

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AUTONOMY, PARTNER UNDERSTANDING,
AND INTIMACY IN A SAMPLE OF HETEROSEXUAL MARITAL
RELATIONSHIPS

by

Timothy Lee Williams

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

January, 2015

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AUTONOMY, PARTNER UNDERSTANDING,
AND INTIMACY IN A SAMPLE OF HETEROSEXUAL MARITAL
RELATIONSHIPS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the
Faculty of Liberty University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by

Timothy Lee Williams

© Copyright, January 2015

Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia

January 2015

Dissertation Committee Approval:

Committee Chair Date

Committee Member Date

Committee Member Date

ABSTRACT

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AUTONOMY, PARTNER UNDERSTANDING, AND INTIMACY IN A SAMPLE OF HETEROSEXUAL MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

Timothy Lee Williams

Center for Counseling and Family Studies

Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia

Doctor of Philosophy in Counseling

The current study examined three research questions. First, do Personality, Partner Understanding, and Autonomy correlate with Intimacy? Second, does self-reported Autonomy correlate with self-reported Intimacy experienced in the marriage after controlling for Personality? Third, Does Partner Understanding correlate with the Partner Intimacy reported in the marriage after controlling for Personality? The study revealed Neuroticism, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Autonomy to be significantly correlated with Intimacy. Results also revealed Autonomy to be a significant predictor of Intimacy after controlling for Personality and Partner Personality. Examination of Standardized Beta Coefficients revealed Autonomy to be the strongest predictor of Intimacy among variables included in the study. Surprisingly, findings revealed Partner Understanding was not a significant predictor of Partner Intimacy after controlling for Personality and Partner Personality. One possible explanation is that Partner Understanding is a moderating variable which influences other predictors of Partner Intimacy. Limitations of this study and suggestions for further research are discussed.

Acknowledgements

I want to begin by thanking my dissertation committee for their work, encouragement, and mostly for their patience to see me through this process. To Dr. Scott Hawkins, I thank you for your guiding comments and questions. Your positive attitude helped raise my morale, especially when things were not going well. Dr. Victor Hinson, I also thank you for your questions and comments which were often challenging, but helped me see things from a different perspective. Your advice and mentorship early in the program helped me stay motivated. To my chair, Dr. David Jenkins, you have influenced me greatly. From our lengthy conversation at an AACCC conference before I enrolled in the PhD program, to the many hours spent communicating about my dissertation, you have been there for me from the start to the end. I would not have been able to complete my dissertation without your patience and encouragement, especially as I struggled through the valleys of finding boundaries around the concepts and variables in my research design. There is also the life-path changing moment of connecting me with Bob Paul at the National Institute of Marriage for my practicum. For your huge investment in my life I am forever grateful.

In addition to my committee, I also thank my sister, Marsha Lane, for your time and conversation as I sorted through the early design process of my research. Mom, thank you for your prayers. They are without number and I'm glad you have seen your prayers answered. I pray God has a reward for you beyond seeing me finish. Thank you for being a great Mom. To the rest of my family, thank you for your prayers and support. Thank you Bob Paul for helping me find volunteers for my study, and especially for your

encouragement during a very discouraging time of my dissertation. To my co-workers at the National Institute of Marriage, thank you for your support. I thank my co-workers at Liberty University, your supportive words and prayers were an inspiration. I thank the seven church leaders who volunteered to help distribute the questionnaire packets and collect the completed packets from participants. My dissertation would not be finished without your help. To my church family at Happy Zion Baptist Church, thank you for the prayers and encouraging words you have freely given over the years; they made a bigger impact than I think you realize. There are so many to thank, if I have forgotten to mention someone, you know your part in helping me reach the finish line and I thank you.

In conclusion there are two people to whom I owe much. First, to Carol, my one and only. Right down the line it's been you and me, all the way from high school. The words "Thank You" just don't seem big enough to match the sacrifice you made and what you have given up in order for me to finish my degree. It's not possible for me to repay you in my lifetime. My hope is that God will give you in this lifetime and the next, rewards that go beyond your sacrifice since only he is able. I look forward to our remaining years together.

Finally, and most of all, I want to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. For without him, none of this would be possible. He guided me from the beginning, he strengthened me through the journey, he never once left me alone, and he gets all the glory for the story. Psalm 18:33 (KJV) "He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places."

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
List of Tables.....	xi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
Background of the Problem	2
Purpose of the Study.....	5
Research Questions	5
Assumptions and Limitations.....	6
Definitions.....	7
Autonomy	7
Self-Determination Scale (SDS).....	7
Self-Determination Theory (SDT).....	7
Personality	8
Partner Personality	8
Five-Factor Theory	8
NEO Five-Factor Inventory-3 (NEO-FFI-3).....	8
Partner Understanding.....	9

Cross Observer Agreement (COA).....	9
Index of Profile Agreement (IPA)	9
Validation	10
Intimacy.....	10
Intimate Safety Questionnaire (ISQ).....	10
Significance of the Study	10
Theoretical/Conceptual Framework	12
Organization of the Remaining Chapters.....	14
Summary	14
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	16
Individual Characteristics	20
Psychological Needs	20
Personality Traits	24
Relational Attributes.....	27
Intimate Behaviors	28
Cognitive Perceptions	33
Emotional Support	35
Intimacy as a Process.....	36

Caring	36
Validation	36
Understanding	37
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS	42
Research Design	42
Selection of participants	42
Instrumentation	44
Research Procedures	47
Research Hypotheses	48
Data Processing and Analysis	50
Summary	51
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS	52
Demographics	52
Research Question One	52
Personality	54
Partner Understanding	54
Autonomy	54

Research Question Two	57
Regression Analysis	57
Unique Variance	58
Research Question Three	62
Regression Analysis	62
Unique Variance	64
Summary	67
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	68
Research Question One	69
Personality	69
Partner Understanding	73
Autonomy	74
Research Question Two	75
Personality	75
Partner Personality	76
Autonomy	77
Research Question Three	78
Personality	79

Partner Personality	79
Partner Understanding.....	83
Implications for Practice	84
Recommendations and Implications for Research	86
Limitations of the Study	87
Summary.....	88
REFERENCES.....	91
Appendix A: Demographic Information Form	104
Appendix B: Letter to Church Leader	106
Appendix C: Research Study Announcement.....	108
Appendix D: Name/Contact Information Form	109
Appendix E: Consent Form.....	110

List of Tables

Table 1: Primary Factors of Relational Intimacy	19
Table 2: Demographic Frequencies of Participant Sample	53
Table 3: Correlations of Intimacy with measures of Personality, Partner Understanding, and Autonomy	56
Table 4: Hierarchical Regression Predicting Unique Variances on Intimacy	59
Table 5: Standardized Beta Coefficients Regression Analysis Predicting the Unique Variances on Intimacy after Accounting for Self and Partner Personality	61
Table 6: Hierarchical Regression Predicting Unique Variances on Partner Intimacy	63
Table 7: Standardized Beta Coefficients Regression Analysis Predicting the Unique Variances on Partner Intimacy after Accounting for Self and Partner Personality	66
Table 8: Regression of Personality and Partner Personality on Intimacy and Partner Intimacy	82

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The need to develop and maintain close interpersonal relationships with a sense of acceptance and belonging has been described as a fundamental need and motivation for well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000b, 2002). Marriage is viewed as the primary adult relationship which offers the opportunity for acceptance and belonging (Noller & Feeney, 2002). Research has shown a healthy marriage relationship to be significantly related to multiple factors of well-being (Carr & Springer, 2010), including, but not limited to, less psychological distress (Johnson & Wu, 2002), longevity (Gardner & Oswald, 2004), general physical health (Hughes & Waite, 2009; Lorenz, Wickrama, Conger, & Elder, 2006; Williams & Umberson, 2004), and improved emotional health, sexual health, and financial success (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). However, results have been mixed identifying the characteristics and qualities that contribute to healthy marital relationships (Fincham & Beach, 2010; Karney, 2007; Wright, Simmons, & Campbell, 2007; Young, 2004). Although conflict resolution has been a major focus in marital research during the past 25 years (Fincham & Beach, 1999), for a little more than a decade marital research has seen increasing emphasis on positive interpersonal processes such as intimacy and the positive factors contributing to relationship health (Fincham, Stanley, & Beach, 2007; Lambert, Fincham, Gwinn, & Ajayi, 2011; Laurenceau, Barrett, & Rovine, 2005; Ryff & Singer, 2000). Researchers recognize the need for increased understanding of marital intimacy and the factors and processes which contribute to connectedness between marital partners (Clark & Reis, 1988; La Guardia & Patrick, 2008; Laurenceau et al., 2005). Because of its foundational

role in relationship health, relational intimacy within the context of marital relationships is the focus of the present study.

Background of the Problem

Intimacy is defined as an interpersonal process (Reis & Shaver, 1988), resulting in one's partner feeling "understood, validated, and cared for" (Reis & Patrick, 1996, p. 536). Reis and Patrick (1996) define *understanding* as "the belief that an interaction partner has accurately and appropriately perceived one's inner self; that the partner gets the facts right about important needs, affects, goals, beliefs, and life circumstances that constitute the central core of the self" (p. 549). Intimacy research has examined the level of spousal understanding through assessing self-disclosure between partners (Waring, Schaefer, & Fry, 1994). Reis and Patrick (1996) explain self-disclosure between partners reflects understanding because certain relationship principles (e.g., mutuality, congruence, trust) exist when self-disclosers feel understood. Although research shows self-disclosure is related to understanding (Reis & Patrick, 1996), self-disclosure does not necessarily equate to *accurate* understanding between partners. Self-disclosure is behavior by which partner understanding can be improved (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998), but the presence of self-disclosure does not ensure understanding and intimacy will increase in the relationship (Morry, 2005; Spencer, 1994). Individuals can self-disclose without the spouse understanding the discloser's personality, motivations or needs; therefore, assessing self-disclosure is not equivalent to assessing understanding.

Accuracy of an individual's understanding of his or her partner's personality, motivations, and needs can be determined through Cross-Observer Agreement (COA) analysis (Piedmont, 1998). Piedmont (1998) explains COA analysis can be conducted using self and rater report forms of the NEO personality measures. The NEO-FFI-3, a shorter version of the NEO-PI-3, provides a comprehensive measure of the five domains of personality as described in Five-Factor Theory (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness), and is available in both self and rater forms (McCrae & Costa, 2010). The congruence between rater report scores and the self-report scores of one's partner using the NEO measures reveals one's understanding of his or her partner's personality, motivations, and needs (Piedmont, 1998). An increase in the difference between one's rater scores and the self-report scores of the partner reveals less understanding the rater has of the partner. Previous research has utilized self and rater analysis in examining the relationship between partner understanding and marital adjustment (Creamer & Campbell, 1988; Murstein & Beck, 1972) and marital satisfaction (Murray, Holmes, Bellavia, Griffin, & Dolderman, 2002; Newmark, Woody, & Ziff, 1977; Ptacek & Dodge, 1995), but no studies have been found that examine the relationship between understanding one's partner and intimacy using COA analysis with the NEO measures.

In addition to feeling understood by one's partner, experiencing validation and feeling cared for are vital aspects in the process of intimacy. Research has confirmed the link between validation and intimacy (Cordova & Scott, 2001; Laurenceau et al., 2005; Mitchell et al., 2008), but further research is needed to identify the individual

characteristics of people who validate their partners (Matthews & Clark, 1982). Reis and Patrick (1996) define validation as “the perception that an interaction partner values and respects one’s inner self and point of view” (p. 550). Value and respect for a partner’s inner self and point of view are linked to autonomy.

Autonomy, as defined by Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000a), has been shown to facilitate “attachment, relational intimacy, and outcomes associated with them” (Ryan & Deci, 2006, p. 1564). More specifically, according to SDT, autonomy is associated with a desire for growth in self and others (Ryan & Deci, 2006), and associated with additional positive interpersonal processes including: (a) attempting to understand one’s partner (Knee, Lonsbary, Canevello, & Patrick, 2005); (b) Openness and respect for partner’s unique differences (Knee, Patrick, Vietor, Nanayakkara, & Neighbors, 2002); (c) a greater consensus, cohesion, and affectional expression with romantic partners (Blais, Sabourin, Boucher, & Vallerand, 1990); (d) more commitment, satisfaction, intimacy, and vitality within relationships (La Guardia & Patrick, 2008); and (e) increased attunement, empathy and encouragement toward partners (Weinstein, Hodgins, & Ryan, 2010). Autonomous individuals are more likely to relate to their partners in ways that are experienced as validating, thus facilitating the interpersonal process of intimacy within their marital relationship. Despite the links between autonomy, validation, and intimacy, no research has been found which examines the relationship between autonomy as defined by SDT and marital intimacy.

Personality can be described by the five primary domains (i.e., Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness) in the Five-Factor

Theory (McCrae & Costa, 2003). In addition to autonomy and understanding one's partner, personality traits have also been found to influence marital outcomes. Lower scores on Neuroticism and higher scores on Agreeableness have consistently shown to be correlated with higher levels of marital satisfaction while the remaining three traits in the Five-Factor Theory (i.e., Extraversion, Openness, and Conscientiousness) have shown mixed results with marital outcomes (Bouchard, Lussier, & Sabourin, 1999; Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Kosek, 1996; Rogge, Bradbury, Hahlweg, Engl, & Thurmaier, 2006). Personality traits are considered relatively stable across the life-span (McCrae & Costa, 2003). Due to their stability during the adult years and their influence on marital outcomes, the five personality domains of the Five-Factor Theory will be utilized as control variables in the study to allow a more accurate assessment of the influence of autonomy and partner understanding on relational intimacy.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between autonomy, partner understanding as measured by COA, and relational intimacy in heterosexual married couples.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide this study and were examined for both spouses:

1. Do Personality, Partner Understanding, and Autonomy correlate with Intimacy?

2. Does self-reported Autonomy correlate with self-reported Intimacy experienced in the marriage after controlling for Personality?
3. Does Partner Understanding, as determined by COA, correlate with the partner's Intimacy reported in the marriage after controlling for Personality?

Assumptions and Limitations

Participants for the study were volunteer heterosexual married couples. Married individuals only were assessed through the study, thus results may not be applicable to cohabitating couples, friendships, and other dyadic relationships. Participants were volunteers recruited through churches. These restrictions on participant selection could have contributed to selection bias and threatened internal validity. Research has provided strong support that married persons are healthier than unmarried individuals (Carr & Springer, 2010). In addition to being married, religiosity has also shown to be significantly related to positive outcomes including higher marital satisfaction and adjustment (Dudley & Kosinski, 1990; Wilson & Musick, 1996), and lower threat of divorce (Heaton & Goodman, 1985; Shrum, 1980).

External validity could have been threatened as results may not be applicable to individuals or couples who do not participate in religious practices through church attendance. Participants were informed that counseling services were available if needed and were given contact information of local counseling agencies. In the event that participation in the study would have facilitated psychological disturbance within individual participants or within the marriage relationship of participants, participants would have been able to contact a counseling agency to initiate services.

Instruments for this study were self-report measures relying on the honesty and integrity of participants for accuracy. Self-report measures elicit validity concerns as participants could have completed the measures with a socially desirable response bias (Kazdin, 2003), and should be considered when results are reviewed. This study utilized a cross sectional correlational design so data collection was limited to a single point in time, thus excluding causality statements regarding findings. A longitudinal design was preferred, but unfeasible due to time and financial constraints.

Definitions

The primary terms used in this study are defined and organized in this section around three main concepts including individual characteristics (i.e., autonomy, personality traits), relational attributes (i.e., partner understanding, validation), and intimacy.

Autonomy

In this study, the term *autonomy* is defined as self-regulation. Autonomous acts are decisions and behaviors which are self-determined, authentically chosen for which one takes full responsibility, and fully endorsed by the self (Ryan & Deci, 2006).

Self-Determination Scale (SDS)

The *Self-Determination Scale (SDS)* is a measure used to assess individual autonomy as defined by Self-Determination Theory (Sheldon, Ryan, & Reis, 1996).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a theory of motivation proposing three innate psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Satisfaction of these three

needs facilitates mental health and well-being while restriction thwarts motivation and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

Personality

Personality refers to the five primary domains of personality as defined by Five-Factor Theory (McCrae & Costa, 2003), including Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. The five domains of personality were assessed using the NEO-FFI-3.

Partner Personality

Partner Personality refers to the five primary domains of personality as defined by Five-Factor Theory (McCrae & Costa, 2003), including Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. The five domains of personality were assessed using the NEO-FFI-3.

Five-Factor Theory

Five-Factor Theory refers to the theory which describes five primary domains of personality presented by McCrae and Costa (2003) including: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness.

NEO Five-Factor Inventory-3 (NEO-FFI-3)

The *NEO Five-Factor Inventory-3 (NEO-FFI-3)* is a measure which was used to assess the five primary domains of personality including Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness (McCrae & Costa, 2010). The five domain scores were used to complete a COA. The NEO-FFI-3 is available in both Form

S and Form R. Form S was used as a self-report measure of personality. Form R is a rater report and was used to assess understanding of marital partner personality.

Partner Understanding

The term *partner understanding* was used to define the level of understanding each spouse has of his or her partner's personality, motivations, and needs. Partner understanding was calculated utilizing a Cross Observer Agreement (COA) analysis which yielded an Index of Profile Agreement (IPA). For example, the husband's *partner understanding* was calculated by comparing his rater report scores to his wife's self-report scores on the NEO-FFI-3 Form R and Form S, respectively. A higher husband *partner understanding* score represents greater understanding the husband has of his wife's personality, motivations, and needs (Piedmont, 1998).

Cross Observer Agreement (COA)

The term *Cross Observer Agreement (COA)* refers to a correlational statistical process which utilized the NEO-FFI-3 rater report scores and spouse NEO-FFI-3 self-report scores to determine an Index of Profile Agreement (IPA). Larger IPA represents a greater level of understanding one has of the partner's personality, motivations, and needs (Piedmont, 1998).

