspective of resilience should include any of the other individual or ego resilience measures, each of which are publically available (e.g., Block & Block, 1980).

Table 1: Themes Derived from Experts' Input

Theme	N	Description	Examples
Respect/ Politeness	25	Civility, Politeness, a general perspective that guides communication behavior toward treating the other with general positive regard and esteem	"Respect for one's partner's viewpoint" (70) "Demonstration of mutual respect" (80)
Sense of Humor/ Enjoyment	29	Joking, Laughing, the ability and willingness to make light of things	"Mutual enjoyment (laughing, having fun)" (72) "Should feel like a great volleyball game, should feel fun" (92)
"We" Orientation	102	Having or arriving at a shared perspective or understanding, team mentality; commitment	"A 'we' orientation (rather than me/you)" (61) "The two work together to keep the whole intact" (77) "Aligned value systems" (106) "Commitment to self and the other" (108)
Conflict Management	116	Mentions of conflict management techniques or strategies; a planning process or general strategy; An openness to considering multiple options, The act of taking another's perspective or viewpoint.	"Jointly constructed problem solving efforts" (80) "Able to successfully manage relational tensions" (111) "Willingness to compromise in conflicts" (118)
Honesty/ Sincerity	21	Varying degrees or a general sense of honest communication, truthfulness, and genuineness	"Interactions are honest" (112)
Silence/ Patience	36	Knowing or discerning when to communicate and when to be quiet	"Taking time to think before speaking" (83) "Timing of talking about hard issue is critical – not all time is the right time" (66) "Understanding the dialectical tension between revealing private information and maintaining it" (108)
Bolstering/ Boosting	105	Confirming, encouraging, unconditional love or support; includes physical affection and types of physical intimacy	"Feeling that your partner supports and loves you" (78) "Showing concern (verbally and nonverbally) for the other" (62) "Having your identity validated" (110)
Social Network	16	Selective Disclosure with various members of immediate social network, such as family members, friends, co-workers, etc.	"Having trusted others to confide in" (110)
Willingness to Communicate	156	Disclosure, forthcomingness, openness and listening to partner; includes empathy, non judgemental communication, and that the partner is a sounding board	"General open communication climates are essential" (76) "Setting aside uninterrupted time to discuss matters with each other" (68) "Its vital that both parties feel heard, understood and valued – even if they disagree (59)
Big Picture	95	Involves a broader macro level perspective that affects communication; sense of past experiences and lessons learned, current and future life goals, faith, transcendence and returning to eventually	"Ability to see the big picture over time" (74) "Trying to remember the benefits of the relationship" (69) "A long term orientation rather than a short-term one" (108) "Giving each other permission to have bad days and difficult moments (as a Christian, I like to call it 'extending grace' to each other)" (101)
Avoiding Hurt	33	Boundary placed on communication such that extremely hurtful messages, displays of emotion, or unchecked aggression are not used.	"Ability to thwart the tendency to respond negatively to negative behavior" (117) "Avoid attribution error" (113)

Table 2: *Varimax Rotated 7 Factor 25 Item Principle Axis Factor Analysis Matrix*

Items	Factor						
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
My partner and I understand when it is appropriate to share our opinions and when to hold back.	.693						
When dealing with a major issue, my partner and I have a sense of when to give each other space.	.685						
My partner and I feel that sometimes it is important to take time to think before speaking to each other.	.645						
When discussing difficult issues my partner and I focus on the problem at hand. ^a	.637						
My partner and I feel comfortable sharing our feelings with each other even if the conversation is unexpected.	.538	.347				-.360	
My partner and I set uninterrupted time aside to discuss important matters with each other.	.510						
In our relationship, we make little effort to foster respect for each other. ^a		.775					
I have little respect for my partner's opinions.		.689					
Given life's difficulties, my partner and I find it challenging to enjoy each other's company.		.581					
My partner and I don't often express our feelings for each other in a physical way, sexual or otherwise.		.576					
The problems that my partner and I encounter seem to take over our whole lives until we can find a way to deal with them. ^a		.444					
Approaching challenges with my partner as opposed to individually makes life easier.			.722				
The commitment my partner and I have for each other helps us feel that we can take on life's challenges together.			.653				
When times get tough my partner and I draw strength from our shared belief system. ^a			.611				
The unconditional support that my partner and I show each other is an important part of our relationship.			.550				
Even if my partner and I are upset with each other, we are very careful not to say hurtful things to each other.				.610			
My partner and I make a special effort to be polite with each other. ^a				.566			
My partner and I try to spare each other from negative reactions to each other's negative behavior.				.462			
Staying positive is an important part of the way my partner and I deal with the difficulties of life.			.279	.436	.371		
My partner and I find ways to make light of life's stressful events.					.797		
My partner and I rely on our sense of humor to break up tension when it is appropriate.	.274				.465		
When my partner and I are mad at each other, we usually express our frustrations, no matter how intense the conversation becomes.						.576	
When my partner and I disagree we usually keep pushing the issue, no matter what.						.456	
Knowing when to involve others in our problems is important to the way my partner and I resolve our problems. ^a							.716
When my partner and I have problems, its helpful to have trusted others to confide in.							.337
Alpha Reliabilities	.806	.749	.766	.648	.563	.437	.392

^a Indicates items that were reverse-scored.

Table 3: *Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for the Dimensions of IR³*

Dimension (# of Items)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Conflict Management (6)	21.83	4.80	.85						
Respect/Harmony (5)	10.97	5.14	.53**	.84					
Partnership (4)	15.18	4.07	.66**	.62**	.90				
Civility (4)	13.86	3.76	.66**	.45**	.56**	.85			
Tension Release (3)	11.48	2.81	.56**	.47**	.56**	.66**	.89		
Restraint (3)	8.51	2.50	-.16	.01	-.12	.20*	-.00	.70	
Discretion (3)	7.17	2.36	.21*	.01	.08	.24*	.11	-.09	.56

N = 111, * $p < .05$, $p < .01$. Alpha reliabilities are on the diagonal.

Table 4: *Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for the Dimensions of IR³ (after integration and removal of Discretion items)*

Dimension (# of Items)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Conflict Management (7)	24.72	5.33	.83					
2. Respect/Harmony (6)	20.72	4.90	.56**	.82				
3. Partnership (4)	15.18	4.07	.64**	.64**	.90			
4. Civility (4)	13.86	3.76	.66**	.47**	.56**	.85		
5. Tension Release (3)	11.48	2.81	.55**	.47**	.56**	.66**	.89	
6. Restraint (3)	8.51	2.50	-.17	.00	-.12	.20*	.00	.70

N = 111, * $p < .05$, $p < .01$. Alpha reliabilities are on the diagonal.

Table 5: *Correlations among Coping Resources and Unemployment Affect (Phase 3)*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Unemployment Affect	.85										
2. Education Level	-.15	^a									
3. Fiscal Resources	-.42**	.37**	.81								
4. Social Support - Amount	.04	.29**	.19*	.80							
5. Social Support – Satisfaction with	-.01	.13	.06	.34**	.64						
6. IR3- Conf. Man.	-.16	.04	.07	.10	.35**	.83					
7. IR3 – Resp./Harm.	-.19	.18	.14	.16	.31**	.56**	.82				
8. IR3- Partnership	-.25**	.19*	.24*	.20*	.41**	.64**	.64**	.90			
9. IR3- Civility	-.20*	.17	.14	.06	.20*	.66**	.47**	.56**	.85		
10. IR3- Ten. Release	-.27**	.12	.10	.09	.27**	.55**	.47**	.56**	.66**	.89	
11. IR3- Restraint	.03	.11	.01	-.05	-.25**	-.17	.01	-.12	.20*	-.01	.70

