Relationship qualities: Investigating the nature of self-identified couple strengths and language use during a strengths interview

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Abstract

Research and practice in couple therapy has been influenced by positive psychology, and other factors, to create a nuanced viewed of relationship health. Relationship strengths are thought to be informative of overall relationship health, possibly even more so than relationship concerns (Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006; Sullivan, Pasch, Johnson, & Bradbury, 2010). The present project explored the association between self-identified relationship strengths and couple satisfaction. Then, the study examined the association between self and partner pronoun use and level of couple satisfaction during an interview about relationship strengths.

Aim 1 replicated Gray and colleagues' (under review) project which examined the association between types of strengths and level of couple satisfaction reported by extremely satisfied and extremely dissatisfied individuals. I predicted similar results, such that type of strength would vary based on relationship satisfaction. More specifically, those individuals who endorse strengths focused on working together as a team will report lower levels of couple satisfaction and those who endorse strengths centered on emotional intimacy will report higher levels of couple satisfaction. Aim 2 expanded on this general research question from looking at what types of strengths partners choose to how they speak about their respective strengths during a focused discussion. Overall, how does language use, specifically pronoun use, during a strengths-based discussion relate to couple satisfaction? I utilized separate actor-partner independence models to (APIMs; Kenny & Kashy, 2010) to determine the path analyses between the associations of unique actor and partner effects of I, me, we, and you pronoun use and level of couple satisfaction.

Results for Aim 1 failed to replicate findings from the Marriage Checkup study such that couples most frequently endorsed the same top three strengths across level of satisfaction. Secondly, path analyses revealed significant negative associations for both actor and partner effects for women's I-talk and significant positive associations for both actor and partner effects for men's you-talk. The remaining paths were not significantly related.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Psychology focused almost exclusively on abnormal behavior and pathology for many years, and not surprisingly, the couple therapy field has concentrated almost solely on dyadic conflict, problem-solving, and relationship dissolution for many years as well. However, more recent relationship research has examined the role of positive emotions, resilience, and strengths in relational processes (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Gordon & Baucom, 2009; Kauffman & Silberman, 2009; Sullivan et al., 2010). The positive psychology movement reminds researchers and clinicians alike to give suffering and resilience equal consideration because of the advantages to studying strengths and integrating strength specific assessments and interventions (Gurman & Fraenkel, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In couple therapy specifically, assessing the couples' perspective of what they do well together often counters the sense of hopelessness or 'stuckness' about a relational pattern that most couples express in the first session. Moreover, if clinicians are able to balance time spent on the couples' strengths and areas of concern, a critical sense of optimism and hope can be fostered starting with the initial session.

Current research findings support the advantages of exploring positive aspects of intimate relationships. Generally speaking, the broaden-and-build model posits that positive emotions broaden our repertoires for thought-action tendencies, and build enduring personal resources such as health, friendships, theory of mind, optimism, and creativity whereas negative emotions shrink the array of possible behaviors (for a review, see Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). Additional evidence suggests that positive affect

stimulates flexible cognitive organization and the ability to integrate material from different domains, which are both important abilities for intimate partners especially when communicating emotions or problem-solving (Isen, 2000). Other findings suggest that individuals' responses when partners share a positive event are more closely related to relationship health and potential for break-up than negative event discussions (Gable et al., 2006). Furthermore, in a study of newlyweds, early supportive behavior provided when partners share something vulnerable was found to influence later marital satisfaction more so than early problem-solving behaviors (Sullivan et al., 2010). Thus, in sum, this pattern of findings indicate that positive relationship aspects, such as the ability to communicate around positive experiences and the discussion of couples' strengths, possibly contribute to relationship health even more than discussions about negative events or problem-solving behaviors.

Aims

Consequently, the aim of the present project is to investigate links between relationship strengths and relationship satisfaction. More specifically, Aim 1 attempts to understand how couples' self-identified strengths are related to satisfaction levels by replicating findings from a prior study (Gray, Sollenberger, Hawrilenko, & Cordova, under review). Aim 2 further develops this premise to test the association between pronoun usage and couple satisfaction during a discussion about relationship strengths because prior studies examine language usage primarily in the context of conflict conversations. The use of language, especially the frequency of certain types of pronouns, in everyday conversation is believed to be an indirect measure of

psychological processes such as emotional and relational functioning, and it is anticipated that language usage might have a different meaning depending upon the context. In other words, dysfunctional strategies when talking about relationship problems or concerns might have a different function or impact when talking about positive aspects of the relationship.

Types of Strengths Matter

Since positive interactions between couples have lasting value, researchers became interested in the types of strengths that couples identify and what, if anything, the types of strengths tell us about the couple. For instance, the Marriage Checkup (Morrill, Eubanks-Fleming, Harp, Sollenberger, Darling, & Cordova, 2011), a brief intervention for couples, explores couples' strengths and areas of concern. These interventions ask both partners to select their most important relationship strengths from a pre-determined list. Early Marriage Checkup facilitators became curious about why one couple might identify "We're a good team when it comes to parenting" and another couple identify "We're good friends" as their top strength. The original exploration of this question revealed that highly satisfied couples identified strengths related to affection and intimacy in the relationship whereas less satisfied couples identified strengths related to parallel support items, or qualities that focus on a couple's ability to work collaboratively toward a goal but are not necessarily focused upon the emotional bond or connection between partners (Gray et al., under review; Sollenberger, Gray, & Cordova, 2013).

As outlined by Gray et al. (under review), the emotional intimacy category includes strengths such as "We chat, touch base, or check-in regularly about what's going

on in our separate day-to-day lives," "We laugh or smile together," and "We're good friends." These strengths emphasize both partners' involvement and connection. On the other hand, the parallel support category includes "We tend to agree more than disagree when it comes to money issues," "We're a good team when it comes to parenting," and "We actively support each other in the things we find most important as individuals." One important difference between the two categories is that the emotional intimacy strengths are all areas which draw the partners closely towards each other whereas the parallel support items describe areas that may divert focus from the dyad to external domains. Intimacy theory proposes that an intimate relationship develops over a period of time deepening when one partner invites the other to come closer through listening, accepting, and validating as opposed to pushing them away by rejecting, criticizing, or invalidating (Cordova & Scott, 2001; Reis & Shaver, 1988). Unfortunately, the dark side of intimacy, which inevitably occurs in every relationship, comes from the risk of being rejected by the typically safe person (Cordova & Scott, 2001). When turned away by an intimate partner, some partners are shaped to take the path of least resistance to ease emotional discomfort. For example, partners may end up spending less and less time together in order to decrease opportunities for sharing vulnerabilities and potential rejection. Partners engaging in this pattern may begin to lead parallel lives, avoiding each other on a deeper level as described by Gottman and colleagues (2002), and thus may focus more on excelling in managing finances, parenting, or managing household tasks and begin to emphasize these domains above feeling close and connected in the relationship. Therefore, as the title of the Gray and colleagues' (under review) paper

suggests, all relationship strengths are not created equal, and the type of strength identified by couples might reflect relationship satisfaction. However, this hypothesis was tested in only one sample and warrants replication.

Aim 1. Thus, the first aim of the project replicates and expounds on Gray et al.'s (under review) findings. The research question is do couples' self-identified strengths vary depending on relationship satisfaction? More specifically, I anticipate similar results to Gray et al. (under review) such that more satisfied couples will nominate affectionate/intimate strengths and less satisfied couples will nominate parallel support strengths.

Moving from What to How: Language Use as an Indicator of Relational Processes

As suggested above, the current literature is beginning to show that positive communication and support is more indicative of relationship health than negative interactions between partners (Gable et al., 2006; Sullivan et al., 2010). Also, the type of relationship strengths self-selected by partners has been shown to be related to relationship health in an initial study (Gray et al., under review). Although examining *what* types of strengths is one way to measure a positive couple process, the current study moves beyond categorical measurement and also aims to investigate *how* couples talk about their strengths.

Relationship researchers utilize many different tools (e.g., self-report, observational report, and behavioral coding) to gain understanding of relationship functioning. Although not a new idea, social and clinical psychologists increasingly depended on linguistic analysis to better understand relationship health as language is an

important means by which people share internal experiences with others. This concept has been of interest to linguists, philosophers, and psychologists for many years. Ludwig Wittgenstein, influential twentieth century philosopher, developed his philosophy of language partially through an interest in the way communities arrive at the meaning of language and language games (Biletzki, Anat, & Matar, 2014). In psychology, Bradac (1986, 1999) advanced the study of language by promoting a wide variety of research methods from highly controlled laboratory studies of written texts as well as naturalistic studies of conversational speech.

Modern text analysis within psychological science has a rich history (for a detailed history see Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010) dating back to Freud's interest in slips of the tongue and projective tests like the Rorschach Inkblot Test and the Thematic Apperception Test. Others began transcribing stream of consciousness during session for diagnostic purposes (Gottschalk & Gleser, 1969). With the technology of the day, researchers developed a computerized text analysis program (Stone, Dunphy, Smith, & Ogilvie, 1966). Later, Walter Weintraub established a fully transparent text analysis method becoming one of the first to link first-person singular pronouns (i.e., I, me, my) and depressive symptoms (1989). Most recently, computerized text analysis programs like Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC: Pennebaker, Booth, & Francis, 2007; Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010) allow researchers to analyze large amounts of text quickly. LIWC counts specific types of words and phrases, and has linked everyday language with personality factors, social behavior, and cognitive styles.

Empirical findings on pronoun usage. In general, language is related to numerous psychological processes including attention, thinking styles, emotion, social functioning, and close relationships (for a comprehensive summary of word category correlates see Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010). Most relevant to this study, words give us social information about our place in the immediate social hierarchy, how well a group is working together, and whether others are being honest. As this type of research progressed, two broad categories for words emerged with different psychometric and conceptual properties: content words (nouns, verbs, and many adjectives and adverbs) and style words (pronouns, prepositions, articles, conjunctions, and auxiliary verbs) which are processed differently in the brain (Miller, 1995). From a psychological perspective, content words communicate 'what' someone is saying whereas style words convey 'how' someone says it. Based on computerized text analysis, it appears that style words, including pronouns, are more indicative of social and psychological processes than content words (Chung & Pennebaker, 2007). In English, different types of pronouns (e.g., first-person plural, first-person singular, second person, and third person pronouns) function as a shorthand allowing speakers to represent and categorize others within the broader social hierarchy (Zimmermann, Wolf, Bock, Peham, & Benecke, 2013). Furthermore, individuals have little control or memory of how they use these types of words; thus, pronoun use is arguably less confounded by social desirability than self-report methods and provides a relatively unobtrusive window into emotional experiences (Chung & Pennebaker, 2007).