Index of Profile Agreement (IPA)

Index of Profile Agreement (IPA) is a number between 0 and 1 calculated by performing a Cross Observer Agreement analysis where the scores from the NEO-FFI-3 rater report (Form R) and spouse's self-report (Form S) were compared (McCrae, 2008). The IPA is a measure of correlation between one's NEO-FFI-3 rater report and the

spouse's NEO-FFI-3 self-report with a larger IPA score representing a greater understanding one has of partner personality, motivations, and needs (Piedmont, 1998).

Validation

Validation was defined as the act of placing value on the true self of another person. Value acts include respect and appreciation for the unique qualities, characteristics, and point of view of one's partner. Validation does not require agreement with a partner's point of view; rather validation is the respect and value of a partner's point of view regardless of level of agreement (Reis & Patrick, 1996).

Intimacy

The term *intimacy* refers to a relational characteristic within the context of heterosexual marital relationships experienced individually by husband and wife as they interact in an interdependent relationship. Intimacy is described as a dyadic interactive process where the vulnerable behaviors of an individual are positively reinforced by one's partner, and the individual being vulnerable experiences feelings of safety (Cordova, 2002).

Intimate Safety Questionnaire (ISQ)

The *Intimate Safety Questionnaire (ISQ)* is a 28-item self-report measure which was used to assess the level of relational intimacy experienced as felt safety during vulnerability around various relational domains (Cordova, Gee, & Warren, 2005).

Significance of the Study

To better understand the factors which contribute to relationship health, it is important for researchers to examine both the personal attributes (e.g., motives, goals,

needs) of each individual in close relationships (Holmes & Murray, 2007; Patrick, Knee, Canevello, & Lonsbary, 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2008), and the perceptions one has of his or her partner's attributes (DeHart, Pelham, & Murray, 2004). Reis (1990) states, "According to our model, little intimacy exists when people feel that their partners do not understand their essential nature..." (p. 25). Supporting the request for more research to assess understanding in relational dyads, Sanderson and Cantor (2001) emphasized the need for future research to "examine not only the characteristics (e.g., traits, goals, needs, styles) of one individual in the relationship but also the actual and perceived characteristics of her or his partners" (p. 1575). Research of interpersonal relationships has examined personality traits (Jensen-Campbell, Knack, & Rex-Lear, 2009; McCrae & Costa, 2003), but few studies have assessed if the understanding one has of partner personality traits using Cross Observer Agreement (COA) analysis relates to dyadic adjustment or relational satisfaction (Piedmont, 1998), and no studies were found to examine the relationship between understanding assessed using COA and relational intimacy in married couples.

In addition to understanding one's partner, autonomy is crucial to the process of intimacy (Ryan & Deci, 2006) and associated with increased responsiveness and empathy toward partners (Weinstein et al., 2010). Autonomy is also associated with increased attempts to clarify communication and understand one's partner (Knee et al., 2002). Despite research supporting the positive influence of autonomy on close relationships, the association between autonomy and attempts to understand one's partner, and findings that support feeling understood influences intimacy, no research to date has examined the

relationship between autonomy, understanding partner personality traits, and the level of intimacy experienced by one's partner in marital relationships. As Sanderson and Cantor (2001) have pointed out, further research is needed to examine perceptions of spouse characteristics (e.g., COA).

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Major theorists in psychology including Karen Horney (1950), Carl Rogers (1961), Harry Stack Sullivan (1953), and Abraham Maslow (1968) have proposed intimate relationships are an important aspect of individual well-being. Research has also shown intimacy to be an important factor within interpersonal relationships (Clark & Reis, 1988; Cordova et al., 2005; Prager, 1995; Reis, 1990). Although various definitions and perspectives of intimacy exist (see Prager, 1995, p.26), Reis and Shaver (1988) present an influential model which describes intimacy as an internal interactive process. Later, Reis and Patrick (1996) refined the definition of intimacy as "an interactive process in which, as a result of partner's response, individuals come to feel understood, validated, and cared for" (p. 536).

Feeling understood, validated, and cared for reflects the fundamental aspects of Roger's Client-Centered approach to therapeutic change. Rogers (1961) believed that providing a certain type of relationship for his clients would give them the opportunity for change, growth, and personal development. Rogers described the relationship he should provide as one characterized by acceptance, warm regard (e.g., caring), offering unconditional self-worth, empathic understanding, and projecting value (e.g., validation) to clients by respecting their conditions, behaviors, and feelings. He believed if he

offered clients a relationship characterized by these qualities and the freedom to explore one's true self, esteeming each person as a separate individual, then clients would grow in their understanding of self, become more understanding and accepting of others, and more expressive of their unique selves. Rogers believed the expression of one's true self (autonomy) within a relationship would facilitate autonomy in the other person. Rogers (1961) described his view as a "general hypothesis which offers exciting possibilities for the development of creative, adaptive, and autonomous persons" (p. 38). Rogers believed these characteristics and results are found to be true in all types of interpersonal relationships including teacher-student, supervisor-subordinate, parent-child, and other family relationships. Speaking specifically regarding married and dating couples, Rogers (1972) expresses the importance for each partner to share one's feelings with the other and express empathy and understanding for the feelings their partner expresses. He further explains that the reciprocal process of validation begins with the expression of one's true self within the context of the relationship (i.e., autonomy), followed by facilitating autonomy in the partner, and increasing the connection (i.e., intimacy) within the relationship. Rogers (1972) states:

Finally, it is so rewarding to be in process of becoming one's real self, that it is almost inevitable that you will permit and encourage your partner in the same direction, and rejoice in every step that he or she takes. It is *fun* to grow together, two unique and intertwined lives. (p. 208)

Research findings have been inconsistent regarding the role of autonomy in the process of intimacy. Results have largely been influenced by whether autonomy is defined as

independence (Eidelson, 1983; Rankin-Esquer, Burnett, Baucom, & Epstein, 1997; Stamp & Banski, 1992) or as an intrinsic need (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). When defined as independence, autonomy is seen as a conflicting factor to closeness and intimacy. However, according to Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2006), autonomy is an intrinsic need and described as a measure of self-governance. Autonomy is not independence but rather the level of free choice one is exercising as he or she chooses the level of interdependence within a relationship.

Organization of the Remaining Chapters

Chapter Two will review relevant literature regarding relational intimacy in marriage and describe how individual characteristics and relational attributes contribute to relational intimacy within marital dyads. Chapter Two will end with a summary. Chapter Three will present the methods and include discussion of the research design, selection of participants, and instrumentation that was used to collect data for the study. Chapter Three will continue with explanation of the research procedures, data processing and analysis, and conclude with a chapter summary. Chapter Four will report the results and discuss the research questions. The chapter will end with a summary. The fifth and final chapter will summarize the findings and discuss limitations and recommendations for future research. Chapter Five will also present implications for practice and a final summary.

Summary

Chapter One presented an overview of the problem to be examined. The background of the problem was presented establishing the need for further research to

examine the relationship between autonomy, understanding, and marital intimacy. The purpose of the study was presented and addressed the need for further marital intimacy research. The purpose will be fulfilled by examining two key questions. First, does self-reported autonomy correlate with self-reported intimacy? Second, does the level of understanding an individual has of partner traits, needs and motivations as determined by COA correlate with the partner's self-reported intimacy? Design limitations were discussed followed by definitions of key terms. The significance of the study and theoretical background including aspects of Roger's Person-Centered approach and Self-Determination Theory were presented. And finally an organization of the remaining chapters offers an overview of the study.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In their attempts to describe intimacy within close relationships and identify elements which contribute to intimacy, researchers have focused on various categories of factors within intimacy including behavioral (Cordova & Scott, 2001; Sullivan, 1953), psychological (Prager, 1995), emotional (Kersten & Himle, 1991), and social factors (Patterson, 1984). Intimacy has many meanings and a clear and unified definition is not found in the literature (Reis & Patrick, 1996). Prager (1995) describes intimacy as a “fuzzy” concept which “is characterized by a shifting template of features rather than by a clearly bounded set” (p. 13). Dorian and Cordova (2004) also speak about the structural “fuzziness” of intimacy and propose staying within a behavioral approach to ensure measurability of the factors that comprise intimacy. In describing the existence of multiple views of intimacy, Acitelli and Duck (1987) used the metaphor of blind men trying to describe an elephant while each are holding a different part of the elephant.

Other researchers (Gaia, 2002; Hook, Gerstein, Detterich, & Gridley, 2003; Patrick & Beckenbach, 2009) have also described the difficulty encountered when defining intimacy due to its multifaceted nature. Prager (1995) recommends defining one or more elements of intimacy rather than attempting a comprehensive definition. Chelune, Robison, and Kommor (1984) describe intimacy as a *relational property* which is not contained within any individual, but is an attribute of the system that “emerges out of” (p. 25), the interactions between two people. Although intimacy is not defined as a characteristic of an individual, it can be understood as an attribute of a system that influences and is influenced by the individuals within the system. Therefore, the

development of intimacy in marital relationships may be better understood by examining the attributes each spouse possesses and expresses within the marital relationship, the interactive processes by which it develops, and the overall system in which intimacy occurs.

While a consensus definition of intimacy may not be possible (Lippert & Prager, 2001), understanding of marital intimacy can be improved by examining it through three *lenses* or perspectives. Those three lenses include: individual characteristics of each partner including the psychological motivational *needs* and personality *traits* within each spouse, the relational *attributes* between spouses, and the relational *processes* of intimacy as it develops in marital relationships. The psychological motivational needs of individuals are described by Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2002) as competence, relatedness, and autonomy. In this study, the Five-Factor Theory is used to define personality traits. The Five-Factor Theory (McCrae & Costa, 2003) identifies the five major personality traits as Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. The primary relational attributes between spouses which facilitate intimacy include the intimate behaviors expressed by both partners (Lippert & Prager, 2001), the cognitive perceptions accumulated by each (Chelune et al., 1984), and the emotional support they mutually exchange (Kersten & Himle, 1991). Caring, validation, and understanding are central aspects of the relational process of intimacy. Reis and Patrick (1996) explain intimacy as “an interactive process in which, as a result of a partner’s response, individuals come to feel understood, validated, and cared for” (p. 536). Examining all three lenses (i.e., individual characteristics, relational attributes, and

relational intimacy processes) provides an opportunity for a thorough understanding of intimacy. This chapter is organized around the factors listed in Table 1: Factors of Relational Intimacy.

Table 1

Factors of Relational Intimacy

Individual Characteristics	Relational Attributes	Intimacy as a Process
Psychological Needs	Intimate Behaviors	Caring
Competence	Self-disclosure	Respect
Relatedness	Partner Responsiveness	Positive Regard
Autonomy	Validation	
		Validation
Personality Traits	Cognitive Perceptions	Autonomy
Neuroticism	Cognitive Knowledge	Understanding
Extraversion	Cognitive Meanings	
Openness		Understanding
Agreeableness	Emotional Support	Extensiveness
Conscientiousness	Caring	Accuracy
	Validation	

Individual Characteristics

The individual characteristics of each individual in a dyadic relationship can have an influence on both the relationship between partners and on one's partner. It is beyond the scope of this study to address all individual characteristics which can influence dyadic relationships, but two types of characteristics, psychological needs and personality traits, are often discussed in the literature on dyadic relationships. Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002) is a common approach to explain psychological needs, and the Five-Factor Theory (McCrae & Costa, 2003) is the predominate theory addressing personality traits.

Psychological Needs

The fulfillment of basic psychological needs is a major factor in psychological development and functioning, and their importance to psychological development and functioning has been compared to the necessity of the fulfillment of basic physiological needs (e.g., food and water) to physical development and functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Ryan and Deci (2002) propose the fulfillment of basic psychological needs are necessary to the development and well-being of individual's personality and cognitive structures, and emphasize the three basic needs of *competence*, *relatedness*, and *autonomy*. Furthermore, Ryan and Deci (2008) propose the quality and well-being of close personal relationships are associated with the fulfillment of the three basic needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy defined within SDT.

Competence. Fulfillment of the psychological need for competence is defined by Ryan and Deci (2002) as “feeling effective in one's ongoing interactions with the social

environment and experiencing opportunities to exercise and express one's capacities" (p. 7). Competence fulfillment has been shown to be associated with greater well-being (Sheldon et al., 1996). Although competence fulfillment in relationships has been shown to be associated with attachment security, it is less important than relatedness and autonomy to attachment security (LaGuardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000). LaGuardia, Ryan, Couchman, and Deci (2000) hypothesize the importance of competence fulfillment in close interpersonal relationships is less than relatedness and autonomy because competence is often satisfied within other contexts (e.g., work or school). Therefore, although competence is an important psychological need, relatedness and autonomy are more central aspects of research addressing close relationships.

Relatedness. While fulfillment of all three psychological needs is important to interpersonal relationships (LaGuardia et al., 2000), the fulfillment of relatedness has been shown to be the most influential on relationship functioning and well-being. Patrick et al. (2007) state that partners experiencing greater fulfillment of relatedness show greater relationship satisfaction, less perceived conflict, and report less defensive reactions to conflict. Relatedness as a psychological need "refers to feeling connected to others, to caring for and being cared for by those others, to having a sense of belongingness both with other individuals and with one's community" (Ryan & Deci, 2002, p. 7). Relatedness within marital relationships as defined by SDT is very similar to the concept of intimacy. A caring connected relationship is central to the process of intimacy (Reis & Patrick, 1996).

Autonomy. The importance of autonomy to individual and relational well-being is substantial. Ryan and Deci (2006) state that autonomy is “a salient issue across development, life domains, and cultures and is of central import for personality functioning and wellness” (p. 1580).

Autonomy defined. Research findings have been inconsistent regarding the role of autonomy in the process of intimacy. Results have largely been influenced by whether autonomy is defined as independence (Eidelson, 1983; Rankin-Esquer et al., 1997) or self-determined motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Defined as independence, autonomy is understood as the opposing end on a continuum with intimacy and is seen as an alternative choice to intimacy (Stamp & Banski, 1992). However, autonomy, as defined by Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2006), is the intrinsic motivation to act in a way endorsed by the whole self, fully chosen and determined by one’s self. According to SDT, autonomy is not independence or isolation and is not the opposite of intimacy, but rather the act of freely choosing from a volitional approach. People can choose to be autonomous or controlled in their relative independence or relative dependence upon others, but those making choices from an autonomous approach are doing so from a full sense of choice and self-endorsement (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2008). According to Ryan and Deci (2006), research on autonomy shows “support for autonomy facilitates attachment, intimacy, and the outcomes associated with them” and “SDT has continually found that people feel most related to those who support their autonomy” (p. 1564). Individuals with higher autonomous motivation have been shown to be more attuned to, empathic, and encouraging of their partners (Weinstein et al., 2010); show

more commitment, satisfaction, intimacy, and vitality within relationships (La Guardia & Patrick, 2008); and have greater consensus, cohesion, and affectional expression with their romantic partners (Blais et al., 1990). Autonomy, as defined by SDT, is similar to Reis and Patrick's (1996) *caring* and *validation*. Autonomous motivation is associated with increased attempts to understand one's partner (Knee et al., 2002, p. 617). Therefore, autonomy and understanding one's partner are interconnected and vital aspects of the intimacy process in close relationships.

Factors that contribute to autonomy. The nature and context of interactions within relationships determines if autonomy is facilitated within individuals. Individuals experience an autonomous self when their environment is autonomy supportive. Skinner and Edge (2002) describe autonomous environments as those that allow and encourage individuals to esteem their inner selves and value one's internal conditions, preferences, and desires. Autonomous interactions are those that facilitate self-expression in decision making and problem solving, promoting expression of one's true sentiments, goals, and longings. In addition to respecting the self-governance of one's partner, autonomous partners effectively participate in the discovery and expression of their partner's true self (Skinner & Edge, 2002).

Relationship between autonomy and intimacy. Intimacy, defined as an attribute of a system influenced by the individuals within the system, requires relational partners to present themselves, on a certain level, as true representations of their individual selves. The authenticity of intimacy is related to the level of authenticity in which each partner presents his or her true self. When the true self of either partner is stifled, smothered or

controlled, relational intimacy is hindered. Intimacy is supported when couples respect their partner's autonomy. Support for autonomy facilitates attachment, intimacy, and the outcomes associated with them (Ryan & Deci, 2006, p. 1564). Honoring partner uniqueness facilitates intimacy. Hatfield (1984) states, "If people are going to have an intimate relationship, they have to learn to enjoy others as they are, without hoping to fix them up" (p. 217). Hatfield continues to explain that one must accept a partner for the person he or she is right now, instead of the person he or she was or could become. Rogers (1972) emphasizes the importance to relationship health when each partner "owns, respects, and develops his or her own selfhood" (p. 206). Thus the promotion of each individual's autonomy within the relationship presents the opportunity for intimacy to increase between partners.

Personality Traits

Individual personality traits are important factors of influence on one's partner and relationship health in dyadic relationships (Dyrenforth, Kashy, Donnellan, & Lucas, 2010; Holland & Roisman, 2008; Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2000; Shiota & Levenson, 2007; White, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 2004). Piedmont (1998) states, "one's personality has a profound impact on both the quality and tempo of one's relationship with intimate others" (p. 172). The leading personality trait theory is the Five-Factor Theory of personality (McCrae & Costa, 2003), which proposes individual personality is made up of the following five traits: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness.

Neuroticism. McCrae and Costa (2010) describe Neuroticism as “the most pervasive domain of personality scales...” and “the general tendency to experience negative affects such as fear, sadness, embarrassment, anger, guilt, and disgust is the core of the N domain” (p. 19). Those scoring lower on Neuroticism are emotionally steady, composed, and easy-going and during difficult circumstances are less likely to become distressed, anxious, or emotionally distraught. Marital research has shown that of the five traits, Neuroticism has the most influence and is consistently related to negative consequences in marital outcomes (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Neuroticism (i.e., lower emotional stability and higher negative emotionality) has been linked to greater marital discord (Whisman, Uebelacker, Tolejko, Chatav, & McKelvie, 2006), lower levels of marital satisfaction and quality (Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Robins et al., 2000; Rogge et al., 2006), lower marital adjustment (Bouchard et al., 1999), and significantly lowers marital idealization (O’Rourke, Neufeld, Claxton, & Smith, 2010).

