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## **THE INTERACTION BETWEEN MARITAL STANDARDS AND COMMUNICATION PATTERNS: HOW DOES IT CONTRIBUTE TO MARITAL ADJUSTMENT?**

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*Couples' cognitions about marriage and their communication patterns have both been found to be highly associated with marital distress. To examine the relationships among marital cognitions, communication, and marital adjustment, we had a sample of 387 community couples complete three self-report measures: the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, the Inventory of Specific Relationship Standards, and the Communication Patterns Questionnaire. Results indicated that the correlation of communication with marital adjustment is higher for women with more relationship-focused standards than for women with less relationship-focused standards; this interaction does not occur for men. The implications of the interaction and the gender difference as well as the importance of teaching communication skills, and working with associated cognitions are discussed.*

Over the last twenty years, the behavioral model of marital interaction has placed a strong emphasis on the relationship between communication and marital adjustment, and this body of research has yielded fruitful results. In general, the findings suggest that couples who engage in a high frequency of negative communication behaviors and patterns are substantially more likely to be maritally distressed (e.g., Baucom & Adams,

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1987; Christensen & Sullaway, 1984; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Gottman, Markman, & Notarius, 1977; Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1990; Revenstorf, Halilweg, Schindler, & Vogel, 1984; Sullaway & Christensen, 1983).

Over time these research findings have contributed to a picture of how couples should communicate. The traditional Behavioral Marital Therapy (BMT) model holds that couples should be taught how to address negative issues in their relationship as well as how to consistently express positive feelings to each other; as a result, most therapies based on this model have primarily emphasized teaching couples to communicate as their main intervention (Jacobson & Margolin, 1979; Markman, 1979; Weiss, 1978). Yet, despite evidence that these interventions are successful at teaching couples these skills, there is mixed evidence that these skills have a significant impact on marital adjustment. In general, treatment outcome studies show that interventions that have communication skills as their main focus are successful in moving only about 50 percent of couples into the nondistressed range (Bray & Jouriles, 1995; Halford, Sanders, & Behrens, 1993). The failure of a substantial number of couples to benefit from these therapies indicates that communication, although important, may not always be the most critical ingredient in marital adjustment for all couples.

Existing research on couple typologies supports the hypothesis that the importance of communication may vary for different types of couples. Studies have found that some couples who report avoidant communication patterns may still report acceptable levels of marital adjustment or have stable marriages (Fitzpatrick, 1988; Gottman, 1993; Raush, Barry, Hertel, & Swain, 1974). Gottman has identified five types of couples, three of which appeared to be stable and nondistressed. Of those three nondistressed types, two of them, the conflict avoidant and volatile types, did not fit the picture of the ideal BMT couple. Gottman hypothesized that the avoidant couples seemed to be more likely to accept differences between spouses and did not place a high value on a great deal of "deep discussion" about difficult issues. However, he also noted that the more traditional BMT type couples, the validators, valued expressions of feelings and placed a premium on working together to come to an agreement on issues.

Gottman's clinical observations suggest that cognitive factors may influence how important a role communication may play in marital adjustment. Research by Christensen and colleagues has also suggested that cognitions such as a desire for closeness or investment in the issue being discussed may impact how couples communicate (e.g., Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Christensen & Shenk, 1991). Furthermore, recent research by Baucom, Epstein, Rankin, and Burnett (1996) also suggests that relationship-focused standards (i.e., standards for marriage that place a major emphasis or priority on the marriage) are related to both marital adjustment and communication patterns. Whereas these findings do not suggest causality, they do indicate that couples who think about their relationships in ways that focus on egalitarianism and sharing are more likely to report higher levels of marital adjustment and to report more egalitarian and constructive communication.

Given that both communication and standards have been shown to be associated with marital satisfaction, the next question is whether these two constructs each contribute separately to marital adjustment, or whether an interaction between the two constructs may be more predictive of marital adjustment. For instance, simply having relationship-focused standards may mean that the couple makes the relationship a high priority in their

lives and may behave in other nonverbal ways, independent of effective communication, that promote closeness and sharing, which may result in the couple's experiencing a better relationship. Similarly, regardless of the partners' standards, effective communication may be needed in order for daily interactions and decision making to run smoothly and efficiently, which may have an impact on their adjustment. These two suggestions are not new; as noted earlier, there are a number of studies that already support these assertions (e. g. Baucom & Adams, 1987; Baucom, Epstein, Rankin, et al., 1996; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Gottman, 1977; Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1990). Thus, the more interesting question that this study addresses is how these two constructs may interact to predict marital adjustment.