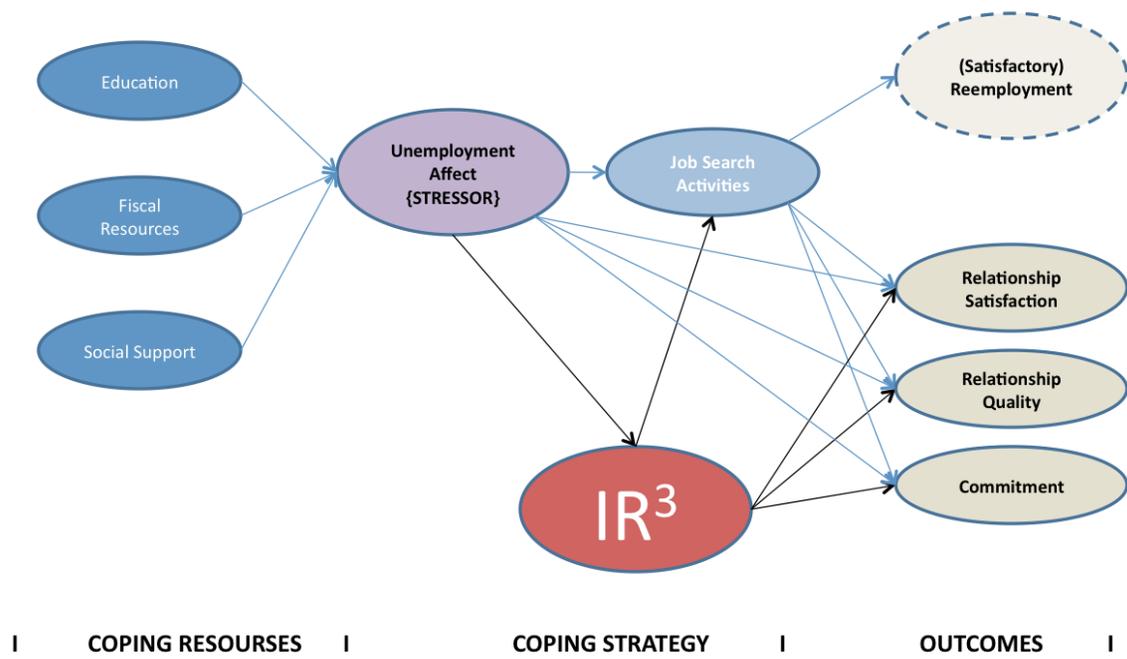
N = 111, * p < .05, ** p < .01. Alpha reliabilities are on the diagonal. ^a Scale has 1 item.

Table 6: *Correlations among Outcome Variables, Coping Strategies, and Unemployment Affect (Phase 3)*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Unemploy. Affect	.85											
2. Job Search-Depth	.28**	.89										
3. Job Search-Breadth	-.05	.28**	.64									
4. IR ³ - Conflict Man.	-.16	.15	.18	.83								
5. IR ³ - Respect/ Harmony	-.19	.06	.21*	.56**	.82							
6. IR ³ - Partnership	-.25**	.00	.19*	.64**	.64**	.90						
7. IR ³ - Civility	-.20*	.06	.14	.66**	.47**	.56**	.85					
8. IR ³ - Tension Release	-.27**	.07	.18	.55**	.47**	.56**	.66**	.89				
9. IR ³ - Restraint	.03	-.07	-.04	-.17	.00	-.12	.20*	-.00	.70			
10. Rel. Satisfaction	-.27**	.02	.21*	.66**	.73**	.78**	.49**	.59**	-.16	.96		
11. Relationship Quality	-.20*	.08	.13	.62**	.74**	.78**	.47**	.48**	-.12	.84**	.77	
12. Commitment	-.21*	.00	.04	.57**	.57**	.60**	.42**	.49**	-.21*	.67**	.78**	.92

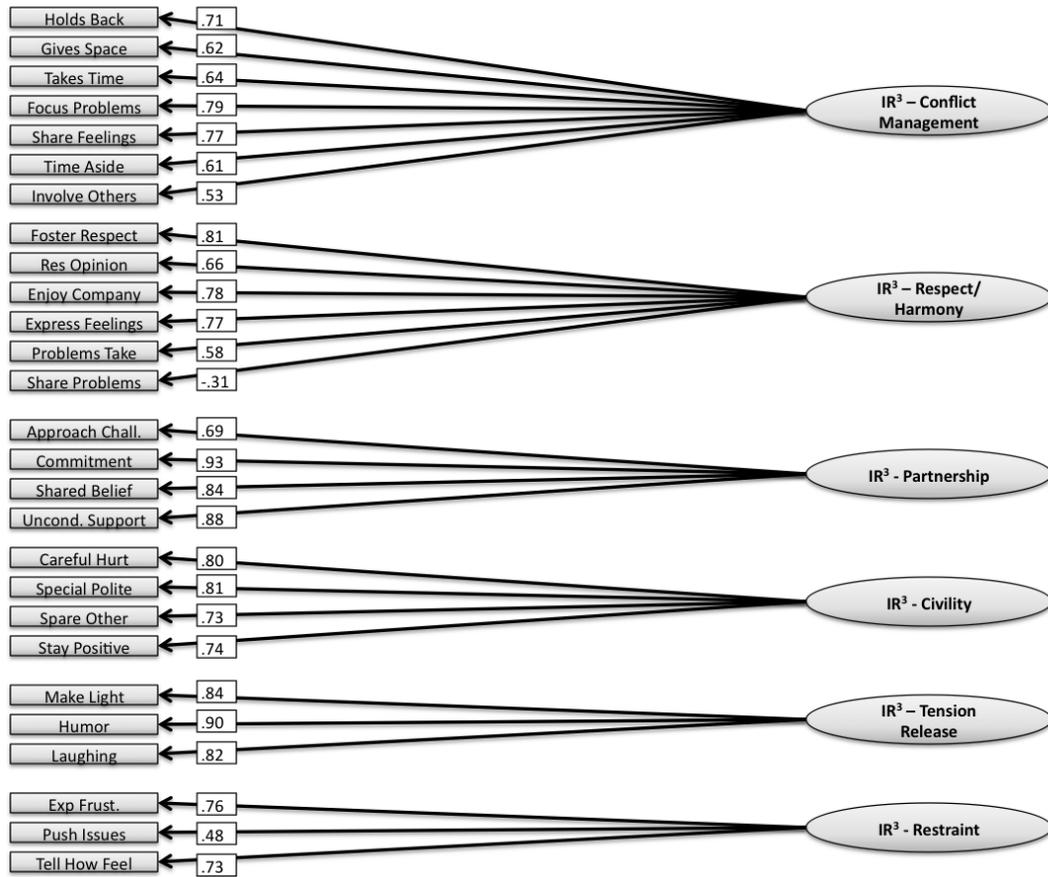
N= 111, *p<.05, **p<.01. Alpha reliabilities are on the diagonal.

Figure 2: Proposed IR³ as a Coping Strategy



Based on an original model by Gowan, Riordan, & Gatewood, 1999.

Figure 3: Confirmatory Factor Analysis for IR³ Dimensions



N = 111, Standardized Regression Weights. Note: All paths are significant.