Extraversion. McCrae and Costa (2010) describe individuals scoring high on the Extraversion scale as sociable people who prefer “large groups and gatherings” who can also be described as “assertive, active, and talkative,” and they “like excitement and stimulation and tend to be cheerful in disposition” (p. 19). Research examining Extraversion in relation to marital outcomes has been inconsistent. Extraversion has been shown to be positively correlated with marital satisfaction (Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000), but Gattis, Berns, Simpson, and Christensen (2004) found no significant correlation between Extraversion and marital satisfaction. Lazarides, Belanger, and Sabourin (2010) found women’s Extraversion to be positively correlated to couple

stability while Bouchard et al. (1999) report no significant correlation between Extraversion and marital adjustment.

Openness. Those who score higher on Openness to experience are described as inquisitive, more tolerant to change, and open to new and original ideas preferring a more independent self-governing approach versus conventional, established, and predictable views (McCrae & Costa, 2010). Openness is positively correlated with marital satisfaction (Botwin, Buss, & Shackelford, 1997) and dyadic adjustment (Bouchard & Arseneault, 2005). However, Bouchard and Arseneault (2005) found that length of relationship moderated the influence of Openness on dyadic adjustment with longer relationships showing a negative correlation between women's Openness and dyadic adjustment. Bouchard and Arseneault (2005) hypothesize that women who score higher on Openness would be more open to non-traditional views of marriage, and when in less satisfactory relationships, those scoring higher on Openness would be more apt to reject traditional views and consider alternative options. Donnellan, Conger, and Bryant (2004) found that "self-reports of Openness were negatively correlated with observer reports of negative interactions" and "self-reports of Openness by wives were positively correlated with global reports of sexual satisfaction for both wives and husbands" (p. 498). Donnellan et al. (2004) suggest caution when interpreting results for Openness, noting it is one of the more difficult traits to understand in close relationships.

Agreeableness. A person scoring high on the Agreeableness scale is described as someone who is unselfish, compassionate, and helpful toward others. Low scorers would be more disagreeable and cynical or questioning of the motives of others (McCrae &

Costa, 2010). Agreeableness has been shown to be negatively correlated to marital discord (Whisman et al., 2006), positively correlated to marital idealization (O'Rourke et al., 2010) and significantly related to marital satisfaction (Botwin et al., 1997; Donnellan et al., 2004; Kosek, 1996; Watson et al., 2000). Donnellan et al. (2004) propose Agreeableness may be as important as Neuroticism in comprehending the health of close relationships and encourage heightened attention to this trait when studying marital relationships.

Conscientiousness. McCrae and Costa (2010) define individuals scoring high on Conscientiousness as “purposeful, strong-willed, determined, scrupulous, punctual, and reliable” and are more likely than low scorers to be engaged in “the process of planning, organizing, and carrying out tasks” (p. 20). Conscientiousness has been examined in relation to marital outcomes, but has shown mixed results (Botwin et al., 1997; Bouchard et al., 1999; Rogge et al., 2006). O'Rourke et al. (2010) reported Conscientiousness is related to marital idealization. Conscientiousness has also been shown to be a significant predictor of marital satisfaction (Gattis et al., 2004; Watson et al., 2000).

Relational Attributes

Relational attributes describe the interactional factors defining the relationship between partners. The primary marital relationship attributes found in the literature include intimate behaviors, cognitive perceptions, and emotional support (Derlega, 1984; Kersten & Himle, 1991; Prager, 1995; Reis & Patrick, 1996).

Intimate Behaviors

Although the sexual relationship and nonsexual physical touch between marital partners can be viewed as important elements of intimacy within the relationship (Bagarozzi, 2001; Kersten & Himle, 1991), sensual and physical contact are considered to be of lesser importance than other relationship qualities when defining intimacy (Van den Broucke, Vertommen, & Vandereycken, 1995). Behaviors, including nonverbal behavior, provide observers information about partner traits, motivations, and states. In addition, information about personality, goals, and feelings can be understood through observed partner behavior (Keeley & Hart, 1994). Nonsexual interaction behaviors between spouses have been a focus of intimacy research. Lippert and Prager (2001) explain interaction characteristics including: pleasantness, disclosure of intimate and private information and emotions, feeling understood, and the expressions of positive feelings about the partner are fundamental descriptors of marital intimacy. Cordova and Scott (2001) define intimacy as a process where individual vulnerable behaviors are reinforced by one's partner. The primary interactional behaviors found in intimacy research include self-disclosure, partner responsiveness, and validation.

Self-disclosure. Self-disclosing personal details about oneself has been viewed as an essential ingredient of intimacy (Derlega, 1984; Laurenceau et al., 2005; Prager, 1995; Waring & Chelune, 1983). Sharing thoughts and feelings with one's partner creates the opportunity for deeper levels of personal connection both cognitively and emotionally with partners, thus facilitating relational intimacy. Researchers have distinguished between disclosure of *factual* personal information and *emotional* personal

information with emphasis placed on the significance of disclosure of emotional content to the process of relational intimacy development (Morton, 1978; Reis & Patrick, 1996). Disclosure of emotional content contributes to intimacy in marital relationships (Lippert & Prager, 2001; Mitchell et al., 2008), but the act of self-disclosure does not guarantee an intimate interaction will occur or that intimacy between partners will increase. Multiple factors including the context of the disclosure, the type of information revealed, receptiveness of the listener, and the speaker's perception of the listener's response can determine if self-disclosure facilitates intimacy.

The context in which self-disclosure occurs can influence the interaction's effect on intimacy (Chelune et al., 1984). Different settings (e.g., churches, restaurants, classrooms, kitchens, bedrooms) influence the perceived appropriateness of self-disclosure interactions, which can impede or facilitate marital intimacy. Disclosure inappropriate for the setting can hinder intimacy; however, partner understanding (i.e. how well each is known by the other) plays a greater role in the process of intimacy than self-disclosure context (Chelune et al., 1984, p. 23). Disclosers with greater understanding of their partner's traits, needs, and motivations are more attuned to what is considered appropriate by their partner in various contexts.

The type of information revealed during self-disclosure can influence if the disclosure interaction facilitates intimacy in marital relationships. Waring et al. (1994) found that "a positive cognitive disclosure pattern as opposed to a negative feeling disclosure pattern" is linked with increase in marital intimacy (p. 144). However, under the right conditions negative disclosures can also facilitate relational intimacy within

marital relationships. Swan, De La Ronde, and Hixon (1994) explain that the accurate evaluation of limitations and/or faults (i.e., weaknesses) in a marital partner can offer the opportunity to help in areas of need, and a cooperative effort between partners with each providing support in areas of weakness can foster relational intimacy. Key to whether self-disclosure facilitates intimacy will be the partner's responsiveness and the discloser's perception of that response.

Partner responsiveness. Although self-disclosure is an important component of intimacy in marital relationships, it alone is not a predictor of intimacy. During interactive exchanges between partners, perceived partner responsiveness has been shown to be an important factor in the interactive process of intimacy (Laurenceau et al., 2005; Cordova & Scott, 2001). However, perceived partner responsiveness must express two important qualities to facilitate relational intimacy. First, partner responses must support an environment of emotional safety. As one spouse expresses interpersonal vulnerability and the partner's response is experienced as positive reinforcement, emotional safety is experienced, which inspires more Openness and expression of deeper vulnerability. Cordova and Scott (2001) explain that vulnerable behavior will increase in the presence of reinforcement, but will decrease or terminate in the presence of emotional punishment. Therefore, the level of intimacy experienced by couples will be influenced by the level of emotional safety perceived by each partner. Burbee, Sparks, Paul, and Arnzen (2011) propose that vulnerable interactions are required for the development of intimacy in marital relationships, and vulnerable interactions which receive partner responses

described as affectionate, validating, and accepting will facilitate emotional safety, thus increasing relational intimacy.

Accurate understanding is the second quality partner responsiveness must express in order to facilitate intimacy. When perceived partner responsiveness coincides with one's view of self, the *self* is validated and one feels understood. Partner responsiveness can also be described as an expression of the level of understanding one has for his or her partner's *true self* (i.e., traits, needs, and motivations). Reis and Patrick (1996) explain that when perceived partner responsiveness to one's disclosure aligns with one's view of self (i.e., the partner's responses express understanding of the internal needs and motivations of the discloser), intimacy increases because the discloser feels understood and cared for by the responsive partner. "People desire genuine honest interactions that reflect the participants 'core selves'" (Reis & Patrick, 1996, p. 547). Partner responsiveness is a core principle in the interactive process of marital intimacy. During verbal and nonverbal communication, married partners increase their understanding of each other, facilitating the reciprocal interaction of knowing and becoming known. Even when unfavorable characteristics are revealed, research has shown that married partners prefer to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each other, recognizing the value of knowing the true "selves" of each other (Swan et al., 1994). Interestingly, Swan et al. (1994) explain that dating partners preferred favorable partner evaluations even when those evaluations were not accurate with self-reports. In contrast, married partners preferred accurate partner responses, even when those responses revealed individual weaknesses in the discloser. Swan et al. (1994) hypothesize their results support the

belief that married intimates have developed more acceptance of each other's weaknesses than dating couples and focus more on obtaining mutual goals. Reis, Clark, and Holmes (2004) support this hypothesis and state, "the belief that one participates in an intimate close relationship arises from processes of interaction during which, or as a result of which, partners feel mutually responsive to each other's important goals, needs, dispositions, and values" (p. 203). Partner responsiveness is a key behavior within the interactive process of marital intimacy as it facilitates understanding of partner needs, motivations, and traits.

In addition to fostering increased partner understanding, partner responsiveness offers couples an opportunity to validate each other in the process of intimate interactions. Reis and Patrick (1996) have identified validation as one of the three primary factors in the process of intimacy.

Validation. Validation is important to the process of marital health. Matthews and Clark (1982) found that validating married partners experienced their relationship as a stimulus toward intellectual and emotional growth, but recognized the need for future research to expand the understanding of the "individual characteristics or interpersonal processes which enable individuals to validate each other" (p. 184). Reis and Patrick (1996) describe validation as the "central element of the intimacy process," and define validation as the "perception that an interaction partner values and respects one's inner self and point of view" (p. 550). Therefore, validation is the expression of value of one's partner and dependent upon the accuracy of partner understanding.

A partner's inner self and point of view in various contexts must be understood and known, at least at some minimum level, before validation can occur; otherwise, the attempted validating expressions will miss the "true self" of the partner and not be received as validating. Sullivan (1953) describes intimacy as a type of relationship that "permits validation of all components of personal worth" and includes "adjustment of one's behavior to the expressed needs of the other person" (p. 246). When internal needs and motivations are understood, praise and encouragement received from marital partners more accurately supports the inner true self of each person, thus facilitating intimacy. Research has shown that beneficial validation is more than just praise for achievement and involves being liked for who one is intrinsically (Schimel, Arndt, Pyszczynski, & Greenberg, 2001). Derlega (1984) supports the necessity of partner understanding and explains that interactions are seen as validating when "one's self-image corresponds with others' impressions" (p. 4). Therefore, validation between married partners that facilitates intimacy requires a minimum level of accuracy in the cognitive perceptions of the spouse validating his or her partner.

Cognitive Perceptions

Although overlapping elements and interactions between the behavioral, cognitive, and affective attributes of relational intimacy exist, it is possible to explore and discuss cognitive components separately. In order to differentiate cognitive components of intimacy from behavioral and affective attributes, a shift of focus to deeper cognitive processes is necessary. Chelune et al. (1984) explain that although self-disclosures are important elements in building the subjective evaluations and expectancies between

partners and play a part in the cognitive process of intimacy, more essential to the process of intimacy are the deeper meanings behind what is communicated in self-disclosures as they are the cognitive material by which partners come to know the true self of each other and become known by their partners. As interaction between partners takes place, a cognitive *database* containing subjective thoughts, beliefs, and expectations of the partner's self is constructed. Intimacy increases as the accuracy and quantity of the subjective meanings behind what is communicated increases, and partners come to know and be known by each other. When discussing the impact of accurate partner knowledge on marital relationships, Pollmann and Finkenauer (2009) state, "...they report greater intimacy when their partner has a more accurate view of their characteristics" (p. 1513). Monsour (1994) labels accurate partner knowledge as "mutual understanding" and describes it as a "shared perceptual reality" which reveals similarities and dissimilarities between two partners (p. 113). Monsour (1994) further explains that mutual understanding between partners "lays the groundwork for building intimacy in a relationship" (p. 129). As partners grow in their cognitive knowledge of each other, they become aware of differences in their thought processes and perspectives. It is possible that increased understanding of each other's differences could hinder intimacy in the relationship. However, the cognitive meanings each assigns to the other's differences determine whether increased understanding hinders or facilitates intimacy. When partners value each other's differences and attributes, it pulls the couple closer together rather than pulling them apart (Monsour, 1994). When partners validate each other's

unique cognitive attributes in an emotionally supportive manner, increased understanding facilitates intimacy rather than hindering its development.

Emotional Support

Kersten and Himle (1991) define emotional support as expressions that are receptive and accommodating of a partner's feelings and emotions. Emotional support is genuine, warm, and caring, and communicates a sense of understanding. Genuineness, warmth, and caring have been recognized for many years as essential in building close relationships (Horney, 1937; Rogers, 1961). Kersten and Himle (1991) explain that significant emotional support requires a greater understanding of a partner's personality, values, and desires, and will be expressed in a variety of contexts. Emotional support that facilitates intimacy confirms partner self-concept because it expresses an accurate understanding of the partner's perceptions of his or her feelings and emotions. Accurate understanding of the marriage partner's personality facilitates increased accuracy of emotional support. Individuals who express emotional support for their partners both during positive experiences and when their partners make a mistake or fail provide evidence of their deeper understanding and willingness to support their partners. Nonjudgmental emotional support that conveys understanding is a basic foundation in marital intimacy (Kersten & Himle, 1991).

In this section, partner understanding has been explained as a common and important factor in intimate behaviors including self-disclosure, partner responsiveness, and validation. Partner understanding has also been presented as a vital part of both

cognitive perceptions and emotional support, two important attributes of intimate relationships.

Intimacy as a Process

A well accepted model presented by Reis and Patrick (1996) describes intimacy as an interpersonal process resulting in feeling cared for, validated, and understood by one's partner. The results of relationally intimate interactions (i.e., caring, validation, and understanding), have some common attributes and overlap as the process of intimacy develops within close relationships.

Caring

Caring is often ignored in the development of models of intimacy (Reis & Patrick, 1996), perhaps because it is described in relationship research using other terms such as relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2002), affectional expression (Blais et al., 1990), liking (Collins & Miller, 1994), unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1961), and emotional support (Kersten & Himle, 1991). Common aspects in each descriptive factor related to caring includes a respect for and value of one's partner and his or her internal affective states. Therefore, Reis and Patrick (1996) compare caring to Rogers' (1961) unconditional positive regard, and can be further described as a qualitative characteristic of validation.

Validation

Reis and Patrick (1996) explain validation as the act of understanding and placing value upon a partner's perspectives and view validation as a "central element in the intimacy process" (p. 550). Marital partners experience validation when they express

respect for each other's individual uniqueness and personal perspectives. Validation is not just praise, but interactive feedback towards the true self of one's partner (Schimmel et al., 2001). Therefore, validation is closely related to SDT's autonomy. Skinner and Edge (2002) describe autonomous experiences as those in which individuals respect and defer to partners, "allowing them freedom of expression and action, and encouraging them to attend to, accept, and value their inner states, preferences, and desires" (p. 303).

Research has shown autonomy is associated with increased Openness and desire to understand one's partner (Knee et al., 2005; 2002). Therefore, it is presumed that more autonomous individuals would be more likely to respectfully seek to understand their partner's perspectives, which would be experienced as validating by their partners. Since understanding is a factor in the process of intimacy, according to Reis and Patrick, it is hypothesized that autonomy is associated with higher levels of intimacy between marital partners because it expresses care and facilitates understanding.

Understanding

Understanding is a vital factor in the process of relational intimacy because it is an essential component of validation (Reis & Patrick, 1996), constructive self-disclosure (Chelune et al., 1984), cognitive perceptions (Pollmann & Finkenauer, 2009), and emotional support (Kersten & Himle, 1991).

Understanding defined. Understanding in close relationships is defined by Reis and Patrick (1996) as "the belief that an interaction partner has accurately and appropriately perceived one's inner self; that the partner gets the facts right about important needs, affects, goals, beliefs, and life circumstances that constitute the central

core of the self” (p. 549). Understanding is not merely agreement, as understanding can exist in the presence of disagreement. Understanding that facilitates intimacy involves one’s awareness of a partner’s internal cognitions, emotions, and motives. Increased understanding in intimate relationships can be seen as an *alignment* of thoughts as Chelune et al. (1984) explain: “...an intimate relationship is a relational process in which we come to know the innermost, subjective aspects of another, and are known in a like manner” (p. 14). Therefore, understanding can be described as the level of accuracy in perception of a partner’s core self.

Factors that contribute to understanding. Multiple factors contribute to partner understanding in close relationships including the accuracy of the information shared, the depth of the information shared, and the ability for married partners to develop mutual meanings. Derlega (1984) emphasizes that the information shared between partners about themselves must be true in order for each person to develop a true picture of their partner’s self, and developing an accurate perception of a partner’s true self is necessary in the process of intimacy. Research has shown that married couples prefer their partner’s perceptions to be accurate (i.e., correlate to self-perceptions) rather than inaccurate or exaggerated, even when those perceptions accurately see one’s weaknesses and unflattering attributes (Swan et al., 1994).