As mentioned above, communication may have different implications for different types of couples. It is possible that one factor that may help us to understand these differing couples and their needs is their standards about how their relationships should be. Certainly this difference is supported by Gottman's aforementioned clinical observations of the couple typologies. It is likely that communication is more important for marital adjustment if one believes one *should* have a great deal of intimate and equitable communication (i.e., holds highly relationship-focused standards). There may be some couples who do not desire to share a great deal with each other, do not feel the need to resolve all conflicts, or have decided that one person will make all or most of the decisions; in these cases, communication may be less important in their marital adjustment. These couples may be similar to traditional couples and/or conflict-avoidant couples identified in previous research (Fitzpatrick, 1988; Gottman, 1993; Rausch et al., 1974). This possibility suggests that the interaction of standards and communication may be more predictive of marital adjustment than either alone. Thus, in this study, it is predicted that communication and standards will interact such that communication will be more highly associated with marital adjustment when the partner holds relationship-focused standards than when the partner holds less relationship-focused standards.

## METHOD

### *Participants*

The participants were 387 community couples from a large urban area and a small Southern university town. Through use of a commercial mailing list, the couples were randomly chosen to form a stratified sample of married couples based on age, education, and race to match the national census data. The average age for female subjects was 42.2 years; for males it was 44.2 years. Female subjects had an average 15.1 years of education; the males had an average 15.7 years of education. Eighty-nine percent of the sample were White, and 11% were African American. The couples reported that they had been married an average of 1.2 times; the mean length of time in the current marriage was 17.5 years. The couples also reported an average of 2.0 children.

### *Materials*

*Inventory of Specific Relationship Standards (ISRS: Baucom, Epstein, Rankin, et al., 1996).* The ISRS is a 60-item self-report measure that assesses standards about marriage, for example, how a person thinks his or her marriage *should* work, across twelve content areas (e.g., leisure, finances, child rearing) on three different dimensions: *Boundaries*, *Control*, and *Investment*. Both Control and Investment are further divided into two

subdimensions: (a) *Control-Outcome* and *Control-Process*, and (b) *Expressive-Investment* and *Instrumental-Investment*; however, only *Control-Outcome* and *Instrumental-Investment* are used in this study, for reasons described below. High scores on *Boundaries*, *Investment*, and *Control* indicate endorsement of more highly relationship-focused standards. A high score for *Boundaries* indicates that the person thinks that people should share a great deal with their partner (minimal *Boundaries*), whereas a low score suggests that the person believes that there should be more separation (greater *Boundaries*) between the spouses. High scores on *Control-Outcome* indicates that the spouse believes that both spouses should share responsibility for final decision making, whereas a low score suggests a belief that only one spouse should be responsible for the decision making. Finally, a high score for *Expressive-Investment* indicates that the spouse believes that partners should often demonstrate their caring and concern for each other; a low score indicates that the spouse believes that partners do not need to demonstrate their caring and concern about each other very often.

Sample items from the questionnaire are: "My partner and I should take part in our leisure activities with each other" (*Boundaries*, leisure); "Only one of us should have final say on decisions we make about money" (*Control-Outcome*, finance); and "We should show our love for each other through physical affection" (*Expressive-Investment*, physical affection). Respondents report their belief in the frequency with which the couple should enact each behavior, using a 5-point scale ranging from "Never" to "Always." There were two additional questions included on the questionnaire: one regarding how satisfied respondents are that their standards are being met, and one regarding how emotionally upset they become if they do not feel that their standards are being met. The current study did not use these latter two measures because the primary focus of this study was on the cognitive component of standards, and these two latter questions were considered to be primarily affective reactions.

For this study, the participants' scores on the *Boundaries*, *Control-Outcome*, and *Investment-Expressive* scales were combined into one measure of how relationship focused their standards were. These three scales were employed because it was decided a priori that these three standards were most likely to be associated with communication. *Boundaries* and *Investment-Expressive* were expected to be related to communication because psychological closeness (*boundaries*) and the expression of thoughts and feelings of affection (*investment-expressive*) may facilitate good communication. It was expected that people who had few boundaries and who believed partners should often show their care and concern may share their thoughts and feelings with their partners to a greater degree. *Control-Outcome* was expected to be related to communication because it is a standard for whether the couple should work together in discussions about solving a problem versus solving problems individually; therefore, it is likely to be related to how the couple will communicate while attempting to solve their problems. *Control-Process* also was not used because its inclusion significantly lowered the composite scale's alpha. The alpha for the new relationship-focused standards measure was .70. Finally, validation studies (Baucom, Epstein, Rankin, et al., 1996) have shown that the five original relationship-focused standards are highly predictive of marital adjustment ( $R = .71, p < .001$ ) as measured by the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976).

*Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ)*: Christensen & Sullaway, 1984). This self-report questionnaire assesses patterns of communication that couples use when

discussing a relationship problem. Spouses score themselves using a 9-point Likert scale on items that comprise three subscales: Mutual Constructive Communication, Mutual Avoidance/Withdrawal, and Demand/Withdraw. Examples of the items include (a) "Both members avoid discussing the problem" (Mutual Avoidance/Withdrawal), (b) "Both members suggest possible solutions and compromises," (Mutual Constructive Communication), and (c) "Woman tries to start a discussion whereas Man tries to avoid a discussion," (Demand/Withdraw). Cronbach's alphas for this measure are acceptable, ranging from .62 to .84, with a mean of .71 (Christensen & Shenk, 1991). The subscales reliably distinguish between distressed and nondistressed couples, and there appears to be a reliable concordance between spouses in responding to the subscales; Cohen's kappas for couples' agreement across items was low but still significant: occurrence agreement = .38, kappa = 1.8,  $p < .01$  (Christensen, 1988). That is, if one spouse reports that the couple uses a particular communication pattern, then the other spouse is significantly likely to report the same pattern. In the current study, the most recent version of the Mutual Constructive Communication scale was employed (see Heavey, Larson, Christensen, & Zuntobel, 1996, for a full description). The new version is a bipolar scale in which high scores suggest constructive communication behaviors (e.g., "Both members express possible solutions and compromises") and low scores indicate destructive communication behaviors (e.g., "Both members threaten each other with negative consequences").

*Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976).* The DAS is a 32-item, widely used measure of marital adjustment. Higher scores suggest better marital functioning. The DAS yields five scores, consisting of four subscales (Affectional Expression, Cohesion, Consensus, and Satisfaction) and a total score for all items. Spanier reported adequate reliability, with coefficient alphas ranging from .73 (Affectional Expression) to .96 (Total score). A recent reanalysis of the DAS has replicated those results, finding coefficient alphas ranging from .70 for the 4-item subscale Affectional Expression to .95 for the 32-item Total score (Carey, Spector, Lantinga, & Krauss, 1993). Carey et al. also found stability coefficients ranging from .75 (Affectional Expression) to .87 (Total score), suggesting that the DAS has good test-retest reliability. Spanier also reported that the DAS correlated significantly with external criteria of marital status and other existing measures of marital adjustment, thus demonstrating adequate criterion-related and construct validity (Spanier, 1976). Various factor analyses have supported the validity of his four dimensions (Spanier, 1976; Spanier & Thompson, 1982); however, other analyses have found little correspondence between the factors obtained and Spanier's original four measures (Sharpley & Cross, 1982). Although these subscales have been questioned, most researchers agree that the DAS is a good general measure of marital adjustment (Carey et al., 1993; Sharpley & Cross, 1982).

### *Procedure*

Letters were sent to the couples explaining the purpose of the study. A \$50 payment per couple was offered as an incentive to participate in the project. The letter was followed by a telephone call to answer questions and to assess the couple's interest in participating. Those who agreed to participate were mailed the questionnaires and instructed to fill them out separately and not to discuss their answers. There were two separate packets, one for each spouse, containing the above measures, as well as

additional measures that were not used in this study. If the questionnaires were not returned within the time allotted, the couple received a follow-up telephone call. Once the couple had returned the inventories, they received payment for participating. Of the couples initially contacted, 52% agreed to participate and completed the packets. Therefore the final sample was 387 couples.

## RESULTS

Six separate regression equations were conducted to assess the relative importance of communication, standards, and the interaction between communication and standards in predicting level of marital adjustment. Three of these equations, one for each communication pattern, predicted the wife's marital adjustment according to her own standards, her report of the communication patterns, and their interaction; similar regression equations were conducted for husbands.<sup>1</sup>

### Wives.

The regression equation using the wife's report of relationship-focused standards, Constructive Communication—female report, and their interaction to predict marital adjustment yielded a significant squared multiple correlation of  $R^2 = .49$ ,  $F = 118.97$ ,  $p < .001$ . Both the standards term and the interaction term contributed significantly to the prediction of marital adjustment; the communication term contributed nonsignificantly to the prediction of marital adjustment. The interaction will be explained in greater detail below. See Table 1 for the predictors' Beta weights and significance.