First-person plural pronouns (we-talk). Continuing to explore existing pronoun use research, the literature seems to converge on relationship benefits and health when partners' language contains more first-person plural pronouns (from here forward referred to as we-talk; including all first-person plural pronouns such as we, we're, we'll, us, and our). Studies find that we-talk is associated with commitment and interpersonal closeness (Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998; Aron & Fraley, 1999), less long-term marital distress and dissolution (Buehlman, Carrère, & Siler, 2005), relationship quality (Mills, Clark, Ford, & Johnson, 2004), marital satisfaction (Sillars, Shellen, McIntosh, & Pomegranate, 1997), and communal coping (Rohrbaugh, Shoham, Skoyen, Jensen, & Mehl, 2012). Thinking about one's relationship as an interactive unit, as opposed to two separate individuals, has been conceptualized as an indicator of health by early theorists who often thought of marital satisfaction as the integration and balance of separate identities within one unit.

Aron et al.'s (2004) self-expansion model develops the earlier ideas and hypothesizes that people are inherently motivated to expand their individual frame of reference and do so through close relationships. For example, greater relationship focus is related to closeness, relationship maintenance, and more love over a three month period in a college sample (Aron & Fraley, 1999). Word count and observational methodologies have shown that higher levels of relational focus are associated with higher relationship satisfaction in oneself (Sillars et al., 1997) and partner (Sullivan & Baucom, 2005). Along these lines, satisfied couples have been found to express more communal themes whereas distressed couples express more individual themes in conversation (Sillars et al.,

1997). Furthermore, more partner ‘we-talk’ is related to better patient adjustment and health improvement in regard to cancer, heart failure, and smoking cessation (Robbins, Mehl, Smith, & Weihs, 2013; Rohrbaugh, Mehl, Shoham, Reilly, & Ewy, 2008; Rohrbaugh et al., 2012).

Despite the overarching support for the positive correlates of ‘we-talk’, several researchers contradict such findings demonstrating no association between we-talk and relationship satisfaction (Slatcher, Vazire, & Pennebaker, 2008; Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010). Additionally, a rigorous analysis of couple communication failed to replicate the previously found positive association between we-focus language and marital satisfaction (Williams-Baucom, Atkins, Sevier, Eldridge, & Christensen, 2010). Williams-Baucom et al. (2010) found that ‘we-talk’ was related to higher relationship satisfaction in only one topic of conversation for satisfied participants (out of two topics per couple, one topic chosen by each partner).

Aim 2. Based on numerous previous findings that link language usage to relationship outcomes, the second aim of this project is to take the current research on positive aspects of marriage one step further by exploring *how* partners talk about their relationship strengths. In general, how is pronoun use related to relationship satisfaction? I will examine this question by testing four different categories of pronoun use: we, I, me, and you-statements. Empirical findings demonstrate a positive relationship between we-talk and positive relationship qualities which converge with self-expansion theory that individuals desire to expand beyond themselves and do so in relation to others, particularly intimate relationships.

Hypothesis 1. Although the findings are mixed on gender differences in the association of pronoun use and marital satisfaction (Rohrbaugh et al., 2008), gender implications of we-talk are difficult to ignore. Indirect evidence from gender differences in overall pronoun use, supports that women use more pronouns than men, and inherent gender differences in communal orientation supports the expectation of a stronger relationship between male we-talk and female relationship satisfaction than between female we-talk and male relationship satisfaction (Chung & Pennebaker, 2007; Rohrbaugh, Shoham, & Coyne, 2006; Taylor, 2006). My first hypothesis is that we-talk will be positively related to relationship satisfaction within the actor, or individual, effect. More specifically, individuals who use more we-talk will report more relationship satisfaction than individuals who use less we-talk. Regarding the partner effect, how an individual's pronoun use is related to their partner's relationship satisfaction, male we-talk is expected to be positively related to female relationship satisfaction whereas female we-talk is not expected to be related to male relationship satisfaction. Male we-talk will be positively associated with male satisfaction while controlling for female we-talk and female relationship satisfaction.

1. Female we-talk will be positively associated with female satisfaction while controlling for male we-talk and male relationship satisfaction.
2. Male we-talk will be positively associated with female satisfaction while controlling for female we-talk and female relationship satisfaction.
3. Female we-talk will not be associated with male satisfaction while controlling for male we-talk and male relationship satisfaction.

First-person singular pronouns (I/me). Past studies have combined the nominative (I) and accusative (me) pronouns into one variable based on the link between first-person pronoun use and self-focus (Simmons, Gordon, & Chambless, 2005). However, findings are mixed regarding the implications of focusing on one's self during couple discussions. Findings reveal marginally positive association between the use of first-person pronoun and relationship satisfaction in one sample, and in another sample, first-person pronoun use is negatively associated with relationship satisfaction (Sillars et al., 1997; Simmons et al., 2005). Other researchers argue for separating I-talk and me-talk based on different factor loadings for I and me (Campbell & Pennebaker, 2003). The current study will examine I-talk and me-talk separately based on the precedent in recent linguistic analysis of couple (Simmons et al., 2005; Williams-Baucom et al., 2010).

I-talk. There are proposed differences in the use of I and me within the context of a couple's *problem-solving* discussion. For example, increased I-talk may reflect positive characteristics such as self-disclosure and perspective taking (Simmons et al., 2005). Additionally, marital theory promotes using I-statements as a way to facilitate adaptive communication and intimacy between couples particularly during communicating emotions or problem-solving conversations (Epstein and Baucom, 2002; Hahlweg et al., 1984). One study of instant text messages between romantic partners indicates that higher frequency of first-person singular pronouns by wives leads to increased relationship satisfaction for both husbands and wives (Slatcher et al., 2008).

However, the literature provides support for the negative aspects of I-talk on oneself as well as the detrimental effects of I-talk on one's partner. For instance,

distressed couples demonstrated a positive association between I-talk and relationship satisfaction whereas nondistressed couples demonstrated a negative association between I language and relationship satisfaction (Williams-Baucom et al., 2010). Although the empirical findings regarding I-talk are mixed, clinical theory and observation suggests that the context in which the I-talk is occurring might have implications for relationship satisfaction. Thus, couples who use more I-language when talking about strengths, as opposed to a problem-based discussion, may be more self-absorbed or concerned with their own contributions to the relationship and less focused on the relational unit or on giving credit to their partners' contributions. Thus, in this context, the expected pattern of findings should be reversed as compared to those found using problem-solving discussions.

Hypothesis 2. Based on the nature of the couple conversations regarding their relationship strengths, it is expected that the association between I-talk and relationship satisfaction during strengths discussions will not be associated with relationship satisfaction in the actor, or individual, paths. Specifically, one's own level of I-talk when describing a relationship strength is not necessarily related to one's satisfaction with the relationship. However, the literature and clinical theory support the expectation of a negative association between one's level of I-talk and his/her partner's relationship satisfaction. To clarify, if one partner fills a relationship strengths discussion with examples of individual qualities and accomplishments, the other partner might feel that their contributions are discounted and invalidated, and thus be less satisfied with the relationship. This occurrence in a brief interview is likely to represent a snap-shot of the

couples' daily interactions with each other such that a disengaged, or less satisfied, partner is likely unhappy with the relationship in general. Specific predictions for each path of the I-talk APIM are as follows:

1. Male I-talk will not be associated with male satisfaction while controlling for female I-talk and female relationship satisfaction.
2. Female I-talk will not be associated with female satisfaction while controlling for male I-talk and male relationship satisfaction.
3. Male I-talk will be negatively associated with female satisfaction while controlling for female I-talk and female relationship satisfaction.
4. Female I-talk will be negatively associated with male satisfaction while controlling for male I-talk and male relationship satisfaction.

Me-talk. Even fewer studies examine me-talk than I-talk. Findings reveal that me-talk was not linked to negative relationship variables in one study (Simmons et al., 2005). Another study states that me-talk was not associated with relationship satisfaction in another (Williams-Baucom, et al., 2010). However, me-focus pronouns have been linked with a higher frequency of negative observed behavior during partner conflict discussions (Williams-Baucom, et al., 2010). Additionally, me-talk may indicate passive strivings or viewing the self as a victim (Slatcher et al., 2008). Me-talk is expected to be negatively related to relationship satisfaction based on these few findings and clinical experiences of the couples discussing strengths in the sessions.

Hypothesis 3. Me-focus pronouns are related to increased negative observed behavior during conflict discussions. Based on the limited findings and the understanding

that using passive me-talk pronouns reveal a victimized self-perspective, it is hypothesized that me-talk will be negatively related to relationship satisfaction in the actor effect paths, and more specifically, partners who use more me-talk will report less relationship satisfaction than partners who use less me-talk. However, the literature on gender differences with me and you-talk is more limited than we and I-talk at this time such that the hypotheses regarding the partner effect for the me and you pronoun categories (i.e., the association between male pronoun use and female relationship satisfaction and vice versa) will remain non-directional such that the predictions for me-talk are:

1. Male me-talk will be negatively associated with male satisfaction while controlling for female me-talk and female relationship satisfaction.
2. Female me-talk will be negatively associated with female satisfaction while controlling for male me-talk and male relationship satisfaction.
3. Male me-talk will be associated with female satisfaction while controlling for female me-talk and female relationship satisfaction.
4. Female me-talk will be associated with male satisfaction while controlling for male me-talk and male relationship satisfaction.

Third-person pronouns (you-talk). In contrast to I-talk, third-person pronoun usage (referred to as you-talk) in couples' conversations is generally thought to reflect negative relationship processes during relational problem discussions. As mentioned, most communication skills training methods (Epstein & Baucom, 2002) promotes that individuals should use "I" language during problem discussions so as to take ownership

for personal actions and consequences rather than come across as blaming their partner. Further, communication skills training as commonly taught in many approaches to couple therapy dictates that the speaker share feelings as subjective and specific experiences. For example, "When the dishes were left in the sink last night, I felt disrespected" as opposed to "You always leave your dirty dishes in the sink." For example, according to Pennebaker (2011), you-talk is 'the equivalent of pointing your finger at the other person while talking' (p.175). Empirical studies demonstrate findings of you-talk related to negative relationship correlates including blaming attitudes, criticism, overinvolved emotional reaction, negativity during problem-solving, relationship satisfaction, and trait anger (Hahlweg et al., 1984; Simmons et al., 2005; Slatcher et al., 2008).