Depth of information is another important factor that contributes to understanding. Several *external* facts can be known about another person. However, to develop the type of understanding that facilitates intimacy, it is necessary for one to understand the motives and how one’s partner makes sense of things *internally* (Duck,

1994). In their definition of understanding, Reis and Patrick (1996) emphasize the importance that each partner “gets the facts right about important needs, affects, goals, beliefs, and life circumstances that constitute the central core of the self” (p. 549). Understanding develops as a partner’s personal and private information is gathered into an organized collection, and the collected information is an accurate portrayal of the internal motives, traits, and needs of the partner.

Another important factor that contributes to understanding in close relationships is one’s ability to grasp the meanings within his or her partner’s mind. Duck (1994) calls this ability an “extended mutual comprehension or a world of shared meanings” (p. 22). He describes shared meanings as a process of perceiving what is in a partner’s mind, comparing it to one’s own meanings, identifying the associations, and being able to cognitively work with the contrasts and/or similarities between meanings. Limitations in this ability will impede the development of partner understanding within a relationship.

Relationship between understanding and intimacy. A large body of literature exists which proposes understanding between partners as a key factor in relational intimacy (Chelune et al., 1984; Clark & Reis, 1988; Cross & Gore, 2004; Derlega, 1984; Duck, 1994; Laurenceau, Rivera, Schaffer, & Pietromonaco, 2004; Prager, 1995; Prager & Roberts, 2004; Reis & Patrick, 1996; Reis et al., 2004; Roberts & Greenberg, 2002). Prager and Roberts (2004) propose two important factors in marital intimate understanding: the *extensiveness* and *accuracy* of a partner’s internal aspects. Extensiveness is the amount of intimate interactions and the quality of those interactions between intimate partners. Prager and Roberts (2004) appraise quality interactions as

those which disclose accurate and personal information, reflect positive regard for one's partner, and promote increased understanding of each other's internal experiences and perspectives. In addition to extensiveness, Prager and Roberts (2004) present *accuracy* as an important factor in marital intimate understanding and describe its importance as "indicative and predictive of the degree and quality of the relational intimacy a couple achieves" (p. 47).

Reis and Patrick (1996) present understanding as the foundational factor in the process of intimacy and describe it as "...a prerequisite for validation and caring" (p. 550). In spite of its significance to relational intimacy, understanding is not equivalent to intimacy, and understanding alone does not facilitate intimacy. Multiple other factors (e.g. validation, caring, acceptance, etc.) contribute to the process of intimacy and, as previously explained, autonomy is correlated with many of the factors which contribute to relational intimacy in marriage. Chelune et al. (1984) explain the importance of understanding and *autonomous-related* factors (e.g., acceptance) to intimacy as follows:

It seems to be of central importance to people to be able to share with others all aspects of themselves, and to feel understood and accepted as the people they are. It is also important to know, understand, and accept people thoroughly at the same time. In an intimate relationship, these processes occur simultaneously and reciprocally. (p. 29)

In their research, Knee et al. (2002) found that autonomy was associated with attempts to better understand one's romantic partner through approach behaviors and communicative clarification efforts, and, more specifically, that autonomous men are "...more open and

flexible when it comes to interpreting feedback from their partner” (p. 617). Thus it can be hypothesized that autonomy and partner understanding work synergistically in facilitating relational intimacy, and that autonomy is necessary for the full impact of partner understanding to influence intimacy in marital relationships.

Based upon the research and literature reviewed, it was hypothesized that understanding as assessed by COA and autonomy as defined by SDT represent a major portion of the variables involved in the facilitation of relational intimacy in married couples. In spite of the number of sources found supporting the relationship between partner understanding, autonomy, and intimacy, no studies have been found which assess the relationship between these variables within a single study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Both autonomy and the ability to understand one's partner are important factors in the development of relational intimacy in dyadic relationships (Ryan & Deci, 2006; Pollmann & Finkenauer, 2009; Sanderson & Cantor, 2001). This chapter presents the methodology which was used to evaluate the correlation between autonomy, partner understanding and the relational intimacy reported by married couples.

Research Design

This study utilized a cross-sectional correlational design to examine the correlation between the independent variables Autonomy, and Partner Understanding, and one dependent variable, Intimacy, in a sample of heterosexual married couples. The study was conducted to determine if Autonomy and Partner Understanding were significant predictors of Intimacy. Cross-sectional designed studies are used to evaluate subjects' current circumstances or characteristics and are suitable for correlational assessments (Kazdin, 2003). Correlational assessments (e.g., bivariate, multiple regression), can be used to determine if independent variables significantly predict a dependent variable (Licht, 1995).

Selection of Participants

To differentiate from similar studies examining personality traits and intimacy, but which utilized college students as participants (Engel, Olson, & Patrick, 2002; Stern, 1999; White, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 2004), the researcher recruited participants from suburban Midwestern churches. It was expected the sample of participants would include couples with longer relationships than college student samples used in other studies and

would therefore be a better representation of intimacy experienced by married couples. Church leaders at selected churches were given a copy of the Letter to Church Leader (Appendix B), which provided a brief description of the study and listed the tasks to be completed by the church leader if he or she agreed to assist with the study. If the church leader agreed to help with the study, he or she agreed to read and/or post the Research Study Announcement (Appendix C) during church services, meetings, or events. The church leader also agreed to collect the names and contact information of participants using the Name/Contact Information form (Appendix D), and distribute questionnaire packets provided by the researcher to all couples who volunteered to participate. Church leaders also agreed to destroy the Name/Contact Information form six months after the study completion date. Church leaders agreed to make the overall study results available to participants. The overall study results will be provided to the church leader by the researcher.

Participants were married couples who volunteered to complete a packet of questionnaires distributed by the church leader. Participants signed the Name/Contact Information form provided by the church leader and provided their contact information. Upon completion of the questionnaires in the packet, participants returned the packets to the church leader, and the packets were stored in a secure place. The packets were later picked up by the researcher. On the consent form included in the packet, participants were provided the address and contact information of local professional counseling agencies. In the event that participants experienced an emotional disturbance as a result of participating in the study, they were instructed to contact one of the counseling

agencies to address their needs. Only churches within driving distance of one of the counseling agency offices were contacted to participate in this study. After final approval of the dissertation committee overall results will be provided to each church leader. If participants desire their individual results from the study they may contact the researcher directly through the email address provided.

Instrumentation

Participants received a questionnaire packet containing a consent form (Appendix E) and the following questionnaires: a Demographic Information form (Appendix A), the Self-Determination Scale (SDS), the NEO-FFI-3 form S, the NEO-FFI-3 form R, and the Intimate Safety Questionnaire (ISQ). At the time of this writing the SDS is available online at <http://www.selfdeterminationtheory.org/>, the NEO-FFI-3 forms available from Psychological Assessment Resources Inc. at www.parinc.com, and the ISQ available from Clark University at <http://www.clarku.edu/research/coupleslab/resources.htm>.

Demographic information. Participants completed a demographic information form which included questions regarding gender, age, race/ethnicity, and education level. Additionally, since intimacy develops over time (Prager, 1995; Reis & Patrick, 1996), the demographic information form contained questions related to marriage duration including number of times married and length of current marriage in years.

The Self-Determination Scale. The Self-Determination Scale (SDS) was used to assess trait autonomy as defined by Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Sheldon et al., 1996). SDT defines autonomy as the intrinsic motivation to act in a way endorsed by the whole self, fully chosen and determined by one's self. The SDS is a 10-item scale with

two 5-item subscales. The first subscale is Self-Contact (i.e., consciousness of oneself), and the second is Choicefulness, defined as perceived choice of one's behaviors (Sheldon et al., 1996). Participants selected a score on a Likert-type scale (1-5) to choose which of two statements is more true. For example, "My emotions sometimes seem alien to me" versus "My emotions always seem to belong to me" is an item on the Self-Contact subscale. An item on the Choicefulness subscale is, "I always feel like I choose the things I do" versus "I sometimes feel that it's not really me choosing the things I do." Items on the Choicefulness subscale are reverse scored so a higher score represents a higher level of autonomy. According to Sheldon et al. (1996) "the scale has good internal consistency (alphas ranging from .85 to .93 in numerous samples) and adequate test-retest reliability ($r = .77$ over an 8-week period)" (p. 1273). Research has shown the SDS to be a strong predictor of positive mental health factors including empathy, life satisfaction, creativity, and resistance to peer pressure (Grow, Sheldon, & Ryan, 1994; Sheldon, 1995; Sheldon & Deci, 1996; as cited in Sheldon et al., 1996) and autonomy of individuals in romantic relationships (Knee et al., 2005).

NEO Five-Factor Inventory-3. The NEO Five-Factor Inventory-3 (NEO-FFI-3) is a shortened form (60 items) of the NEO-PI-3 (240 items), which assesses personality traits along five primary domains: Neuroticism (N), Extraversion (E), Openness (O), Agreeableness (A), and Conscientiousness (C) (McCrae & Costa, 2010). The NEO-FFI-3 domain scale scores show a high correlation to the full version NEO-PI-3 scales ($N = .93$, $E = .91$, $O = .90$, $A = .93$, and $C = .93$) and internal consistency ranging from .77 (O) to .88 (C). The NEO-FFI-3 is a copyrighted instrument available from Psychological

Assessment Resources (PAR: <http://www4.parinc.com/>) in a self-report form (form S) and a rater report (form R). Form S was used as a self-report form to assess one's personality around the five primary personality domains. Form R was used as a rater (i.e., observer) report to measure an individual's perspective of his or her partner's personality. Each participant completed an NEO-FFI-3 form S (self-report) and form R (rater report). Each participant's rater report scale scores were compared to his or her partner's self-report scale scores and an Index of Profile Agreement coefficient (IPA) was calculated. The IPA is a measure of correlation between one's self-report and the partner's rater report with a larger IPA representing a greater understanding one has of partner personality, motivations, and needs (Piedmont, 1998). The IPA ranges between zero and one, similar to a correlation coefficient, but calculates correlation taking into consideration both the magnitude and pattern of discrepancies between self and rater scores (McCrae, 2008).

Intimate Safety Questionnaire (ISQ). The Intimate Safety Questionnaire (ISQ) is a 28-item instrument which was used to measure intimacy. The ISQ was designed to assess the level of intimate safety experienced by individuals in a dyadic relationship. According to Cordova (2002), intimate safety develops through a process of behavioral reinforcement when one reinforces the vulnerable behavior of his or her partner rather than reacting in a way that is experienced as punishment. Interpersonal vulnerable behavior that is reinforced will increase. As the interactive process of reinforced vulnerable behavior unfolds, felt safety is experienced and relationship intimacy increases. Items on the ISQ include "When I am with my partner I feel safe and

comfortable,” “I feel comfortable telling my partner when I’m feeling scared/anxious,” and “I am comfortable being physically affectionate with my partner.” Participants rated each statement on a 5-point scale (0 = *Never* to 4 = *Always*). The ISQ has been shown to be significantly correlated with the Global Distress Scale of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (Snyder, 1979), the Marital Status Inventory (Weiss & Cerreto, 1980), and partner’s attachment styles (Hazan & Shaver, 1990). The ISQ has been shown to be a reliable predictor of marital intimacy (Cordova et al., 2005; Mirgain & Cordova, 2007). Mirgain and Cordova (2007) report the ISQ has internal reliability alphas of .93 for men and .96 for women with test-retest reliability over a one-month period of .83 for men and .92 for women.

Research Procedures

A request for approval of this research study was submitted to Liberty University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). To request their assistance in the study, a copy of the Letter to Church Leaders was emailed to church leaders at churches within driving distance of one of the counseling agencies listed on the Consent form. A copy of the Research Study Announcement and an appropriate number of questionnaire packets was delivered to church leaders who agreed to assist with the study. The church leaders agreed to read and/or post the Research Study Announcement to church attendees and distribute questionnaire packets to individuals who were willing to participate in the study. Church leaders assured participants signed the Name/Contact Information form. Once IRB approved the study, the researcher contacted church leaders and provided them with the questionnaire packets, which the church leaders distributed to the study

participants. Upon completion of the questionnaires, participants returned them back to the church leader who stored them in a secure location. The packets were then picked up by the researcher and stored in a secure location. Questionnaire responses were entered into a statistical software program for evaluation and the results reported in Chapter Four of the study.

Research Hypotheses

This study was designed to examine the relationship between autonomy, partner understanding, and relational intimacy in married couples. Autonomy is an important factor for individual well-being and relationship health (Ryan & Deci, 2006). Understanding one's partner provides the framework for intimacy to develop and the process by which intimacy unfolds in relationships (Reis & Patrick, 1996). Personality traits are enduring intrapersonal factors that can have an influence on the quality of one's relationship with an intimate partner (Piedmont, 1998). However, Neuroticism and Agreeableness have shown the most profound impact upon interpersonal relationships (Donnellan et al., 2004), while the remaining three trait domains (i.e., Extraversion, Openness, Conscientiousness) have shown mixed results (Bouchard et al., 1999; Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Kosek, 1996; Rogge et al., 2006). Based upon the importance of personality traits, autonomy, and partner understanding in the development of relational intimacy, the following hypotheses were proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Neuroticism is significantly inversely correlated with intimacy. More specifically, individuals reporting higher Neuroticism will also report less intimacy experienced in their marital relationship.

Null Hypothesis 1: There is no correlation between Neuroticism and intimacy.

Hypothesis 2: Agreeableness is significantly correlated with intimacy. More specifically, individuals reporting higher Agreeableness will also report higher levels of intimacy experienced in their marital relationship.

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no correlation between Agreeableness and intimacy.

Hypothesis 3: Extraversion is not significantly correlated with intimacy.

Null Hypothesis 3: Extraversion is significantly correlated with intimacy.

Hypothesis 4: Openness is not significantly correlated with intimacy.

Null Hypothesis 4: Openness is significantly correlated with intimacy.

Hypothesis 5: Conscientiousness is not significantly correlated with intimacy.

Null Hypothesis 5: Conscientiousness is significantly correlated with intimacy.

Hypothesis 6: Self-reported autonomy is significantly correlated with self-reported intimacy after controlling for personality. More specifically, individuals reporting higher autonomy will also report higher levels of intimacy experienced in their marital relationship after statistically controlling for both self-reported and spouse self-reported personality traits.

Null Hypothesis 6: There is no correlation between self-reported autonomy and self-reported intimacy.

Hypothesis 7: Partner understanding is significantly correlated with self-reported intimacy after controlling for personality. More specifically, individuals with lower discrepancy between their partner's rater-report on the NEO-FFI-3 and their own self-

report, will report higher levels of intimacy experienced in their marital relationship after statistically controlling for both self-reported and spouse self-reported personality traits.

Null Hypothesis 7: Partner understanding is not correlated to self-reported intimacy.

Data Processing and Analysis

Three research questions were examined in this study. First, Do Personality, Partner Understanding, and Autonomy correlate with Intimacy? A zero-order correlation was used to address the first research question. The second research question was addressed for each spouse using a hierarchical multiple regression analysis to determine if self-reported Autonomy correlated with self-reported Intimacy experienced in the marriage after controlling for both self-reported Personality and Partner Personality. The third research question was also addressed for each spouse using a hierarchical multiple regression analysis to determine if Partner Understanding, as determined by COA, correlated with the Partner Intimacy in the marriage after controlling for both self-reported Personality and Partner Personality.

Personality traits can have an enduring influence on psychological and relationship health (McCrae & Costa, 2003). McCrae and Costa (2010) describe Neuroticism as the most pervasive personality trait, and Donnellan et al. (2004) have suggested Agreeableness may be as important as Neuroticism in its influence on the health of close relationships. Research has also shown Extraversion, Openness, and Conscientiousness to be related to marital health (Botwin et al., 1997; Watson et al., 2000). Due to the possibility of all five personality traits of each individual and spouse

personality traits to have an influence on the level of intimacy experienced in the marital relationship, the potential influence of traits was statistically controlled for in the study. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed on the scores for each spouse.

To address the second research question, self-reported Intimacy was regressed upon self-reported Autonomy after controlling for both Personality and Partner Personality. To address the third research question, self-reported Intimacy was regressed upon Partner Understanding after controlling for both Personality and Partner Personality. For example, the husband's Partner Understanding will be an Index of Profile Agreement (IPA), which is a congruence coefficient obtained by calculating the extent to which his rater report scores and his wife's self-report scores on the NEO-FFI-3 are similar (Piedmont & Rodgerson, 2013). The IPA reflects both the distance between the rater and self-report assessments, and the extremeness of their mean, and has been found to be the preferred method when computing correlations between rater and self-reports of the five trait domains scored in the NEO-FFI-3 (McCrae, 2008).

Summary

In summary, this chapter discussed the methods that were used to complete the study. The research design was discussed, which included an explanation of how participants were selected and the instruments used to assess the variables. The research hypotheses and research procedures were presented. Finally, the data processing and analysis section described the research questions and statistical procedures that were used to assess the data.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between autonomy, partner understanding, and relational intimacy in a sample of heterosexual married couples. This chapter presents the results of the statistical analysis of the three research questions guiding this study along with their corresponding hypotheses. Chapter Four ends with a summary of the findings.

Demographics

A total of 112 heterosexual married couples (224 individuals) participated in the study. However, during scoring six questionnaire packets were rejected from inclusion in the final data due to missing entire questionnaires in the returned packet, or omitting a substantial number of responses on questionnaires. A total of 106 couple questionnaire packets (212 individuals) were included in the final data for this study. Bivariate correlation was used to analyze the demographic data (see Table 2) to ensure no significant correlations between variables exist which could introduce statistical error into the study. No statistically significant relationships were found between demographic variables.

Research Question One

The first of three research questions guiding this study is: “Do Personality, Partner Understanding, and Autonomy correlate with Intimacy?” Bivariate correlation analysis was used to evaluate the variables.