The regression using the wife's report of relationship-focused standards, Mutual Avoidance/Withdrawal—female report, and their interaction term significantly predicted the level of marital adjustment, with a squared multiple correlation of  $R^2 = .40$ ,  $F = 83.14$ ,  $p <$

**TABLE 1**  
**Predicting Wife's Marital Adjustment from Her Own Standards, Report of**  
**Communication Patterns, and Their Interaction**

	Standards	Constructive Communication	Standards x Constructive Communication
Beta	.12**	-.76	1.41***
	Standards	Mutual Avoidance/ Withdrawal	Standards x Mutual Avoidance/Withdrawal
Beta	.40****	.95*	-1.49****
	Standards	Total Demand/ Withdrawal	Standards x Total Demand/Withdrawal
Beta	.37***	.25	-.68

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .005$ . \*\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

.001. All three of the predictors, standards, communication, and their interaction, contributed significantly to the prediction of marital adjustment. A more detailed explanation of the interaction is given below. See Table 1 for the predictors' Beta weights and significance.

Finally, predicting marital adjustment from the female's report of relationship-focused standards, her report of the Total Demand/Withdraw communication pattern, and their interaction produced a significant squared multiple correlation of  $R^2 = .26$ ,  $F = 44.41$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, for this equation only the wife's relationship-focused standards significantly predicted the level of marital adjustment. The interaction term and wives' report of the Demand/Withdraw pattern contributed nonsignificantly to the prediction of marital adjustment. See Table 1 for the predictors' Beta weights and significance.

The significance of the interaction term in the first two regression equations required closer examination. Using a median split, the wives were divided into two groups, those with highly relationship-focused standards and those with less relationship-focused standards. The correlation between the Constructive Communication pattern–Female report and the wives' DAS scores among women with highly relationship-focused standards was  $.70$ ,  $p < .001$ ; among women with less relationship-focused standards, the correlation was  $.61$ ,  $p < .001$ . The  $z$  of the difference between these two correlations was  $2.19$ ,  $p < .05$ . The correlation between the Mutual Avoidance/Withdrawal communication pattern–Female report and wives' DAS score was  $-.63$ ,  $p < .001$ , for women with highly relationship-focused standards; the correlation was  $-.53$ ,  $p < .001$ , among women with less relationship-focused standards. The  $z$  of the difference between these two correlations was  $2.06$ ,  $p < .05$ . As can be seen, wives' communication is more highly correlated with their reports of marital adjustment when they report more relationship-focused standards; the correlation between constructive communication and marital adjustment is lower, although still high, for wives who report less relationship-focused standards. These results are consistent with the second hypothesis: Constructive communication and avoidance are more related to marital adjustment for wives who believe relationships should consist of closeness and egalitarianism than for wives for whom those qualities are not as central to their ideas of a good relationship.

#### *Husbands.*

The regression equation employing male relationship-focused standards, Constructive Communication–Male report, and their interaction to predict marital adjustment yielded a significant squared multiple correlation of  $R^2 = .42$ ,  $F = 90.36$ ,  $p < .001$ . Predicting marital adjustment from the husband's relationship-focused standards, his report of the Mutual Avoidance/Withdrawal communication pattern, and their interaction produced a significant squared multiple correlation of  $R^2 = .35$ ,  $F = 69.81$ ,  $p < .001$ . Finally, the regression of the husband's relationship-focused standards, his report of the Demand/Withdraw pattern, and their interaction on marital adjustment produced a significant squared multiple correlation of  $R^2 = .31$ ,  $F = 56.86$ ,  $p < .001$ . For all three instances, only husband's marital standards contributed significantly to the prediction of the level of marital adjustment; his report of communication and the interaction term contributed nonsignificantly. See Table 2 for the predictors' Beta weights and their significance.

**TABLE 2**  
**Predicting Husband's Marital Adjustment from His Own Standards,  
 Report of Communication Patterns, and Their Interaction**

	Standards	Constructive Communication	Standards x Constructive Communication
Beta	.19****	.03	.54
	Standards	Mutual Demand/ Withdrawal	Mutual x Total Demand/Withdrawal
Beta	.42****	.15	-.62
	Standards	Total Demand/ Withdrawal	Standards x Total Demand/Withdrawal
Beta	.31**	-.26	-.16

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .005. \*\*\*\**p* < .001.