Figure 4a: Coping Strategy Model, with IR³ Dimensions

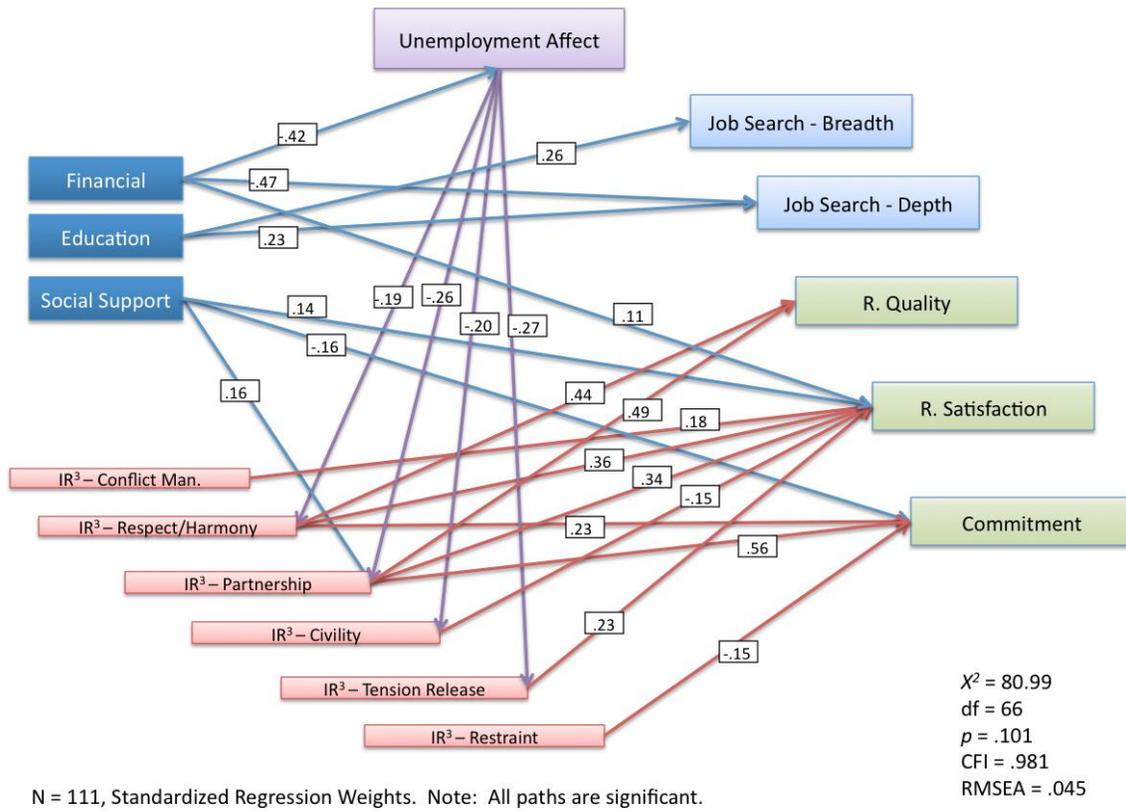
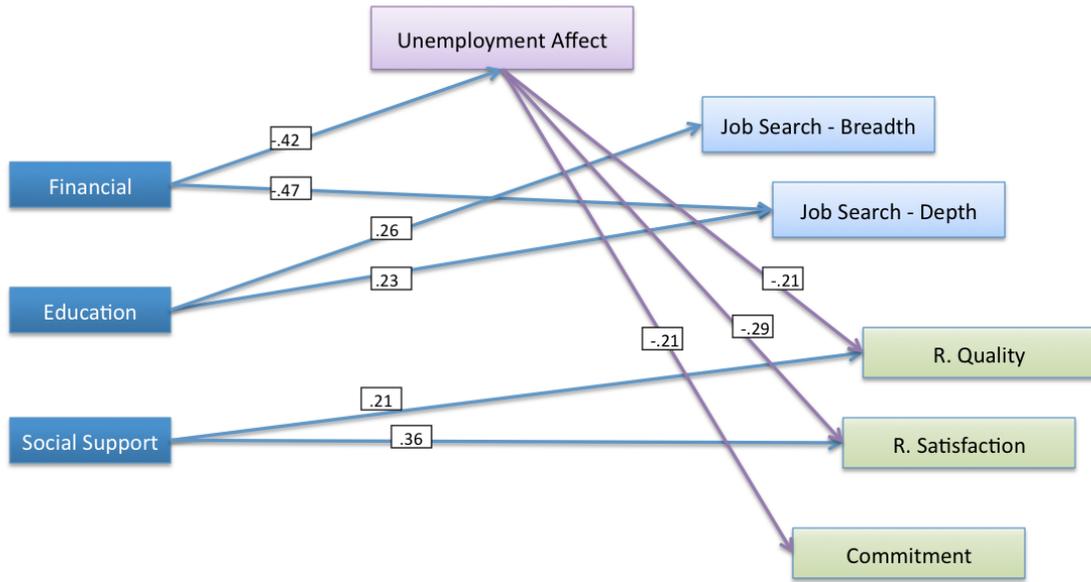


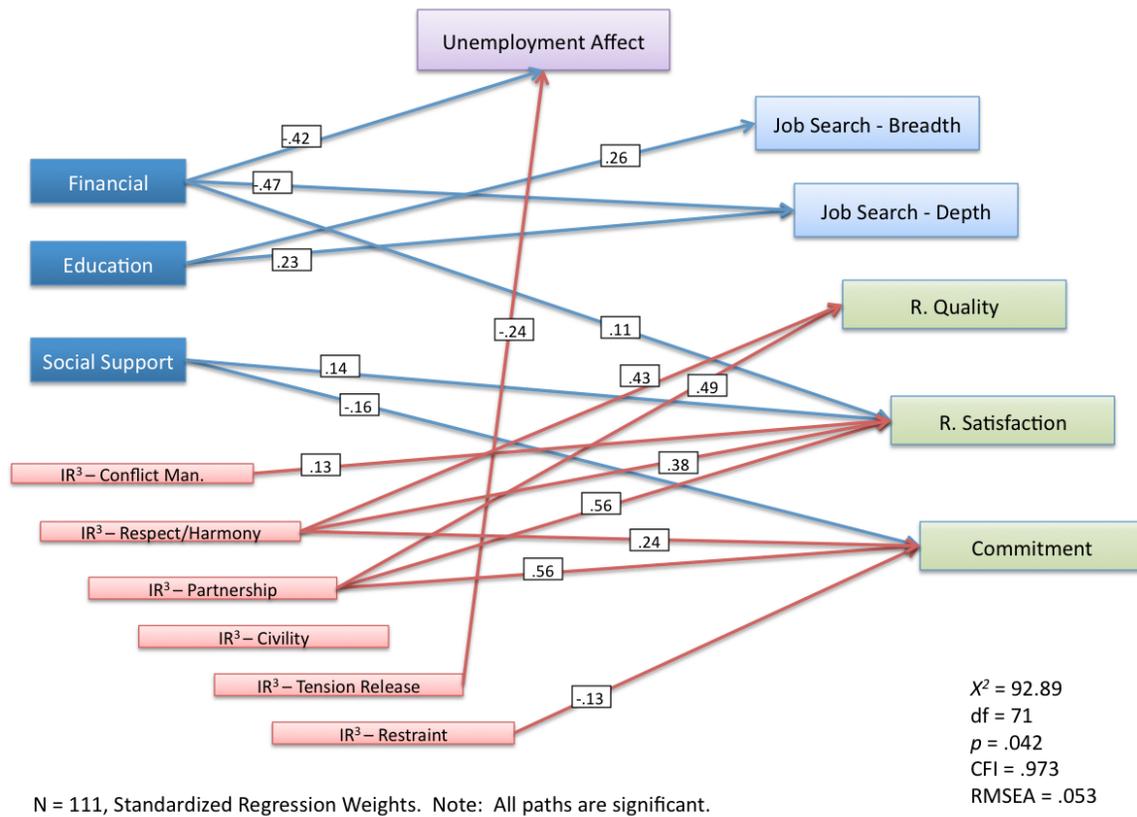
Figure 4b: Coping Strategy Model, without IR³



$\chi^2 = 27.2$
 $df = 21$
 $p = .161$
 $CFI = .982$
 $RMSEA = .052$

N = 111, Standardized Regression Weights. Note: All paths are significant.

Figure 5: Coping Resource Model, with IR³ Dimensions



N = 111, Standardized Regression Weights. Note: All paths are significant.

APPENDIX A: Solicitation Email

Name of Study: Interpersonal Resilience in Romantic Relationships (IR³)
Location: Internet Survey Tool (Qualtrics)
Eligibility Criteria: Possessing a Terminal Degree in Interpersonal Communication (or related field)
Principal Investigator: Gary Beck, MA (ABD)
Contact Information: Gary Beck, garyb@mail.utexas.edu

Dear Professor _____,

I am writing this letter to ask you to participate in an online research study which serves as partial fulfillment of degree requirements for my doctoral degree at the University of Texas at Austin.