Table 2

Demographic Frequencies of Participant Sample

Demographic	Type	<i>n</i>	Percentage
Gender	Female	106	50%
	Male	106	50%
Age	<24	7	3.3%
	25-29	22	10.4%
	30-39	42	19.8%
	40-49	54	25.5%
	50-59	66	31.1%
	60-69	17	8.0%
	70+	4	1.9%
Ethnic/racial group	African American	2	0.9%
	Hispanic	3	1.4%
	American Indian	2	0.9%
	Caucasian	204	96.2%
	Other	1	0.5%
Highest Education Completed	High school	65	30.7%
	2-year college	30	14.2%
	4-year college	75	35.4%
	Graduate school	42	19.8%
Number times married	1	155	73.1%
	2	32	15.1%
	3+	24	11.3%
Years in current marriage	<2	19	9.0%
	2-5	26	12.3%
	6-10	40	18.9%
	11-19	43	20.3%
	20-29	38	17.9%
	30-39	36	17.0%
	40+	10	4.7%

Personality

It was hypothesized there would be a negative correlation between Neuroticism and Intimacy, and a positive correlation between Agreeableness and Intimacy. Results (see Table 3) show Neuroticism was negatively correlated with Intimacy ($r = -.308, p < .01$), and as expected, Agreeableness ($r = .247, p < .01$) was significantly predictive of Intimacy. Also as hypothesized, Openness and Conscientiousness were not statistically significant predictors of Intimacy. It was hypothesized Extraversion would not be significantly correlated with Intimacy. Surprisingly, Extraversion ($r = .244, p < .01$) was shown to be significantly predictive of Intimacy.

Partner Understanding

It was hypothesized Partner Understanding would be significantly correlated with Intimacy. Partner Understanding was calculated using Cross Observer Analysis to compare rater-report personality domain scores with partner self-report personality domain scores (Piedmont, 1998). Greater Partner Understanding is reflected by a higher match between rater scores and self-reported partner scores. Results show Partner Understanding ($r = .098, p < .05$) was not significantly correlated with Intimacy.

Autonomy

It was hypothesized Autonomy would be significantly correlated with Intimacy after statistically controlling for Personality and Partner Personality. Consistent with Self-Determination theory, which maintains Autonomy supports healthy relationship factors, Autonomy ($r = .328, p < .01$) was shown to be a significant predictor of Intimacy.

Autonomy showed the highest correlation with Intimacy among all variables in the correlation matrix.

Table 3

Correlations of Intimacy with measures of Personality, Partner Understanding, and Autonomy

	N	E	O	A	C	PAU	AUT	INT
N	1							
E	-.451**	1						
O	-.025	.168*	1					
A	-.232**	.174*	.047	1				
C	-.198**	.046	.069	.055	1			
PAU	-.144*	.121	.029	.165*	.132	1		
AUT	-.133	.011	.022	.066	.113	.094	1	
INT	-.308**	.244**	.069	.247**	.081	.098	.328**	1

Note. N= Neuroticism; E=Extraversion; O=Openness; A=Agreeableness;

C=Conscientiousness; PAU=Partner Understanding; AUT=Autonomy; INT=Intimacy.

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$

Research Question Two

The second research question is: “Does self-reported Autonomy correlate with self-reported Intimacy experienced in the marriage after controlling for Personality?” It was hypothesized there would be a significant correlation between Autonomy and Intimacy after statistically controlling for the five domains of self-reported Personality and the five domains of self-reported Partner Personality.

Regression Analysis

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis (see Table 4) revealed all independent variables accounted for a little over 22% of the variance in the dependent variable Intimacy. Each of the three steps in the regression were statistically significant ($R^2 = .140$, $\Delta R^2 = .049$, and $\Delta R^2 = .032$) respectively. In the first step, Intimacy was regressed on Personality, which includes the five personality domains (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness). Results show self-reported Personality ($R^2 = .140$) predicts approximately 14% of the variance in Intimacy.

In the second step, Intimacy was regressed on Partner Personality which includes the five domains of personality from the partner’s self-report personality assessment. Although not as strong of a predictor as self-reported Personality, Partner Personality ($\Delta R^2 = .049$) accounted for approximately 5% of the unique variance in Intimacy. As expected, the combined influence of both Personality and Partner Personality ($R^2 = .189$) accounts for a statistically significant amount, about 19%, of the unique variance in Intimacy.

The third and final step of the regression analysis regressed Intimacy on Autonomy. Autonomy ($\Delta R^2 = .032$) accounts for a statistically significant amount of the variance in Intimacy, approximately 3%, after controlling for Personality and Partner Personality. Further analysis is needed to determine the unique variance in Intimacy accounted for by the five individual Personality and Partner Personality domains, and Autonomy.

Unique Variance

To determine unique variance, Standardized Beta Coefficients (β) should be used when the independent variables in a multiple regression analysis utilize different scales of measurement (Keith, 2006). Standardized Beta Coefficients are reported in standard deviation units allowing comparison across variables with differing raw score metrics.

Table 4

Hierarchical Regression Predicting Unique Variances on Intimacy

Step and predictor variable	R^2	ΔR^2	F Change
Step 1	0.140**	0.140**	6.702**
Neuroticism			
Extraversion			
Openness			
Agreeableness			
Conscientiousness			
Step 2	0.189*	0.049*	2.409*
Partner Neuroticism			
Partner Extraversion			
Partner Openness			
Partner Agreeableness			
Partner Conscientiousness			
Step 3	0.221*	0.032*	3.237*
Autonomy			

Dependent Variable: Intimacy

** $p \leq .001$ * $p \leq .05$

In this study, Personality and Partner Personality were assessed using the NEO-FFI-3 instruments. Autonomy was assessed using the Self-Determination Scale, which utilizes different metrics than the NEO-FFI-3 instruments. Standardized Beta Coefficients (see Table 5) were examined. Review of the five Personality domains shows Agreeableness ($\beta = 0.170, t = 2.588$) to be a significant predictor of Intimacy. Surprisingly, Neuroticism ($\beta = -.125, t = -1.575$) was not a significant predictor of Intimacy in the third step of this regression. The remaining three Personality domains (Extraversion, Openness, and Conscientiousness) were also not significant predictors of Intimacy. Results show Autonomy ($\beta = .204, t = 2.870$) to be the largest unique predictor of Intimacy in the regression.

Table 5

Standardized Beta Coefficients Regression Analysis Predicting the Unique Variances on Intimacy after Accounting for Self and Partner Personality

Variable	β	t	Sig.
Neuroticism	-.125	-1.575	.117
Extraversion	.119	1.630	.105
Openness	.023	.344	.731
Agreeableness	.170*	2.588*	.010*
Conscientiousness	-.010	-.151	.880
Partner Neuroticism	-.125	-1.639	.103
Partner Extraversion	.043	.599	.550
Partner Openness	.052	.778	.437
Partner Agreeableness	.039	.595	.553
Partner Conscientiousness	.056	.853	.394
Autonomy	.204*	2.870*	.005*

Dependent Variable: Intimacy

* $p < .05$

Research Question Three

Research question three is: “Does Partner Understanding, as determined by COA, correlate with Partner Intimacy reported in the marriage after controlling for Personality?” It was anticipated there would be a significant correlation between Partner Understanding and Partner Intimacy after statistically controlling for both self-reported personality domains and partner self-reported personality domains. The third and final step of the regression analysis regressed Partner Intimacy on Partner Understanding.

Regression Analysis

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis (see Table 6) revealed all independent variables accounted for about 19% of the variance in the dependent variable Partner Intimacy. Only Step 1 (Personality) and Step 2 (Partner Personality) were statistically significant. In the first step, Intimacy was regressed on Personality, which includes the five personality domains (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness). Results show self-reported Personality ($R^2 = .053$) predicts approximately 5% of the variance in Intimacy.

Table 6

Hierarchical Regression Predicting Unique Variances on Partner Intimacy

Step and predictor variable	R^2	ΔR^2	F Change
Step 1	0.053*	0.053*	2.285*
Neuroticism			
Extraversion			
Openness			
Agreeableness			
Conscientiousness			
Step 2	0.189*	0.136*	6.737*
Partner Neuroticism			
Partner Extraversion			
Partner Openness			
Partner Agreeableness			
Partner Conscientiousness			
Step 3	0.189	0.000	0.026
Partner Understanding			

 Dependent Variable: Partner Intimacy
* $p \leq .05$

In the second step, Partner Intimacy was regressed on Partner Personality, which represents the five domains of personality from the partner's self-report personality assessment. In this regression, Partner Personality ($\Delta R^2 = .136$) was shown to be the largest predictor (13.6%) of the unique variance in Partner Intimacy. As expected, the combined influence of both Personality and Partner Personality accounts for a statistically significant amount of the variance in Partner Intimacy. The third and final step of the regression analysis regressed Partner Intimacy on Partner Understanding. Partner Understanding ($\Delta R^2 = .000$) did not account for a significant amount of the variance in Partner Intimacy after statistically controlling for Personality and Partner Personality. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis revealed all independent variables accounted for approximately 19% of the variance in the dependent variable Partner Intimacy. Further analysis is needed to determine the unique variance in Partner Intimacy accounted for by the five domains of Personality, Partner Personality, and Partner Understanding.

Unique Variance

To determine unique variance, Standardized Beta Coefficients (β) were examined (see Table 7). Review of the five Personality domains shows Neuroticism ($\beta = -.157, t = -2.037$) to be a significant predictor of Partner Intimacy. The remaining four Personality domains (Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness) were not significant predictors of Partner Intimacy.

Standardized Beta Coefficients for Partner Personality domains were examined next. Partner Neuroticism ($\beta = -.192, t = -2.484$), and Partner Agreeableness ($\beta = .179, t$

= 2.662) were both shown to be significant predictors of Partner Intimacy. Partner Neuroticism was negatively correlated with Partner Intimacy and the largest predictor of Partner Intimacy in the regression. However, the remaining three Partner Personality domains (Partner Extraversion, Partner Openness, and Partner Conscientiousness) were not significant predictors of Partner Intimacy. Results show Partner Understanding ($\beta = -.011$, $t = -.163$) was not a statistically significant predictor of Intimacy.

Table 7

Standardized Beta Coefficients Regression Analysis Predicting the Unique Variances on Partner Intimacy after Accounting for Self and Partner Personality

Variable	β	t	Sig.
Neuroticism	-.157*	-2.037*	.043*
Extraversion	.038	.509	.611
Openness	.046	.678	.498
Agreeableness	.047	.705	.482
Conscientiousness	.068	1.010	.314
Partner Neuroticism	-.192*	-2.484*	.014*
Partner Extraversion	.141	1.897	.059
Partner Openness	-.005	-.072	.942
Partner Agreeableness	.179*	2.662*	.008*
Partner Conscientiousness	.020	.293	.770
Partner Understanding	-.011	-.163	.871

Dependent Variable: Partner Intimacy

*p<.05

Summary

A participant sample of 106 married couples was used in this study. Bivariate correlation analysis was utilized to answer the first research question: “Do Personality, Partner Understanding, and Autonomy correlate with Intimacy?” Results showed Agreeableness, Extraversion, and Autonomy to be significantly correlated with Intimacy. Neuroticism was shown to be negatively correlated with Intimacy, while the remaining Personality domains and Partner Understanding were not significant predictors of Intimacy.

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was utilized to examine the second research question: “Does self-reported Autonomy correlate with self-reported Intimacy experienced in the marriage after controlling for Personality?” Autonomy was determined to be a significant predictor of Intimacy after controlling for Personality domains and Partner Personality domains.

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was also utilized to examine the third research question: “Does Partner Understanding, as determined by COA, correlate with Partner Intimacy reported in the marriage after controlling for Personality?” Results show Partner Understanding is not a significant predictor of Partner Intimacy. Further discussion of the results are given in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Close interpersonal relationships are an important part of well-being. Various views exist regarding the constructs that form relational intimacy (Fincham & Beach, 2010; Karney, 2007; Prager, 1995; Reis, 1990; Wright et al., 2007; Young, 2004). Reis and Patrick (1996) describe intimacy as a process which develops when two people share a relationship described as caring, validating, and understanding.

Autonomy has been linked to the expression of care and validation within interpersonal relationships (Blais et al., 1990; La Guardia & Patrick, 2008; Weinstein et al., 2010) and partner understanding has been identified as a key factor in relational intimacy (Chelune et al., 1984; Clark & Reis, 1988; Cross & Gore, 2004; Derlega, 1984; Duck, 1994; Laurenceau et al., 2004; Prager, 1995; Prager & Roberts, 2004; Reis et al., 2004; Roberts & Greenberg, 2002). Individual personality traits have also been shown to influence interpersonal relationship quality (Dyrenforth et al., 2010; Holland & Roisman, 2008; Robins et al., 2000; Shiota & Levenson, 2007; White et al., 2004), and can have a major impact on relationship health (Piedmont, 1998). Although closeness within interpersonal relationships has been shown to be related to autonomy, partner understanding, and individual personality traits, no studies have been found that assess the relationship between autonomy, partner understanding, and intimacy while controlling for personality traits in marital relationships.

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between Autonomy, Partner Understanding as measured by COA, and relational Intimacy in heterosexual married couples. The study was guided by the following three research questions:

1. Do Personality, Partner Understanding, and Autonomy correlate with Intimacy?
2. Does self-reported Autonomy correlate with self-reported Intimacy experienced in the marriage after controlling for Personality?
3. Does Partner Understanding, as determined by COA, correlate with the partner's Intimacy reported in the marriage after controlling for Personality?

Research Question One

The first research question addressed was: “Do Personality, Partner Understanding, and Autonomy correlate with Intimacy?” It was hypothesized some of the five domains of personality, Partner Understanding, and Autonomy, would be significantly correlated with intimacy in the marital relationships of the participant sample. Bivariate correlation was used to assess the relationship between variables. A correlation matrix was developed and results presented in Table 3 in the previous chapter.

Personality

Although there has been disagreement regarding the stability of personality throughout an individual lifespan (Roberts & Mroczek, 2008), McCrae and Costa (2003) argue personality traits are relatively enduring across lifespan development and much of the variance assessed in traits at different time periods reflect variance in trait expression as life roles and environments change, but are not a reflection of change in traits. Due to their relative stability and permanence throughout the lifespan, personality traits were statistically controlled when examining the relationship between Autonomy, Partner Understanding, and Intimacy in this study. Direct correlations between Personality, Partner Personality, and Intimacy were also examined.

Neuroticism. Although results are mixed when comparing all traits, previous research has shown Neuroticism to consistently be the most pervasive personality trait affecting relationship factors (Karney & Bradbury, 1995, 1997; Robins et al., 2000; Rogge et al., 2006). This study shows Neuroticism ($r = -.308$) was negatively correlated with Intimacy, and statistically the most influential personality trait predictive of Intimacy. This means participants reporting higher levels of Neuroticism reported lower levels of Intimacy, and conversely, those reporting lower levels of Neuroticism reported higher levels of Intimacy experienced in their marriage. McCrae and Costa (2003) describe those reporting lower levels of Neuroticism as emotionally steady, composed, and easy-going and during difficult circumstances are less likely to become distressed, anxious, or emotionally distraught. Therefore the results in this study are consistent with previous research showing individuals scoring higher in Neuroticism would also be expected to score lower in Intimacy.

Agreeableness. Individuals scoring high in Agreeableness are described as altruistic, sympathetic, helpful, and cooperative with others (McCrae & Costa, 2003). Previous research has shown Agreeableness to be significantly related to marital satisfaction (Botwin et al., 1997; Donnellan et al., 2004; Kosek, 1996; Watson et al., 2000). Donnellan et al. (2004) suggest agreeable spouses may better manage intrapersonal emotional tension, thus lowering the frequency and/or intensity of relational conflict, which in turn would support relational intimacy in the marriage. They also suggest Agreeableness may be as influential as Neuroticism on relational health. As was hypothesized in this study, Agreeableness ($r = .247$) showed significant statistical

correlation with Intimacy, which coincides with previous research. Participants reporting higher levels of Agreeableness also reported higher levels of Intimacy in their marriage.

Extraversion. Previous research assessing the correlation between Extraversion and factors of marital health have been mixed with a few studies showing significant positive correlation (Lazarides et al., 2010; Watson et al., 2000), while others have found no significant correlation (Bouchard et al., 1999; Gattis et al., 2004). Extroverts are described as sociable, active, talkative, and preferring large gatherings of people over being alone (McCrae & Costa, 2003). Based upon previous mixed results in the literature, it was hypothesized Extraversion would not be significantly correlated with Intimacy. However, results in this study showed Extraversion ($r = .244$) to be significantly correlated with Intimacy. Participants reporting higher levels of Extraversion also reported higher levels of Intimacy in their marriage. Surprisingly, the strength of the correlation between Extraversion and Intimacy (.244) was very close to the correlation results between Agreeableness and Intimacy in this study (.247). A possible explanation for this similarity in the strength of the correlation results could be the number of items within the Intimate Safety Questionnaire (ISQ) that relate closely to both Agreeableness and Extraversion as assessed by the NEO-FFI-3. McCrae and Costa (2003) describe those scoring higher in Agreeableness as altruistic, sympathetic, helpful, and cooperative with others. The ISQ includes questions related to these Agreeableness factors such as, “When I need to cry I go to my partner,” “When I am with my partner I feel safe and comfortable,” and the reverse scored “When I am with my partner I feel anxious, like I’m walking on eggshells.” McCrae and Costa (2003) describe extroverts as

sociable and talkative, and likewise, the ISQ includes items related to these factors of Extraversion such as, “I like to tell my partner about my day,” “I feel comfortable telling my partner things I would not tell anyone else,” and “When things aren’t going well for me, it’s comforting to talk to my partner.”

Openness. McCrae and Costa (2003) describe individuals scoring high on Openness as curious, willing to consider and accept new ideas or experiences, having greater aesthetic sensitivity, and an active imagination. As with Extraversion, Openness has shown mixed results in relation to factors of marital health in previous research (Donnellan et al., 2004; Gattis et al., 2004; Watson et al., 2000; White et al., 2004). Bouchard et al. (1999) found husband’s Openness to be significantly correlated with wife’s dyadic adjustment, but the wife’s Openness did not significantly influence husband’s adjustment, and proposed that Openness may be more valued by women than men. In contrast, Bouchard and Arseneault (2005) found wife’s Openness to have a significant positive influence on husband’s dyadic adjustment in the earlier years of the relationship, but then reverses as the years pass, and wife’s Openness has a negative impact on husband’s adjustment later in the relationship. Bouchard and Arseneault (2005) suggest Openness in the earlier years, as the relationship is developing, facilitates a deeper knowledge of each other. However, as the relationship continues, partners can become more critical of each other and Openness could promote more negative interactions. Due to the mixed results in previous research, it was hypothesized Openness would not be significantly related to Intimacy. Results supported the

hypothesis and showed Openness ($r = .069$) was not significantly correlated with Intimacy.