However, in contrast, the present study expects a positive relationship between you-talk and relationship satisfaction. This expectation is based in part on the fact that the research on you-talk comes from studies examining couple language use during conflict or problem-solving communication. Instead, clinical observations suggest that when partners use you-talk when asked about relationship strengths, they have more positive connotations than the blaming statements made during conflict conversations. For example, general comments are made during strengths discussions such as "I am really good at X and you are really good at Y" or "You contribute X to the relationship whereas I contribute Y quality."

Hypothesis 4. Although most previous findings from conflict conversations point to a negative relationship between you-talk and relationship satisfaction with associations to blaming and criticizing one's partner, observations of the strengths discussions suggest

that in this context, you-talk is used in more positive ways. Therefore, I predict that you-talk will be positively related to relationship satisfaction for the actor, or individual effects, such that individuals who use more you-talk will report higher levels of relationship satisfaction than individuals who use less you-talk. The partner effects of the APIM will be non-directional because while the literature supports a relationship in general between individuals' language use and partners' relationship satisfaction, we do not yet have enough empirical support for a directional hypothesis. Therefore, our specific predictions are:

1. Male you-talk will be positively associated with male satisfaction while controlling for female you-talk and female satisfaction.
2. Female you-talk will be positively associated with female satisfaction while controlling for male you-talk and male satisfaction.
3. Male you-talk will be associated to female satisfaction while controlling for female you-talk and female satisfaction.
4. Female you-talk will be associated to male satisfaction while controlling for male you-talk and male satisfaction.

Chapter 2: Method

Participants

Participants consisted of opposite-sex, cohabitating couples in an intimate committed relationship. The sample was a subset of participants who have completed the Relationship Rx (Gordon, 2014), a two session, motivational relationship intervention. Initially, couples were excluded from the intervention if they were under 18 years of age. Of the 338 couples who completed the brief intervention at the beginning of this study, 168 couples, consenting to be electronically recorded, were selected using a stratified sampling procedure to increase sample diversity. Several changes to the list of participants occurred from beginning of the transcription process to the end including removal of 18 transcriptions due to the discovery during data cleaning that both members of the couple did not give consent for the video to be used and a modification to the methods such that couples were removed from the sample if the strengths portion of the interview was deemed off topic or off protocol by the research assistants. Off topic was defined as being unable to focus on relationship strengths during the strengths portion of the assessment interview and off protocol was defined as the facilitator failing to adhere to the semi-structured interview format leading to missing portions of information from either one of the partners (e.g., facilitator failed to ask partner 2's opinion of partner 1's identified top strength). The Relationship Rx program (Gordon, 2014), including the questions in the present study, was approved by University of Tennessee's Institutional Review Board.

A total of 150 opposite-sex dyads were included in this study (Table 1). In summary, 150 participants (50%) were men and 150 participants (50%) were women. In this sample, 63.3% of couples were married with an average length of marriage equal to 11.37 years (SD = 11.22), and 36.7% of couples were cohabitating with an average length of cohabitation equal to 5.75 years (SD = 4.76). Forty percent of couples had no children living in the home whereas the majority of couples (47.3%) had one or two children. Almost half of males (45.3%) and females (47.4%) were between 18 and 34 years of age. In regard to racial identity, the sample consisted of mostly white participants (78.7% of men and 86% of women) followed by black participants (18% of men and 12% of women). American Indian or Alaskan Native participants (2.7% of men and 2% of women); Asian participants (0.7% of men and 0.7% of women); and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander participants (0% of men and 0.7% of women) made up the remainder of the sample. As for ethnic identity, the sample consisted of mostly non-Hispanic participants (92% of men and 96% of women) whereas 3.3% of men and 4% of women identified as Hispanic.

When asked about level of education, 45.9% of women and 46.9% of men reported their highest level of education as a vocational degree or technical certificate or less with the remaining 54.1% of women and 53.1% of men reported their highest level of education as falling between an associate's degree and a master's or doctoral degree. As far as current employment, a majority of men (57.3%) held full-time employment whereas 27.3% of women were employed full-time. With respect to annual income, 56.7% of men and 80.7% of women earned less than $29,999.

Procedure

As mentioned, the present study analyzed data collected within the scope of a larger treatment implementation project, the Relationship Rx (Gordon, 2014). Segments from the recordings of consenting participants' assessment session were transcribed. Transcriptions were analyzed using Linguistic Inquiry Word Count software (LIWC), and the word count output was combined with data from the baseline measurement period before final data analysis. In contrast to the original study (Gray et al., under review, which examined partners at either end of the spectrum, of marital distress, I examined a sample of participants from the Relationship Rx (Gordon, 2014) across the entire range of relationship satisfaction. It is important to note that this replication study differed from the original study on the measure used to assess relationship health. Whereas the original study utilized the Global Distress Scale of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI-GDS: Snyder, 1997), the present study utilized the Couples Satisfaction Inventory-16 (CSI-16: Funk & Rogge, 2007).

Relationship Rx. In an effort to reach couples who are less likely to attend traditional therapy due to numerous barriers, Cordova et al. (2005) designed the Marriage Checkup as a brief, two-session intervention for couples. The Marriage Checkup incorporates strategies from Rollnick and Miller's (1995) motivational interviewing and Jacobson and Christensen's (1998) acceptance-promotion work with couples. The Marriage Checkup is conceptualized as the marital health equivalent of a yearly dental or car maintenance check-up. The Relationship Rx program (Gordon, 2014), an intervention based on the Marriage Checkup, is currently being implemented in a different area of the

United States, targeting a primarily low-income sample of couples under an initiative funded by a grant from the United States Department of Health and Human Services. Couples are recruited from the community at large but more heavily from an integrative health care facility providing primary and behavioral health care services for many under and non-insured individuals. Couples are recruited through active face to face efforts with on-site recruiters, as well as through flyers, local print and news media, and word of mouth.

The flow of the Relationship Rx (Gordon, 2014) is a two-step process. During the Assessment Session, a couple first completes a baseline packet of questionnaires to assess different aspects of individual and relationship functioning. For the current study, only self-nominated strengths, relationship satisfaction, demographic variables, and a segment of the interview were examined from the assessment data. For the remainder of the assessment session, a facilitator explores the couples' relationship history, areas of strength and concern, and steps the couple has taken to improve specific areas of concern in the relationship so far. During the Feedback Session, typically 1-2 weeks after the Assessment session, information is provided to the couple about their relationship health. Often partners receive a menu of suggestions and available community resources to help them decide how to respond.

Transcription. Once couples completed the program, a team of undergraduate research assistants, trained in the research theory, ethics, and procedure for the present project by the principal investigator, transcribed ten minute segments of the couple interactions using the LIWC Operator's Manual (for a more detailed explanation of the

LIWC program, transcription instructions and dictionary see Pennebaker et al., 2007). Selecting which segment in the couples' interview and determining the length of time to transcribe was influenced by the precedent from Williams-Baucom et al. (2010) and Rohrbaugh et al., (2012). Additionally, Pennebaker approved the method for transcription with the addition of a third party to the conversation (Pennebaker, 2014, personal correspondence). The ten minute segments are a composite of two five minute segments. The first segment begins after the facilitator asks the first partner to describe the most important relationship strength as identified on their Relationship Checkup Questionnaire. The second segment begins after the facilitator asks the second partner to describe the most important relationship strength identified on their Relationship Checkup Questionnaire. Both 5 minute segments consist of all spoken words by the couple and facilitator since the Relationship Rx (Gordon, 2014) protocol allows the facilitator to follow-up with either partner during this discussion especially by asking the other partner whether or not they agree with the responding partner's self-identified strength and vice versa. Both segments end after five minutes unless the couple has changed subjects in which case the segment is noted to be shorter than the desired time.

Transcription instructions specify that the text spell out all abbreviations and shorthand whereas common contractions do not need to be changed. Possessive nouns and words ending in " 's" were double checked (e.g., Sue's or cat's) because "Sue's" can be a contraction as in 'Sue is going to the store' or a possessive noun as in 'Sue's research is fun.' Additionally, nonfluencies in speech (i.e., hm, hmm, uh, uhh, uhm, um, umm, and er) are part of the LIWC nonfluency dictionary and can remain in the text.

Other spellings such as ‘oooo, ooh’ were changed to the closest acceptable nonfluency. Finally, specific instructions were followed to exclude fillers such as the phrase “you know” and “I mean” in analyses because they are frequently used as fillers and should not be counted as proper pronouns. This procedure is consistent with Simmons et al. (2005) and Williams-Baucom et al. (2010). The finished text files were expected to be a highly accurate reflection of the couples’ interactions.

All transcribers read the LIWC operator manual, participated in a demonstration of the transcription protocol, and attended lab meetings to ensure adherence and answer questions about the process. The transcription segment length for each couple equaled 10 minutes with the research assistant beginning to transcribe when the facilitator reads the first partner’s top strength as identified on the intake packet and asks the other partner to discuss how and why they view that as a top strength. The research assistant transcribed word for word all discussion that took place between the partners and the facilitator for a total of five minutes. Then, the research assistant will stop transcribing and proceed to the portion of the assessment session recording when the facilitator reads the second partner’s top strength as identified on the intake packet and asks the other partner to discuss how and why they view that as a top strength. The research assistant transcribed word for word all discussion that took place between the partners and the facilitator for another five minutes. Finally, the research assistant saved the file to the designated folder on the laboratory computer following a specific naming procedure. Upon completion of transcription, another research assistant reviewed the transcript in order to clean the text files, record the specific segment length in the case of short segments, correct errors, and

replace speech that was not understood originally. Additionally, the text from the combined files was separated into male and female files so that LIWC could produce separate word counts for each partner.

Missing data.

Rather than deleting cases with missing data, the present analyses used full-information maximum likelihood (FIML) to test predicted relationships among theoretical constructs. Parameter estimates from FIML provide less biased information than ad hoc procedures such as listwise deletion, pairwise deletion, or imputation of means (Acock, 2005). Because both partners of a couple completed questionnaires and participated in a transcribed semi-structured interview, observed and self-reported data from both partners, thus allowing us to examine relationship satisfaction and pronoun usage within and between partners.

Measures.

Demographic questionnaire. Each participant reported on various demographic variables including age, gender, race, ethnicity, individual income, number of children, marital status, and length of marital or cohabiting relationship.

Couple satisfaction. Each participant reported on their relationship health using the 16-item Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI-16; Funk & Rogge, 2007). The CSI-16 asks participants for 10 global evaluations of their romantic relationship on 6- and 7-point Likert-type scales, and 6 ratings of their relationship on a bipolar adjective scale for each of six characteristics (e.g., 0 = Boring and 5 = Interesting). Then all ratings are summed, and higher scores indicate greater satisfaction. The CSI-16, which has demonstrated good

reliability and validity with college age dating relationships, provides more precision and power than other conventional measures of marital satisfaction (Funk & Rogge, 2007). In the current sample, internal consistency was excellent (a = .98).