#### DISCUSSION

The aim of the current investigation was to examine how communication and marital standards may contribute jointly to marital adjustment. It was hypothesized that the interaction between standards and communication would contribute to the prediction of marital adjustment; this hypothesis was confirmed for wives but not for husbands. For women, the interrelations between two communication variables (Constructive Communication and Mutual Avoidance/Withdrawal) and their marital adjustment differed as a function of how relationship-focused their standards were. Communication and marital adjustment were more closely related for women who reported highly relationship-focused standards than they were for women who held less relationship-focused standards.

The findings suggest that for most women, as the literature already indicates, communication is highly related to marital adjustment; however, as some of the literature has also suggested (Fitzpatrick, 1988; Gottman, 1993; Raush et al., 1974), the findings indicate that there may be a subset of couples for whom communication is less related to their marital adjustment. The current study suggests that this subset of couples also may be set apart by the couples' preference for more emotional and psychological space and less conjoint decision making, that is, by their less relationship-focused standards. Avoidance of discussing problems and sharing emotions might not have so great an effect on their marital happiness as with other couples because this avoidance may be a better fit with their standards for more emotional space and independent decision making. However, although there is a lower association between these two factors, the association is still significant, most likely because when these couples do need to address conflicts, effective communication would be of benefit to them.

In addition to the presence of the standard/communication interaction itself, the



gender difference in the significance of this interaction also is an interesting finding. Whereas the level of women's relationship standards is associated with how closely their report of dyadic communication correlates with marital satisfaction, there is no such interaction for men. One possible interpretation of this difference is that women are monitoring their relationships more closely and thus are more likely to be aware of inconsistencies between standards and communication. Furthermore, their awareness of this inconsistency may affect their perceptions of marital adjustment. This interpretation has some support from other findings that demonstrate a gender difference in the relationship between cognitions and behavior. Results from a study by Rankin, Burnett, Baucom, and Epstein (1997) indicated that wives' "relatedness behaviors" (e.g., behaviors promoting intimacy and closeness in a relationship) were correlated with their own and their husbands' standards, whereas husbands' relatedness behaviors were correlated with neither their own nor their wives' relationship standards. The investigators interpreted this difference as stemming from women's greater awareness of their relationship standards, which then affects their behavior in the relationship. Additionally, two recent studies have reported a strong correlation between attributions and behavior for women, but not for men (Bradbury, Beach, Fincham, & Nelson, 1996; Bradbury & Fincham, 1992). These investigators' interpretation of this difference is similar to the one given above: Women may have greater sensitivity to relationship behaviors, which allows them to make more accurate attributions about events and to choose behaviors that are more consistent with these attributions.

Taken together, these findings are consistent with a view that a greater awareness of relationship behaviors and cognitions both (a) allows women to behave in ways that correspond to their standards and (b) increases the likelihood that they will be more attuned to discrepancies. Furthermore, Bradbury et al. (1996) report finding a higher behavior-satisfaction correlation for women than for men, which is interesting in light of the current finding that there is a higher correlation between communication and marital adjustment for women when their standards are more relationship-focused. Given this possible greater behavior-satisfaction correlation for women, the wives' perception of the discrepancy between their own standards for the relationship and their perceptions of their dyadic communication behavior may then have the effect of decreasing the wives' marital adjustment. On the other hand, men, who may not be as likely to focus on their relationship standards, will be less likely to choose behaviors that are consistent with these standards and will be less attuned to discrepancies between communication and standards. Furthermore, the discrepancies may be less likely to impact their marital adjustment.

Knowing both partners' relationship standards appears to provide a marital therapist or researcher with increased ability to predict information about marital adjustment and communication, which by necessity has implications for marital therapy. First, whereas communication appears to be of importance for marital adjustment for almost all couples, its relationship to marital distress may be particularly strong for wives with relationship-focused standards. This pattern of findings suggests two points of intervention. One option would be that the couple can be taught new and more effective communication skills. The second option is that the therapist can work with marital partners to examine their standards and their consistency with the couples' actual ability to communicate in order to evaluate the consequences of continuing to hold such high standards for communication. In other words, given the

couples' actual communication ability, it may be that continuing to expect a higher level of communication may leave the partner who holds high standards open for greater disappointment in the relationship, whereas adjusting his/her expectations to the couple's actual level of ability may allow him/her to achieve greater satisfaction with the communication that they currently do have. This kind of cognitive restructuring is similar to the acceptance work now promulgated by Jacobson and Christensen in their Integrative Behavioral Couples Therapy, which they report has achieved high levels of success with helping distressed couples (Christensen & Jacobson, 1995).

In addition, although the cause-effect relationship between relationship standards and communication cannot be established from these data, these findings indicate that relationship-focused standards might facilitate effective communication. It seems likely that standards involving a great deal of sharing between partners and a high level of investment in the marriage would help to create an atmosphere that leads to more communication. Therefore, helping couples to develop standards that involve openness and sharing with each other might be of assistance to some couples who complain of emotional distance or difficulties in resolving conflicts. Furthermore, certain relationship standards might shape the form of communication that couples demonstrate. Standards for sharing in decision making might lead to problem-solving strategies that take into account both partners' needs and desires. Therefore, when a clinician encounters spouses who have difficulty integrating their partners' points of view into solutions and who dominate interactions, a discussion of standards for power in relationships might prove to be fruitful.

Probably even more important, these findings indicate that although good communication is generally related to marital adjustment, it may have less importance for some couples than for others. In these instances, a central focus on improving and increasing communication may not be wholly effective; therapists may need to look beyond communication to discover other crucial issues for these couples in order to focus on their problems more directly. Although behavioral marital therapy has a strong tradition of focusing on improving communication skills, this study reveals the importance of also focusing on other variables in marriage that may be of equal or greater importance than communication. Other variables may include the partner's cognitions about their relationship such as how the partner thinks their relationship should be or how the partner is interpreting the current relationship. The therapist may not always need or, even more likely, be *able* to change the couple's communication. In some cases it may be more important to then work on the couple's standards about the relationship and bring these cognitions more in line with the realities and limitations of their abilities. Additionally, the therapist should also pay attention to important behaviors within the marriage other than communication, and non-verbal expressions of affection or emotional support, such as sex, physical affection, or performing instrumental tasks in the relationship (e.g., child care, picking up the other spouse's dry cleaning, earning the household income, or cooking a meal when the other spouse is too busy).

Unfortunately, because this study was solely correlational, it does not provide any information about causality. A longitudinal study that follows the patterns of development of communication and standards in a relationship would be a logical next step in this area. It is possible that having relationship-focused standards early in the relationship may help the couple to develop constructive communication skills; however, it is equally possible that good communication may aid the partners in creating a positive relationship, which

in turn may foster the development of relationship-focused standards. Furthermore, this study only examined standards and communication behaviors in marriage, but standards may also be related to other marital behaviors, such as expressions of physical affection or performance of chores and tasks. Study of this interaction between standards and non-communication-related behaviors would also be likely to yield useful information, particularly for the subset of couples for whom communication seems to be less important. In these relationships, it is possible that other behaviors carry more weight in determining marital adjustment. Finally, in the current investigation communication was assessed through a self-report measure, which is subject to the usual problems of these kinds of measurements. It is possible that this study may be measuring only the couples' perceptions of their interactions, not their actual communication behavior. Future studies including observational measures of communication are needed. However, even if this study is measuring solely the couples' perceptions, this information may still be of worth. It may not matter what actual behaviors are occurring if the couple does not encode these behaviors accurately or gives them a different interpretation.

Despite these problems, several findings emerged from this paper that are worth attention, and in general these results supported the original hypotheses. First, the degree of correlation between communication and marital adjustment appears to vary as a function of relationship-focused standards. This finding extends previous research on communication and couple typologies by adding new information about what variables may set these couples apart. Second, this interaction holds for women but not for men. These results also fit with the previous literature looking at gender differences in communication. As suggested in other studies, women may be more attuned to consistencies and inconsistencies between their thoughts and their behaviors, which in turn may have more impact upon their reports of marital adjustment. Taken as a whole, the pattern of these results suggests that standards are a category of cognition that offer critical information about the workings of intimate relationships, and that more can be learned about marital relationships in general by including cognitive assessment procedures for both research and practice.

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NOTE:

- <sup>1</sup> In order to assess for effect of having the same respondent fill out all self-report measures, these same regression analyses were run substituting the opposite partner's report of the communication pattern for that of the same respondent. These equations yielded a similar pattern of significant results, suggesting that these results are not simply a matter of shared variance from the same respondent. These additional analyses are available from the first author upon request.