Conscientiousness. McCrae and Costa (2003) describe individuals scoring high on Conscientiousness as those who would be better at controlling impulses, planning ahead, being determined, staying organized, and be more successful in carrying out tasks. Similar to Extraversion and Openness, Conscientiousness has also shown mixed results in correlation to factors of marital health (Botwin et al., 1997; Bouchard et al., 1999; Gattis et al., 2004; Rogge et al., 2006). Donnellan et al. (2004) found Conscientiousness to be correlated with relationship satisfaction, but with only slightly significant results. Watson et al. (2000) found Conscientiousness to be a significant predictor of satisfaction in dating couples, but have low association with satisfaction in married couples. Due to mixed results in previous research, it was hypothesized Conscientiousness would not be significantly correlated with Intimacy. Results for this study show Conscientiousness ($r = .081$) was not significantly correlated with Intimacy, thus the hypothesis was supported.

Partner Understanding

It was hypothesized Partner Understanding would be correlated with Intimacy. Understanding one's partner influences multiple factors related to intimacy including validation (Laurenceau et al., 2005; Reis & Shaver, 1988), appropriate self-disclosure (Chelune et al., 1984), perceiving and accepting partner's true self, caring, and helpful support (Reis & Patrick, 1996), comprehending the underlying meanings of partner communication (Duck, 1994), and affirmation of partner's self-perceptions (Reis et al.,

2004). However, the results of this study showed Partner Understanding was not significantly correlated with self-reported Intimacy in the marital relationship.

It is not fully understood why Partner Understanding did not show a higher correlation with Intimacy. Partner Understanding was not a significant predictor of Intimacy in this study, however, Partner Understanding could be a moderating variable which influences other factors correlated with Intimacy. As previously stated, validation is an important factor in the process of intimacy. Derlega (1984) suggests interactions are seen as validating when people perceive they are seen by others as they see themselves (p. 4). The validation of self facilitates intimacy, but partner validation is not possible without a minimal amount of understanding of the partner's true self. Partner Understanding could moderate the intensity of validating interactions and influence whether the interaction is experienced as validating. In order for interactions to be validating, care for one's partner must also be present. Without care, Prager (1995) points out the increased knowledge from understanding can be used to "hurt and humiliate" the interactive partner (p. 53). Therefore, increased understanding of one's partner could also contribute to greater relational conflict and deeper emotional hurt. It is possible Partner Understanding alone does not contribute to intimacy, but could moderate other variables which do predict intimacy.

Autonomy

Autonomy is the intrinsic motivation to act in a way endorsed by the whole self, fully chosen and determined by one's self. Autonomy is the expression of self-

governance as opposed to being coerced, manipulated, or controlled by others and has been shown to be related to factors that contribute to intimacy (Ryan & Deci, 2006).

It was hypothesized Autonomy would be a significant predictor of Intimacy. Bivariate correlation results showed Autonomy to be significantly correlated with Intimacy which is consistent with other findings that have shown autonomy to be related to empathy and encouragement of partners (Weinstein et al., 2010), and increased commitment, satisfaction, intimacy, and vitality within relationships (La Guardia & Patrick, 2008).

Research Question Two

The second research question was, “Does self-reported Autonomy correlate with self-reported Intimacy experienced in the marriage after controlling for Personality?” It was hypothesized Autonomy would be a significant predictor of Intimacy after statistically controlling for both self-reported personality traits and partner personality traits. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis found that Autonomy was a significant predictor of Intimacy after controlling for Personality and Partner Personality.

Personality

Except for Neuroticism, which has shown fairly consistent results, other personality traits have shown mixed results on factors of marital health (Bouchard & Arseneault, 2005; Holland & Roisman, 2008; O’Rourke et al., 2010; Watson et al., 2000; White et al., 2004). Despite the inconsistencies between results for individual traits, researchers agree that personality as a whole is an influential aspect of how one experiences the marital relationship (Kosek, 1996; Piedmont, 1998; Robins et al., 2000;

Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2002). Donnellan et al. (2004) state, “Personality traits shape the psychological infrastructure of the marriage from very early on in the relationship and this dynamic then persists as a relatively enduring aspect of the relationship” (p. 500). Robins et al. (2002) suggest personality to be an enduring influence on relationship quality, which contributes to the recreation of similar relationship dynamics across multiple relationships with different partners. Due to the strong influence of personality on relationship factors, this study statistically controlled for Personality and Partner Personality traits when examining the relationship between Autonomy and Intimacy.

In the first step of the regression, Personality traits (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness) were entered and results show they account for approximately 14.0% of the variance in self-reported Intimacy. In other words, a husband’s own personality predicts 14% of the variance in Intimacy he reports experiencing in the marriage. To assess how much each trait predicts Intimacy, Standardized Beta Coefficients were calculated and results show Agreeableness (.170) to be the most predictive trait of Intimacy, even more so than Neuroticism (-.125). Although Neuroticism has shown consistent results in its relationship to factors of marital health, Agreeableness has also proven to be a significant influence (Bouchard et al., 2005; Kosek, 1996; Lazarides et al., 2010; Watson et al., 2000; Whisman et al., 2006; White et al., 2004).

Partner Personality

Although partner personality traits have been shown to be weaker predictors of relationship quality than one’s own personality (Holland & Roisman, 2008; Watson et al.,

2000), multiple studies have shown partner traits consistently influence factors of relationship quality (Botwin et al., 1997; Dyrenforth et al., 2010; Lazarides et al., 2010; O'Rourke et al., 2010; Robins et al., 2000). Due to the consistent influence of partner personality on factors of relationship quality, this study statistically controlled for partner personality traits when examining the relationship between Autonomy and Intimacy.

In the second step of the regression, Partner Personality traits (Partner Neuroticism, Partner Extraversion, Partner Openness, Partner Agreeableness, and Partner Conscientiousness) were entered into the equation. Results show Partner Personality predicts 4.9% of the variance in Intimacy after Personality is accounted for in the regression. The findings are consistent with the previous research mentioned, which suggests partner personality traits (4.9%) are less predictive of marital factors than self-reported traits (14.0%). Standardized Beta Coefficients showed no single partner personality traits were significant predictors of Intimacy.

Autonomy

Autonomy was expected to be a strong predictor of Intimacy. Past studies have shown autonomy to be correlated with several factors of relational health (Blais et al., 1990; Deci & Ryan, 2006; Knee et al., 2002; La Guardia & Patrick, 2008; Weinstein et al., 2010). Autonomy, as defined by SDT, is the choice of self-governance where one makes decisions and choices from a volitional or free-will stance, rather than from a position of manipulation or coercion. Autonomous individuals express more accurately their true selves and convey more genuineness and congruence between their inner selves and how others experience them in relationship. Not only is there more acceptance of

one's true self, but autonomous individuals respect and accept the true selves of others within their interpersonal relationships.

Reis and Patrick (1996) emphasize the importance of validation as a central component in the developmental process of intimacy and define validation as the "perception that an interaction partner values and respects one's inner self and point of view" (p. 550). Autonomous individuals interact in ways that are interpreted by partners as respectful and valuing of the partner's inner self. The process of valuing self and the true self of one's partner facilitates intimacy.

Because of their enduring qualities and resistance to change, personality traits were statistically controlled for in this study to examine the unique contribution of Autonomy on Intimacy variance; therefore, Autonomy was entered into the third step of the regression following Personality and Partner Personality. Consistent with other research, this study found Autonomy to be a significant predictor of Intimacy, and accounted for approximately 3% of the variance in Intimacy after controlling for Personality and Partner Personality traits. To better understand the magnitude of prediction Autonomy has on Intimacy, Standardized Beta Coefficients were calculated. Results show Autonomy had the highest coefficient (.204) of all variables entered, even after statistically controlling for the influence of Personality and Partner Personality on Intimacy variance.

Research Question Three

The third research question was, "Does Partner Understanding, as determined by COA, correlate with the partner's Intimacy reported in the marriage after controlling for

Personality?” It was hypothesized Partner Understanding would be a significant predictor of the partner’s Intimacy after statistically controlling for both self-reported personality traits and partner personality traits. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis found that Partner Understanding was not a significant predictor of partner Intimacy after controlling for Personality and Partner Personality.

Personality

As described in the previous sections addressing research question two, an individual’s personality has been shown to have significant impact on relationship factors experienced by the individual (Kosek, 1996; Piedmont, 1998; Robins et al., 2000, 2002). McCrae and Costa (2003) suggest personality traits are relatively stable across lifespan development. Due to their relative stability throughout the lifespan and influence on relationship factors, personality traits were statistically controlled when examining the relationship between Partner Understanding and Partner Intimacy in this study.

Results of step one of the regression analysis when analyzing research question three showed Personality to predict 5.3% of the variance in Partner Intimacy. Examination of Standardized Beta Coefficients show Neuroticism (-.157) to be the only trait which significantly predicted Partner Intimacy.

Partner Personality

Personality has been shown to have significant impact on relationship factors experienced by the individual (Kosek, 1996; Piedmont, 1998; Robins et al., 2000, 2002). Likewise, partner personality has also shown to be correlated with factors of an individual’s relational experience, although partner personality as a whole has typically

shown to be a weaker predictor of relational factors than self-reported personality traits (Dyrenforth et al., 2010; Holland & Roisman, 2008; Watson et al., 2000). Due to their influence on relationship factors, partner personality traits were statistically controlled when examining the relationship between Partner Understanding and Partner Intimacy in this study.

In the second step of the regression analysis, Partner Intimacy was regressed on Partner Personality. Results show Partner Personality predicted 13.6% of the variance in Partner Intimacy. To determine unique prediction among the Partner Personality traits, Standardized Beta Coefficients were examined. Results show Neuroticism (-.192) and Agreeableness (.179) were significant predictors of Partner Intimacy, which is consistent with previous research reporting the influence of Neuroticism and Agreeableness on factors of marital health (O'Rourke et al., 2010; Watson et al., 2000; Whisman et al., 2006; White et al., 2004).

It is interesting to note the similarities between the regression results for research question two and research question three. For question two regression, the dependent variable was Intimacy. For question three regression, the dependent variable was Partner Intimacy. In both regression equations, self-reported personality traits and partner self-reported personality traits were statistically controlled for. The similarities between the results of these two regression equations can be viewed in Table 8. The percent change in Intimacy variance predicted by Personality is 14.0. A similar result (13.6) was obtained when calculating the percent change in Partner Intimacy predicted by Partner Personality. This similarity is because assessing the relationship between Partner

Intimacy and Partner Personality is essentially the same as assessing the relationship between Intimacy and Personality. Both are assessing the change in self-reported intimacy as predicted by self-reported personality. A similar result can be seen when comparing the percent change in Intimacy as predicted by Partner Personality (4.9), compared to the percent change in Partner Intimacy as predicted by Personality (5.3). Both are assessing how well one's partner's personality predicts self-reported intimacy.

Table 8

Regression of Personality and Partner Personality on Intimacy and Partner Intimacy

Step and predictor variable	Intimacy % Change	Partner Intimacy % Change
Step 1 Personality	14.0	5.3
Step 2 Partner Personality	4.9	13.6

Partner Understanding

Understanding one's partner has been shown to be correlated with multiple factors of relational health (Chelune et al., 1984; Duck, 1994; Laurenceau et al., 2005; Reis & Patrick, 1996; Reis & Shaver, 1988). Due to its influence on marital health, it was hypothesized Partner Understanding would be a significant predictor of Partner Intimacy.

Partner Understanding was entered as the third step in the multiple regression analysis of research question three. Surprisingly, results of the analysis showed that Partner Understanding (0.0%) was not a significant predictor of the variance in Partner Intimacy after statistically controlling for Personality and Partner Personality. Examination of Standardized Beta Coefficients also show Partner Understanding was not a significant predictor of Partner Intimacy.

Clarification for why Partner Understanding was not a significant predictor of Intimacy in this study might be explained by the function of understanding in the interactional process of intimacy. Understanding in close relationships is the belief that one's partner has an accurate impression of one's perceived core self, and the needs, goals, beliefs, and life circumstances are correctly perceived by one's partner (Reis & Patrick, 1996). Intimacy is facilitated by communicative interactions where partners understand each other's true self as understood and defined by self-perception. However, Reis et al. (2004) caution that more than understanding is needed to facilitate positive interactions that contribute to intimacy and emphasize the importance of a sense of supportiveness, caring, and valuation between interaction partners. As previously

mentioned, Partner Understanding could be a moderating variable which influences other factors correlated with Intimacy. Self-disclosure is a key component of communication in close relationships. Laurenceau et al. (2005) suggest partner responsiveness characterized by understanding, accepting, validating, and caring contribute to the interpersonal process of intimacy above and beyond self-disclosure. Reis and Patrick (1996) describe validation as the “central element of the intimacy process,” and define validation as the “perception that an interaction partner values and respects one’s inner self and point of view” (p. 550). Therefore, validation requires both value of one’s partner and partner understanding. Partner Understanding is also an important part of emotional support in close relationships. Nonjudgmental emotional support that conveys understanding is a basic foundation in marital intimacy (Kersten & Himle, 1991). Since understanding one’s partner is an important characteristic of key factors in relational health, it is suggested Partner Understanding could be a moderating variable in some factors of Intimacy as opposed to a primary independent variable as it was assessed in this study.

Implications for Practice

This study provides implications for counseling practice and marital therapy. First, implications related to personality trait assessment could inform practice. Findings in this study are consistent with previous studies showing Neuroticism and Agreeableness to be the primary traits which influence relational factors of marital health. Personality assessment and interpretation conducted by counselors could provide clients insight into personality traits most influential in their interpersonal relationships. Assessment and

interpretation by marital therapists could also provide couples increased insight into partner personality traits important to relational factors. Since personality traits are considered predominantly stable over the adult lifespan (McCrae & Costa, 2003), attempts to change traits should not be the focus of counseling. However, counsel on how to better understand and interact within the context of a relational partner's individual traits could help facilitate relational intimacy. Additionally, increased awareness of one's own traits and how to express those traits in relationally healthy choices could facilitate intimacy within the client's marital relationship.

Second, findings from this study regarding autonomy provide implications for practitioners. Results show Autonomy to be a significant predictor of Intimacy. Autonomous motivation and behavior can be improved over time as an individual determines to make decisions described as more autonomous. Counselors could assess and promote autonomy within their clients. Counselors who identify low levels of autonomous beliefs and behaviors within their clients could help them adjust toward a more autonomous expression of life choices, and help clients support autonomous behavior in their spouses. Autonomous individuals express more accurately their true selves. Counselors could encourage clients to portray an accurate presentation of one's true self within the context of a marital relationship, which would provide the opportunity for increased intimacy within the marriage.

Third, findings from this study regarding understanding one's partner could provide implications for practitioners. Results showed Partner Understanding does not predict Partner Intimacy in marital relationships. The literature suggests partner

understanding is an important contributor to factors of relational health. However, it is important for counselors to note that partner understanding alone is not a significant factor in relational intimacy. Increased understanding can also be utilized by relational partners to inflict greater emotional pain. As counselors work with couples, relational factors other than understanding must be emphasized. Other factors such as improved communication skills, emotional support, care, empathy, and validation should be the primary factors of focus, and partner understanding should be viewed as a supportive aspect of these factors.

Recommendations and Implications for Research

Considering the design and results of this study, there are several recommendations for future research. This study recruited participants from evangelical Christian Midwestern churches, and demographic results show ethnicity of the participant sample to be overwhelmingly Caucasian (96.2%). Future studies could utilize a more ethnically and religiously diverse participant sample. Although it is not known whether participants were receiving outpatient treatment, it is presumed most participants were not receiving treatment at the time of data collection. Future studies could compare both non-clinical participants and those receiving marital therapy services. This study used a cross-sectional correlational design. A longitudinal study may provide more insight into how marital intimacy develops over time, or reveal changes in factors that are influential to the process of marital intimacy through various life experiences.

The variables included and excluded from this study offer another area of recommendation for future research. The literature supports partner understanding as an

influential factor within the process of marital intimacy. However, the results of this study show Partner Understanding was not a significant predictor of Partner Intimacy. It is suggested that future research examine the moderating qualities of Partner Understanding on other factors of marital health including self-disclosure, validation, care, empathy, and emotional support. Future research could also assess the unique contributions to intimacy by other factors closely related to autonomy such as validation, responsiveness, and care.

Additionally, assessment choices in this study pose additional recommendations for future research. Personality, Partner Personality, and Partner Understanding through COA analysis all utilized the short version of the NEO personality inventory (NEO-FFI-3). The long version of the NEO (NEO-PI-3) would collect data on the individual facets of the five personality domains which could provide additional insight on the facet level of the trait factors correlated with intimacy. Finally, all data for this study were collected through self-report and spouse rater report instruments. Future research could employ other forms of assessment including trained observers or rater reports from sources in addition to spouse rater reports.

Limitations of the Study

There were multiple limitations in this study. The participants were primarily evangelical Christian Caucasians living in the Midwestern United States. Results may not be applicable to individuals from other religious and ethnic/cultural backgrounds. The sample size (212) was adequate, but a larger sample size would provide more statistical power. Participants for this study were married couples, so results may not

apply to other forms of intimate relationships (e.g. family, friendships). It is presumed most participants were not receiving marital therapy at the time of data collection, so results may not be applicable to those receiving marital therapy services or couples experiencing high levels of relational dysfunction.