The Relationship Checkup Questionnaire. The Relationship Checkup Questionnaire (RCQ), based on the Marriage Checkup Assessment Questionnaire (MCAQ) designed for the Marriage Checkup study (Cordova, 2014; Cordova et al., 2014), assesses each participant's self-identified areas of relationship strength and areas of concern by asking each participant to choose their top three strengths out of 33 provided items. Upon completion of the questionnaire, each participant was asked to identify what they perceived to be the couple's top three strengths. Sample items include: "We solve problems well together as a team"; "We are very committed to our relationship"; and "We tend to agree more than disagree when it comes to money issues." A variety of possible domains were included in the strength items ranging from communication and parenting to emotional intimacy and companionship.

Linguistic Inquiry Word Count. To analyze the text of the transcriptions, the software program, Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC; Pennebaker et al., 2007), was used. Although LIWC was developed with an internal dictionary, it allows users to customize the dictionary for specific purposes. I utilized the customized dictionary used by Williams-Baucom et al. (2010) to answer the research questions at hand that included all first and second person pronouns, including the possessive cases. The customized dictionary was broken down into four categories fitting with the hypotheses: we-talk, I-talk, me-talk, and you-talk. The rate of using a word from each pronoun category was

calculated by dividing the number of words from one of the four specific pronoun categories by the total number of first and second person pronouns used by the partner in that segment (e.g., number of we-talk pronouns divided by total number of we, I, me, and you-talk pronouns used by that person in the ten minute transcription.) This method is consistent with Agnew et al., (1998), Simmons et al., (2005), and Williams-Baucom et al. (2010).

Chapter 3: Results

Aim 1

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 was used to analyze the data for Aim 1. For this hypothesis, I replicated the data analytic method utilized by Gray et al. (under review) as closely as possible. In the current analysis, I used SPSS to calculate the frequencies of RCQ items with which individuals rank ordered what they considered to be the top three (e.g., first, second, and third) strengths in their relationship from the given list of 33 items (i.e., items 34a, 34b, 34c on the RCQ). Next, I divided the sample (n = 300 individuals) into the most and least satisfied with their relationship by calculating the bottom and top quartiles on the CSI measure.

I initially divided the sample into top (75^{th}) and bottom (25^{th}) quartiles because the original study only examined extremely distressed and happy individuals by using the Global Distress Scale of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory which has published norms to distinguish between extremely happy and extremely distressed. Further, in the present study, post-hoc analyses compared participants in additional ways including (a) the entire sample; (b) published distress cut-off score of the CSI (Funk & Rogge, 2007); and (c) the most and least satisfied by top and bottom halves, or 50^{th} percentile, on the CSI. Also, beyond examining the frequencies of first, second, and third top relationship strengths as predicted, I examined through the top ten relationship strengths for comparison.

Prior to analyzing the data, I created a new variable, "dichotomous relationship satisfaction," by effects coding for level of satisfaction. For the quartiles, 0 = the lowest 25^{th} percentile (scores of 0- 46 on the CSI) and 1 = the highest 25^{th} percentile (scores of

72- 82 on the CSI). Therefore, the middle 50th of the sample was coded as missing since only the highest and lowest quartiles were utilized for comparison. For the halves, 0 = the lowest 50th percentile (scores of 0- 63.99 on the CSI) and 1 = the highest 50th percentile (scores of 64- 82 on the CSI). Thus, the entire sample was utilized since the upper and lower halves composed one hundred percent of participants. For the CSI distress cut-off score, 0 = distressed (scores of 0- 51.499 on the CSI) and 1 = not distressed (scores of 51.5- 82 on the CSI). Again, the entire sample was included.

Next, I performed the following steps for each of the methods of sample division. First, I split the file by the new dichotomous satisfaction variable. Then, I determined the frequencies with which each of the 33 RCQ items were identified as first, second or third top strength (RCQ items 34a, 34b, and 34c). The output displayed how many times each of the 33 RCQ strength items was endorsed as a first, second, and third top relationship strength for the more and less satisfied couples. Then, I transferred this information into an Excel spreadsheet and summed the three frequencies per item. For example, if item 14 was endorsed as the first top strength by 4 individuals, as the second top strength by 9 individuals, and as the third top strength by 20 individuals, I summed each of the frequencies to equal 33 (i.e., 4 + 9 + 20= 33). Finally, I sorted the columns by the summed variable from highest to lowest. In short, this step produced a count of how often each of the 33 RCQ strength items was endorsed as one of the top three relationship strengths by study participants. After determining the top three most frequently endorsed items, I repeated this method to obtain the top ten most endorsed items for the most and

least satisfied individuals when the sample was split using the different categories of comparison. See Table 1 included below.

Table 1.
Most frequently endorsed strengths

	Entire Sample (*N* = 300)	**Halves**		**Quartile**		**Distress**	
		Bottom (*n = 144)*	Top (*n = 147)*	25th Percentile (*n = 75)*	75th Percentile (*n = 78)*	Distressed (*n = 86)*	Not-Distressed (*n = 205)*
Top 1	*31*	*31*	*16*	*16*[a]	*31*	*31*	*16*
Top 2	*16*	*15*	*31*	*31*[a]	*16*	*16*	*31*
Top 3	*15*	*16*	*15*	*15*	*15*	*15*	*15*
Top 4	10	24	10	24	10	24	10
Top 5	24	28	28	8	24	8	29
Top 6	7	10	29	28	21	28	28
Top 7	29	8	24	1	28	1	24
Top 8	1	1	21	18	29	18	1
Top 9	8	17	1	20	26	10	21
Top 10	17	29	26	10	2	20	2

Notes.
Items associated with each item number are in Table 4.
Italicized item numbers are part of the original replication study.
Items within a column with the same letter superscript have the same frequency.

As displayed in Table 3, items 16, 31, and 15 (We're good friends; We laugh or smile together; and We are very committed to our relationship) were the top three most frequently endorsed items regardless of sample categorization. These seem to be important relationship values for our sample. Additionally, items 10 and 24 (My partner accepts who I am as a person, including my faults and weaknesses; and Our relationship is a high priority for both of us) were endorsed by all categories of participants. All but the top quartile most frequently endorsed item 1 (We chat, touch base, or check-in regularly about what's going on in our separate day-to-day lives) and all but the entire sample category

endorsed item 28 (We're a good team when it comes to parenting) as a top relationship strength. Furthermore, all but bottom half and distressed categories most frequently endorsed item 29 (Our trust in each other is strong and stable).

Interestingly, the seemingly less satisfied participants (the bottom half, bottom quartile, and distressed participants) and the entire sample, endorsed Item 8 (We're happy with our sex life) whereas the seemingly more satisfied individuals (the top half, top quartile, and not distressed participants) most frequently endorsed item 21 (We actively support each other in the things we find most important as individuals). Only the entire sample and the bottom half endorsed item 17 (We share each other's burdens), and the top quartile and the not distressed participants most frequently endorsed item 2 (We regularly spend quality time together). Finally, only the entire sample endorsed Item 7 (When one of us has been hurt, we are good at forgiving each other) as a top ten strength; only the distressed category frequently endorsed Item 18 (We're comfortable leaning on each other for emotional support) as a top ten strength; and only the top quartile of satisfied participants frequently endorsed Item 26 (We actively show our love toward one another) as a top ten strength.

In the original study, individuals who were most distressed endorsed different top strengths than individuals who were most satisfied in the relationship. The authors categorized items selected by more satisfied partners as "intimacy/affectionate" strengths and items selected by less satisfied partners as "parallel support" strengths (Gray et al., under review). Then, a series of paired sample t-tests was performed to determine if the differences in frequencies were statistically significant. However, in the present study, the

findings revealed that individuals in this sample most frequently endorsed the same top three strengths, though in different orders, regardless of the relationship satisfaction or the categorization used for comparison purposes. Thus, paired sample t-tests were not necessary to determine differences.

Aim 2

SPSS and Mplus (Muthen & Muthen, 1998-2012) were used to test hypotheses for Aim 2. As a preliminary examination of the data, Table 2 shows the correlations between pronoun usage and relationship satisfaction variables for women and men in the sample. The correlations revealed several important findings. First, I-talk and Me-talk are significantly and positively correlated for both men (r = .26, p < .01) and women (r = .28, p < .01). Second, I-talk and We-talk are significantly and negatively correlated for both men (r = -.38, p < .01) and women (r = -.60, p < .01) as are Me-talk and We-talk for men (r = -.38, p < .01) and women (r = -.56, p < .01) whereas We-talk and You-talk are significantly and negatively correlated for men only (r = -.17, p < .05). Third, men's You-talk and women's You-talk is significantly and positively correlated (r = .31, p < .01). Finally, men's and women's reports of relationship satisfaction are significantly and positively correlated (r = .76, p < .01).

Due to the dyadic nature of the data, I utilized a dyadic data analytic method for this research question because dyadic data violates the statistical assumption of independent observation as this data is from both members of a couple. For example, people who are satisfied in their romantic relationship tend to have partners who are also satisfied. To account for this interdependence, researchers increasingly rely on Actor

Partner Interdependence Models (APIM: Kashy & Kenny, 2000; Kenny & Kashy, 2006; Kenny & Kashy, 2010). This technique addresses interdependence in dyadic data and allows researchers to examine the influence of one person's behavior (e.g., pronoun use) on his/her own outcome (e.g., relationship satisfaction), the *actor* effects, as well as the effects of his/her behavior on his/her partner's outcome, the *partner* effects.

Prior to testing the models, I used maximum likelihood estimation to test whether gender should be treated as a distinguishing factor in the analysis. This test showed that the constraints required for an indistinguishable model significantly worsened model fit relative to the model that treated gender as a distinguishing variable (I-talk: χ^2 (4) = 16.76, $p < .01$; Me-talk: χ^2 (4) = 14.73, $p < .01$; We-talk: χ^2 (4) = 19.13, $p < .01$; and You-talk: χ^2 (4) = 20.84, $p < .01$). Thus, the remaining analyses treated couples as distinguishable by gender. Figures 1-4 provide a visual representation of the results from the APIMs whereas Table 6 displays both standardized and unstandardized estimates for all four models. Finally, paired samples t-tests revealed no difference in the percentage of men's and women's pronoun use for I, me, we, and you as shown in Table 5. Thus, men and women do not significantly differ in the frequency of pronoun use for we, I, me, or you in this study.