The purpose of this initial study is to identify characteristics of communication that would contribute to a romantic couple's ability to resiliently deal with significant stressors that they experience in their relationship. This research will eventually use a measure created from the characteristics contributed by experts to determine what effect communication has on the pursuit of resilient outcomes.

I am recruiting experts, those identified as having been awarded a terminal degree in interpersonal communication or related fields, to contribute their knowledge on the subject matter.

The initial part of this research, which you are being invited to participate in, will take approximately 15 minutes of your time. The survey forms will NOT ask for any identifying information, so there is no way to trace any of your answers back to you.

There are no direct benefits involved with participating in this study, as well as no more risk than what you would experience in everyday life.

If you are interested in participating, please click the following link to be sent directly to the online study:

http://texascommunication.qualtrics.com/SE?SID=SV_72preWBOmn1kUvO&SVID=Prod

Any questions or concerns related to the research can be directed to the primary investigator, Gary Beck, at garyb@mail.utexas.edu, or my dissertation advisor, Dr. Anita Vangelisti at a.vangelisti@mail.utexas.edu.

Thank you in advance for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,

Gary A. Beck, MA (ABD)
Assistant Instructor, Interpersonal Communication
Department of Communication Studies, University of Texas at Austin
garyb@mail.utexas.edu

APPENDIX B: Phase One, Survey Materials

You have found the "Expert Input Survey: Resilience". This phase of data collection is an aspect of my dissertation research.

The following online survey consists of 4 pages:

- Standard IRB Short consent form
- Demographics and Career Survey Questions
- Brief Read on Resilience, &
- Resilience Feedback Form

This process should take 15 minutes of your time, but feel free to take as long as you like.

Thank you for your help and participation! If you have any questions, concerns, suggestions, or overlapping work and would like to network please contact me at: garyb@mail.utexas.edu.

Sincerely,

Gary A. Beck, ABD
University of Texas at Austin

IRB APPROVED ON: 08/17/09
IRB # 2009-06-0111
EXPIRES ON: 08/16/10

SHORT CONSENT FORM

Conducted By: Gary Beck, M. A. garyb@mail.utexas.edu, 512-471-5251
Dr. Anita Vangelisti, a.vangelisti@mail.utexas.edu, 512-471-5251
Dept. of Communication Studies, The University of Texas at Austin

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. Please read the information below before deciding whether or not to take part. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can stop participating at any time.

The purpose of this study is to investigate people's ideas about resilience in romantic relationships.

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to do the following things:

- Fill out a short demographic background survey
 - Read a short passage on resilience.
 - Provide as many answers as you can to two open-ended questions.
- Total estimated time to participate in the study is 15 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

- The risks in this study are no greater than in everyday life.
- There are no benefits.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for participation in this study.

The records of this study will be stored securely and kept private. Authorized persons from The University of Texas at Austin, members of the Institutional Review Board, and (study sponsors, if any) have the legal

right to review your research records and will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. All publications will exclude any information that will make it possible to identify you as a subject.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions about the study please ask now. If you have questions later or want additional information, call the researcher conducting the study. His name, phone number, and e-mail addresses are at the top of this page. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Jody Jensen, Ph.D., Chair of The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, (512) 471-8871 or email: orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu. If you so choose, please feel free to print this page to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and have sufficient information to make a decision about participating in this study. I consent to participate in this study.

{By clicking the next button below you agree to the above statement and will begin the study.}

DEMOGRAPHIC AND CAREER SURVEY

INSTRUCTIONS: The following asks background questions about you and your career. Please fill out each of the following and proceed on to the next sheet when you are done. There are no right or wrong answers. *Thank you!*

Age:

Gender:

- Male
- Female

Sexual Orientation:

- Heterosexual, "Straight"
- Homosexual, "Gay" or "Lesbian"
- Bisexual

Ethnic Background:

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| European American, "White" | Middle Eastern American/Middle Eastern |
| African American, "Black" | Indian American/Indian |
| Latino/Hispanic/Chicano | Native American |
| Asian American/Asian | Not Listed: |

Current rank in your academic career:

- | | |
|----------------------------|----------------|
| Visiting/Adjunct Professor | Full Professor |
| Assistant Professor | Not Listed: |
| Associate Professor | |

How would you classify your primary academic specialization(s) {please check all that apply}:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Interpersonal Communication | Professional Communication |
| Relational Communication | Instructional Communication |
| Health Communication | Intercultural Communication |
| Language and Social Interaction | Organizational Communication |
| Family Communication | Other area/discipline: |

Please feel free to describe any other aspects of your research and/or academic focus:

RESILIENCE IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS BRIEF

INSTRUCTIONS: Please read the following brief passage regarding resilience. After you are done, use the details you have read to help you answer the questions on the following page. *Thank you!*

Survival. Toughness. Ability to endure. These are characteristics commonly associated with the concept of resilience. People can demonstrate resilience when they encounter health problems, experience abuse, deal with work place and career challenges, or as suggested by the current research, cope with difficulties in their romantic relationships. Researchers have used two perspectives to explain how resilience is demonstrated: Trait and Pattern perspectives.

The trait perspective suggests that resilience is a personality characteristic that people possess to varying degrees. For instance, some scholars argue that people vary in a trait called hardiness, such that individuals who are high in hardiness perceive their behavior as having an impact on the course of events in their lives, have a tendency to be actively (as opposed to passively) involved in events and in the lives of others, have a desire to learn from both positive and negative experiences, and believe they can benefit from both failures and successes.

Another view is that resilience can be seen in interactions between people, and how people handle situations with stressors. Pattern perspectives generally describe resilience as occurring when individuals (a) experience a stressor, (b) use resources to help them deal with the stressor, and then (c) emerge as “okay.” Social interaction between those involved in the situation can serve as an important resource to help people deal with the stressor. However, the contributions of communication to resilience are not entirely clear.

Given the potential importance of communication to resilience, researchers need to look specifically at the characteristics of interactions that occur when resilience is demonstrated. The purpose of the current study is to examine the communication behaviors exhibited by romantic couples that contribute to their ability to competently manage situations in which they encounter a serious stressor.

Thank you for reading the passage. Please proceed to the questions...

RESILIENCE IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

INSTRUCTIONS: The following questions ask about your impressions regarding resilience in a romantic relationship. Please read each question and answer as thoroughly as you can according to your experiences and expertise.

NOTE: Please feel free to flip back to the Resilience Brief if need be. The following questions are not meant to be a test of your memorization, but instead to help frame or guide your responses.

Thank you!

From your experiences and expertise, what do you feel are *characteristics of typical interaction* that help individuals in romantic relationships do well in spite of diverse stressors in their lives?

(Romantic relationship stressors might include infidelity, issues related to children, severe financial difficulty, etc.)

What are the things that people do (behaviors) that help those in relationships do well in spite of stressors in their lives?

Additional Feedback Section: Feel free to provide any additional thoughts or feedback regarding this topic.

APPENDIX C: Phase Two, Solicitation Email

SUBJECT: New data collection phase, seeking IP prof input

Dear Professor _____,

I am writing this letter to ask you to participate in a new brief online research study which serves as partial fulfillment of degree requirements for my doctoral degree at the University of Texas at Austin. This part of the research will take approximately 5-10 minutes of your time.

You may remember an email I sent out in the fall semester asking for feedback on what characteristics of communication contribute to a romantic couple's ability to resiliently deal with significant stressors that they experience in their relationship. That first phase yield interesting results, to which I would like to ask for your feedback through the linked survey below.

I am recruiting experts (once again), those identified as having been awarded a terminal degree in interpersonal communication or related fields, to contribute their knowledge on the subject matter. If you participated in the first phase, please help again! If you didn't have the opportunity, please help this time!

The survey forms will NOT ask for any identifying information, so there is no way to trace any of your answers back to you.

There are no direct benefits involved with participating in this study, as well as no more risk than what you would experience in everyday life.

If you are interested in participating, please click the following link to be sent directly to the online study:

http://texascommunication.qualtrics.com/SE?SID=SV_8JuF20K4ejG78Fu&SVID=Prod

Any questions or concerns related to the research can be directed to the primary investigator, Gary Beck, at garyb@mail.utexas.edu, or my dissertation advisor, Dr. Anita Vangelisti at a.vangelisti@mail.utexas.edu.

Thank you in advance for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,

Gary A. Beck, MA (ABD)
Assistant Instructor, Interpersonal Communication
Department of Communication Studies, University of Texas at Austin
garyb@mail.utexas.edu

APPENDIX D: Phase Two, Survey Material

WELCOME!

You have found the "Expert Input Survey: Resilience Items". This phase of data collection is an aspect of my dissertation research.

UPDATE (January 4th, 2010): In the Fall Semester of 2009, I sent out a series of open ended questions to Interpersonal Communication experts asking for "...characteristics of communication that would help a romantic couple deal with serious stressors in their lives." The response was excellent!

After coders and I unitized the answers, divided them into themes, and selected representative items from the themes, I am now asking for your quick assistance again to help me evaluate the items.

If this is your first time participating, your help is still needed and appreciated!

The following online survey consists of 4 (reasonably sized) pages:

- Standard IRB Short consent form
- Demographics and Career Survey Questions
- Brief Read on Resilience, &
- Resilience Feedback Form

This process should take no longer than 5-10 minutes of your time, but feel free to take as long as you like.

Thank you for your help and participation! If you have any questions, concerns, suggestions, or overlapping work and would like to network please contact me at: garyb@mail.utexas.edu.

Sincerely,

Gary A. Beck, MA (ABD)

University of Texas at Austin

IRB APPROVED ON: 08/17/09
IRB # 2009-06-0111
EXPIRES ON: 08/16/10

SHORT CONSENT FORM

Conducted By: Gary Beck, M. A. garyb@mail.utexas.edu, 512-471-5251

Dr. Anita Vangelisti, a.vangelisti@mail.utexas.edu, 512-471-5251

Dept. of Communication Studies, The University of Texas at Austin

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. Please read the information below before deciding whether or not to take part. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can stop participating at any time.

The purpose of this study is to investigate people's ideas about resilience in romantic relationships.

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to do the following things:

- Fill out a short demographic background survey
- Read a short passage on resilience.
- Rate a series of items on how closely they represent "resilience in romantic relationships."

Total estimated time to participate in the study is 10 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

- The risks in this study are no greater than in everyday life.
- There are no benefits.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for participation in this study.

The records of this study will be stored securely and kept private. Authorized persons from The University of Texas at Austin, members of the Institutional Review Board, and (study sponsors, if any) have the legal right to review your research records and will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. All publications will exclude any information that will make it possible to identify you as a subject.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions about the study please ask now. If you have questions later or want additional information, call the researcher conducting the study. His name, phone number, and e-mail addresses are at the top of this page.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Jody Jensen, Ph.D., Chair of The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, (512) 471-8871 or email: orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

If you so choose, please feel free to print this page to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and have sufficient information to make a decision about participating in this study. I consent to participate in this study.

{By clicking the next button below you agree to the above statement and will begin the study.}

DEMOGRAPHIC AND CAREER SURVEY

INSTRUCTIONS: The following asks background questions about you and your career. Please fill out each of

the following and proceed on to the next sheet when you are done. There are no right or wrong answers. *Thank you!*

Age:

Gender:

- Male
- Female

Sexual Orientation:

- Heterosexual, "Straight"
- Homosexual, "Gay" or "Lesbian"
- Bisexual

Ethnic Background:

- European American, "White"
- African American, "Black"
- Latino/Hispanic/Chicano
- Asian American/Asian
- Middle Eastern American/Middle Eastern
- Indian American/Indian
- Native American
- Not Listed:

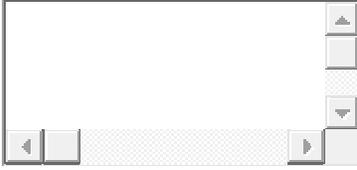
Current rank in your academic career:

- Visiting/Adjunct Professor
- Assistant Professor
- Associate Professor
- Full Professor
- Not Listed:

How would you classify your primary academic specialization(s) {please check all that apply}:

- Interpersonal Communication
- Relational Communication
- Health Communication
- Language and Social Interaction
- Family Communication
- Professional Communication
- Instructional Communication
- Intercultural Communication
- Organizational Communication
- Social Influence
- Small Group Communication
- Nonverbal Communication
- Communication Theory
- Other area/discipline:

Please feel free to describe any other aspects of your academic focus:



**NOTE: IF YOU PARTICIPATED IN THE EARLIER PHASE OF THIS RESEARCH,
THIS PAGE SHOULD ONLY SERVE AS A REMINDER.
IF THIS IS YOUR FIRST INVOLVEMENT,
PLEASE READ THIS BRIEF SUMMARY ON THE RESEARCH TOPIC.**

RESILIENCE IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS BRIEF

INSTRUCTIONS: Please read the following brief passage regarding resilience. After you are done, use the details you have read to help you answer the questions on the following page. *Thank you!*

Survival. Toughness. Ability to endure. These are characteristics commonly associated with the concept of resilience. People can demonstrate resilience when they encounter health problems, experience abuse, deal with work place and career challenges, or as suggested by this research, cope with difficulties in their romantic relationships. Researchers have used two perspectives to explain how resilience is demonstrated: Trait and Pattern perspectives.

The trait perspective suggests that resilience is a personality characteristic that people possess to varying degrees. For instance, some scholars argue that people vary in a trait called hardiness, such that individuals who are high in hardiness perceive their behavior as having an impact on the course of events in their lives, have a tendency to be actively (as opposed to passively) involved in events and in the lives of others, have a desire to learn from both positive and negative experiences, and believe they can benefit from both failures and successes.

Another view is that resilience can be seen in interactions between people, and how people handle situations with stressors. Pattern perspectives generally describe resilience as occurring when individuals (a) experience a stressor, (b) use resources to help them deal with the stressor, and then (c) emerge as “okay.” Social interaction between those involved in the situation can serve as an important resource to help people deal with the stressor. However, the contributions of communication to resilience are not entirely clear.

Given the potential importance of communication to resilience, researchers need to look specifically at the characteristics of interactions that occur when resilience is demonstrated. The purpose of the current study is to examine the communication behaviors exhibited by romantic couples that contribute to their ability to competently manage situations in which they encounter a serious stressor.

Thank you for reading the passage. Please proceed to the next page...

"INTERPERSONAL RESILIENCE IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS" ITEMS

INSTRUCTIONS: The following items represent characteristics of communication between two people in a romantic relationships that might bolster their ability to manage serious stressors. **NOTE:** Please feel free to flip back to the Resilience Brief if need be. The following questions are not meant to be a test of your memory, but instead to help frame or guide your responses. *Thank you! Please rate each item on the corresponding scale point as to how strongly you agree or disagree that each represents characteristics of communication that contribute to resilience.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
My partner and I rely on our sense of humor to break up tension when it is appropriate.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When my partner and I have problems, those we confide in often feel like they are caught in the middle of our drama.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My partner and I aren't always very honest when it comes to discussing difficult issues.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sometimes my partner and I have difficulties understanding how the other feels about a particular issue.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Approaching challenges with my partner, as opposed to individually, makes life easier.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My partner and I set uninterrupted time aside to discuss important matters with each other.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Touch, hugging, and other forms of physical intimacy usually calm my partner and I when we are upset.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If necessary, my partner and I are able to find new and creative ways to handle disagreements.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The problems that my partner and I encounter seem to take over our whole lives until we can find a way to deal with them.

The unconditional support that my partner and I show each other is an important part of our relationship.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

When times get tough, my partner and I draw strength from our shared belief system.

In our relationship, we make little effort to foster respect for each other.

Even when we disagree, my partner and I believe it is important that each of us feels listened to.
I have little respect for my partner's opinions.

When giving advice to each other, my partner and I generally have the other's best interests in mind.

When my partner and I experience life's difficulties, we keep the problems in perspective, reminding each other of our life goals and plans.

My partner and I have a solid understanding of our history together and how it affects our current relationship.

Staying positive is an important part of the way my partner and I deal with the difficulties of life.

When discussing difficult issues my partner and I focus on the problem at hand.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My partner and I view disagreements as opportunities to show each other who is right and who is wrong.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Knowing when to involve others in our problems is important to the way my partner and I resolve our problems.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My partner and I feel that sometimes it is important to take time to think before speaking to each other.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My partner and I find ways to make light of life's stressful events.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When my partner and I have problems, it's helpful to have trusted others to confide in.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Given life's difficulties, my partner and I find it challenging to enjoy each other's company.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Even if my partner and I are upset with each other, we are very careful not to say hurtful things to each other.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When dealing with a major issue, my partner and I have a sense of when to give each other space.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I only move forward with major life decisions after speaking to my partner to get his or her perspective.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When my partner and I have different opinions, we find it easy to take each other's perspective.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The commitment my partner and I have for each other helps us feel that we can take on life's challenges together.

My partner and I feel that we can be genuine with each other.

When my partner and I disagree we usually keep pushing the issue, no matter what.

My partner and I feel comfortable sharing our feelings with each other, even if the conversation is unexpected.

My partner and I make a special effort to be polite with each other.

My partner and I try to spare each other from negative reactions to each other's negative behavior.

When my partner and I are mad at each other, we usually express our frustrations, no matter how intense the conversation becomes.

My partner and I generally have trouble arriving at a shared perspective on most issues.

My partner and I don't often express our feelings for each other in a physical way, sexual or otherwise

Even when we disagree my partner and I make sure to keep our discussion civil.

My partner and I understand when it is appropriate to share our opinions and when to hold back.

APPENDIX E: IR³ Items derived from Phase 1 & 2, with *Discretion* Dimension

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT (alpha reliability = .806):

1. My partner and I understand when it is appropriate to share our opinions and when to hold back. (6)
2. When dealing with a major issue, my partner and I have a sense of when to give each other space. (6)
3. My partner and I feel that sometimes it is important to take time to think before speaking. (6)
4. When discussing difficult issues, my partner and I focus on the problem at hand. (4)
5. My partner and I feel comfortable sharing our feelings with each other, even if the conversation is unexpected. (9)
6. My partner and I set uninterrupted time aside to discuss important matters with each other. (9)

RESPECT/HARMONY (alpha reliability = .749):

1. R: In our relationship, my partner and I make little effort to foster respect for each other. (1)
2. R: I have little respect for my partner's opinions. (1)
3. R: Given life's difficulties, my partner and I find it challenging to enjoy each other's company. (2)
4. R: My partner and I don't often express our feelings for each other in a physical way, sexual or otherwise. (7)
5. R: The problems that my partner and I encounter seem to take over our whole lives until we can make a find a way to deal with them. (10)

PARTNERSHIP (alpha reliability = .766):

1. Approaching challenges with my partner, as opposed to individually, makes life easier. (3)
2. The commitment my partner and I have for each other helps us feel that we can take on life's challenges together. (3)
3. When times get tough, my partner and I draw strength from our shared belief system.(10)
4. The unconditional support that my partner and I show each other is an important part of our relationship. (7)

CIVILITY (alpha = .648):

1. Even if my partner and I are upset with each other, we are very careful not to say hurtful things to each other. (11)
2. My partner and I make a special effort to be polite to each other. (1)

3. My partner and I try to spare each other from negative reactions to each other's negative behavior. (11)

4. Staying positive is an important part of the way my partner and I deal with the difficulties of life. (7)

TENSION RELEASE (alpha = .563):

1. My partner and I find ways to make light of life's stressful events. (2)

2. My partner and I rely on our sense of humor to break up tension when it is appropriate. (2)

RESTRAINT (alpha = .437):

1. R: When my partner and I are mad at each other, we usually express our frustrations, no matter how intense the conversation becomes. (11)

2. R: When my partner and I disagree we usually keep pushing the issue, no matter what. (6)

DISCRETION (alpha = .392):

1. Knowing when to involve others in our problems is important to the way my partner and I resolve our problems. (8)

2. When my partner and I have problems, it's helpful to have trusted others to confide in. (8)

APPENDIX G: Phase Three, Survey Materials

WELCOME!

You have found the "Learning About Job Loss" Survey Packet. This phase of data collection is an aspect of my dissertation research, a requirement for earning a doctorate in communication studies.

TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR THIS STUDY, YOU MUST:

- Have lost your full time employment in the last 12 months
- Have been involved in a romantic relationship with your partner before you became unemployed, and still are involved with the same partner
- Are currently seeking re-employment at a full time basis.

ALL THREE MUST BE TRUE TO PARTICIPATE. IF YOU ARE NOT ELIGIBLE, THANK YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST.

MORE OPPORTUNITIES MAY BE AVAILABLE IN THE FUTURE.

Your complete and honest participation in this survey will enter you in a drawing for one of 10 \$50.00 gift certificates to a grocery store in your area. At the end of the survey you will be given an opportunity to provide a first name and an email address or telephone number. This information will be recorded separately from your answers to the survey.

At that time you will also have an opportunity to check a box to let us know that you would be open to follow up questions about your employment and relationship status down the road. Future drawings for more gift certificates would be a part of this process. You DO NOT have to check this box to be eligible for the first drawing.

The following online survey consists of 8 pages:

- Standard IRB Short consent form
- Demographics and Resources
- Current Job Search Activities
- Support Network
- Personal Characteristics
- Typical Communication between You and Your Partner
- Relationship Quality
- Relationship Satisfaction

This process should take approximately 30 minutes of your time, but feel free to take as long as you like. The survey is meant to be taken ALONE, without help or assistance from others.

Thank you for your participation! If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to email me at: garyb@mail.utexas.edu.

Sincerely,

Gary A. Beck, MA (ABD)

University of Texas at Austin

IRB APPROVED ON: 08/17/09

IRB # 2009-06-0111

EXPIRES ON: 08/16/10

SHORT CONSENT FORM

Conducted By: Gary Beck, M. A. garyb@mail.utexas.edu, 512-471-5251

Dr. Anita Vangelisti, a.vangelisti@mail.utexas.edu, 512-471-5251

Dept. of Communication Studies, The University of Texas at Austin

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. Please read the information below before deciding whether or not to take part. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can stop participating at any time.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experience of job loss and its effects on your romantic relationship.

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to fill out surveys based on the following things:

- Demographics and Resources
- Current Job Search Activities
- Support Network
- Personal Characteristics
- Typical Communication between You and Your Partner
- Relationship Quality
- Relationship Satisfaction

Total estimated time to participate in the study is 30 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

- The risks in this study are no greater than in everyday life.
- There are no benefits of being involved in the study.

Compensation:

As a result of participating in this study, if you complete the survey and choose to provide your contact information at the end, you will be entered in a drawing for a \$50 gift certificate to a local grocery store. There are 10 possible winners.

The records of this study will be stored securely and kept private. Authorized persons from The University of Texas at Austin, members of the Institutional Review Board, and (study sponsors, if any) have the legal right to review your research records and will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. All publications will exclude any information that will make it possible to identify you as a subject.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions about the study please ask now. If you have questions later or want additional information, call the researcher conducting the study. His name, phone number, and e-mail addresses are at the top of this page.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Jody Jensen, Ph.D., Chair of The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, (512) 471-8871 or email: orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

If you so choose please feel free to print this page to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and have sufficient information to make a decision about participating in this study. I consent to participate in this study.

{By clicking the next button below you agree to the above statement and will begin the study.}

DEMOGRAPHICS AND RESOURCES

INSTRUCTIONS: The following asks background questions about you and your career. Please fill out each of the following and proceed on to the next sheet when you are done. There are no right or wrong answers. *Thank you!*

Age:

Gender:

- Male
- Female

Sexual Orientation:

- Heterosexual, "Straight"
- Homosexual, "Gay" or "Lesbian"
- Bisexual

Ethnic Background:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> European American, "White" | <input type="radio"/> Middle Eastern American/Middle Eastern |
| <input type="radio"/> African American, "Black" | <input type="radio"/> Indian American/Indian |
| <input type="radio"/> Latino/Hispanic/Chicano | <input type="radio"/> Native American |
| <input type="radio"/> Asian American/Asian | <input type="radio"/> Not Listed: <input type="text"/> |

What religion do you most closely associate with?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Protestant | <input type="radio"/> Buddhist |
| <input type="radio"/> Catholic | <input type="radio"/> Muslim |
| <input type="radio"/> Mormon | <input type="radio"/> Faith Not Listed |
| <input type="radio"/> Jehovah's Witness | <input type="radio"/> Unaffiliated |
| <input type="radio"/> Orthodox | <input type="radio"/> Atheist |
| <input type="radio"/> Non-denominational Christian | <input type="radio"/> Agnostic |
| <input type="radio"/> Other Christian | <input type="radio"/> Prefer not to identify religion |
| <input type="radio"/> Jewish | |

If you would like to clarify your answer from above, observe multiple religions, or observe a religion unlisted above, please provide such information below:

Please indicate how religious you are:

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Not Religious at all | Slightly Religious | Moderately Religious | Very Religious | Extremely Religious |
| <input type="radio"/> |

Please indicate the highest level of education you have completed:

- Elementary School/Middle School/Some High School
- GED/High School Diploma
- Some Technical or Vocational School, or Some College

- College Degree
- Some Graduate School
- Graduate Degree
- Not Listed:

What zip code do you use for your current address (for example, 77271)?

What date did you and your partner start to think of yourselves as a couple? (Month, Day, Year)

How would you describe the relationship between yourself and your partner?

- Casually dating
- Seriously dating (considering long term commitment)
- Privately engaged to be married
- Publicly and formally engaged to be married
- Married
- Currently Broken up
- Separated/Divorced
- Not Listed:

Do either you or your romantic partner have children that you contribute to financially?

- Yes No

How would you describe the living arrangement between yourself and your partner?

- Living in separate residences
- Living in separate residences, but staying at either place overnight a few times a month
- Living in separate residences, but staying at either place overnight a few days a week
- Living in separate residences, but staying at either place overnight most days a week
- Living in same residence

Are you dating or seeing other people in addition to your current partner?

- Yes No

For how much longer do you want your relationship to last? (select the closest answer)

A Month or Less 6 Months Twelve Months Five Years Ten Years or More

Do you feel committed to maintaining your relationship with your partner?

Not At All Committed Completely Committed

How likely is it that your relationship will end in the near future?

Not at All Likely to End Extremely Likely to End

How likely is it that you will date someone other than your partner within the next year?

Not At All Likely Extremely Likely

Do you feel attached to your relationship with your partner (like you're really "linked" to your partner, whether or not you're happy)?

Not At All Attached Completely Attached

Do you ever have fantasies about what life might be like if you weren't dating your partner (i.e. how often do you wish that you weren't involved)?

Never Have Such Fantasies Often Have Such Fantasies

How much difficulty do you have paying your bills?

Great Difficulty Some Difficulty Little Difficulty No Difficulty

At the end of the month, do you end up with?

Some money left over Just enough to make ends meet Not enough to make ends meet

Your total household assets in checking accounts, saving accounts, and investments are:

- \$0-1000
- \$1001-5000
- \$5001-10000
- \$10001-50000
- over \$50,000.00

Using your best idea, what is your family's total current monthly income at this time? (example: \$750.00)

CURRENT JOB SEARCH ACTIVITIES

INSTRUCTIONS: The following asks questions about job search activities that you engaged in. Please fill out each of the following and proceed on to the next sheet when you are done. There are no right or wrong answers. *Thank you!*

What was the date that you became unemployed from your full time position? (Month, Day, Year)

What type of work are you looking for? {check all that apply}

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Laborer | <input type="checkbox"/> Nurse, Teacher, Technician |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Semi-Skilled Worker | <input type="checkbox"/> Executive, Administrator |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Farming, Forestry, Fishing | <input type="checkbox"/> Doctor, Lawyer, Professional |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanic, Trades, Crafts | <input type="checkbox"/> Anything that pays |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Police, Firefighter | <input type="checkbox"/> Not listed: <input style="width: 60px; height: 15px;" type="text"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clerical, Sales | |

When you think about being unemployed, how does it make you feel?

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Really Glad | Somewhat Glad | Neither Glad nor
Depressed | Somewhat Depressed | Really Depressed |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

When you think about the effect being unemployed has on your family how does it make you feel?

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Really Glad | Somewhat Glad | Neither Glad nor
Depressed | Somewhat Depressed | Really Depressed |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

When you think about the effect being unemployed has on your plans for the future how does it make you feel?

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Really Glad | Somewhat Glad | Neither Glad nor
Depressed | Somewhat Depressed | Really Depressed |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Current work status:

- Without employment of any means (0 paid hours)
- Part time employment (less than 40 paid hours per week)
- Part time employment at multiple jobs
- Full time employment, but looking for other employment (at least 40 hours per week)
- Fulltime employment (at least 40 hours per week)

How much effort are you putting into finding another job?

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Very Little | Some | Moderate | Very Much | Extreme |
| <input type="radio"/> |

How much time are you putting into finding another job?

Very Little	Some	Moderate	Very Much	Extreme
<input type="radio"/>				

How much emotion are you putting into finding another job?

Very Little	Some	Moderate	Very Much	Extreme
<input type="radio"/>				

My job search efforts primarily are focused on getting assistance from:

	Don't use this source	Hardly use this source	Sometimes use this source	Occasionally use this source	Always use this source
Employment Agencies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family/Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Previous Co-workers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Previous Supervisors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Online Search Engines (Google, yahoo)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Online Classifieds (Craig's list)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social Networking Websites (Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please provide any other information about your job search process.

▲

▼

◀

▶

SUPPORT NETWORK

INSTRUCTIONS: The following questions ask about people in your environment who provide you with help or support. Each question has two parts. For the first part, list all the people you know, excluding yourself, whom you can count on for help or support in the manner described. Give the persons' initials and their relationship to you (see example).

For the second part of each question, click the circle to indicate how satisfied you are with the overall support you have.

If you have no support for a question, write the words "No one," but make sure to still click your level of satisfaction. Please do not list more than nine persons per question.

Please answer all the questions as best as you can. All your responses will be kept confidential.

EXAMPLE:

Who do you know whom you can trust with information that could get you in trouble?

J.T. (friend), R.W. (father), L.W. (sister), P.L. (neighbor)

How satisfied are you with this support?

Very Dissatisfied Dissatisfied Somewhat Dissatisfied Somewhat Satisfied Satisfied Very Satisfied

 *

1. Who accepts you totally, including both your worst and your best points? {List initials, and relation to you}

2. How satisfied are you with this support?

Very Dissatisfied Dissatisfied Somewhat Dissatisfied Somewhat Satisfied Satisfied Very Satisfied

3. Whom can you really count on to tell you, in a thoughtful manner, when you need to improve in some way?

4. How satisfied are you with this support?

Very Dissatisfied Dissatisfied Somewhat Dissatisfied Somewhat Satisfied Satisfied Very Satisfied

5. Whom do you feel truly loves you deeply?

6. How satisfied are you with this support?

Very Dissatisfied Dissatisfied Somewhat Dissatisfied Somewhat Satisfied Satisfied Very Satisfied

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

INSTRUCTIONS: Please answer the following 18 questions to the best of your ability, and as honestly as possible. This is important for report accuracy. There are no right or wrong answers.

	Not at all True	Somewhat true	True	Very True
1. By working hard, you can always achieve your goal.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. I don't like to make changes in my everyday schedule.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. I really look forward to my work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. I am not equipped to handle the unexpected problems of life.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Most of what happens in life is just meant to be.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. When I make plans, I'm certain I can make them work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. No matter how hard I try, my efforts usually accomplish little.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. I like a lot of variety in my work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. Most of the time, people listen carefully to what I have to say.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. Thinking of yourself as a free person just leads to frustration.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. Trying your best at what you do usually pays off in the end.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. My mistakes are usually very difficult to correct.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13. It bothers me when my daily routine gets interrupted.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. I often wake up eager to take up life wherever it left off.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15. Lots of times, I really don't know my own mind.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16. Changes in routine provoke me to learn.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17. Most days, life is really interesting and exciting for me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18. It's hard to imagine anyone getting excited about working.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

TYPICAL COMMUNICATION

BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR PARTNER

INSTRUCTIONS: Please read the following statements about how you and your partner may act towards each other. After reading each statement, please mark the appropriate circle (for example, if you strongly Disagree with the statement, please click the circle all of the way on the left).

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
My partner and I understand when it is appropriate to share our opinions and when to hold back.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

When dealing with a major issue, my partner and I have a sense of when to give each other space.	<input type="radio"/>				
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My partner and I feel that sometimes it is important to take time to think before speaking.	<input type="radio"/>				
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	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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When discussing difficult issues, my partner and I focus on the problem at hand.	<input type="radio"/>				
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My partner and I feel comfortable sharing our feelings with each other, even if the conversation is unexpected.	<input type="radio"/>				
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My partner and I set uninterrupted time aside to discuss important matters with each other.	<input type="radio"/>				
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...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
In our relationship, my partner and I make little effort to foster respect for each other.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I have little respect for my partner's opinions.	<input type="radio"/>				
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	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Given life's difficulties, my partner and I find it challenging to enjoy each other's company.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My partner and I don't often express our feelings for each other in a physical way, sexual or otherwise.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The problems that my partner and I encounter seem to take over our whole lives until we can find a way to deal with them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...					

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Approaching challenges with my partner, as opposed to individually, makes life easier.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The commitment my partner and I have for each other helps us feel that we can take on life's challenges together.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When times get tough, my partner and I draw strength from our shared belief system.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The unconditional support that my partner and I show each other is an important part of our relationship.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...					

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Even if my partner and I are upset with each other, we are very careful not to say hurtful things to each other.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My partner and I make a	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
special effort to be polite to each other.					
My partner and I try to spare each other from negative reactions to each other's negative behavior.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Staying positive is an important part of the way my partner and I deal with the difficulties of life.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
My partner and I find ways to make light of life's stressful events.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My partner and I rely on our sense of humor to break up tension when it is appropriate.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Laughing together is one way my partner and I cope with stressful events.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
When my partner and I are mad at each other, we usually express our frustrations, no matter how intense the conversation becomes.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When my partner and I disagree, we usually keep pushing the issue, no matter what.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When my partner and I get angry with each other, we always tell each other exactly how we feel.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Knowing when to involve others in our problems is important to the way my partner and I resolve our problems.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When my partner and I have problems, it's helpful to have trusted others to confide in.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My partner and I usually share our problems with anyone and everyone.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

RELATIONSHIP QUESTIONNAIRE

INSTRUCTIONS: The following asks questions about quality and satisfaction of your relationship with your partner. For example if you think that you have a strong sense of "belonging" with your partner, click the circle right next to the word "Very much". If you think that you don't have a strong sense of "belonging", click the circle right next to the word "Not at all". If you think it has been somewhere in between, click the circle that indicates this. There are no right or wrong answers. *Thank you!*

1. To what extent do you have a sense of "belonging" with your partner?

Not at all Very Much

2. To what extent do you reveal or disclose very intimate facts about yourself to your partner?

Not at all Very Much

3. How often do you and your partner argue with one another?

not very frequently Very Frequently

4. How much do you feel you "give" to the relationship?

very little Very Much

5. To what extent do you try to change things about your partner that bother you (e.g. behaviors, attitudes, etc.)?

Not at all Very Much

6. How confused are you about your feelings toward your partner?

Not at all Extremely

7. To what extent do you love your partner at the present time?

Not at all Very Much

8. How much time do you and your partner spend discussing and trying to work out problems between you?

No time at all A great deal of time

9. How much do you think about or worry about losing some of your independence by being involved with your partner?

Not at all Very much

10. To what extent do you feel that things that happen to your partner also affect or are important to you?

Not at all Very Much

11. How much do you and your partner talk about the quality of your relationship (e.g., how “good” it is, how satisfying, how to improve it, etc.)?

Never Very often

12. How often do you feel angry or resentful toward your partner?

Never Very often

13. To what extent do you feel that your relationship is somewhat unique compared to others you've been in?

Not at all Very much

14. To what extent do you try to change your own behavior to help solve certain problems between you and your partner?

Not at all Very Much

15. How ambivalent or unsure are you about continuing in the relationship with your partner?

Not unsure at all Extremely Unsure

16. How committed do you feel toward your partner?

Not at all Extremely

17. How close do you feel toward your partner?

Not close at all Extremely Close

18. To what extent do you feel that your partner demands or requires too much of your time and attention?

Not at all Very Much

19. How much do you need your partner at this time?

Not at all Very Much

20. To what extent do you feel “trapped” or pressured to continue this relationship?

Not at all Very Much

21. How sexually intimate are you with your partner?

Not at all Extremely

22. How much do you tell your partner what you want or need from the relationship?

Not much at all Very Much

23. How attached do you feel to your partner?

Not at all Very Much

24. When you and your partner argue, how serious are the problems or arguments?

Not serious at all Very serious

25. To what extent do you communicate negative feelings toward your partner (e.g., anger, dissatisfaction, frustration, etc.)?

Not at all Very often

Think about your relationship over the last month or so, and use the following words or phrases to describe it. For example if you think that your relationship during the last month or so has been very miserable, click the circle right next to the word “miserable”. If you think it has been very enjoyable, click the circle right next to the word “enjoyable”. If you think it has been somewhere in between, click the circle that indicates this.

Miserable	<input type="radio"/>	Enjoyable						
Hopeful	<input type="radio"/>	Discouraging						
Free	<input type="radio"/>	Tied down						

- | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Empty | <input type="radio"/> | Full |
| Interesting | <input type="radio"/> | Boring |
| Rewarding | <input type="radio"/> | Disappointing |
| Doesn't give me much of a chance | <input type="radio"/> | Brings out the best in me |
| Lonely | <input type="radio"/> | Friendly |
| Hard | <input type="radio"/> | Easy |
| Worthwhile | <input type="radio"/> | Useless |

All things considered, how satisfied or dissatisfied have you been with your relationship over the last month or so?

Completely Satisfied Completely Dissatisfied

THANK YOU!

Your participation in this phase of the research is complete! Thank you for your assistance and honest feedback regarding your experience becoming unemployed.

Where did you learn about completing this survey?

If you would like to be considered for the \$50 grocery card drawing, please provide a first name below, followed by an email address. (Example: Marco, example@gmail.com) If an email address is not available, please provide a reliable telephone number or mailing address.

We would like the possibility of doing additional research regarding job loss and your relationship with you in the future. Future participation would involve additional drawings for more rewards. Please indicate your interest below:

- Yes, I would like to be involved. Please use the contact information provided above to reach me.
- No, thank you.

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VITA

Gary Alan Beck attended Shelton High School in Shelton, Connecticut and graduated in the spring of 1997. Following his graduation from high school, Gary enrolled at the University of Rhode Island in Kingston, RI. He received a Bachelor of Arts Degree in the spring of 2001. After he obtained a Bachelor's degree in History, Gary stayed at the University of Rhode Island to pursue a Masters of Arts Degree in Communication Studies. He graduated with a Master's Degree in the spring of 2004. During that fall, Gary enrolled at The University of Texas at Austin to pursue a Doctoral degree in Communication Studies.

Permanent Address: 13604 Caldwell Drive, #23, Austin, Texas 78750

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