There were limitations related to the instruments used in this study. Data for all variables except Partner Understanding were collected using self-report instruments, which are limited by participant bias. The Self-Determination Scale and Intimate Safety Questionnaire show adequate reliability and validity performance, but previous use of these instruments has been limited to a few studies. The NEO personality inventories were chosen for this study to assess the five domains of personality and have a robust history of use for personality trait assessment. However, this study utilized the NEO-FFI-3 to determine Partner Understanding through COA, and the NEO instruments have had limited use for this purpose.

Summary

This study extended current research on the relationship between Personality, Partner Personality, Autonomy, Partner Understanding, Intimacy, and Partner Intimacy in marital relationships. In the participant sample, Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Agreeableness were significantly correlated with Intimacy. Neuroticism and Agreeableness emerged as the strongest traits related to Intimacy, which is consistent with previous personality trait research. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis showed Autonomy to be a significant predictor of Intimacy experienced in the marital relationship after statistically controlling for Personality and Partner Personality traits. A

second hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between Partner Understanding and Partner Intimacy after statistically controlling for Personality and Partner Personality. Results show Partner Understanding was not a significant predictor of Partner Intimacy.

The findings regarding personality traits support the importance for therapy practitioners to consider the influence personality can have on relationship functioning. Although personality traits are considered enduring and resistant to change, practitioners can help clients increase awareness of their own and their partners' personalities to improve intrapersonal functioning and relational health. The findings also emphasize the importance of autonomous motivation to relational health, which corresponds to previous research showing autonomy supports relationship vitality, satisfaction, and intimacy (Blais et al., 1990; La Guardia & Patrick, 2008). Practitioners should emphasize the importance of autonomy and how it both facilitates the expression of one's true self, and promotes partner expression of true self in relationship functioning. Individuals operating from a less autonomous perspective are more susceptible to manipulation and coercion from others or environmental sources, which hinders the interactional process of intimacy. Unexpectedly, Partner Understanding did not significantly predict Partner Intimacy in the participant sample. Further research will be needed to determine the relationship Partner Understanding has with Partner Intimacy. The prevalence of understanding in the literature suggests understanding one's partner would influence the intimacy experienced by one's partner. It is possible that understanding one's partner goes beyond the ability to identify personality traits and extends to other factors of the

individual (e.g. emotional intelligence, cognitions, core beliefs), which were not assessed in this study. Future research could examine other aspects of knowing and becoming known within interpersonal relationships. Additionally, future research could examine if Partner Understanding plays a moderating role in the relationship between other factors of relational health and the level of intimacy experienced by one's partner. For practitioners, the implications are important. Understanding a partner's personality traits alone does not predict the level of intimacy experienced by the partner. Other relational factors must be considered, which emphasizes the importance for practitioners to look for other factors influencing the interpersonal process of intimacy in marital relationships. Partner Understanding through COA should not be the sole treatment modality without further exploration of other factors influencing the marital relationship.

In conclusion, two important aspects of autonomous motivation are suggested for couples. First, one's level of autonomy within intrapersonal decision making can greatly influence marital relationship health. Secondly, respecting and promoting the autonomy of one's partner can facilitate intimacy within the marriage. It is also suggested that couples recognize the importance of self-care and respect for one's own personality uniqueness and perspectives, as well as the expression of care and respect of the unique personality differences of his or her partner. Suggestions for practitioners include helping clients work within their own and their partner's unique personality while supporting autonomy in self and partner decisions.

REFERENCES

- Acitelli, L. K., & Duck, S. W. (1987). Intimacy as the proverbial elephant. In D. Perlman & S. W. Duck (Eds.), *Intimate relationships: Development, dynamics, and deterioration* (pp. 297-308). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Bagarozzi, D. A. (2001). *Enhancing intimacy in marriage: A clinician's guide*. New York: Brunner-Routledge.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, *117*(3), 487-529. doi: 10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497
- Blais, M. R., Sabourin, S., Boucher, C., & Vallerand, R. (1990). Toward a motivational model of couple happiness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *59*, 1021-1031. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.59.5.1021
- Botwin, M. D., Buss, D. M., & Shackelford, T. K. (1997). Personality and mate preferences: Five Factors in mate selection and marital satisfaction. *Journal of Personality*, *65*(1), 107-136. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-6494.1997.tb00531.x
- Bouchard, G., & Arseneault, J. (2005). Length of union as a moderator of the relationship between personality and dyadic adjustment. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *39*(8), 1407-1417. doi: 10.1016/j.paid.2005.05.005
- Bouchard, G., Lussier, Y., & Sabourin, S. (1999). Personality and marital adjustment: Utility of the Five-Factor Model of personality. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *61*(3), 651-660. doi: 10.2307/353567
- Burbee, R. K., Sparks, B. K. Paul, R. S., & Arnzen, C. (2011). Integrative marital intensive therapy: A strategy for marriages in severe distress. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, *30*(1), 37-50. Retrieved from <http://psycnet.apa.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu>
- Carr, D., & Springer, K. W. (2010). Advances in family and health research in the 21st century. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *72*, 743-761. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00728.x
- Chelune, G. J., Robison, J. T., & Kommor, M. J. (1984). A cognitive interactional model of intimate relationships. In V. J. Derlega (Ed.), *Communication, intimacy, and close relationships* (pp. 11-40). Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
- Clark, M. S., & Reis, H. T. (1988). Interpersonal processes in close relationships. *Annual*

- Review of Psychology*, 39, 609-672. doi: 10.1146/annurev.ps.39.020188.003141
- Collins, N. L., & Miller, C. L. (1994). Self-disclosure and liking: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 116(3), 457-475. doi: 10.1037/0033-2909.116.3.457
- Cordova, J. V. (2002). Behavior analysis and the scientific study of couples. *Behavior Analyst Today*, 3, 412-420. Retrieved from <http://www.clarku.edu/research/coupleslab/publications.htm>
- Cordova, J. V., Gee, C. B., & Warren, L. Z. (2005). Emotional skillfulness in marriage: Intimacy as a mediator of the relationship between emotional skillfulness and marital satisfaction. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 24(2), 218-235. doi: 10.1521/jscp.24.2.218.62270
- Cordova, J. V., & Scott, R. L. (2001). Intimacy: A behavioral interpretation. *The Behavioral Analyst*, 24(1), 75-86. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2731357/pdf/behavan00009-0077.pdf>
- Creamer, M., & Campbell, I. M. (1988). The role of interpersonal perception in dyadic adjustment. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 44(3), 424-430. doi: 10.1002/1097-4679(198805)44:3<424::AID-JCLP2270440318>3.0.CO;2-N
- Cross, S. E., & Gore, J. S. (2004). The relational self-construal and closeness. In D. J. Mashek & A. Aron (Eds.), *Handbook of closeness and intimacy*. (pp. 229-245). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11, 227-268. doi: 10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2002). *Handbook of self-determination research*. New York: University of Rochester Press.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2008). Facilitating optimal motivation and psychological well-being across life's domains. *Canadian Psychology*, 49(1), 14-23. doi: 10.1037/0708-5591.49.1.14
- DeHart, T., Pelham, B., & Murray, S. (2004). Implicit dependency regulation: Self-esteem, relationship closeness, and implicit evaluations of close others. *Social Cognition*, 22(1), 126-146. doi: 10.1521/soco.22.1.126.30986
- Derlega, V. J. (1984). Self-disclosure and intimate relationships. In V. J. Derlega (Ed.), *Communication, intimacy, and close relationships* (pp. 1-9). Orlando, FL:

Academic Press.

- Donnellan, M. B., Conger, R. D., & Bryant, C. M. (2004). The Big Five and enduring marriages. *Journal of Research in Personality, 38*, 481-504. doi: 10.1016/j.jrp.2004.01.001
- Dorian, M., & Cordova, J. V. (2004). Coding intimacy in couples' interactions. In P. K. Kerig and D. H. Baucom (Eds.), *Couple observational coding systems* (pp. 243-256). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Duck, S. (1994). *Meaningful relationships: Talking, sense, and relating*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.
- Dudley, M. G., & Kosinski, F. A. (1990). Religiosity and marital satisfaction: A research note. *Review of Religious Research, 32*(1), 78-87. Retrieved from web. ebscohost.com
- Dyrenforth, P. S., Kashy, D. A., Donnellan, M. B., & Lucas, R. E. (2010). Predicting relationship and life satisfaction from personality in nationally representative samples from three countries: The relative importance of actor, partner, and similarity effects. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 99*(4), 690-702. doi: 10.1037/a0020385
- Eidelson, R. J. (1983). Affiliation and independence issues in marriage. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 45*(3), 683-688. doi: 10.2307/351674
- Engel, G., Olson, K. R., & Patrick, C. (2002). The personality of love: Fundamental motives and traits related to components of love. *Personality and Individual Differences, 32*(5), 839-853. doi: 10.1016/S0191-8869(01)00090-3
- Fincham, F. D., & Beach, S. R. (1999). Conflict in marriage: Implications for working with couples. *Annual Review of Psychology, 50*(1), 47-77. doi: 10.1146/annurev.psych.50.1.47
- Fincham, F. D., & Beach, S. R. (2010). Marriage in the new millennium: A decade in review. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 72*(3), 630-649. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00722.x
- Fincham, F. D., Stanley, S. M., & Beach, S. R. H. (2007). Transformative processes in marriage: An analysis of emerging trends. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 69*(2), 275-292. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2007.00362.x
- Gaia, A. C. (2002). Understanding emotional intimacy: A review of conceptualization,

- assessment and the role of gender. *International Social Science Review*, 77(3), 151-170. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu>
- Gattis, K. S., Berns, S., Simpson, L. E., & Christensen, A. (2004). Birds of a feather or strange birds? Ties among personality dimensions, similarity, and marital quality. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 18(4), 564-574. doi: 10.1037/0893-3200.18.4.564
- Gardner, J., & Oswald, A. (2004). How is mortality affected by money, marriage, and stress? *Journal of Health Economics*, 23, 1181-1207. doi: 10.1016/j.jhealeco.2004.03.002
- Hatfield, E. (1984). The dangers of intimacy. In V. J. Derlega (Ed.), *Communication, intimacy, and close relationships* (pp. 207-220). Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
- Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. R. (1990). Love and work: An attachment-theoretical perspective. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59(2), 270-280. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.59.2.270>.
- Heaton, T. B., & Goodman, K. L. (1985). Religion and family formation. *Review of Religious Research*, 26(4), 343-359. Retrieved from web.ebscohost.com
- Holland, A. S., & Roisman, G. I. (2008). Big Five personality traits and relationship quality: Self-reported, observational, and physiological evidence. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 25(5), 811-829. doi: 10.1177/0265407508096697
- Holmes, J. G., & Murray, S. L. (2007). Felt security as a normative resource: Evidence for an elemental risk regulation system. *Psychological Inquiry*, 18(3), 163-167. Retrieved from <http://psycnet.apa.org/?&fa=main.doiLanding&uid=2007-13150-003>
- Hook, M. K., Gerstein, L. H., Detterich, L., & Gridley, B. (2003). How close are we? Measuring intimacy and examining gender differences. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 81(4), 462-472. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu>
- Horney, K. (1937). *The neurotic personality of our time*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Horney, K. (1950). *Neurosis and human growth: The struggle toward self-realization*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

- Hughes, M. E., & Waite, L. J. (2009). Marital biography and health at mid-life. *Journal of Health & Social Behavior*, 50(3), 344-358. doi: 10.1177/002214650905000307
- Jensen-Campbell, L. A., Knack, J. M., & Rex-Lear, M. (2009). Personality and social relations. In P. J. Corr & G. Matthews (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of personality psychology* (pp. 506-540). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Johnson, D. R., & Wu, J. (2002). An empirical test of crisis, social selection, and role explanations of the relationship between marital disruption and psychological distress: A pooled time-series analysis of four-wave panel data. *Journal of Marriage & Family*, 64(1), 211-224. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2002.00211.x
- Karney, B. R. (2007). Not shifting but broadening marital research: Comments on Finchham, Stanley, and Beach. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69(2), 310-314. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2007.00366.x
- Karney, B. R., & Bradbury, T. N. (1995). The longitudinal course of marital quality and stability: A review of theory, method, and research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 118(1), 3-34. doi: 10.1037/0033-2909.118.1.3
- Karney, B. R., & Bradbury, T. N. (1997). Neuroticism, marital interaction, and the trajectory of marital satisfaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72(5), 1075-1092. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.72.5.1075
- Kazdin, A. E. (2003). *Research design in clinical psychology* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Keeley, M. P., & Hart, A. J. (1994). Nonverbal behavior in dyadic interactions. In S. Duck (Ed.), *Dynamics of Relationships*. (pp. 135-162). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Keith, T. Z. (2006). *Multiple regression and beyond*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Kersten, K. K., & Himle, D. P. (1991). Marital intimacy: A model for clinical assessment and intervention. In B. J. Brothers (Ed.), *Intimate autonomy: Autonomous intimacy* (pp. 103-121). New York: The Haworth Press.
- Knee C. R., Lonsbary, C., Canevello, A., & Patrick, H. (2005). Self-determination and conflict in romantic relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 89(6), 997-1009. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.89.6.997
- Knee, R. C., Patrick, H., Vietor, N. A., Nanayakkara, A., & Neighbors, C. (2002). Self-determination as growth motivation in romantic relationships. *Personality*

and Social Psychology Bulletin, 28(5), 609-619. doi: 10.1177/0146167202288005

- Kosek, R. B. (1996). The quest for a perfect spouse: Spousal ratings and marital satisfaction. *Psychological Reports*, 79(3), 731-735. doi: 10.2466/pr0.1996.79.3.731
- La Guardia, J. G., & Patrick, H. (2008). Self-determination theory as a fundamental theory of close relationships. *Canadian Psychology*, 49(3), 201-209. doi: 10.1037/a0012760
- La Guardia, J. G., Ryan, R. M., Couchman, C. E., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Within-person variation in security of attachment: A self-determination theory perspective on attachment, need fulfillment, and well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79(3), 367-384. doi: 10.1037//0022-3514.79.3.367
- Lambert, N. M., Fincham, F. D., Gwinn, A. M., & Ajayi, C. A. (2011). Positive relationship science: A new frontier for positive psychology? In K. M. Sheldon, T. B. Kashdan, & M. F. Steger (Eds.), *Designing positive psychology: Taking stock and moving forward* (pp. 280-292). NY: Oxford University Press.
- Laurenceau, J., Barrett, L. F., & Pietromonaco, P. R. (1998). Intimacy as an interpersonal process: The importance of self-disclosure, partner disclosure, and perceived partner responsiveness in interpersonal exchanges. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(5), 1238-1251. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.74.5.1238
- Laurenceau, J., Barrett, L. F., & Rovine, M. J. (2005). The interpersonal process model of intimacy in marriage: A daily-diary and multilevel modeling approach. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 19(2), 314-323. doi: 10.1037/0893-3200.19.2.314
- Laurenceau, J., Rivera, L. M., Schaffer, A. R., & Pietromonaco, P. R. (2004). Intimacy as an interpersonal process: Current status and future directions. In D. J. Mashek & A. Aron (Eds.), *Handbook of closeness and intimacy*. (pp. 61-78). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Lazarides, A., Belanger, C., & Sabourin, S. (2010). Personality as a moderator of the relationship between communication and couple stability. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 6(2), 11-31. doi: 10.1037/e676482011-004
- Licht, M. H. (1995). Multiple regression and correlation. In L. G. Grimm & P. R. Yarnold (Eds.), *Reading and understanding multivariate statistics*. (pp. 19-64). Washington DC, US: American Psychological Association.
- Lippert, T., & Prager, K. J. (2001). Daily experiences of intimacy: A study of couples.

- Personal Relationships*, 8(3), 283-298. doi: 10.1111/j.1475-6811.2001.tb00041.x
- Lorenz, F. O., Wickrama, K. A. S., Conger, R. D., & Elder, G. H. (2006). The short-term and decade-long effects of divorce on women's midlife health. *Journal of Health & Social Behavior*, 47(2), 111-125. doi: 10.1177/002214650604700202
- Maslow, A. H. (1968). *Toward a psychology of being*. (3rd ed.) New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Matthews, C., & Clark, R. D. (1982). Marital satisfaction: A validation approach. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 3(3), 169-186. doi: 10.1207/s15324834basp0303_2
- McCrae, R. R. (2008). A note on some measures of profile agreement. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 90(2), 105-109. doi: 10.1080/00223890701845104
- McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P. T. (2003). *Personality in adulthood: A five-factor theory perspective*. (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.
- McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P. T. (2010). *NEO Inventories professional manual*. Lutz, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources.
- Mirgain, S. A., & Cordova, J. V. (2007). Emotion skills and marital health: The association between observed and self-reported emotion skills, intimacy, and marital satisfaction. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 26(9), 983-1009. doi: 10.1521/jscp.2007.26.9.983
- Mitchell, A. E., Castellani, A. M., Herrington, R. L., Joseph, J. I., Doss, B. D., & Snyder, D. K. (2008). Predictors of intimacy in couples' discussions of relationship injuries: An observational study. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 22(1), 21-29. doi: 10.1037/0893-3200.22.1.21
- Monsour, M. (1994). Similarities and dissimilarities in personal relationships: Constructing meaning and building intimacy through communication. In S. Duck (Ed.), *Dynamics of Relationships*. (pp. 112-134). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Morry, M. M. (2005). Allocentrism and friendship satisfaction: The mediating roles of disclosure and closeness. *Canadian Journal of Behavioral Science*, 37(3), 211-222. doi: 10.1037/h0087258
- Morton, T. L. (1978). Intimacy and reciprocity of exchange: A comparison of spouses and strangers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 36(1), 72-81. doi:

10.1037/0022-3514.36.1.72

- Murray, S. L., Holmes, J. G., Bellavia, G., Griffin, D. W., & Dolderman, D. (2002). Kindred spirits? The benefits of egocentrism in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82(4), 563-581. doi: 10.1037//0022-3514.82.4.563
- Murstein, B. I., & Beck, G. D. (1972). Person perception, marriage adjustment, and social desirability. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 39(3), 396-403. doi: 10.1037/h0033960
- Newmark, C. S., Woody, G., & Ziff, D. (1977). Understanding and similarity in relation to marital satisfaction. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 33(1), 83-86. doi: 10.1002/1097-4679(197701)33:1<83::AID-JCLP2270330>3.0.CO;2-W
- Noller, P., & Feeney, J. A. (2002). Introduction in P. Noller & J. A. Feeney (Eds.), *Understanding marriage: Developments in the study of couple interaction* (pp. 1-5). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Rourke, N., Neufeld, E., Claxton, A., & Smith, J. Z. (2010). Knowing me – knowing you: Reported personality and trait discrepancies as predictors of marital idealization between long-wed spouses. *Psychology and Aging*, 25(2), 412-421. doi: 10.1037/a0017873
- Patrick, S., & Beckenbach, J. (2009). Male perceptions of intimacy: A qualitative study. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 17(1), 47-56. doi: 10.3149/jms.1701.47
- Patrick, H., Knee, C. R., Canevello, A., & Lonsbary, C. (2007). The role of need fulfillment in relationship functioning and well-being: A self-determination theory perspective. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(3), 434-457. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.92.3.434
- Patterson, M. L. (1984). Intimacy, social control, and nonverbal involvement: A functional approach in V. J. Derlega (Ed.), *Communication, Intimacy, and Close Relationships* (pp. 105-132). Orlando, FL: Academic Press Inc.
- Piedmont, R. L. (1998). *The revised NEO Personality Inventory: Clinical and research applications*. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.
- Piedmont, R. L., & Rodgeron, T. E. (2013). Crossover analysis: Using the Five-Factor Model and revised NEO personality inventory to assess couples. In T. A. Widiger & P. T. Costa (Eds.), *Personality disorders and the five-factor model of*

personality (3rd ed.), (pp. 375-394). Washington DC, US: American Psychological Association.