We-talk. The results do not support three of the four stated hypotheses for We-talk: (a) men's we-talk was not associated with men's satisfaction while controlling for women's we-talk and women's relationship satisfaction; (b) men's we-talk was not associated with women's satisfaction while controlling for women's we-talk and women's relationship satisfaction; and (c) women's we-talk was not associated with

women's satisfaction while controlling for men's we-talk and men's relationship satisfaction. However, the findings supported one hypothesis: (a) Women's we-talk was not associated with men's satisfaction while controlling for men's we-talk and men's relationship satisfaction.

I-talk. Results supported two of the four predictions for I-talk: Men's I-talk was not associated with men's satisfaction while controlling for women's I-talk and women's relationship satisfaction; and Women's I-talk was negatively associated with men's satisfaction while controlling for men's I-talk and men's relationship satisfaction. The findings did not support the following I-talk predictions: Women's I-talk was negatively associated with women's satisfaction while controlling for men's I-talk and men's relationship satisfaction. Men's I-talk was not associated with women's satisfaction while controlling for women's I-talk and women's relationship satisfaction.

Me-talk. The results do not support any of the four stated hypotheses for Me-talk: Men's me-talk was not associated with men's satisfaction while controlling for women's me-talk and women's relationship satisfaction; (b) Men's me-talk was not associated with women's satisfaction while controlling for women's me-talk and women's relationship satisfaction; (c) Women's me-talk was not associated with women's satisfaction while controlling for men's me-talk and men's relationship satisfaction; and (d) Women's me-talk was not associated with men's satisfaction while controlling for men's me-talk and men's relationship satisfaction.

You-talk. Findings supported two of the four stated hypotheses for You-talk. Men's you-talk was associated with women's satisfaction while controlling for women's

you-talk and women's satisfaction, and men's you-talk was positively associated with men's satisfaction while controlling for women's you-talk and women's satisfaction. However, women's you-talk was not associated with women's satisfaction while controlling for men's you-talk and men's satisfaction, and women's you-talk was not associated with men's satisfaction while controlling for men's you-talk and men's satisfaction.

In summary, woman's I-talk yields both actor and partner effects on relationship satisfaction. As women's ratio of I-talk increases, her own and her partner's relationship satisfaction decreases. In contrast, men's I-talk is not related to men or women's relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, men's you-talk yields both actor and partner effects such that as men's ratio of you-talk increases, his own and his partner's relationship satisfaction increases. In contrast, women's you-talk is not related men's or women's relationship satisfaction. For both we- and me-talk, the ratio of pronoun use is unrelated to actor or partner relationship satisfaction.

Chapter 4: Discussion

The current study contributes to the growing interest in the connection between couple's strengths and relationship health. Based on the current understanding of relationship health, it is valuable to consider positive emotions, resilience, and strengths in the context of relationships (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Gordon & Baucom, 2009; Gurman & Fraenkel, 2002; Kauffman & Silberman, 2009; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Sullivan et al., 2010). Therefore, the present study utilized strengths focused discussions to address the following research questions: (a) Does the type of self-identified relationship strength vary based on couple satisfaction; and (b) Does language use, specifically pronoun use, during an interview about relationship strengths relate to couple satisfaction? Results did not support the hypothesis that predicted a difference in types of self-endorsed strengths among more and less distress partners. However, results partially supported the hypothesized actor and partner effects between pronoun use and relationship satisfaction.

Aim 1

Results for analyses investigating Aim 1 indicate that the top three most frequently endorsed strengths are the same no matter how the sample was divided. Specifically, the entire sample endorsed items 16, 31, and 15 (We're good friends; We laugh or smile together; and We are very committed to our relationship) most frequently as top strengths. Aim 1 was a replication of a study using the Marriage Checkup data (Morrill et al., 2011; Gray et al., under review). The original study found that the most satisfied partners most frequently endorsed emotional intimacy strengths more often than

the least satisfied partners whereas the least satisfied partners most frequently endorsed parallel support items more often. The hypotheses predicted a similar result in the current sample; however, all participants, despite their reported relationship satisfaction, identified the same top three strengths.

However, when looking beyond the top three and examining the top ten strengths identified by these participants, there are several interesting observations. First, distressed partners endorsed "We're happy with our sex life" in their top ten strengths whereas the seemingly more satisfied individuals did not. However, the top quartile endorsed "We regularly spend quality time together" and "We actively show our love toward one another" as one of their top ten strengths. Given this observed difference, sexual intimacy may be a more accessible form of intimacy for couples who report lower overall satisfaction (Litzinger & Gordon, 2005). Perhaps sex and physical touch provides an opportunity to connect in different ways than quality time and active expressions of love. For example, many stereotypical forms of quality time and expressions of love cost money (e.g., gifts, eating out, movies, concerts and other entertainment opportunities, and transportation to and from events).

Second, partners scoring higher as compared to the rest of the sample and the not distressed partners endorsed "We actively support each other in the things we find most important as individuals" whereas the seemingly less satisfied partners did not. Perhaps more satisfied partners are able to provide more support for autonomy in close relationships due to a higher sense of felt security in the relationship. Alternatively and equally plausibly, support for autonomy might lead to higher satisfaction over time.

Unfortunately, the design of this study does not enable determination of the nature of causal mechanism at this time.

Third, the entire sample and the bottom half endorsed "We share each other's burdens" and only the distressed individuals endorsed "We're comfortable leaning on each other for emotional support" as a top ten strength. A previous study using the Relationship Rx sample found that individuals living below the poverty line reported lower relationship satisfaction than individuals above the poverty line (e.g., Wischkaemper, Darling, Khaddouma, & Gordon, 2014). Additionally, the literature suggests an association between low-income populations and lower relationship satisfaction (Karney & Bradbury, 2005). Furthermore, the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation model highlights relationship constraints such as demands outside the couple and vulnerabilities within each partner (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Given that low income populations have been found more likely to face stressful life events (McLeod & Kessler, 1990) and report poorer mental health (Hammen, 2005) than more affluent individuals, the less satisfied individuals in our sample may be more likely to select relationship strengths like sharing burdens and leaning on each other because they may be coping with the external demands of poverty and intrinsic vulnerabilities to poor mental health in ways that the more affluent, more satisfied couples are not.

Thus, the failure to replicate the Marriage Checkup findings may be due to sample differences. First, the different demographic characteristics between the two samples may influence why types of strengths varied based on satisfaction for couples participating in the Marriage Checkup but not for couples participating in the Relationship Rx. For

example, all couples in the Marriage Checkup sample are married and living together, mostly white (94% white), middle class (average household income between $75,000 and $99,000), educated (88% with high school diplomas and 44% with bachelor's degree or higher), and employed (79% of treatment seekers were employed with 75% employed full-time and 24% part-time) (Morrill et al., 2011). In contrast, the Relationship Rx sample included unmarried (63% married and 37% cohabitating), more racially diverse (79% of men are white and 86% of women are white), less educated (45.9% of women and 46.9% of men reported their highest level of education as a vocational degree and 37% of men and 29% of women with a high school diploma), lower socioeconomic status (56.7% of men and 80.7% of women reported an individual annual income of less than $29,999) and fewer working (57.3% of men and 27.3% of women were employed full-time) participants than the Marriage Checkup.

In addition to these specific demographic differences, recruitment for the two programs occurred in different regions of the United States. The Marriage Checkup recruited from the metropolitan area of a large city in the northeastern United States, and the Relationship Rx from medium sized city and surrounding rural counties in the southeastern United States. Based on findings reported by social psychologists, different regions of the United States developed distinct cultural identities over time based on historic and economic factors (Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, & Schwarz, 1996). Furthermore, these regions are located in areas that hold markedly different views on religion and politics which may influence their beliefs, values, and practices in relationships. Although it is beyond the scope of the present study to explore the implications of

religious and political views held by residents of the two states, these additional sample differences may contribute to the failure to replicate the Marriage Checkup's findings. Another reason for this might be that recruitment strategies, incentives, and participant characteristics of who signs up for brief, relationship interventions likely impacts the types of strengths identified by participants. For example, one of the program requirements of the Relationship Rx is that all participants be in a "committed relationship." This wording appears on multiple recruitment tools as well as the questionnaire packet completed by participants and may unintentionally prime participants to select commitment as a top strength.

Finally, based on the theoretical underpinnings for examining couple strengths, partners across the continuum of couple satisfaction might endorse similar strengths due to Fredrickson and Branigan's (2005) broaden-and-build model. This model posits that positive emotions contribute to enduring personal resources such as health, friendships, theory of mind, optimism, and creativity. The procedure of the current study gave participants a strength oriented task, to reflect on a predetermined list of relationship strengths and then self-identify the three strengths which most closely describe their day-to-day experience. As a result, participants across the range of satisfaction identified identical strengths throughout their top three. Perhaps arranging an opportunity to consider the strengths, giving a context to singling out positive relationship aspects, and naming the strengths expands a participant's repertoire for thinking about the healthy and beneficial aspects of being with their partner such that even extremely dissatisfied

couples are enabled to recognize enduring positive qualities no matter what other negative qualities are present in the relationship dynamic.

In sum, aim 1 failed to replicate findings from the Marriage Checkup study. Findings demonstrated that this sample of couples most frequently endorsed the same strengths no matter how the sample was divided for comparison. On the one hand, partners reporting less relationship satisfaction more often endorse strengths that highlight their sexual relationship and strengths that may be related to coping as a couple with both the environmental and intrinsic stressors of living below the poverty line. On the other hand, partners reporting more satisfaction more often identify strengths that may be related to valuing autonomy within the relationship. Reasons for this unexpected finding might be demographic differences between participants particularly income and level of education, cultural differences between the regions of recruitment, and subtle programmatic differences between the Marriage Checkup and Relationship Rx.

Aim 2

This portion of the study furthers the long history of research on relationships and language (Biletzki et al., 2014; Bradac 1986, 1999; Pennebaker et al., 2007; Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010). Recent empirical findings from modern text analysis (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010) laid the foundation for each of the actor and partner path analysis hypotheses. Studies typically utilize a procedure with a ten minute problem-solving conversation or conflict discussion among couples, whereas the current study utilized an interview focused on relationship strengths. The main finding is that there seem to be different implications for pronoun use when couples discuss relationship strengths than

one would expect based on existing research studying conflict conversations (Sillars et al., 1997; Simmons et al., 2005; and Williams-Baucom, et al., 2010). However, this is in line with previous findings, which indicate that the context, or topic, of couples' conversations is an important factor in the language they use (Williams-Baucom, et al., 2010).

We-talk.

For we-talk, APIM path analyses found no significant associations between actor and partner pronoun use and actor and partner relationship satisfaction, which supported only one of the four we-talk hypotheses. As predicted, women's we-talk was not associated with men's satisfaction while controlling for men's we-talk and men's relationship satisfaction. The positive implications of we-language on relationship qualities (i.e., commitment, interpersonal closeness, long-term marital distress and dissolution, relationship quality, marital satisfaction, communal coping, and relationship satisfaction) in conjunction with Aron et al.'s (2004) self-expansion model provided a basis for this study's original four we-talk hypotheses (Agnew et al., 1998; Aron & Fraley, 1999; Buehlman et al., 2005; Mills et al., 2004; Sillars et al., 1997; Rohrbaugh et al., 2012). However, there were no actor effects for women's we-talk and no actor or partner effects for men's we-talk as expected based on the existing literature.

There have been several contradictions to the long legacy of positive associations between we-talk and relationship satisfaction; most notably, Williams-Baucom et al. (2010) failed to strongly replicate the positive association between we-focus language and marital satisfaction. Nevertheless, it remains perplexing why we-talk was not

significantly associated with satisfaction in the current study. Perhaps this is another implication of the importance of the context. For instance, couples might be more able to discuss and recognize relationship strengths at an individual level rather than from a dyadic perspective. Alternatively, the nature of a semi-structured interview may pull for more direct response to facilitators and more use of first, second, and third person singular pronouns rather than first person plural pronouns. Furthermore, we-focus pronouns may be better markers of behavior or more cognitively oriented relationship markers such as closeness or commitment which are distinct from satisfaction.

I-talk.

Interestingly, APIM path analyses indicated two significant paths in the I-talk model. Women's I-talk was significantly associated with both her own and her partner's relationship satisfaction whereas men's I-talk did not have significant actor or partner effect on relationship satisfaction. Only two out of the four I-talk hypotheses were supported which raises the question: What is it about women's increased use of I-language that indicates lower relationship satisfaction in themselves and their partners (or the inverse, what is it about less satisfied men and women that indicates an increased frequency of I-talk for women)?

Historically, first person singular pronouns were associated with self-focus and other depressive symptoms like rumination and negative thinking (Weintraub, 1989). Additionally, epidemiologic data from diverse samples demonstrated that major depression is approximately twice as common in women as men (Weissman & Olfson, 1995). There is also a growing body of literature documenting the association between

marital distress and depression although the causal direction is not straightforward and likely bi-directional in nature (Whisman, 2007; Uebelacker & Whisman, 2006). Additionally, meta-analytic findings demonstrate a significantly greater association between marital discord and depressive symptoms for women than for men, although not a large difference (Whisman, 2001). However, a later study found that gender did not moderate marital distress and major depression (Uebelacker & Whisman, 2006). Relevant to the present findings for women's I-talk, it is important to consider partner effects, or the connection between women's I-talk and men's relationship satisfaction. Therefore, it is reasonable to question how women's depressive symptoms might contribute to the women's I-talk in the present sample as well as their own and their partner's relationship satisfaction.

Furthermore, a key proposition of social role theory (Eagly, Wood, & Diekman, 2000; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Rudman & Glick, 2001) is that beliefs about the sexes pertain to communal and agentic attributes. Findings support that women are commonly ascribed more communal characteristics with primary concern for others (e.g., affectionate, kind, helpful, sympathetic, nurturant, and gentle) (Rudman & Glick, 2001). In contrast, men are attributed with more agentic qualities with primary assertive and controlling tendencies (e.g., aggressive, ambitious, dominant, forceful, independent, self-sufficient, and self-confident) (Rudman & Glick, 2001). Perhaps when women use I-language more frequently gives others the impression that they are more self-focused, or less kind and helpful and more forceful and dominant, which in turn violates conventional role expectations for women. Male partners who ascribe to highly

conventional gender roles may be less satisfied in a relationship where their partner frequently acts, or speaks, in ways that violate the traditional feminine script.

Finally, it is crucial to keep in mind the context of existing literature on pronoun use and relationships, which was primarily a couple's *problem-solving* discussion. Couples who use more I-language during a *strengths* interview may be more self-absorbed or concerned with their own contributions to the relationship and less focused on the relational unit or on giving credit to their partners' contributions. Perhaps she focuses more on her internal state which takes away from acknowledging her partner or the mutual contribution of both partners to co-creating a positive characteristic in the relationship. Furthermore, since men are socialized to be more assertive, it is more socially acceptable from them to develop self-focused traits whereas women who display similar behaviors, speech patterns, and attitudes are likely to be met with negative attributions from others because this violates socialized gender role expectations.

Me-talk.

APIM path analyses found no associations between actor and partner me-talk and their relationship satisfaction. None of the four me-talk hypotheses were supported by the findings. In the past, linguistic researchers combined first person singular pronouns (i.e., I and me-talk) although more recent studies separated the two into different constructs due to evidence from factor analysis studies (Campbell & Pennebaker, 2003). In the conflict literature, me-talk and relationship satisfaction findings are mixed such that one of the newer studies using multi-level modeling reported no association between me-talk and relationship satisfaction (Williams-Baucom, et al., 2010). When talking about

relationships strengths, the passive role that me-talk indicates (Slatcher et al., 2008) may not be related to relationship satisfaction in the same way that me-talk in conflict conversation is related to relationship satisfaction. In fact, me-talk may function as a healthy expression of ownership of one's own positive contribution to the relationship (e.g., "My part in things is to listen to her and not try to fix things") or may more often function as an casual expression of identifying oneself and one's partner as a unit (e.g., "You and me have a lot in common"). An additional explanation for the non-significant findings is that, me-talk may have a different role if romantic partners were asked to journal about their strengths, speak alone with their partner, or were interviewed one-on-one by a facilitator rather than as a couple. An increase in self-reflection may be stated in a more personal way using me-talk in these settings versus communicating with a facilitator present.

You-talk.

The results of you-talk path analyses are perhaps the clearest departure from existing findings from studies of conflict discussions supporting our hypotheses for men and disconfirming the hypotheses for women. The research literature strongly suggests that you-talk reflects negative relationship qualities (e.g., blaming attitudes, criticism, overinvolved emotional reaction, negativity during problem-solving, decreased relationship satisfaction, and trait anger; Hahlweg et al., 1984; Simmons et al., 2005; Slatcher et al., 2008). Moreover, skills-training historically teaches couples to use "I-statements" rather than "you-statements" to express emotions and subjective experiences in problem-solving discussions. However, when talking about strengths, men using more

you-talk is associated with increased relationship satisfaction whereas there is no association with women. This might suggest that when husbands acknowledge the unique contributions of their wives, or notice them individually, it is a positive indicator of the relationship health. Perhaps you-talk indicates more flexibility, consideration of others, or give and take in the relationship.

In conclusion, in the context of discussing strengths, women's increased use of I-talk is negatively related to satisfaction in themselves and their partners. Alternatively, men's increased use of you-talk is positively related to satisfaction in themselves and their partners. Surprisingly, we-talk and me-talk were both unrelated to relationship satisfaction in this sample. Congruent with recent findings, the present results support increased attention to positive relationship qualities such as having couples reflect on and discuss their relationship strengths (Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006; Sullivan et al., 2010).

Qualitative overview. The results of Aim 2 stimulated several nuanced questions involving aspects of language use that would be most appropriately addressed after a complete and rigorous study of all 150 couples in the sample. However, given that a full qualitative analysis is beyond the scope of this project, to expand the discussion on the quantitative findings for Aim 2, cursory reading was conducted of six select transcripts (e.g., two highly satisfied couples, two couples in which relationship satisfaction differed between the partners, and two couples highly dissatisfied with their relationship).

After a thorough review of the select transcripts, it appeared that men and women employed pronouns in numerous contexts. However, several observations stood out based

on the APIM findings for I-talk in the present study. For example, women who used more I-talk demonstrated signs of depressive symptoms. The following excerpt (with different categories of pronouns highlighted in different colors and filler phrases like "you know" and "I mean" indicated by removing the space between words so that pronouns are not counted by LIWC) illustrates the negative association between women's I-talk and actor and partner relationship satisfaction:

> "And I cry a lot. And it's just because I worry so much. Youknow I worry, I start worrying about the kids, and I start crying. And he's always right next to me. And Imean that's a healthy way for me to, to get my emotions out because I can do that and for the rest of the day I'm fine. I'll cry for five minutes and then I'm fine the rest of the day" (Couple 5051).

This woman expressed frequent tearfulness, anxiety, and a tendency to become easily emotionally flooded. This participant appeared to depend solely on her partner in order to feel emotionally secure which may be indicative of a pattern that is contributing to the mutual relationship dissatisfaction.

A close examination of men's pronoun use revealed that men used you-talk to support their partner or notice what their partner contributes to the relationship as in the following:

> MP: Imean, I let her, if she wants to go anywhere, I tell her hey youknow you're your own person youknow if you want to go somewhere go youknow. Don't expect me to hold you back. (Couple 4022)

> MP: Well with, um, everything we've been through, if you haven't left me now, I don't, um, think you're going to, so youknow, we, um, trust each other and then, um, the fact that um, we are both committed to it. And the reason I would put the third is just because I can – you can be committed to a relationship, um, but if you're not really good friends or trust each other then, youknow who cares if you're committed? A lot of people are committed, and they make, try to make it work, but they're miserable. (Couple 3088)

Additionally, men seem to use you-language to express tender or vulnerable emotions in a veiled or depersonalized manner. For example:

> "I plan on youknow spending the rest of my life with this woman, and youknow you can't have secrets in a relationship, you can't hold things back, and you may not like the results, you may not like where the conversation is going or something, but you got to go youknow force through it, and youknow deal with it and go on" (male partner in couple 2117).

A qualitative investigation of emerging adult males' casual conversations revealed a similar theme such that displays of intimacy and the accompanying vulnerability occur with low frequency and typically, intimate stories were hedged with rapid shifts between intimate and distancing positions (Korobov & Thorne, 2006). This distancing quality may be characteristic for men's communications about intimacy.

In summary, the brief qualitative overview provided good direction for future exploration of the quantitative findings while serving to highlight the complexity and subtlety of human speech. Utilizing the frequency of word usage as a measure of

language usage should be only a first step in examining such a multifaceted process like communication. Word count may be a necessary but not sufficient methodological tool to understand the meaning of language and opens numerous doors for future research. A complete and thorough qualitative study with grounded theory or thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Charmaz, 2014) is thoroughly recommended as an area of rich further study.

Implications

Future Research. To expand the inquiry around types of strengths from Aim 1, future research could compare the self-endorsed strengths of participants based on other measures such as commitment, intimacy, or more behavioral measures such as steps the couple has taken toward divorce. Additionally, testing the moderating effects of gender, race, income, and education on the types of strengths chosen would allow understanding of which social and cultural factors might influence relationship strength selection, if any. Another way to understand the types of strengths participants are endorsing would be to examine the other aspect of the RCQ which asks partners to rate each individual strength from 0-2 (from not to full) in addition to listing the top three strengths. A future study could see whether or not, among the top three strengths listed, participants differ in the level of strength they attribute to each of those strengths.

Also, another study could follow-up with testing whether or not more satisfied partners endorse or select more strengths than less satisfied partners. Asking partners to identify the top three strengths may pigeon hole responses both for those individuals who struggle to think of three and for individuals who identify more than three relationship

strengths. Summing or averaging the number of items participants endorse from the 33 items on the RCQ scale would be another way to test differences in types of strengths and level of satisfaction. Finally, further qualitative investigation is warranted to fully understand the nuanced meaning of the types of strengths romantic partners self-nominate. Selecting strengths from a given list may be a surface-level task when in fact, more might be learned by examining the reasons couples give for selecting certain strengths or directly observing the strengths in the couples.

To continue the investigation of pronoun use and relationships from Aim 2, watching the recorded strengths interview or conducting a full qualitative study would allow for a more complete understanding of how participants understand the strengths they selected. For example, do all couples mean the same thing when they identify commitment as a top strength or is commitment sometimes a code for "we're just hanging on" or "at least we're still together?" Additionally, many couples appear to be "just friends" or roommates rather than romantic partners, so might there be negative aspects of endorsing strengths like "we laugh and smile together." Future researchers could compare pronoun use from the strengths discussion with pronoun use from the concerns conversation using the same transcription methodology and data analysis. This would serve to be able to compare language use surrounding strengths and concerns directly. Future studies could test actor satisfaction as a mediator of the relationship between actor pronoun use and partner satisfaction. In other words, is my pronoun use associated to my partner's satisfaction through my relationship satisfaction?

Subsequent research questions to pursue include, (a) are pronouns used differently in the presence of a facilitator versus when the couple is talking with only each other; and (b) is the frequency of he/she usage more strongly related to relationship satisfaction than first and third person pronoun usage? Controlling for and testing the moderating effects of the facilitator's pronoun use on each partner's language use will be an interesting study. Along these lines, recording a 10 minute strengths conversation alone and comparing pronoun use from that conversation to pronoun use with the presence of a facilitator with the same couples could help determine whether or not differences exist between the two conditions. Another research area of interest is including a path analysis of he/she pronouns in addition to I/me/we/and you examined in the present study since partners often respond to direct questions and reflections from the facilitator.

Additionally, an interesting finding from the descriptive statistics is that I-talk and we-talk are negatively correlated (men = -.38 and women = -.60) which possibly indicates that as men and women speak more from an individual perspective, they also speak about the relationship less as a unit. This correlation is larger for women than for men, and may also mean that women have a tendency to become absorbed or self-focused when speaking about their relationship and risk losing perspective of the relationship itself. However, it is unknown why these two pronoun categories are more related for women than for men when speaking of strengths, and future research is warranted to explore this association. For instance, the frequency of we-talk may not fully capture the ways in which partners refer to the relationship or the dyad, and future research could modify the linguistic measurement to include "my spouse/partner and I"

as we-talk. Furthermore, future research could test the relationship of different ratios of pronouns and relationship satisfaction. For example, another study could examine APIM path analyses for each participant's calculated ratio of I-talk to we-talk related to relationship satisfaction as opposed to the individual path analyses of I-talk and We-talk.

Finally, longitudinal studies are needed to better understand the direction of causality between the related constructs in Aim 1 and Aim 2. For example, using the 1 month and 6 month follow-up data from the Relationship Rx to learn how self-identified relationship strengths and pronoun use predict change in relationship satisfaction before and after the brief intervention could help us understand the nature of the related variables of interest.

Clinical Implications.

The present study contributes several potential clinical implications for working with opposite sex couples in addition to ideas for future research. First, engaging couples, across the range of satisfaction, in discussions focused on relationship strengths and asking couples to elaborate on why they choose certain strengths over others provides more information than simply the types of strengths they self-identify. The findings suggest that the therapist can be attuned to language cues that might indicate relationship health such as how couples describe the strength. More specifically noticing an increase use of I-language in women as they discuss their relationship strengths may signal decreased satisfaction in both partners. Furthermore, increased you-language in men as they discuss their relationship strengths may signal increased satisfaction in both partners.

Second, helping couples be aware of and notice their own patterns of communicating around strengths could be valuable exercise in couples work. For instance, clinicians can emphasize the value in discussing relationship strengths in addition to concerns when couples talk about their relationship at home. Also, clinicians can highlight women's I-talk and men's you-talk when discussing different aspects of their relationship in session. For instance, when assisting with communication skills clinicians can demonstrate to couples how you-talk can be perceived as critical or blaming during conflict conversations yet empowering and healthy during for men to use during a strengths conversation. As the research continues and the field learns more about the causal nature of pronoun use and relationship satisfaction couples therapists may encourage both men and women to share their thoughts and feelings about strengths in more healthy ways. For example, based on the present findings, it might be healthier for men to learn to acknowledge their partners' unique contribution to the relationship strengths more often. Additionally, women might learn how to share their personal feelings and internal states in ways that also include the dynamic nature of the relationship by including their partners more either with direct statements or as observations on how the couple functions positively as a whole unit.

Since research on relationship strengths is in an early phase, couple therapists should take these findings in context. It is too early to know whether or not pronoun use during a strengths discussion is a changeable trait with skills based training. However, the findings suggest that pronoun use may be a reflection of overall relationship health, and therefore, may give therapists specific signals to notice in session.

Limitations

Findings from the current study should be interpreted with the following limitations in mind. First, the causal relationship between types of relationship strengths and pronoun use (and vice versa) and between actor and partner pronoun use and relationship satisfaction was not tested due to the cross-sectional nature of the data. Participant responses came from only one time point of the Relationship Rx. Another limitation of the current dataset and dyadic data analyses is that the sample excluded same-sex couples. Thus, there is no certainty that the findings generalize outside of heterosexual couples. Finally, the study utilized purely quantitative data analyses, and although a qualitative method was attempted with a few transcripts, the findings from that brief review need to be interpreted with caution.

Aim 1 had several specific limitations. Since it was a replication study of a brief relationship intervention, the methodology changed slightly from the original project to the current project. For instance, the RCQ strength items were modified based on the original MCQ items (i.e., the wording of items is different on several items and a few were deleted). Also, the original study utilized a different measure for relationship health. The Marriage Checkup (Cordova et al., 2005; Cordova, 2014) administered the Global Distress Scale of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (Snyder, 1997) to assess relationship satisfaction whereas the Relationship Rx project (Gordon, 2014) utilized the Couple Satisfaction Inventory (Funk & Rogge, 2007).

After completing the qualitative reading of six transcriptions, the following limitations for Aim 2 are noted. First, the percent variance explained in the outcome

variables (R^2 value) in the APIM models for I-talk and you-talk is low meaning there are many other variables explaining variation in satisfaction than pronoun use. If other factors were included in the model, this significant finding may disappear. Second, a large percentage of pronouns referring to the partner are second person pronouns (i.e., he or she) as opposed to third person (i.e., you). Failing to include second person pronouns in the APIM analyses seems to miss rich clinical data particularly since the conversation takes place in front of a third party rather than strictly between the dyad. Third, presence and speech of the facilitator in session limits how much information from the transcripts is truly dyadic in nature. The facilitator may be instrumental in the types of questions asked of participants, the reflections that are made, and how comfortable participants feel in the session to discuss sensitive relationship issues. Overall, the present study does not control for the impact of the facilitator's language on each partner's language or the difference among the sample couples based on which facilitator was paired with which couple. There were six different facilitators and each facilitator's speech pattern may vary and this may also vary based on the couple they are paired with. We did not control for facilitator pronoun use or facilitator characteristics (e.g., gender, personality, experience), so the present study is unable to address how much of the partner's pronoun use could be attributed to the specific facilitator characteristics.

In addition, when multiple pronouns are used in a sentence, or turn taken in the conversation, the sequencing seems to be important (e.g., "I _____, but you _____", functions differently than, "I _____ and we _____"). Not accounting for patterns in the order of pronoun use seems to miss important information about how the pronouns

are being used. Another noticeable limitation is that the pronouns, I and you, were counted equally in “I love you” as “I believe we have this strength, but you aren’t as good as me.” After reviewing several transcripts in depth, it now seems fitting that the phrase “I love you” be counted as a separate phrase in the word count program. Affectionate expressions communicate important information between couples and is valuable data especially for romantic couples. Thus, these phrases, and likely others used in similar ways, should be captured in a separate category.

Conclusion

Consequently, the aim of the present project is to investigate links between relationship strengths and relationship satisfaction. Overall, the present findings suggested that couples in this sample self-selected similar strengths no matter their reported level of satisfaction with the relationship. Furthermore, findings suggested that the context for couple conversation matters when considering pronoun use in couple discussions about their relationships. More specifically, pronoun use appears to function in different ways for men and women when couples discuss positive relationship characteristics as compared to problem areas.

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Appendices

Table 2.
Descriptive summary of participants

Characteristics	Mean (SD) or N (%)	
	Couple	
Marital status		
Married	63.3%	
Cohabitating	36.7%	
Years partners knew each other	11.84 (6.67)	
Years romantically involved	10.37 (10.52)	
If cohabitating, length in years	5.75 (4.76)	
If married, length in years	11.37 (11.22)	
Number of children	1 (1)	
0	40%	
1	21.3%	
2	26%	
3	6.7%	
4	3.3%	
5	2.0%	
6	.7%	
	Men	Women
Age		
Under 18	0%	0.7%
18-24	8%	16.7%
25-34	37.3%	30.7%
35-44	21.3%	26.7%
45-54	24%	16.7%
55-64	4%	5.3%
Over 64	5.3%	3.3%
Racial Identity		
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2.7%	2.0%
Asian	.7%	0.7%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0%	0.7%
Black	18%	12%
White	78.7%	86%

Table 2 Continued.

Characteristics	Mean (SD) or N (%)	
	Men	Women
Ethnicity		
Hispanic	3.3%	4%
Non-hispanic	92%	96%
Education		
No degree or diploma	8.7%	7.3%
HS diploma/GED	37.3%	29.3%
Vocational or technical certificate	12%	8%
Associate's degree	6%	8%
Bachelor's degree	20.7%	26%
Master's degree or PhD	13.3%	18.7%
Employment		
Full-time	57.3%	27.3%
Part-time	10%	18%
Retired	4.7%	6%
Student	1.3%	9.3%
Disabled	9.3%	12.7%
Unemployed	14.7%	22%
Individual Income		
Less than $10,000	25.3%	50.7%
$10,000- 19,999	20.7%	16.7%
$20,000- 29,999	10.7%	13.3%
$30,000- 39,999	10%	8%
$40,000- 49,999	6%	6%
$50,000- 59,999	9.3%	2.7%
$60,000- 69,999	2%	1.3%
$70,000- 79,999	5.3%	1.3%
More than $80,000	10.7%	0%

Table 3.
Correlations of individual pronoun use and relationship satisfaction.

	I female	I male	Me female	Me male	We female	We male	You female	You male	CSI female	CSI male
I female										
I male	-.09									
Me female	.28**	.03								
Me male	-.11	.26**	-.01							
We female	-.60**	.13	-.56**	.14						
We male	.06	-.38**	-.07	-.38**	-.10					
You female	.05	-.08	-.03	.01	-.16	-.09				
You male	-.04	-.12	.03	-.16	.07	-.17*	.31**			
CSI female	-.09	-.12	.05	-.10	.04	.03	-.09	.12		
CSI male	-.17	-.02	-.06	-.11	.05	-.08	-.03	.14	.76**	

Notes.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 4.
Relationship Checkup Questionnaire: Areas of Strength

1. We chat, touch base, or check-in regularly about what's going on in our separate day-to-day lives.
2. We regularly spend quality time together.
3. We both show our emotions in healthy ways.
4. We communicate our anger with each other in an open, respectful, and assertive manner.
5. We're good at making up after a fight.
6. We're able to raise issues with each other in a kind and respectful way.
7. When one of has been hurt, we are good at forgiving each other.
8. We're happy with our sex life.
9. My partner and I feel emotionally close to each other during and after sex (rather than more distant or lonely).
10. My partner accepts who I am as a person, including my faults and weaknesses.
11. We are verbally affectionate toward each other on a daily basis.
12. We are physically affectionate toward each other on a daily basis.
13. We are actively taking care of the health of our marriage.
14. We clearly and effectively communicate our wants and needs to each other.
15. We laugh or smile together.
16. We're good friends.
17. We share each other's burdens.
18. We're comfortable leaning on each other for emotional support.
19. I feel safe being emotionally open and honest with my partner.
20. We talk about the things we each find most meaningful in our lives.
21. We actively support each other in the things we find most important as individuals.
22. All couples have their irresolvable issues. We handle ours in a way that leaves us feeling secure in our relationship.
23. My partner and I usually go along with one another's wishes.
24. Our relationship is a high priority for both of us.
25. We both tend to think in terms of "we, us, and ours," rather than "I, me, and mine."
26. We actively show our love toward one another.
27. We tend to agree more than disagree when I comes to parenting.
28. We're a good team when it comes to parenting.
29. Our trust in each other is strong and stable.
30. We talk to each other in a supportive way about the stresses in our individual lives.
31. We are very committed to our relationship.
32. We solve problems well together as a team.
33. We listen well to each other.

Notes. Instructions: 1) Please indicate with an X the degree to which you experience each of the following areas as a strength in your relationship (from Not a strength, moderate strength or significant strength; and 2) Now, please rank order what you consider to be the top three strengths in your relationship from the list above. For example: #1 Strength: Statement number 28: We are a good team when it comes to parenting.

Table 5.
Paired Samples t-tests between percentage of men's and women's pronoun use.

Variable		M	SD	Correlation	t-test(df)
I-talk:	Men	5.52	2.81	-.09	-1.55(149)
	Women	5.02	2.57		
Me-talk:	Men	1.34	1.34	-.01	1.44(149)
	Women	1.57	1.43		
We-talk:	Men	3.21	2.68	-.10	.67(149)
	Women	3.43	2.84		
You-talk:	Men	1.36	1.70	.31	-1.25(149)
	Women	1.17	1.39		

Notes: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$.

Table 6.
Actor Partner Path Analyses
Unstandardized and standardized estimates for model in figure 1 (Standard errors in parentheses; N = 300).

Parameter Estimate	*Unstandardized*	*Standardized*
I-talk		
Male I-talk → Male satisfaction	-.14 (.50)	-.02
Male I-talk → Female satisfaction	-.93 (.59)	-.13
Female I-talk → Female satisfaction	-1.85 (.64)	-.23**
Female I-talk → Male satisfaction	-1.12 (.54)	-.17*
Me-talk		
Male Me-talk → Male satisfaction	-1.22 (1.05)	-.09
Male Me-talk → Female satisfaction	-1.77 (1.26)	-.11
Female Me-talk → Female satisfaction	,69 (1.19)	-.06
Female Me-talk → Male satisfaction	-.70 (.98)	-.05
We-talk		
Male We-talk → Male satisfaction	-.49 (.53)	-.08
Male We-talk → Female satisfaction	.32 (.64)	.04
Female We-talk → Female satisfaction	.20 (.61)	.03
Female We-talk → Male satisfaction	.38 (.50)	.06
You-talk		
Male You-talk → Male satisfaction	1.20 (.34)	.18*
Male You-talk → Female satisfaction	.84 (.40)	.16*
Female You-talk → Female satisfaction	1.08 (.37)	-.12
Female You-talk → Male satisfaction	1.01 (.48)	-.08

Notes: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

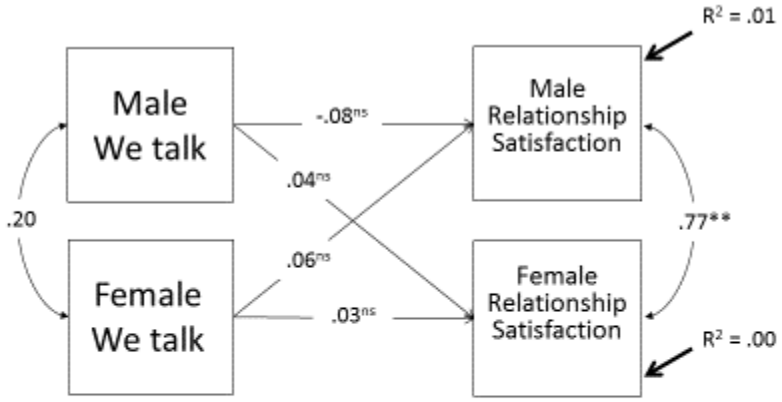


Figure 1.
We-talk APIM path analysis

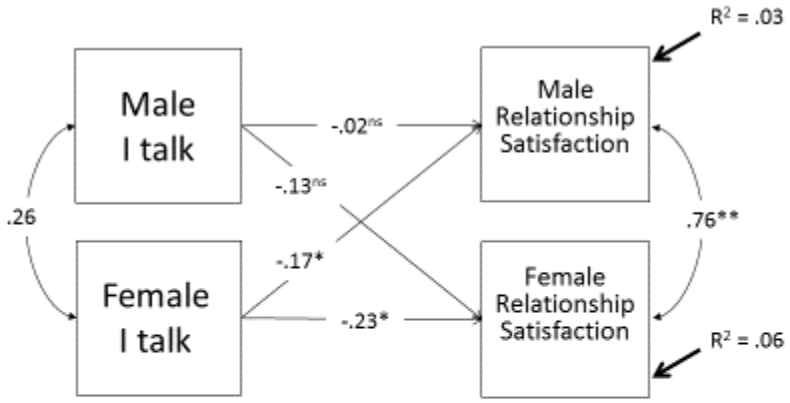


Figure 2.
I-talk APIM path analysis.

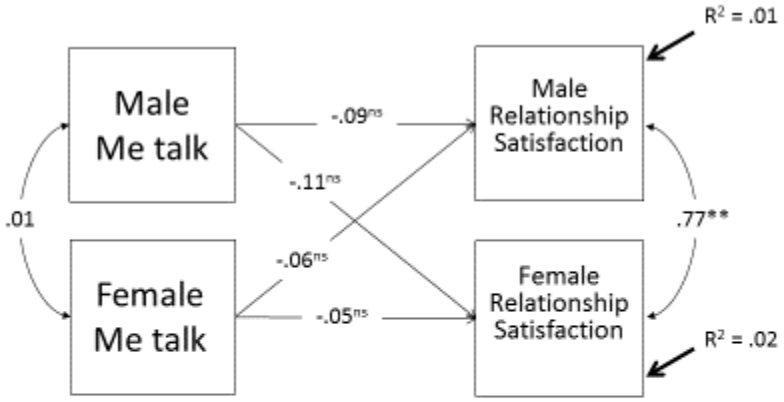


Figure 3.
Me-talk APIM path analysis.

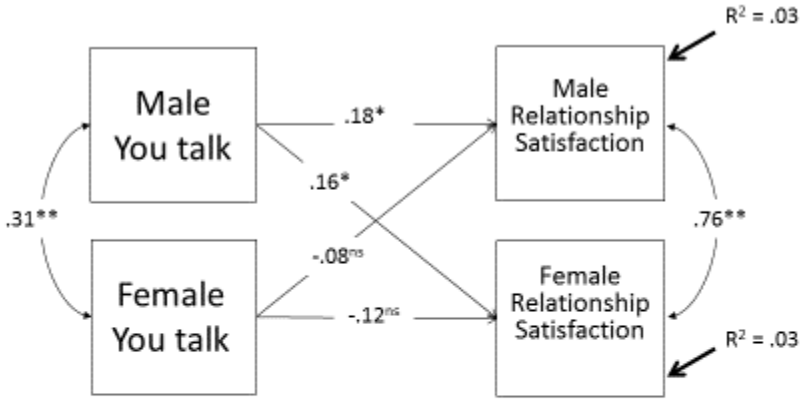


Figure 4.
You-talk APIM path analysis.

Vita

Katie Wischkaemper was born in Amarillo, Texas, and spent most of her formative years in Sweetwater, Texas. She has an older brother, stepbrother, and stepsister. She attended Sweetwater High School, and after graduation, attended Texas A&M University as a Terry Scholar. Katie worked with children from various socioeconomic backgrounds and taught English in Thailand throughout the summers during her undergraduate career. She obtained a Bachelors of Science degree from Texas A&M University in May 2008 in Psychology with a minor in History. For the next two years, she worked as an ophthalmic technician which confirmed her decision to pursue a higher degree as a psychologist. She was accepted into the Clinical Psychology Doctoral Program at the University of Tennessee in 2010 to work in Dr. Kristina Coop Gordon's laboratory. Katie graduated with a Master of Arts degree in Psychology in August 2013, will begin a yearlong predoctoral clinical internship at the James H. Quillen VA Medical Center beginning in July 2015, and plans to graduate with her Doctor of Philosophy degree in August 2016.