- Pollmann, M., & Finkenauer, C. (2009). Investigating the role of two types of understanding in relationship well-being: Understanding is more important than knowledge. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 35(11), 1512-1527. doi: 10.1177/0146167209342754
- Prager, K. J. (1995). *The psychology of intimacy*. New York: The Guildford Press.
- Prager, K. J., & Roberts, L. J. (2004). Deep intimate connection: Self and intimacy in couple relationships. In D. J. Mashek & A. Aron (Eds.), *Handbook of closeness and intimacy*. (pp. 43-60). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Ptacek, J. T., & Dodge, K. L. (1995). Coping strategies and relationship satisfaction in couples. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 21(1), 76-84. doi: 10.1177/0146167295211008
- Rankin-Esquer, L. A., Burnett, C. K., Baucom, D. H., & Epstein, N. (1997). Autonomy and relatedness in marital functioning. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 23(2), 175-189. doi: 10.1111/j.1752-0606.1997.tb00242.x
- Reis, H. T. (1990). The role of intimacy in interpersonal relations. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 9(1), 15-30. Retrieved from <http://psycnet.apa.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/index.cfm?fa=search.searchResults>
- Reis, H. T., Clark, M. S., & Holmes, J. G. (2004). Perceived partner responsiveness as an organizing construct in the study of intimacy and closeness. In D. J. Mashek & A. Aron (Eds.), *Handbook of closeness and intimacy*. (pp. 201-225). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Reis, H. T., & Patrick, B. C. (1996). Attachment and intimacy: Component processes. In E. T. Higgins & A. Kruglanski (Eds.), *Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles* (pp. 367-389). Chichester, England: Wiley & Sons.
- Reis, H. T., & Shaver, P. (1988). Intimacy as an interpersonal process. In S. Duck (Ed.), *Handbook of personal relationships* (pp. 367-389). Chichester, England: Wiley & Sons.
- Roberts, L. J., & Greenberg, D. R. (2002). Observational “windows” to intimacy processes in marriage. In P. Noller & J. A. Feeney (Eds.), *Understanding marriage: Developments in the study of couple interaction* (pp. 118-149). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

- Roberts, B. W., & Mroczek, D. (2008). Personality trait change in adulthood. *Current Directions In Psychological Science*, 17(1), 31-35. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8721.2008.00543.x
- Robins, R. W., Caspi, A., & Moffitt, T. E. (2000). Two personalities, one relationship: Both partners' personality traits shape the quality of their relationship. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79(2), 251-259. doi: 10.1037//0022-3514.79.2.251
- Robins, R. W., Caspi, A., & Moffitt, T. E. (2002). It's not just who you're with, it's who you are: Personality and relationship experiences across multiple relationships. *Journal of Personality*, 70(6), 925-964. doi: 10.1111/1467-6494.05028
- Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On becoming a person: A therapist's view of psychotherapy*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Rogers, C. R. (1972). *Becoming partners: Marriage and its alternatives*. New York: Delacorte.
- Rogge, R. D., Bradbury, T. N., Hahlweg, K., Engl, J., & Thurmaier, F. (2006). Predicting marital distress and dissolution: Refining the Two-Factor hypothesis. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 20(1), 156-159. doi: 10.1037/0893-3200.20.1.156
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000a). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68-78. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000b). The darker and brighter sides of human existence: Basic psychological needs as a unifying concept. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 319-338. doi: 10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_03
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2002). Overview of self-determination theory: An organismic dialectical perspective. In E. L. Deci & R. M. Ryan (Eds.), *Handbook of self-determination research* (pp. 1-33). Rochester, NY: The University of Rochester Press.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2006). Self-Regulation and the problem of human autonomy: Does psychology need choice, self-determination, and will? *Journal of Personality*, 74(6), 1557-1585. doi: 0.1111/j.1467-6494.2006.00420.x
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2008). Self-determination theory and the role of basic psychological needs in personality and organization of behavior. In O. P. John, R. W. Robins & L. A. Pervin (Eds.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research*

(pp. 654-678). New York: Guilford Press.

Ryff, C. D., & Singer, B. (2000). Interpersonal flourishing: A positive health agenda for the new millennium. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 4(1), 30-44. doi: 10.1207/S15327957PSPR0401_4

Sanderson, C. A., & Cantor, N. (2001). The association of intimacy goals and marital satisfaction: A test of four meditational hypotheses. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 27(12), 1567-1577. doi: 0.1177/01461672012712001

Schimel, J., Arndt, J., Pyszczynski, T., & Greenberg, J. (2001). Being accepted for who we are: Evidence that social validation of the intrinsic self reduces general defensiveness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 80(1), 35-52. doi: 10.1037//0022-3514.80.1.35

Sheldon, K. M., Ryan, R. M., & Reis, H. T. (1996). What makes for a good day? Competence and autonomy in the day and in the person. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 22, 1270-1279. doi: 10.1177/01461672962212007

Shiota, M. N., & Levenson, R. W. (2007). Birds of a feather don't always fly farthest: Similarity in Big Five personality predicts more negative marital satisfaction trajectories in long-term marriages. *Psychology and Aging*, 22(4), 666-675. doi: 10.1037/0882-7974.22.4.666

Shrum, W. (1980). Religion and marital instability: Change in the 1970s. *Review of Religious Research*, 21(2), 135-147. Retrieved from web.ebscohost.com

Skinner, E., & Edge, K. (2002). Self-determination, coping and development. In E. L. Deci & R. M. Ryan (Eds.), *Handbook of self-determination research* (pp. 297-337). Rochester, NY: The University of Rochester Press.

Snyder, D. K. (1979). Multidimensional assessment of marital satisfaction. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 41(4), 813-823. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/351481>.

Spencer, T. (1994). Transforming relationships through ordinary talk. In S. Duck (Ed.), *Dynamics of relationships* (pp. 58-85). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage

Stamp, G. H., & Banski, M. A. (1992). The communicative management of constrained autonomy during the transition to parenthood. *Western Journal of Communication*, 56(3), 281-300. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov>

Stern, B. L. (1999). Fear of intimacy, adult attachment theory, and the Five-Factor model

of personality: A test of empirical convergence and incremental validity. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering*, 60(11-B), 5793.

- Sullivan, H. S. (1953). *The interpersonal theory of psychiatry*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Swan, W. B., De La Ronde, C., & Hixon, G. (1994). Authenticity and positivity strivings in marriage and courtship. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 66(5), 857-869. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.66.5.857.
- Van den Broucke, S., Vertommen, H., & Vandereycken, W. (1995). Construction and validation of a marital intimacy questionnaire. *Journal of Applied Family Studies*, 44(3), 285-290. doi: 10.2307/585527
- Waite, L. J., & Gallagher, M. (2000). *The case for marriage*. New York: Broadway Books.
- Waring, E. M., & Chelune, G. J. (1983). Marital intimacy and self-disclosure. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 39(2), 183-190. doi: 10.1002/10974679(198303)39:2<183::AID-JCLP2270390206>3.0.CO;2-L
- Waring, E. M., Schaefer, B., & Fry, R. (1994). The influence of therapeutic self-disclosure on perceived marital intimacy. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 20(2), 135-146. doi: 10.1080/00926239408403424
- Watson, D., Hubbard, B., & Wiese, D. (2000). General traits of personality and affectivity as predictors of satisfaction in intimate relationships: Evidence from self and partner-ratings. *Journal of Personality*, 68(3), 413-449. doi: 10.1111/1467-6494.00102
- Weinstein, N., Hodgins, H. S., & Ryan, R. M. (2010). Autonomy and control in dyads: Effects on interaction quality and joint creative performance. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 36(12), 1603-1617. doi: 10.1177/0146167210386385
- Weiss, R. L., & Cerreto, M. C. (1980). The Marital Status Inventory: Development of a measure of dissolution potential. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 8(2), 80-85. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01926188008250358>.
- Whisman, M. A., Uebelacker, L. A., Tolejko, N., Chatav, Y., & McKelvie, M. (2006). Marital discord and well-being in older adults: Is the association confounded by personality? *Psychology and Aging*, 21(3), 626-631. doi: 10.1037/0882-7974.21.3.626

- White, J. K., Hendrick, S. S., & Hendrick, C. (2004). Big Five personality variables and relationship constructs. *Personality and Individual Differences, 37*, 1519-1530. doi: 10.1016/j.paid.2004.02.019
- Williams, K., & Umberson, D. (2004). Marital status, marital transitions, and health: A gendered life course perspective. *Journal of Health & Social Behavior, 45*(1), 81-98. doi: 10.1177/002214650404500106
- Wilson, J., & Musick, M. (1996). Religion and marital dependency. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 35*(1), 30-40. doi: 10.2307/1386393
- Wright, D. W., Simmons, L. A., & Campbell, K. (2007). Does a marriage ideal exist? Using Q-sort methodology to compare young adults' and professional educators' views on healthy marriages. *Contemporary Family Therapy, 29*(4), 223-236. doi: 10.1007/s10591-007-9044-0
- Young, M. A. (2004). Healthy relationships: Where's the research? *The Family Journal, 12*(2), 159-162. doi:10.1177/1066480703262090

Appendix A: Demographic Information Form

Participant ID # _____

Please fill in the circle next to the appropriate responses to the questions below.

1. Gender:

- Female
- Male

2. Age:

- Less than 24
- 25-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- 70+

3. Ethnic/racial group under which you would classify yourself:

- African American
- Asian American
- Hispanic
- American Indian
- Caucasian
- Other

4. Highest level of education completed:

- Elementary school
- Middle school
- High school
- 2-year college
- 4-year college
- Graduate school

5. Number of times married including current marriage:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4+

6. Length of current marriage in years:

less than 2 years

2-5

6-10

11-19

20-29

30-39

40+

Appendix B: Letter to Church Leader

Dear Church Leader,

My name is Tim Williams and I am requesting your assistance as I work to complete a PhD in Counseling from Liberty University. I am seeking volunteers to participate in my dissertation research study which will assess relational intimacy in married couples.

Participants will complete a set of written questionnaires designed to statistically evaluate the relationship between individual traits, level of partner understanding, and the amount of relational intimacy experienced in the marriage. It is estimated it will take an average of 40 minutes for each participant to complete the questionnaires.

If you decide to assist me with the study you will agree to complete the following steps:

1. Read and/or make available the Research Study Announcement to potential volunteers at your church.
2. Collect the names and contact information of each couple who volunteers to participate in the study using the Name/Contact Information form provided by the researcher, and store the form in a safe and secure location.
3. Distribute questionnaire packets to any couples who volunteer to participate in the study. (Participants will return the questionnaire packets to the researcher using a self-addressed postage paid envelope provided by the researcher.)
4. Read and/or make available the overall results of the research study to participants.
5. Destroy the Name/Contact Information form six months after the study is completed.

If you agree to the above steps I will complete the following:

1. Provide you a written Research Study Announcement.
2. Provide you a Name/Contact Information form.
3. Provide you questionnaire packets.
4. Provide you a written report of the research study overall results after my dissertation is completed.

5. Provide participants their individual study results if any participants request them by contacting the researcher through the professional counseling agency.

Sincerely,
Tim Williams

Appendix C: Research Study Announcement

You are invited to be in a research study of relational intimacy in marriages. This study is being conducted by Timothy Williams, a doctoral student (under the direction of Dr. David Jenkins) in the Center for Counseling and Family Studies at Liberty University.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Participation will be limited to married couples who volunteer to participate. Individuals should not participate if their spouse is not also willing to volunteer to participate. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or your church. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationships with Liberty University or church. There will be no compensation provided to volunteers who participate in the study.

Participants will complete a packet of questionnaires estimated to take approximately 40 minutes, and mail the questionnaire packet to the researcher in the self-addressed postage paid envelope provided by the researcher. No personal identifiable information will be collected in the questionnaire packet. You will be asked to provide your name and contact information to your church leader to receive a questionnaire packet.

The results of this study will be published in the researcher's dissertation and may be released in future publications. However, no information will be published that will make it possible to identify any individual participant. Overall study results will be reported when the study is completed. Participants may contact the researcher for individual study results using the provided contact information after the study is completed.

To participate in the study, obtain a questionnaire packet from your church leader listed below. After you and your spouse complete the questionnaires, mail them to the researcher using the provided self-addressed postage paid envelope.

Researcher:
Timothy Williams
(*Contact information deleted*)

Church leader:

Appendix E: Consent Form

The Relationship Between Individual Traits, Understanding Partner Self-Perception, and Intimacy in a Sample of Heterosexual Marital Relationships

Timothy Williams

Liberty University

Center for Counseling and Family Studies

You are invited to be in a research study of relational intimacy in marriages. You were selected as a possible participant because of your marital status and attendance at this church. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Timothy Williams, a doctoral student (under the direction of Dr. David Jenkins) in the Center for Counseling and Family Studies.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to explore the effect of individual characteristics (e.g., personality traits, autonomy) and the understanding of partner traits on relational intimacy experienced in the marital relationship. A large amount of research exists examining the relationship between personality traits and marital outcomes such as marital satisfaction and adjustment. However, very little research exists which examines personality traits and intimacy, and no research has been found to examine the effect of both personality traits and understanding of partner traits on intimacy in marriages. Your voluntary participation will provide important data and could increase understanding of how intimacy develops or is hindered in marriage relationships.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things: You will complete the questionnaires contained in this packet which includes a demographic form, the Self-Determination Scale (SDS), NEO-FFI-3 Form S, NEO-FFI-3 Form R, and Intimate Safety Questionnaire (ISQ). It is estimated it will take approximately 40 minutes to complete all the questionnaires in the packet. Upon completion both spouses should place their questionnaires in the self-addressed stamped envelope which contained the questionnaires and mail the packet back to the researcher. A mailing address and return address will be provided on the return envelope, do not write your address or any other information that would identify you on the envelope or questionnaires. You should not discuss any of the questionnaires or your answers with anyone, including your spouse, until after the packet has been mailed. Study results will be reported to the church leader who distributed the questionnaire packets when the study is completed. Participants may contact the researcher for overall study results using the provided

contact information after the study is completed. Participants may also contact the researcher for individual results after the study is completed.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The study has several risks: First, it is possible for your questionnaire answers to be discovered without your written consent. To minimize this risk a random ID number will be utilized to identify questionnaires instead of participant's name. Also, no individual participant results will be released or published.

Second, it is possible for participants to become fatigued from completing the questionnaires. To minimize this risk the short version was chosen for each questionnaire available in a shorter form.

Third, it is possible for participants to experience increased awareness during or after answering the questionnaires, which could result in increased anxiety or emotional disturbance. In the event of increased anxiety or emotional disturbance, participants can contact the following mental health service provider:

Hope Crossing Christian Counseling
1810 Craig Road
St. Louis MO 63141
314-983-9300

No study is without risks. However, the risks in this study are minimal and are no more than what participants would encounter in everyday life.

Increased awareness is also a potential benefit to participants. Increased awareness can facilitate increased understanding of self and/or one's partner. Another potential benefit to participants is knowing that participation in this study is contributing to a general body of knowledge regarding marriage relationships. The results of this study will be published and could aid in the development of further research, marriage enrichment curriculum, or improvements in marital therapy.

Compensation:

There will be no compensation provided to participants. In the event they contact the mental health provider for services, participants will be expected to follow the normal payment policies set forth by the mental health provider.

Confidentiality:

Completed questionnaires will be mailed by the participants to the researcher in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided by the researcher. Once received, the questionnaires will be kept private and stored in a secure locked safe only accessible to the researcher and a research assistant. The research assistant will aid the researcher in data entry once the questionnaire packets are received. The results of this study will be published in the researcher's dissertation and may be released in future publications. However, no information will be published that will make it possible to identify any individual participant.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or your church. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Timothy Williams. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have any questions later **you are encouraged** to contact him. To reach him by telephone or email: (*Contact information deleted*)

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Boulevard, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502, or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You may keep this copy of the consent form for your records.

By completing the enclosed questionnaires and mailing them to the researcher using the envelope provided, you are confirming that you have read, understand, and agree with the information contained in this consent form.

IRB Code Numbers:

IRB Expiration Date: