A Feasibility Study of an Intervention Designed to Create Cooperative Communication for Couples: a Sociolinguistic Approach to Cognitive Behavioral Couple Therapy

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A FEASIBILITY STUDY OF AN INTERVENTION DESIGNED TO CREATE
COOPERATIVE COMMUNICATION FOR COUPLES: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC
APPROACH TO COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL COUPLE THERAPY

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Dissertation Approval

This is to certify that the thesis presented to us by Lee Wood Morand on the 25th day of June, 2008, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Psychology, has been examined and is acceptable in both scholarship and literary quality.

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Researchers and clinicians recognize relationship distress as one of the most frequently presented problems in psychotherapy. Relationships themselves depend on language and sociolinguistic skills. However, despite the passionate interest and relevance imparted to *success in relationships*, little attention is paid to sociolinguistic skills. This study is an evaluation of a feasibility study designed as a couple’s communication program. Overcoming communication problems and improving marital satisfaction is the intent of this program. The design of this program is to overcome communication problems and improve marital satisfaction. Cooperative communication is the framework for the communication skills training. One voluntary couple participated in this pilot study. The study utilized a 55-page treatment workbook designed to increase sociolinguistic skills and gender difference awareness. The workbook employed the seminal works of Immanuel Kant, H. P. Grice, and Deborah Tannen. The brief intervention consisted of 11 sessions over a period of 9 consecutive weeks. Each session used a cognitive-behavioral theoretical orientation. The rationale of this study was to promote cooperative communication between individuals within a couple’s therapy milieu. This cognitive-behavioral couple therapy (CBCT) intervention focused on improving sociolinguistic skills and increasing couple satisfaction.
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Chapter One: Introduction

The problem of relationship distress is recognized by researchers and clinicians as one of the most frequently presenting problems in psychotherapy (Johnson & Lebow, 2000; Jacobson & Addis, 1993). Relationship distress is associated with individual distress, poorer professed health, and increased work and social impairments (Whisman & Uebelacker, 2006). Marital discord also has deleterious effects on children; these include poor academic achievement, poor adjustment, and physiological problems (Cummings & Davies, 1994; Gattis, Simpson, & Christensen, 2008). When considering the fact that 40% of all new marriages eventually end in divorce (Krieder, 2005), and that 20% of all marriages are experiencing discord at any one time (Beach, Arias, & O’Leary, 1986), it is difficult to overemphasize the impact of marital discord.

According to Gottman and Silver (1999), the two core therapeutic components that create healthy relationships include good communication and good problem solving skills. Couples learn the importance of these two sets of skills and usually practice them with some guidance from instructors in the therapeutic setting with a strong emphasis on communication skill building (Hawkins, Blanchard, Baldwin, & Fawcett, 2008). Establishing relationships and maintaining them depends upon communication, which, itself, relies on mutually dependent contributions of the participants. Despite the interest directed toward success in relationships, and the
knowledge that communication is essential to relationship success, little attention is paid to sociolinguistic requirements and skills for purposive rational communication.

Psychotherapy and counseling, in general, rely upon language as one of its primary tools. The specific preparation of clinical psychologists is extensive; however, in the clinical setting in which many psychologists are employed, the application of linguistic principles could assist in providing clearly defined communication skills. The clinical literature could pay more attention to how individual or group-based (e.g., gender) differences in sociolinguistic style influence individual and couple psychotherapy. Many questions arise in this relatively untouched area of sociolinguistics as it applies to the clinical setting of couple therapy, and more specifically to client communicative styles and the causal role that language plays in psychological adaptation or maladaptation.

Many disciplines have essential components that promote understanding and appreciation of that discipline; this is most particularly true of the study of language. Therefore, the basic aspects and qualities of language, mapped out in further discussions in this dissertation provide a prelude to examining the application of linguistics to couple therapy. The sociolinguistic orientations of Deborah Tannen and H. P. Grice provide not only pertinent and applicable dimensions of gender differences in linguistics, but also succinct maxims of communication that can be applied to couple therapy. The combined works of these sociolinguists (Tannen and Grice) are applied to the therapeutic setting (speech among patients -- in couple therapy). Deborah Tannen is renowned for her theories relative to gender and linguistics. H. P. Grice’s four maxims of cooperative communication are a timeless and concise format
for introducing linguistic skills into the applied setting of couple therapy, which requires relationship and social skill-building exercises.

In this dissertation, an exploration of language, gender differences in discourse, and couple therapy results in a proposed format (a workbook for couples) for incorporating sociolinguistics into cognitive-behavioral couple therapy (CBCT). Based on the review of the literature, this dissertation project will provide an evaluation of a pilot study that is designed to apply sociolinguistics to the clinical setting of couple therapy. In theory, the application of sociolinguistic skills will assist couples in decreasing their marital distress and in enhancing their marital satisfaction.

Statement of the Problem

The literature on communication among couples and family members is abundant, particularly in the surveys and questionnaires that are applied to couples and families. However, there is relatively little research on the application of sociolinguistic principles with cognitive-behavioral couple therapy, and on gender difference awareness in the clinical setting. Although psychologists use language as a central avenue of communication in therapeutic venues, there is a paucity of information regarding the application of linguistic skills, gender difference awareness, and cognitive-behavioral theory to the clinical setting of couple therapy.

The research literature review supports the idea that interpersonal communication is a frequent source of marital and family discord. Lack of cooperative discourse and poor communication skills can lead to marital discord and relationship distress (Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Gottman & Levenson, 1988; Gottman, Markman, & Notarius, 1977; Hawkins et al., 2008; Whisman & Uebelacker, 2006). It is also true
that breakdowns in communication are often evidenced in distressed couples and these same couples in distress often lack specific techniques useful in repairing effective communication (Gottman, et. al. 1977).

Communication skills training is probably one of the most widely used behavioral techniques in couple therapy, regardless of psychotherapeutic orientation (Dattilio & Bevilacqua, 2000). The goal of training in communication skills is to increase effective expression of thoughts and feelings, to increase effective listening, and to promote constructive communication in relationships. Traditional training in communication skills often focuses on the use of I-messages and active listening and on the distinction between the listener’s role and the speaker’s role (Cordova, Jacobson, & Christensen, 1998). This dissertation project proposes that the incorporation of basic sociolinguistic skill building exercises and gender difference awareness into couple therapy will improve communication and, in turn, improve marital satisfaction.

Thus, the rationale for this study is to incorporate and demonstrate Grice’s time worn sociolinguistic skills and Tannen’s gender difference awareness into the therapeutic milieu of couple therapy. Grice and Kant have demonstrated the value and the simplicity of the four maxims of the cooperative principle. The maxims are straightforward and value neutral. This proposal suggests that Grice’s cooperative principle and Tannen’s theory on gender differences can be built into the theoretical orientation of CBCT. The specific linguistic skills and gender difference awareness can be demonstrated with annotated data collected on the participant couple.
This pilot study is designed to assess the feasibility of enhancing relationship satisfaction by incorporating cooperative communication and gender difference awareness into cognitive-behavioral couple therapy (CBCT). The literature review discusses the import of cooperative communication in relationships because communication skills are one of the most common techniques employed in couple therapy. The review of the research also suggests that gender difference awareness is an important aspect of communication among heterosexual couples.

**Purpose of the Study**

The current study was designed to further the existing research on effective communication skill interventions with couples either in the therapy setting or in couple’s enrichment programs. The study, which was conducted with one participant couple, examined the effects (on marital satisfaction) of a scripted and contextualized investigator-developed intervention, focused on attainment of four sequentially targeted communication skills. The instructional design used in this study was based on cognitive-behavioral couple’s therapy and practice, Tannen’s gender difference awareness, and Grice’s four cooperative maxims.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Derivation of Language

Although there are many theories regarding the derivation of language, echoic imitation, sound symbolism, instinctive cries, and so on, the origin of language is unknown (Solso, 1991). However, it does seem clear and salient that language is principally, if not entirely, a human characteristic. In our society it is the most common means by which ideas are expressed (Smock, 1999). Sapir (1964) has suggested that not only is language the first element developed in a culture, but it is, in fact, also a precondition of culture. Linguistics has generated a wealth of theoretical and empirical literature that has contributed to our understanding of language and the way in which it interacts with the human mind (Carroll, 1986). Theories on linguistics such as Noam Chomsky’s (1965) have been applied to the nature and development of linguistics that may have begun a century ago with Carroll’s, *Through the Looking Glass* (1872).

Elements of Language

Language, as defined by Smock (1999), is the communication of thoughts through the organized use of words and symbols. Linguistic theorists agree (Sternberg, 2003) upon six basic aspects, suggesting that language is communicative, arbitrarily symbolic, structured, structured at multiple levels, generative, and dynamic. For example, the previous sentence is able to be communicated to the reader by virtue of creating an arbitrary relationship between the symbol (a word such as “aspect”) and its referent (an idea about language). It does so in a structured format that has meaning to the reader at different levels (sound and meaning units), using a novel utterance (a
unique combination of words), and having the advantage of evolving components (new words) that are limitless (Sternberg, 2003).

The study of language development has revealed four separate elements of language. These are phonology (sounds), semantics (the meaning of words and phrases), syntax (the underlying structure of sentences or phrases), and pragmatics (practical communication skills). Phonology begins at birth; infants emit an assortment of communicative cries that indicate needs such as hunger, pain and the need for attention (Sternberg, 2003). Semantics begin prior to speech itself for infants, because they are able to understand the meaning of certain words and phrases such as “no,” or “hot.” At 18 months, most children demonstrate a speaking vocabulary as well as the understanding of far more words than they are able to speak (Sternberg, 2003). Syntax begins when children switch from one-word utterances (holophrastic speech), such as “up,” to two-word utterances (telegraphic speech) such as “me up.” The final aspect, pragmatics, is best thought of as a gestalt, for it involves not merely the sum of phonology, semantics, and syntax, but also entails establishing relevancy between the message and the audience. Therefore a mother calling home to alert the family that she is staying late at work will contour her message to fit the recipient. For example, to an adolescent she might say, “Tell your father I will be home in 2 hours.” This differs from speaking to her 4-year-old for whom she tailors the message to meet the audience; she would say, “Tell daddy that mommy is on the phone.”

Sociolinguistics is the relationship between social behavior and language (Carroll, 1986). Sociolinguists study the social context of language. Noam Chomsky, a sociolinguist, is credited with the initial development of a set of formal models, as
well as a methodology, for studying language (Bandler & Grinder, 1975; Solso, 1991). Chomsky’s theories on transformational grammar altered the very way in which we view language. Chomsky’s theories spurred greater interest in the field of linguistics and expanded the scope of the field of transformational grammar to include pragmatics (Solso, 1991; Sternberg, 2003). There are many different views of linguistics. Indeed, the field as it relates to couple therapy is characterized best in terms of psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics. H. P. Grice (1957, 1967, 1975, 1989) and Deborah Tannen (1986, 1990, 1993, 1994, 1998, 2001) are notable sociolinguists. Immanuel Kant’s (1781), whose interest in language dates back more than two centuries, was also interested in social behavior and language. The contributions of each of these individuals, Grice, Tannen, and Kant play a role in the underpinnings of this dissertation project.

Some sociolinguists study the ways in which people use nonlinguistic elements in a conversational context (Sternberg, 2003). Examples of nonlinguistic elements include body language, personal space, gestures, and vocal inflections (Sternberg, 2003). Body language, also in the category of pragmatics, can play a significant role in communication from infancy into adulthood (Hermansson, Webster, & McFarland, 1988). For example, a toddler, by raising her or his arms toward a caregiver, communicates that she or he wants to be lifted up and possibly held. In adulthood, a partner in couple therapy can register dissatisfaction in her/his body language or facial expression communicating a distinct message of displeasure to the other partner. This message has the power to produce fear of retribution in the partner who is addressed
and she/he may abruptly stop talking, change the subject, or lose her/his train of thought.

For couples in distress, body language is often the last remnant of communication that exists when other means of communication are fractured. Withholding affection is a form of body language that communicates a barbed message to partners in couple’s therapy (Baucom & Epstein, 1990; Baucom, Sayers & Sher, 1990). For example, a spouse, by crossing her/his arms in front of her/him when the partner approaches, can communicate the fact that contact is not wanted with the partner. Body language can also be coercive. An example of body language that is coercive would be when one spouse or partner glares at the other in the midst of a couple’s therapy session. If the intense glare occurs when one partner is embarking upon a new subject, the body language (the glare) may be meant to stifle his/her partner’s communication. The glare may have historical idiosyncratic meaning to the person glaring and to the receiver of the glare. The glare could mean, “You better not talk about that or I am going to be very upset with you!” Or, the glare may mean, “I thought we agreed not to talk about that.”

Although diverse theoretical frameworks and treatment models have emerged since Freud, his original description of psychotherapy as the “talking cure” remains. Therapists speak, and listen – as do patients – and this ongoing exchange comprises the essential medium of healing and personal change. Indeed, Freud himself took an interest in language usage in therapy, as evidenced in his writing regarding the hidden meaning of “slips of the tongue.”

The Cooperative Principle of Communication
The philosopher, Immanuel Kant, himself, first mentioned four linguistic principles of communication in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). Since that time, H. P. Grice (1967) further elucidated these conversational postulates. (Note that Grice preferred his middle name: some of his early articles appear under the name “H. P. Grice”, but in later years he was universally known and published as “Paul Grice”.) Grice (1975) proposed that conversations thrive when we communicate in ways that make it easier for our listener to comprehend what we mean. Grice adapted Kant’s conversational principles, calling them the four maxims or the conversational postulates. Grice’s adaptations of the cooperative principles extol the benefits of each maxim to successful conversations (1989).

These maxims include quality, quantity, relation, and manner. The four maxims are general features of discourse. Grice suggests that talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks, and if they did, these conversations would not be rational (Grice, 1975). Discourse is at least, to some degree, a cooperative effort (Grice, 1975). Participants recognize a common purpose or at least a mutually agreed upon direction. Throughout discourse, certain conversational moves would be suitable and other moves would be unsuitable. Grice (1975) suggests that the four maxims provide a format for participants to “make contributions to the discourse such as is required at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction or the talk exchange in which you are engaged” (p. 45).

*Grice’s Conversational Postulates; the Maxims*

Echoing Kant, H. P. Grice’s (1967) four maxims are conversational postulates for language use in social, conversational settings. His model suggests that
conversations thrive when language is modified to communicate readily and clearly with an audience. Grice’s cooperative principle is used to underpin the distinction between *bona fide* and non-*bona fide* communication. Furthermore, Grice suggests that normal communication cannot take place unless the participants in a dialogue operate upon certain assumptions that define common purposes in communication tacitly understood (Grice, 1957). Discourse or talk exchanges normally consist of a succession of connected remarks making communication, at least, rational.

Cooperative communication prevails when attention is paid implicitly to how remarks are connected. Grice summarized his cooperative principle into four categories or maxims (with some sub-maxims).

Grice’s four maxims of cooperative communication include *quality*, *quantity*, *relation* and *manner* (Sternberg, 2003). Grice’s maxim of quantity suggests that self-imposed limitations govern a level of quantitative appropriateness in communication during which responses should match the other person’s expectations. In couple therapy both partners should share time communicating in the session. According to Grice, when the maxims are observed, the discourse is guaranteed to be *bona fide*, and it is obvious that lying, facetiousness, joke-telling, and sarcasm are ruled out, as is fiction in general. At first glance, joke-telling does not appear as an obvious infraction. However, it is true that when one hears something that one can hardly believe, the immediate response is often, “You must be joking!” Unfortunately, this places joke-telling in the same category as lying. The individual maxims are further elucidated in the following paragraphs.
The maxim of quality stipulates that an individual’s contribution to a conversation is sincere. Grice (1975) explains as follows: “Do not say that which you believe to be false and do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence” (p. 46). Furthermore, preserving the integrity of a conversation depends upon sincerity and abstaining from irony, jokes, and sarcasm. For example, if a married female is attending a formal party in honor of her husband and they are about to depart and he says (jokingly), “You are not going out looking like that, are you?” This statement is uncooperative (even if it is meant to be a joke) and it lacks the maxim of quality because the integrity of the conversation is damaged. The use of irony and sarcasm violate the maxim of quality and the individual’s intention is viewed with skepticism. Quality is demonstrated in the next example in which the husband states sincerely “I appreciate the attention to detail you have put into this evening.”

The maxim of quantity relates to the quantity of information to be provided. Grice (1975) states, “Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange)” (p. 45). According to Grice (1975), being over informative is not a transgression; it is a waste of time. Being over informative can be confusing and raise side issues if the listener presumes that there is a particular point to the overload of information.

Grice’s maxim of quantity suggests that self-imposed limitations govern a level of quantitative appropriateness in communication during which responses should match the other person’s expectations. For example, questions are asked and answered in the course of communication. If a hypothetical question such as, “What would you like to do for dinner?” is answered by detailing all the possible options that exist for
dinner, the maxim of quantity would be violated. The opposite response would also violate the maxim of quantity by being too brief. For example, if the answer to the question “What would you like to do for dinner?” involves one word—“Eat!”—then the maxim of quantity is violated. In fact, this response may violate the maxim of quality discussed previously. Quality responding requires that a response be sincere and that any responses avoid sarcasm. This response, “Eat!” may appear sarcastic.

The maxim of quantity also suggests that speaking time should, for the most part, be equally shared. For example, in couple therapy both partners should be cognizant that time in sessions and outside of sessions should be shared. The maxim quantity would be violated if in a phone conversation, one individual speaks for 3 minutes and the other person speaks for 45 minutes. There are exceptions made for quantity as it pertains to monopolizing the conversation; for example, an exception may be made if one person is in distress. However, a person may become disenchanted when the maxim of quantity is repeatedly violated in either extreme—through the paucity or plethora of information divulged.

As suggested by Baucom and Epstein (1990), deficits in the amount of information that couples reveal to one another in discourse is among the key goals of communication skills training in couple therapy. Additional research gleaned through self-report measures of couple communication suggests that the lack of deficits in quantity of communication, particularly surrounding thoughts and emotions, can lead to marital satisfaction (Snyder, 1981). However, ability merely to communicate did not correlate with couple satisfaction (Guerney, 1977) when comparing codes of a
Grice’s third maxim, relation, suggests that cooperative conversation requires that contributions to the discourse should be relevant. Therefore, the third maxim requires attention to the topic of conversation and the purposeful, relevant responding. Grice suggests that the talker who is irrelevant (lacking in relation) has primarily let down not only his audience but also herself/himself (Grice, 1989). A common violation of the maxim of relation in couple therapy occurs when one partner makes a statement about her/his own emotions and the other partner responds by stating her/his thoughts about a separate issue. For example, one partner states, “I would like to feel less afraid of sharing my feelings with you.” The other partner responds, “Well, I would like you to do a better job of parenting our children.” When attending to the maxim of relation, the partner could respond by asking, “How could I help you feel less afraid of sharing your feelings with me?”

Continuing with the previous example of “What would you like to do for dinner?” to respond with, “Eat!” would violate the maxim of relevance, too. Because a contribution to discourse involves purposeful responding, to say, “Eat!” is not purposeful. A more relevant response would be to say, “I am in the mood for Italian cuisine. I would like to go to Nona’s for dinner.”

The fourth maxim, manner, does not relate to what is said (as in the previous maxims), but how what is said is to be said. Grice (1975) says, “Be perspicuous” (p. 46). In addition, one should avoid obscurity, avoid ambiguity, be brief, and be orderly in one’s discourse. This maxim strongly asserts that one should speak or write in a
clear and concise manner. A metaexample of the fourth maxim in written text would be Strunk and White’s *The Elements of Style* (2000). A violation of this maxim in couple therapy would be “I hate how my wife spends all of our money; every time I turn around she’s blowing money on some insignificant something that she thinks is necessary for some reason and shirking all of her other financial responsibilities that involve money.” This is a convoluted statement that lacks both concision and clarity. The following statement represents a clear account of concision and clarity: “I would like to develop a financial budget that my wife and I can agree upon.”

The example used above regarding, “What would you like to do for dinner?” can have a concise and clear response that establishes manner such as, “I would like to go out to dinner for Italian.” This response is cooperative. It directly and concisely responds to what the hearer would like, employing all four maxims; quality, quantity, relation, and manner. Quality is established by the sincerity of the response; quantity is established by giving the right amount of information; relation is established by relevance of the response, and manner is established by avoiding ambiguity.

As noted in the previous examples, the relevance of Grice’s four maxims of cooperative conversation is best viewed in their absence; that is to say, when the maxims are violated. The cost of violating the four maxims can be considerable in couple therapy. Grice suggests that the reader/listener always assumes that the speaker/writer is being cooperative. Because of this, the reader/listener goes to great lengths to construct a context in which the contribution to the conversation will be meaningful. Thus, for example, a husband’s summary of his marriage consisting solely of the statement that “the children have two parents” might cause the listener to
interpret the paucity of information (i.e., a violation of the Maxim of Quantity) as a negative summary of his relationship with his partner. Communication breaks down when listeners are unable to construct a meaningful context for a comment that is violating a maxim.

Concerning Grice’s model, it is also important to point out that his four maxims of cooperative communication, if exaggerated, can specifically create the opposite effect, lack of cooperation. For example, a partner may become anxious or fearful regarding the cognitive or emotional content of the other partner’s comment and attempt to divert the conversation by employing the maxim of relation. Another example, employing the maxim of quality, occurs when a partner uses irony, joking, or sarcasm to create psychological distance from an anxiety provoking cognition or an undesirable state of feeling that the other partner is expressing. Each one of the four maxims can be exaggerated and employed in conversation. Other examples using Grice’s cooperative postulates will be elucidated in the applied section of this paper.

In contrast, cooperative communication can lead to self-disclosure intimacy in which each partner is “motivated and able to share their deepest thoughts, desires, concerns, likes and dislikes with a special other without fear of retribution, or ridicule” (Freeman, 1999, p. 174). Grice’s claim is that discourse participants attempt to be maximally cooperative by making each contribution to a discourse adhere to the four “conversational maxims.”

Cooperative Communication and Couple Therapy

As noted by Baucom and Epstein (1990), even when quantity, or deficits in the amount of information divulged are not problematic, the manner (or clarity), and the
quality (specificity) of couple’s messages may be awkward or absent entirely. This awkwardness or lack of sociolinguistic skill in reference to specificity and clarity can itself be problematic. It is well established that individuals (Grice, 1957, 1967, 1975) and couples (Baucom & Epstein, 1990; Gottman, Notarius, Gonso, & Markman, 1976; Guerney, 1977) often make awkward and vague statements that indirectly produce uncooperative communication.

Vagueness, or, for the purposes of this project lack of manner in couple communication produces ambiguity, obscurity of expression, and unnecessary prolixity. Thus lack of manner can be especially limiting when one spouse expresses disenchantment with her/his partner’s behavior because the addressed spouse has little useful information about behavioral change (Baucom & Epstein, 1990).

According to Gottman et al. (1976), concision and specificity, or in a word, manner, are emphasized in clinician’s guidelines for clear communication. The formula, resulting from their work, “When you do X in situation Y, I feel Z” requires that the “X” is described in specific observable behavior. The “Y” and “Z” also involve specificity and concision. Because cognitive-behavioral theory (CBT) emphasizes cognitions, emotions, and behaviors, they can be directly incorporated into cooperative communication. Utilizing CBT theory, applying the four maxims of cooperative communication, and addressing Gottman’s formula would suggest that discourse addressing the behavior “X” be clear, concise, relevant, and genuine. In describing the situation, “Y” should also employ the four maxims. And, finally, the emotion “Z” should be discussed using the four maxims as a reference for describing one’s emotion. For example, one might suppose that the initial question was, “Why
are you ignoring me?” Then suppose the answer is, “I’m just mad because you are never available, and you always do this to me.” The answer violates quality, manner, and relevance. The answer is an obscure statement that lacks evidence and might be irrelevant. Perhaps the reality is this: “I am ignoring you because I am upset with you.” The suggestion that one is never available is, by nature, lacking in evidence and therefore, lacking in quality. Manner is violated because the statement is obscure. What does it really mean if one is unavailable? One might use the formula, “When you forget to turn on your cell phone after your plane landed, I feel like you are unavailable to me.”

In reference to the clinical application of couple therapy, it is certainly important that attention is paid to language and speech styles themselves. Although language is not the cause of patients’ problems, it is fair to conceptualize language and speech as important elements that serve to reinforce and perpetuate their malaise. Therapy is a venue in which assumptions and habits of everyday life are questioned. Therefore, why not question language itself and the significance of sociolinguistic skills within the web of interpersonal relations that patients have with significant others.

*Introduction to Couple Therapy*

Marital therapists and couples, also, rated communication problems as the most frequent and most destructive problems that couples face in distressed marriages (Doss, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009; Geiss & O’Leary, 1981). Because of this, communications skills training is one of the behavioral skills most widely employed by couple’s therapists (Dattilio & Bevilacqua, 2000). This study explores the feasibility of using the maxims of cooperative communication as the main skill-
building exercise with couples in couple therapy. The conversational postulates provide a concise format for combining sociolinguistics and communication skill-building in couple therapy.

Various forms of communication rescue demonstrate applications to therapy with couples (Baucom et al. 1998; Doss, et al., 2009; Guerney, 1977; Jacobsen & Christensen, 1996; Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994). Guerney (1977) outlined expressive listening skills. Markman, et al. (1994), demonstrate specific exercises for training couples to use expressive listening skills. The skill of being an effective listener is an essential component for communication in couple therapy. Both cognitive-behavioral couple therapy and communication skill-building employ listening skills.

Two methods of couple therapy with the strongest research support are Behavioral Marital Therapy (BMT; Baucom et al. 1998) and Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT; Johnson, Hunsley, Greeenberg, & Schindler, 1999). The BMT approach emphasizes communication skills. This approach combines problem solving and communication skills training with behavioral contracting. Another method, Integrative Behavioral Couples Therapy (IBCT; Jacobsen and Christensen, 1996), uses traditional behavior change methods to promote acceptance between couples.

*The Intimate Couple* (Carlson & Sperry, 1999), and *Comparative Treatments for Relationship Dysfunction* (Dattilio & Bevilacqua, 2000) are collections of approaches to couple therapy. Historical overviews of the field of couple therapy offer a rich narrative of ways in which the different therapies such as Imago relationship therapy, object relationships therapy, Adlerian therapy, narrative therapy and many others have
applied communication guidance to couple therapy (Dattilio & Bevilacqua, 2000).

Several authors and researchers have noted gender differences as they relate to relationships (Tannen, 1994, 1993; Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998). However, there is a paucity of research on the how gender differences and sociolinguistic skills may contribute to communication issues in clinical settings such as couple therapy.

Cognitive-behavioral couple therapy (CBCT) has developed from the convergence of cognitive psychology research, behavioral couple therapy (BCT) and cognitive therapy (CT) (Baucom, Epstein, Norman, LaTaillade, & Kirby, 2008). CBCT incorporates a great deal of structure in the clinical setting of couple therapy. Despite the structure employed, these critical treatment decisions, requiring logic and algorithms are made in each session of CBCT (Beck, 1990). Baucom and Epstein (1990) clarify the behavioral, cognitive, and emotional variables that exist in CBCT. In their text, Cognitive-Behavioral Marital Therapy, the authors explain the interrelationship of these variables (behaviors, cognitions, and emotions) and the reciprocal influence they have on each other in couple therapy. Their text is a seminal work that provides a detailed guide to conducting CBCT (Beck, 1990).

This dissertation project proposes a pilot study, including a treatment workbook and CBCT therapy. In this study, sociolinguistic skill development and gender difference awareness will be used as the communication skill-building exercises within the realm of CBCT. Through the lenses of Kant, Grice, and Tannen, the four maxims of cooperative communication and gender differences in sociolinguistics are applied to CBCT.
Epstein and Baucom’s (1990, 2003) scientist-practitioner clinical approach to 
CBCT is a cognitive-behavioral skills oriented approach to couple therapy. The 
overall emphasis is a skills approach that assists couples in addressing their current 
concerns as well as their future concerns. Baucom and Epstein emphasize goal-setting 
as a key point when establishing an alliance with couples in couple therapy (Baucom 
& Epstein, 2002, p. 279). Goal-setting guides the therapeutic intervention toward 
aspects of the couple’s relationship when intervention is necessary.

Gender and Discourse—Deborah Tannen

The study of linguistics and gender was launched in 1975 by several authors 
(Robin Lakoff, Barrie Thorne, Mary Ritchie Keys, and Nancy Henley), who at the 
time, produced seminal works on the consistent variations in the way in which men 
and women tend to use language (Tannen, 1993). More recently, Deborah Tannen, a 
gender differences in language. Tannen’s research suggests that gender differences 
begin in childhood when children model and practice language skills predominantly in 
same-sex friendships (Tannen, 1993; Hall, 1984). Female children tend toward 
relational and cooperative characteristics and males practice independent orientations 
in language usage as a direct result of their socialization (Tannen, 1993).

Tannen contends that male-female conversation is cross-cultural, stating that, 
“Culture is simply a network of habits and patterns gleaned from past experience, and 
men and women have different past experiences” (Tannen, 1986, p.125). Tannen’s 
research has led her to conclude that treating boys and girls differently and speaking to 
them differently results in their communicating very differently. Based on her
research, Tannen (1998) elaborates on the dissimilar goals that males and females have in conversation. Her findings suggest that men are socialized to the goal of establishing the upper hand in a conversation; therefore, they may use language in different ways in order to attain this goal (Tannen, 1998). Her findings also suggest that males are more likely than females to take an oppositional stance in their communications (Tannen, 1998).

Concerning the communication goals among females, a strong tendency exists that perpetuates the female role of being more affiliative and facilitating in communication with both sexes; women tend to work hard to keep the conversation going and attempt to reach agreement through negotiation (Tannen, 1998). To reach their conversational goals, women tend to minimize differences, establish equity, and avoid appearances of superiority (Tannen, 1986, 1994).

Male-female conversational styles also differ in terms of the expectations that each brings to long term relationships. When a relationship becomes long term, Tannen suggests that women, in general, might have the expectation that men should know what they like and they should not have to ask for it (Tannen, 1986). For example, a woman might state, “After all this time we have spent together you should know what I want and I shouldn’t have to tell you.” Conversely, being able to ask for exactly what she wants is, to men, a pleasant expectation of a long-term relationship (Tannen, 1986). For example, a male might make this statement, “As well as we know each other, you should feel comfortable telling me exactly what you want.”

The review of the literature on gender differences in conversational goals demonstrates the fact that in order to comprehend gender differences in couples, it is
important to take into account specific gender related, goal directed behaviors. Tannen (1993, 2001) has found that social structure and social context make significant contributions in the conversational goal differences that exist between males and females. Tannen’s research (1993) also proposes that perceived competency, performance expectations, and power differences can retain and continue status hierarchies that direct linguistic differences in social interactions and in general communication styles that exist between males and females.

Research suggests that men and women are socialized to have different conversational goals (Moynihan & Adams, 2007; Tannen, 1993). Males and females, therefore, in an effort to attain these goals, use talk and conversation differently. Research substantiates the fact that women supply more affirmative socioemotional acts, such as showing support and agreement in conversations (Aries, 1982; Wood & Karten, 1986; Mclaughlin et al. 1985). Women have been found to show more frequent indications of interest in and attention to what other people are saying (Tannen, 1993). More specifically, women tend to make comments that expand upon what others have said (Roger & Schumacher, 1983). Such goals have a direct effect on conversational style and amount of talk and, in general, the overarching goal is to establish rapport.

Tannen’s research (2006) suggests that women are unsuccessful in communication with men when they reenact communication strategies through which they were very successful with other women. For example, a female who displays a minor injury, such as a hangnail to her husband results in his telling her to “Put on a Band-Aid” (Tannen, 2006 p. 15); however, showing this same wound to her mother
may have brought her a sympathetic response. Tannen suggests that it is not necessarily the sympathy that a female is seeking, but rather a sense of connection that comes from the metamessage of caring that might be shared in this instance with a mother and daughter communicating. However, as Tannen (2008) demonstrated, given the gender differences, a female utilizing this communication strategy will experience a different result. In fact, she might interpret the Band-Aid comment as uncaring.

Interestingly, males tend to be inclined to show a lower frequency of engaging in informal tasks (familiar and relaxed conversational style), but women are inclined to show more sociolinguistic engagement. Research in this area (Tannen, 1994, 2001; Greenburg, & Johnson, 1988) suggests that the informal engagement that women employ requires greater expertise in socioemotional skills. In fact, Tannen suggests (2001) that success in informal sociolinguistic engagements requires either a harmonious conversational style or the ability to comprehend how males and females differ in their styles. As such, the research suggests that both men and women expect women to be more expert in informal communication styles. Additionally, Tannen has found (2001) that informal communication tends to dominate in the conversations that couples refer to in their marriages. Although both individuals in the couple may perceive talking to a car salesperson as more formal, the conversations that occur in regard to running a household are informal.

Tannen (2001) refers to the conversational goal differences between males and females as report talk (for males) and rapport talk (for females). In other words, males prefer to be, in general, concise and “reporting” in their communication style and females prefer establishing and maintaining rapport in their communication style.
Because of this, if the conversation between a couple is focused on finances, the female may concentrate on making the conversation interesting and be content to generate rapport while discussing financial matters. Males, by stark contrast, may prefer to get the details and facts regarding the financial issue rather than using the topic to generate rapport. For example, if the couple is discussing a new kitchen, the female in the couple may wish to point out all the aspects of the new kitchen that will increase the convenience and the aesthetic qualities of the new kitchen. The male in the couple may want “just the facts.” In this goal directed communication style, the facts might be the cost of the new kitchen. Obviously, with two very different points of reference for communicating, in this instance, about the kitchen, this conversation could become frustrating for both parties if the communication differences are not understood. The solution is to know to whom one is talking (Tannen, 1994, 2001) and, in general, to know that individual’s conversational style, so that style of the person talking can be moderated to fit the listener. The idea is that if both parties understand each other’s style, communication will be more effective and more enjoyable for both parties. In other words, when male-female communication occurs, each party is adjusting her/his style to meet the other at a hypothetical point that exists between the two distinct styles.

In addition to each party moderating her/his style to match the listener or speaker, there may be situations when, given the gravity or the intensity of the speaker, the listener relinquishes a particular style and accommodates the speaker entirely. For example, if the male in the couple calls from an airport and mentions that he is running late and about to board a plane, the female may want to switch directly
to report talk in an effort to grasp the specific reason for the call. In this situation, trying to establish rapport talk would be very frustrating for the male if, in fact, the purpose of the phone call is specifically to give the new details of his flight arrangements. Perhaps a brief “nicety” at the end of the call is all that should be expected, e.g. “thank you,” or “I’ll be there to pick you up!” is enough. This would not be the time to ask, “How are you feeling?” or to tell a story about one’s day. Conversely, if the call is made from out-of-town (on business) to the female on the date commemorating the couples twenty-fifth anniversary and the call consists of “Happy anniversary, gotta get going”, most females would be expecting more rapport talk in this delivery. This may not necessitate an increase in the length of the conversation as much as a greater emphasis on building rapport. For example, “I wish we could be together today on our twenty-fifth anniversary. Let’s each think about what would be a fun way to celebrate it when we can be together. I gotta go—but know I am thinking about you!”

In her text, Tannen (2001) discusses “troubles talk.” Following in the same vein regarding gender differences, and her theory regarding report versus rapport talk, Tannen suggests that males can attend to the facts related to difficult conversations; however, the feelings that go along with the facts can run the gamut, altering their impressions of the “real” problem. In other words, even when it comes to difficult and problem oriented discussions among males and females, if a female wants to leave the impression that there is a problem, it is best stated simply and concisely if it is to be understood as a valid issue. Unfortunately, according to Tannen (2001), a problem does not have to be great for a female to bring it up for dialogue; any concern can
make a good issue provided that it creates an opportunity to endorse common interest and a common bond. Not surprisingly, Tannen (2001) has found that the male viewpoint is the opposite; men assume that if a problem warrants a discussion, that problem must be serious or severe. An example that Tannen uses in her book, *I Only Say This Because I Love You*, is of a husband and wife returning from her office party, and he says, “Your co workers are nice people!”; she responds with, “Of course they are, why wouldn’t they be?” He responds with, “the way you talk about them, I thought they would be awful.” “He had taken too literally, and blown out of proportion, her rapport-talk complaints.” (Tannen, 2001).

According to Tannen (2001, 1994, 1993), when males and females come together to discuss problematic issues, females as mentioned above, see this as another time when rapport can be established. Tannen (2001) goes on to suggest that communication between males and females is best considered “cross-cultural.” In fact, she believes that if an individual does not make this realization about communication between males and females—“then you might end up blaming your partner, yourself, or the relationship” (Tannen, 2001, p 127).

Many females talk about troubles as a way to create more intimacy in the relationship (Tannen, 1993). In fact, females initiate a conversation about troubles as a ritual, looking for what Tannen (1990) refers to as symmetry in conversation. This symmetry would likely be found in a discussion with another woman, in which the other women may share the emotion or thought (creating symmetry between the speaker and the listener). When males and females converse in this way, males tend to see this sharing as evidence of a problem that requires a solution and they feel
obligated to offer a solution (Tannen, 1990b). This offering of a solution creates asymmetry in the relationship, granting the male a one-up position. This is the opposite of what the female sought by initiating the conversation.

Extending beyond Tannen’s use of the term, “troubles talk”, and focusing on it as a phrase used to frame difficult conversations between couples constitutes a theme or category for conversation that might require its own parameters. It makes sense that this allocation should be time sensitive in an effort to protect both parties and ensure that solutions are found. Therefore, problems would be best understood if they were concisely and directly stated by both parties. In addition, if a specified amount of time is allocated ahead of time, circling the problem would be less likely and a solution orientation would be highlighted. It is also possible that by factoring in brevity, the likelihood of both parties maintaining attention would be increased. Once again this will involve meeting in the middle, half way between what each party prefers. Females would do best to concentrate on one topic and state it concisely. Males would do best to understand the point and how the issue may make their spouses or significant others feel, rather than immediately looking for a solution.

For example, if the issue is that he looks at other women when he is with her, she might want to state it concisely. In this situation she might say, “Though I recognize that we all love looking at beautiful people, when you are with me I would appreciate it if you didn’t stare at other women. You might want to consider how you would feel if I were to stare at and attempt to make eye contact with every good looking male I see when I am with you.” End of story! Done! If, in this situation the female goes on to talk about how this makes her feel and how many times she has
found him doing this, including all the (sordid?? assorted??) details, most men, according to Tannen (2001), are going to get lost in the details and not understand the real problem and what they are to do about it. Hence, troubles talk requires that both members of the couple define the time allowance. If troubles talk has to be accomplished in twenty minutes, then concentration tends to fall on the solution instead of rehashing the problem and both parties can attend for this finite amount of time.

Gender differences infiltrate and determine preferred topics of conversation (Tannen, 1994). Preferences regarding topics of conversation prevail in the sexes from childhood to adulthood; young women are more inclined to use talk as part of their play (telling secrets and pretend play); boys, however, spend a lot of time roughhousing, grappling for toys and threatening and clobbering each other (Tannen, 1998).

In adulthood, preferential topics for men may include sports and financial investments but women are interested in discussing what happens to them on a day-to-day basis (Tannen, 1986). Tannen suggests that when women go through the day, they may make mental notes about what to share with their mates and that this mental note taking makes them feel less alone, knowing that there is someone to talk to at the end of the day, even if the thoughts and ideas shared are not profound (Tannen, 1993).

Men, preferring to discuss facts about history, sports, and politics, may totally miss the point of female conversation (connection), focusing on what appears to be insignificant details (Tannen, 1986). When this distinct message (disinterest) is sent to a female and she confronts the uninterested male if he denies his lack of interest, she
may end up feeling confused. In fact, Tannen (1986) found that at this juncture, a male’s refusal to admit disinterest to a female denies her authority over her feelings. Conversely, a male in this situation may feel that his intent was misinterpreted and that “His authority over his own meaning has been denied” (Tannen, 1986). Gender differences in general and this one in particular can be elucidated in couple therapy to create more satisfying communication for both males and females.

Looking beyond the gender differences regarding preferences for conversation and conversational style, Moynehan and Adams (2007) examined the professional perception of men, as clients, in marital therapy. This research study (Moynehan & Adams) refers to Anna Dienhart’s (2001) seminal work on this topic, suggesting that the perception of men as poor clients in marital therapy is linked to their socialization.

Tannen’s recent research (2001) analyzes gender patterns in couples and in family talk. Her findings imply that women tend to do rapport talk, described as discourse that makes a family what it is: intimate, close and relaxed. Conversely, men do report talk, described as conversation focused on impersonal information (Tannen, 2001). Another familial focus described by Tannen (2001) is the “I love it,” “I hate it” dichotomy in which, for instance, men traditionally “love” when their children mature and move from the family dwelling, and women tend to “hate” this transition, suggesting opposing views about significant life events.

According to Tannen, genderspeak generates mass bewilderment between parents and children of the opposite sex so that daughters may mystify fathers and sons mystify mothers (Tannen, 2001). Tannen suggests that the cultural differences that men and women experienced while growing up create an autonomous
understanding, even in adulthood, between same-sex individuals (Tannen, 2001). Another cultural difference noted by Tannen (2001) involves the opposing habits relative to teasing and joking that are employed more often by men. For example, a father may call his toddling son, “rubber legs,” and his adolescent son, “knuckle head,” expressing affection in a format that is familiar to the father’s childhood. Teasing and joking is employed predominantly by males in a family environment and translates into a level of toughness that men demonstrate with their sons that is contrary to interactions with their daughters (Tannen, 2001).

The overabundance of Tannen’s research expands beyond the scope and limits of this paper. Other researchers (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998) have also commented on the deleterious effects that stereotypical gender roles can have on relationships. Knudson-Martin is another researcher who addresses the critical aspects of gender, specifically in CBCT, (??) in her recent chapter in Gurman’s text (2008). Knudson-Martin demonstrates a framework for dealing with the cultural attributes of being male and female and the corresponding issues in CBCT (Knudson-Martin, 2008). Tannen and Knudson-Martin are in agreement that gender itself is a context for couple life (Tannen, 1986; Knudson-Martin, 2008). This dissertation is an attempt to isolate the salient aspects of gender differences that might apply to the clinical setting of couple therapy. In summary, those aspects include divergent gender goals in conversation, gender expectations in discourse, and preferential topics of discussion that vary by gender.

Because it is efficacious and practical to create such paradigms for couple therapy based on landmark theories, it is also possible that couple therapy is
diametrically opposite to individual therapy. Opposing forces are most apparent in heterosexual couples in which gender differences in communication can be profound. Although communication is one of the areas most commonly addressed in couple therapy, gender differences in speech styles are addressed only tangentially in such therapeutic venues.

**Couple Therapy**

Contributing factors that have led couples treatment into the mainstream of therapy include divorce, juvenile delinquency, Adler’s theory of social influence, sexology, and the family life education movement (Dattilio & Bevilacqua, 2000). The theoretical underpinnings of couples and family therapies tend to be borrowed from more general landmark approaches to therapy such as psychodynamic, integrative, postmodern, and systems theories (Dattilio & Bevilacqua, 2000). Practiced outside of the therapeutic mainstream, couple therapy to be referred to as marriage counseling; in the 1960’s and 1970’s, behavioral approaches gained recognition among couples’ therapists (Bevilacqua & Dattilio, 2000).

A recent meta-analysis by Hawkins et al. (2008) on marriage and relationship education suggests that communication skills were most highly affected by the interventions. In this research (Hawkins et al.), most of the communication skills assessments were observational by the researchers, but couples, themselves, were assessing the positive changes in their overall relationships. In fact, the authors (Hawkins et al.) theorize that the reason why marital satisfaction can decrease when communication increases is that couples are actually discussing problems that have been ongoing.
Tenets of cognitive-behavioral theory (CBT) are empirically supported in the realm of couple therapy. Practically speaking, CBT provides a short-term structured approach to relationship problems. Generated in part by behavioral research that proposed increasing pleasant behaviors (Thibault & Kelley, 1959) and further elucidated by Gottman’s (1993) research (on behavioral attributes of successful couples), CBT continues to emphasize more satisfying ratios of pleasing to displeasing behaviors (Dattilio & Bevilacqua, 2000).

The three tenets of CBT as applied to couples include: (a) modifying unrealistic expectations, (b) correcting faulty attributions, and (c) decreasing destructive interactions (Dattilio & Bevilacqua, 2000). In this CBT model, unrealistic expectations are subjective outlooks that have their roots in an individual’s previous relationships. Such expectations begin in early childhood relationships. For example, a male reared in a large family with a very vocal father figure may have the expectation that his female partner will be as comfortable in a screaming match with him as his mother was with his father.

The second tenet, correcting faulty attributions, stipulates that certain thoughts, feelings and behaviors have ascribed interpretations. For example, if a female unexpectedly receives roses from her husband she may have the thought, “He must be up to something!” or “My mom received roses when my father was bonking his secretary.” This example demonstrates an ascribed, negative interpretation to a seemingly positive behavior. Additionally, this female’s history in relationships includes the models provided by her parent’s interactions.
Dattilio and Bevilacqua’s third tenet, decreasing destructive interaction, requires mindfulness in the couple’s interaction patterns. For example, difficult conversations are often rife with cognitive, emotional, and behavioral patterns that are destructive to communication. Increasing positive interactions often involves learning skills that promote a safe atmosphere for each partner to express herself/himself, particularly in regard to expressions of dissatisfaction. A defensive posture is an example of a destructive interaction pattern. Defensiveness retards cooperative communication in the present as well as in future settings in which a partner may stop communicating about an important topic for fear of another partner’s defensive stance. This third tenet involves replacing destructive patterns with functional patterns. For example, a partner who has traditionally been defensive and destructive in regard to financial matters in a relationship, changes from prior cognitions of “I earn more money so I am going to do what I want” to “Following a budget may help me rein in my spending.” The consequences of this cognitive shift will be reciprocal behavioral and attitudinal shifts as well.

Sociolinguistic Elements Proposed for this Manual

The sociolinguistic elements proposed for this manual are the combined works of two sociolinguists—Deborah Tannen and H. P. Grice. The motivation for choosing Deborah Tannen’s work is due to her renown, relative to gender and linguistics. Grice’s work was chosen because his conversational maxims represent a succinct and timeless guide for promoting cooperative communication. Grice’s four maxims can be utilized in an applied setting, such as traditional counseling, during which relationship
and social skill building exercises are often required (e.g., couple and family counseling venues.)

Theoretical and Empirical Literature

The study of linguistics and gender has generated a plethora of theoretical and empirical literature in the past three decades (Tannen, 1993). Research studies report on a broad range of gender differences in language, examining the effect of status, indirect or tentative speech, gender differences in parental storytelling and parental socialization, as well as non-verbal gender differences in communication (Carli, 1990; Rubini & Kruglanski, 1997; Semin & De Poot, 1997; Gallaher, 1992).

Previous studies on gender and status suggest that stereotypical feminine language is evaluated as less favorable than stereotypical male language and communication traits, leading to the perception that males have more status (Meeker & Weitzel-O’Neill, 1977). Status is an important variable in gender studies on language because status has been shown to be a robust determinant of a person’s comportment in discourse. Gender is an overt status cue that is often used in the absence of identified covert cues. Given the fact that it is considered illegitimate for lower status individuals to behave assertively in the company of high status individuals, women, in the presence of this diffuse cue, will inherently use passive language in an effort to be heard and not be rejected by males (Meeker & Weitzel-O’Neill, 1977).
In a study by Carli (1990), the subjects included 59 males and 59 females; half were paired with same-sex partners, half with opposite sex partners. Each pair was videotaped as they discussed particular topics. Opinions about the topic of discussion were individually recorded after the couple disengaged. Status was an influential factor in the comportment of the female subjects who used more tentative language such as tag questions, “It’s going to be a good summer, isn’t it?” and more hedges (perhaps, maybe, and sort of) as well as disclaimers, (I’m not sure; I could be wrong) in their mixed-sex dyads. This use of tentative language actually enhanced their capacities to persuade men, even though these women were considered less knowledgeable and less competent. Conversely, the specific language usage by males in this study was not a consideration when evaluating their competence and knowledge. In fact, both genders rated tentative and assertive males as competent. In addition to competence ratings, male subjects rated unassertive females as more trustworthy and likable, but female subjects rated unassertive females as less likeable, less trustworthy and less competent.

In a study by Moynihan and Adams (2007), 92 couples undergoing treatment at a university-based outpatient clinic, had an average of 6 years in a relationship; the researchers reported no gender differences in frequency or pattern of initial problem reports or improvement rates. Each couple had ten sessions of couples’ therapy. One explanation that had been offered previously for men’s reluctance to seek therapy was that they do not recognize or identify problems; they lack emotional self-awareness; they are less psychologically minded, or they think less than women about their relationships. Moynihan and Adams’ results did not support this finding. Both men
and the women in their study reported problems to the same extent as the women. They also found no discernible difference in the topics acknowledged as problematic. In addition, both partners reported being likewise discontented with the quality and quantity of feelings expressed in the family and the degree to which they felt the family members cared for each other. They (Moynehan & Adams) stated that, in their study, the “men and women were equally cognizant and emotionally aware” (p. 49). However, they went on to say that traditional men are less likely to distinguish relational problems and that the study did not evaluate the degree to which the men in their sample subscribed to traditional roles. The implications for couples’ therapy is to recognize that privacy concerns are more significant than problem awareness as a reason for men’s reserve in seeking treatment (Moynehan & Adams).

Carli’s study (1990) is consistent with Tannen’s research (1986, 1994) that suggests opposing gender styles, expectations, and evaluations are prevalent in language. The findings in this study also suggest that women tend to follow Grice’s cooperative postulates, particularly in discourse with men, but also in conversations with other women. Carli’s view suggests that women (in conversation with men) assume that men will violate the rules of cooperative communication and men (when conversing with women) assume that women will uphold the rules. The result is that both parties seem to fall into gender-linked schemas.

Research by Tennebaum and Leaper (2003) studied the interactions between adolescents (N = 52) and their parents as they engaged in four separate activities. Differences in gender socialization were studied and the milieu of the family environment was explored for gender typing of science achievement. The results of
the study suggest that despite gender equity in achievement levels, parents were more likely to believe that science was less interesting and more difficult for daughters than for sons and, in fact, efficacy in science skills were ultimately influenced by parental beliefs. Another finding in this study was that gender-typing differences tend to intensify in adolescence because of the increased pressure for adolescents to fit into dating roles. This study substantiates Tannen’s research (1986, 1993, 1994), indicating that males and females are commonly raised in culturally divergent environments because of gender.

Gender differences in parental storytelling were the subject of a study by Reese and Fivush (1993). In this study, parents from 24 two-parent families told stories to their 3-year-olds. Storytelling sessions were audiotaped and the results were coded. Results from this study suggested that storytelling might also be sex-typed; this is due to the fact that the overall findings suggest that storytelling style was more elaborative with parents of daughters. Another finding was that daughters in this study responded to the elaborations by demonstrating greater participation in the storytelling.

Hall’s (1984) meta-analysis findings suggested that nonverbal language, or body-movement, is also sex-typed. She reported that men, in general, display more restlessness in their body language such as body shifts and leg movements. Other gender-related findings include a more expansive range of movement (in arms and legs) for men and more expressive gestures in women. The possible impression here is that men are more assertive even in their body movements.

_Tannen’s Research_
Tannen’s research has consistently demonstrated that men and women bring almost opposite goals, expectations, and preferences to language in the context of social communication. Her research has demonstrated the value of understanding communication styles as a precursor to becoming more cognizant and deliberate in mixed-sex conversations during which solutions to communication problems may require only slight adjustments. Her theoretical thrust is anthropological, sociolinguistic and ethnographical: communication as it occurs in natural environments is analyzed regarding the differences in male and female styles.

Tannen uses microanalysis based on observation, transcription, and tape-recording of language as it is used in communication (Tannen, 1993). Although Tannen’s work is extensive, her case-based approach lacks experimental methods such as random sampling, statistical analysis, large databases and control groups. However, as demonstrated in the literature review, the basic premises of her research are consistent with studies employing scientific methodology (Carli, 1990; Reese & Fivush, 1993; Tennenbaum & Leaper, 2003).

H. P. Grice

Grice’s four maxims for cooperative conversation are timeless in their applicability to sociolinguistics. As suggested in Sternberg (2003), a fifth maxim should be added: only one individual should speak at one time. Relative to the clinical application of the four maxims, these four postulates could be applied in couple therapy as a structural base for understanding and employing cooperative communication in the therapy session and in the home.
Application of the Four Maxims to the Clinical Setting

Applying Tannen’s research to gender inequities when considering the misinterpretations that are inherent in gender discourse, one might employ Sternberg’s suggestion (2003) of using a style similar to the style of the person one is addressing. For example, when addressing a male one might use a directive, “To prepare for the gathering, I need you to mow the lawn.” Whereas, when addressing a female, an expressive might be used, “I really enjoy when you make steaks on the grill.”

Application of the Four Maxims to Couple Therapy

Most couples who seek counseling are experiencing some degree of communication difficulty; in fact, the principal aspects of cognitive–behavior treatment as applied to couples counseling entail: changing unrealistic expectations in rapport, modifying faulty thinking in relationship communications and use of self-instructional measures to reduce caustic communication (Dattilio, 2002). What appears to be significant in Dattilio’s primary tenets is sociolinguistics. Assuming Tannen is correct in regard to the opposing forces at work in gender discourse, all couples would benefit from understanding gender differences in goals, expectations and topic preferences. Utilizing the application of Grice’s four maxims along with basic views of Tannen’s research, an amalgam might be created, addressing the components of both theorists by using Dattilio’s three components of marriage counseling as a map to guide the application of Tannen and Grice’s tenets.

Unrealistic expectations in rapport (Dattilio, 2002) might have an educative piece that elucidates the basic postulates in Tannen’s theory on gender discourse. This might be posed to the couple in a question: “Do you find that each of you enjoys
talking about different topics?” Or, “Can you give me an example of how your conversational style differs from your partner’s?” Also, “As you consider your communication style, is one of you more direct than the other?” In this format, instruction and practical exploration of the existing problems in the relationship could reduce unrealistic expectations in rapport.

Modifying faulty thinking in relationship communication (Dattilio, 2002) might include a further exploration of the basic differences in gender communication, coupled with an exercise that includes role-playing to practice communicating, utilizing responses that match the partner’s style in terms of direct versus indirect communication; it also may include using the maxims of quality, quantity, relation, and manner (Sternberg, 2003). Role-play could also include playing the role of the opposite sex in an effort to establish, if needed, more assertion or a more tentative style.

Using self-instruction measures to improve rapport (Dattilio, 2002) could include the rehearsal (as homework) and role-playing of Grice’s four maxims of cooperative communication. A workbook might be created to practice the four maxims (Appendix A); the workbook might also adhere to two of Tannen’s ideas on gender differences in terms of whom the individual is addressing. Structured inventories and questionnaires could be created using Tannen’s views as well as Grice’s model to incorporate the two theories and their applications to Dattilio’s identified issues in marriage counseling.

Application of the Four Maxims to Family Therapy
With regard to family therapy as it too often applies to marriage counseling, the application of Tannen’s research (1986, 1993, 1994, 1998, 2001) and Grice’s maxims (Sternberg, 2003) would assist families in establishing the basic structure of cooperative communication and the underlying gender differences in rapport within family interrelationships. Using Grice’s four maxims as an overlay and Tannen’s gender research as the underpinnings, the application might look like this: A husband attempting to establish rapport with his wife would be cognizant of her need to talk about her day’s activities (Tannen); it would also include his need to create a response that is relevant (Grice). A wife, understanding that her husband has different needs in conversation, might employ the maxim of manner by being direct and concise when requesting his help. Other examples, such as a father’s tendency to tease, would be altered by the maxim of quality, which suggests that irony and joking would not create cooperative communication, particularly, for example, on prom night or on the evening of his son’s first date.

Using an educative approach in family therapy would structure communication with Grice’s maxims and create an understanding of gender differences, using Tannen’s research. Role-playing in therapy sessions using Grice’s maxims as well as homework that would look for violations of the four maxims would take the emphasis away from the violator and attach it to the violation, de-escalating miscommunication and practicing cooperative communication. These violations could be written down and shared and practiced in session. Leading questions by the therapist might lead to illumination of the gender differences by family members as they become more experienced.
In *I Only Say This Because I Love You* (Tannen, 2001), the author combines thoughtful, real life examples that validate common miscommunication themes in the family environment. This book could be used for bibliotherapy with specific emphasis on the chapters in the book that are pertinent to the issues presented by a particular couple or family. Requesting that family members read excerpts from Tannen’s work in session may also de-escalate emotions of frustration, anger, and fear with regard to a family’s interpretation that their family is abnormal and is suffering from irreparable damage.

**Summary**

When embarking on a new subject of study it is common to wonder about the reasons why the subject is important and to ask, “Why do I need to know about sociolinguistics to treat couples in couple therapy?” Psychologists, working with couples in the clinical setting, draw upon many aspects of cognitive psychology such as perception, attention, consciousness, memory, knowledge, and language for diagnosis and therapy (Sternberg, 2003). Linguistics, the study of language, is essential for communication and perception. Linguistics incorporates historical and comparative views and descriptive, structural, and auditory properties of language. Pertinent areas for clinical psychologists include the study of language development and acquisition, and the cognitive representations of language (Solso, 1991). Because language plays a fundamental role in cognition (Solso, 1991), it also plays a significant role in contemporary clinical settings such as couple therapy.

Familiarity with basic linguistic skills would prepare the therapist to assess and teach rudimentary principles of sociolinguistics that are pertinent to clients in the
clinical setting. These principles would apply when assessing and mediating the inevitable problems that appear to be salient for couples in distress.

In summary, it is quite important that attention be given to language and speech styles themselves. Although language is not the cause of patient’s problems, it is fair to conceptualize language and speech as important elements that serve to underline and be responsible for their dissatisfaction in relationships. Psychotherapy relies upon language as one of its primary tools. Individuals and group-based (e.g., gender) differences in linguistic style can and do influence the patient’s web of interpersonal relationships with significant others. Many questions arise in this area of sociolinguistics as applied to the clinical setting, and more specifically to client communicative styles and the causal role that language plays in psychological adaptation or maladaptation. This pilot study will evaluate the feasibility of the use of sociolinguistics in an applied clinical setting such as couple therapy.

The combination of sociolinguistics skills, gender difference awareness, and CBT will be applied to the clinical setting of couple therapy with one couple. Couple therapy is currently the preferred method of treatment for relationships in considerable distress in much of our culture. Intimate relationship distress and the emotional deterioration therein is one of the single, most frequent presenting problems in the clinical setting (Johnson & Lebow, 2000). Fifty percent of first marriages (Cherlin, 1992), and approximately 20% of couples who continue in their marriages report distress (Epstein & Baucom, 2002); these statistics do not include the couples who do not marry and end a relationship in distress. Because of this, there is an increasing demand for couple therapy.
A common theme for couples in therapy is their inability to communicate with each other (Epstein & Baucom, 2002). Therefore, the application of linguistic findings to sociolinguistics in the therapeutic setting (speech among patients—in couples and family therapies), using a contextualized approach is hypothesized to increase marital satisfaction. A manual adhering to CBCT as well as incorporating Grice’s four maxims and Tannen’s gender difference awareness is proposed for couple therapy.

Chapter Three: Hypotheses

This single-subject study was designed to answer the following general research questions: First, will the communication skills and gender difference awareness result in an increase in dyadic adjustment? Will the intervention and the skill attainment result in increased satisfaction in their marriage? Will the participants experience a change in their mood state as a result of the intervention? From these research questions, the following hypotheses were developed:

Hypothesis 1: The participant couple will demonstrate an increase in dyadic adjustment as measured by the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (Spanier, 1976).

Hypothesis 2: The participant couple will experience an increase in marital satisfaction as measured by the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI-R) (Snyder, 1979).

Hypothesis 3: The participant couple will demonstrate improvements in communication style with each other, using the four maxims of
cooperative communication and measuring the improvement using the annotated data, workbook exercises from the investigator-developed workbook, *Cooperative Communication Workbook*, and daily checklists.

**Hypothesis 4:** The participant couple will demonstrate understanding and competency regarding gender differences in communication and speech styles as measured by annotated data, workbook exercises from the investigator developed workbook—*Cooperative Communication Workbook*, and daily checklists.

**Hypothesis 5:** The participant couple will have a decrease in symptoms of depression and anxiety as measured by the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-II) (Beck, 1996), and the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) (Beck, Epstein, Brown, & Steer, 1988)
Chapter Four: Methods

Overview

This chapter outlines the methods used in this research on the effect of sociolinguistic techniques and gender difference awareness on communication skills and marital satisfaction. The investigator-developed workbook includes scripted session plans that target two aspects of gender difference awareness (Tannen, 2001) and the four maxims of communication adapted from Grice (1967). Grice resurrected the four maxims from Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant, 1781) and renamed them the Cooperative Principle. Applying Grice’s four maxims (sociolinguistic techniques) to couple therapy in an effort to create cooperative communication in couples, is the objective of the study.

The instructor-developed workbook, *Cooperative Communication for Couples Workbook* (see Appendix A), is divided into instructional units that enabled the couple to establish an understanding of the four maxims as well as to apply them in dialogues with each other. The workbook provides detailed explanations of each of the maxims and thirty-nine separate, scripted exercises to practice using the maxims in session.
Each session includes several exercises and one entire session was allocated to each of the four maxims.

Cognitive-behavioral research (Baucom & Epstein, 2002; Dattilio & Bevilacqua, 2000) on couple’s therapy suggests that some of the critical components to initiating change include commitment, motivation, and identification of goals. Hence, the first two scripted sessions in the investigator-developed workbook were allocated to identifying and establishing motivation, commitment, and goals.

A single-subject research design using one couple was used in this pilot study to demonstrate a functional relationship between acquiring the four maxims as communication skills and increasing marital satisfaction and mood stability.

Participants

The two individuals who participated in this study were a couple who have been married for 36 years. They reside together with their two sons in a suburban neighborhood. She is a 56-year-old Caucasian female possessing a bachelor’s degree in communication arts. He is a 59-year-old Caucasian male who also possesses his baccalaureate.

The initial interview revealed that the couple’ single, previous experience with therapy was for one of their sons throughout his early teenage years. He is currently 18. The female participant reported that she has been a “homemaker” and a stay-at-home mom throughout the marriage. She stated that she would have preferred having a career; however, a myriad of medical issues precluded her from this endeavor. The male participant reported that he has consistently worked in a professional capacity throughout the marriage.
The female participant mentioned that she was involved in several volunteer organizations that keep her quite busy. As to her interest in the study, she mentioned that she is “surrounded by men at home” and that she feels like “nobody is listening” to her. She also felt that she and her husband, as a couple, were in need of some skills that they could apply to their communication as a couple.

The male participant also stated that he thought they could use some help with their interpersonal communication. He was aware that their communication has been compromised for a long time.

**Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

Potential participants were excluded from the study if the clinical interview and assessment data indicated that either partner suffers from bipolar disorder, psychotic symptoms, current alcohol/drug problems, or if they meet criteria for battering (Jacobsen et al. 1994). In general, couples with severe psychological (psychotic) symptoms, couples exhibiting domestic violence, and couples requiring therapy for addiction would not be good candidates for this study. Additionally, compromises in intellectual capacity as measured by the Wechsler Test of Adult Reading (WTAR; Wechsler, 2001) were also used as exclusion criteria. Couple’s younger than 21 years old or older than 60 were excluded from the study. The other couple that applied was excluded because the female was known to the responsible researcher. She is a hair stylist and owner of the salon where the researcher has been a regular customer for several years.

This study required one participant couple. To be included in the study, the participant couple was required to be: (a) married, (b) living together, (c) between 21-60
years old, and (d) each member of the dyad should have achieved a normal score on the Wechsler Test of Adult Reading (WTAR). The participant couple must have expressed an interest in improving their communication skills.

**Design of the Study**

The current research study employed a single-subject design (Kazdin, 1998) to evaluate the effects of the investigator-developed workbook on marital satisfaction. Case studies, themselves, have played a central role in clinical psychology because the techniques and principles are often applied to problems of the individual (Kazdin, 1998), or, in this case, to one individual couple. Single-subject designs are significant in their ability to provide an opportunity for researchers to test and identify behavioral interventions (Kazdin, 1998).

The value of a single-subject design is described in Kazdin (1998) as having certain advantages listed here. (a) These designs serve as a source of ideas and hypotheses about human development and performance. (b) Such designs have been a source for developing therapy protocols and techniques. (c) These designs can be used to study rare phenomena. (d) They are valuable in developing opposing approaches for therapeutic notions that are considered to be universally applicable. (e) Single-subject designs have influential and inspirational value. In further delineation of Kazdin’s fifth, and final point—this study required a research design that would provide a “dramatic and persuasive demonstration and make concrete and poignant what might otherwise be abstract principles” (Kazdin, 1998, p. 205). Direct observation and annotated data are
utilized in this study as a means to collect and analyze individual and collective changes in the couple’s communication. Researchers have been disinclined to employ systematic observation to study couples, mainly because it is incredibly costly and exasperating (Gottman, 1998).

A qualitative description of the participant couple will include information from a clinical interview, and pre-intervention data from the following scales: the Wechsler Test of Adult Reading (WTAR) (Wechsler, 2001), the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (Spanier, 1976), the Global Distress Scale of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI-R) (Snyder, 1979), the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-II) (Beck et al. 1996), and the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) (Beck et al. 1988).

Throughout the study, the BDI-II (Beck et al. 1996) and the BAI (Beck, Steer, & Garbin, 1988) were administered on a weekly basis to establish the couple’s level of anxiety and depression. Other continuous measures included the individual daily checklists. These checklists provided each participant with a subjective self-monitoring measure regarding the utilization of their new skills with her or his spouse in between sessions. The other function of the Daily Checklist was to rate their spouses utilization of the new communication skills.

The pilot study design used post intervention assessment measures of the couple’s performance on the following scales: (a) Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (Spanier, 1976), (b) The Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI) (Derogatis, 1993), (c) Global Distress Scale of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI-R) (Snyder, 1979). The Wechsler Test of Adult Reading (WTAR) provides a brief measure of intellectual capacity for screening couples. Daily checklists provide subjective and objective
assessments of the couple’s attention to and practice of the skills they are learning in the sessions.

Finally, several of the same scales used above (DAS, MSI-R-R, BSI, BAI, BDI-II) provide the pre intervention and post intervention measures for the study. *The Cooperative Communication for Couples Workbook (CCCW)* assignments provides a measure of competency regarding the four maxims of communication. The BDI-II and BAI provide weekly measures of mood state for each member of the dyad. The checklists provide daily measures of subjective and objective self-monitoring regarding practicing the skills in between sessions.

Training of communication skills was conducted in 11 sessions using the investigator-developed *Cooperative Communication for Couples Workbook* with scripted session plans. The session plans included practicing the skills in session using the designated exercises, responsible investigator reinforcement feedback, and daily self-monitoring. All sessions were audio taped. Skill attainment was based on observations of individual performance for each of the participants in each of the eleven sessions.

The couple’s skill level relative to the four maxims and gender difference awareness in communication was observed by the primary investigator throughout the course of the study. The descriptive function of their skill level was to provide information about the pre intervention level of communication skills. Further, the annotated data, once transcribed were instrumental in solidifying skill level and skill development. Session exercises, self-monitoring checklists, observations by the
responsible investigator, taped sessions, and questionnaires provided additional data on baseline marital satisfaction, mood state, and self-assessment of skill utilization.

This intensive design allowed the responsible investigator to use exact excerpts from therapy sessions to assess and modify the workbook. These excerpts provide examples that explain the maxims of communication and gender differences in communication. This investigation has the potential to complement and contribute to research, theory, and practice by demonstrating scripted session plans that can be duplicated in future couple therapy and research.

The design of this pilot study was to evaluate the effects of the investigator-developed workbook. A single-subject design, such as this, has, as stated in Kazdin (1998), the possibility of providing dramatic and persuasive demonstrations of the maxims of communication in couple therapy and make concrete and poignant what might otherwise be abstract principles. Successful application of the cooperative maxims might stimulate research by others who could test and critically evaluate the claims made in this study. Because single-subject designs provide dramatic and concrete examples, they often stimulate investigation of a phenomenon.

**Materials**

The study incorporated the use of a variety of questionnaires, and materials. In addition, the intervention included an investigator-developed workbook based on scripted session plans.

*The Intervention Workbook*

The *Cooperative Communication for Couples Workbook (CCCW)* is an investigator-developed contextualized instructional unit designed to assist couples in
improving their cooperative communication. The CCCW is based on theoretical principles of cognitive-behavioral therapy, Grice’s conversational postulates, and Tannen’s gender difference awareness. Self-monitoring daily checklists provide motivation toward awareness of using the four maxims of communication between sessions.

**Measures**

This pilot study measured what effect, if any, the intervention of acquiring new communication skills would have on the couple’s (a) dyadic adjustment, (b) psychological distress, (c) marital distress, and, (d) marital satisfaction. As mentioned above, these assessments were performed at pre intervention and post intervention.

**Measure of Dyadic Adjustment**

Dyadic adjustment was measured by each member of the dyad’s actual responses on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (Spanier, 1976). The DAS is a rapid measure of the adjustment of partners in committed relationships. DAS items are worded so that they are applicable to married, dating, or cohabiting dyads. This scale indicates whether or not the satisfaction level increases as cooperative communication increases.

The DAS, a 32-item self-report questionnaire that provides a measure of overall dyadic adjustment, has four subscales. Each of the four subscales generates useful and specific information concerning the major components that compose dyadic adjustment. Factor analyses show that the instrument measures four empirically validated dimensions: dyadic consensus (DCon), dyadic satisfaction (DS), Dyadic cohesion...
(Dcoh), and affectional expression (AE) (Spanier, 1989). The higher the score on these dimensions, the higher the level of satisfaction in the dyad.

Item analysis for the DAS indicates that the total score is reliable. The literature review revealed high Cronbach’s alpha values from the dozens of studies; the alphas for the total scores range between 0.91 and 0.96 (Spanier, 2000). Cronbach’s alpha values for two of the four subscales (Dyadic Satisfaction and Dyadic Consensus) are reported as high by Spanier (2000). The alpha coefficients for the two shorter subscales demonstrate only adequate homogeneity (Spanier, 2000). The range for the four subscales is 0.73-0.94 (Dcon = .90, DS = .94, Dcoh = .81, and AE = .73) for internal consistency. The DAS has a high test-retest reliability of 0.96 over an 11-week interval. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale is a rapid measure of the adjustment of partners in committed relationships.

*Measure of General Intelligence*

General intellectual capacity is measured by each member of the dyad’s actual performance on the Wechsler Test of Adult Reading (WTAR; Wechsler, 2001). The research couple’s reading skills and general intellectual capacity (sufficient for successfully utilizing the workbook) was measured by the WTAR. Rationale for using the WTAR in this study is to briefly assess the participant’s intellectual capacity in an effort to avoid engaging a couple who cannot grasp the basic elements of the study.

The WTAR has been shown to be a reliable and valid measure of premorbid intellectual functioning of adults aged 16-89. The WTAR was designed and conormed with the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-Third Edition (WAIS-III; Wechsler, 1997) and the Wechsler Memory Scale-Third Edition (WMS-III; Wechsler, 1997). The
WTAR manual was developed as a companion to the WAIS-III/WMS-III Technical Manual (The Psychological Corporation, 1997).

The co-development of the WTAR with the WAIS-III and WMS-III was instrumental in establishing data for direct comparison between actual and predicted intelligence and memory function of a large, representative sample of normally functioning adults (Wechsler, 2001). Direct comparisons can be made for a variety of clinical groups because the WTAR, the WAIS-III, and the WMS-III share developmental research and overlapping validity studies (Wechsler, 2001). The WTAR word list, which is composed of 50 items, requires fewer than 10 minutes to administer. This instrument is administered individually.

*Measure of Psychological Symptom Patterns*

Psychological symptom patterns are measured by each member of the dyad’s actual performance on the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI; Derogatis, 1993). This inventory is designed to reflect psychological symptom patterns of respondents (Derogatis, 1993). The BSI is a self-administered inventory derived from the Symptom Checklist-90-Revised (SCL-90-R; Derogatis, 1993).

The BSI is a 53-item brief self-report form that reflects psychopathology and psychological distress. It is based on the SCL-90-R (Derogatis, 1993) in terms of the same nine symptom dimensions and the same three global indices. The BSI also has nine symptom dimension scales (somatization, obsessive-compulsive, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, anxiety, hostility, phobic anxiety, paranoid ideation, and psychoticism). The BSI has three global indices (global severity index [GSI], positive symptom distress index [PSDI], and positive symptom total [PST]). The global indices
help to measure overall psychological distress, intensity of symptoms, and reports number of self-reported symptoms.

The BSI in this study was administered using a paper-and-pencil format. Respondents are directed to report the level of discomfort each item may have caused them in the past week. The BSI usually requires 2-5 minutes for instruction and 8-10 minutes to complete. The BSI provides an overview of an individual’s symptoms and their intensity at a specific point in time.

The psychometric properties of the BSI were well-defined in the *Handbook of Psychiatric Measures* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). The psychometric properties of the BSI demonstrate that on the basis of a sample of 718 psychiatric outpatients, Cronbach’s alpha coefficients range from 0.71 on the Psychoticism dimension to 0.85 on the Depression dimension (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). A sample of 70 nonpatient individuals was tested twice across a 2-week interval, and coefficients ranged from 0.68 for somatization and .91 for phobic anxiety (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). The Global Severity Index (GSI) has a stability coefficient of 0.90. Very high correlations have been found between the BSI and the SCL-90-R on all nine-symptom dimensions (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

The validity of the BSI is also substantiated in the *Handbook of Psychiatric Measures* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). As to the validity of the BSI, according to the American psychiatric Association (2000), the sum of studies using the BSI demonstrates the instrument to be broadly sensitive to the expression of psychological distress and interventions across a wide range of situations. The BSI
correctly identified 84% of previous cancer patients judged to be clinically depressed 1 year later as potentially problematic. According to the American Psychiatric Association (2000), the relationship between the GSI of the BSI and the Global Assessment of Functioning (GAF) Scale was assessed in a sample of 217 psychiatric inpatients. No discernible relationship was found between symptom distress reported by patients (GSI) and global functioning rated by clinicians (GAF). Overall, the reliability, validity and utility of the BSI instrument have been tested in more than 400 research studies (Derogatis, 1993).

The rationale for using the BSI in this study was to assess the participant’s pre intervention and post intervention psychological status. The BSI was used in addition to the BDI-II and the BAI for evaluating distress in each member of the dyad both at pre intervention and at post intervention.

Measure of Marital Satisfaction

Marital satisfaction was measured by each member of the dyad’s actual self-reports on the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI-R, Snyder, 1979). This inventory is a self-report inventory that measures, individually, the nature and degree of distress or of satisfaction in key areas of a couple’s relationship. The MSI-R generates scores reflecting global marital distress and also distress in a number of specific subcategories, such as problem-solving communication, disagreements about sex, and disagreements about finances.

The MSI-R is a multidimensional 150-item questionnaire in the form of brief statements with a true-false response format and a sixth-grade readability level (Snyder, 1997). Administration of the MSI-R generally takes about 25 minutes. In a clinical
setting, as a self-report measure, the MSI-R complements the clinical interview by permitting sensitive information about the couple’s relationship to be gathered in the early stages of therapy.

The administration and scoring of the MSI-R was conducted with hand-scored paper-and-pencil materials. Administration generally takes about 25 minutes. Each member of the dyad was administered the MSI-R at pre intervention and again at post intervention.

The psychometric properties of the MSI-R demonstrate that the instrument is a reliable and valid measure of marital distress and/or satisfaction (Snyder, 2004). The revisions made from the MSI to the MSI-R were examined for a national sample of 646 individuals (323 couples). Snyder (1997), states that correlations ranged from .94 to .98 ($M = 95.5$). Test-retest reliability coefficients for the original MSI-R generally confirm the temporal stability of individual scales, ranging from .74 (GDS, FIN, CCR) to .88 (ROR) with a mean coefficient of .79 (excluding the inconsistency scale). More than 20 studies have examined the discriminate validity of the original MSI across diverse clinical samples. Several studies have confirmed the ability of the MSI to discriminate between couples in marital therapy and in non distressed couples from the general population. Analyses confirm both the internal consistency and the stability across time (test-retest reliability) of individual scales on the MSI-R (Snyder, Wills, & Keiser-Thomas, 1981; Scheer & Snyder, 1984; Snyder, 1997).

The rationale for using the MSI-R was to identify the nature and extent of the relationship distress prior to and after the treatment was administered. The MSI-R can also serve as an objective measure of therapeutic gains and outcome throughout therapy
and at termination (Synder, 1997). Additionally, the MSI-R is used as a multivariate criterion of dyadic functioning in research such as this, for investigating the effectiveness of various treatment methods.

Measure of Depression

The research couple’s level of depression was measured and monitored weekly by each member of the dyad’s actual self-reports on the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-II; Beck et al., 1996). The BDI-II, which provides a measure of the behavioral manifestations of depression in adults and adolescents, was designed to standardize the assessment of depression severity, describe the illness, and to monitor change over time (Beck & Steer, 2000). The BDI-II has been found to be a reliable and valid instrument (Beck, Steer, & Garbin, 1988). Based on a review of 25 years of research, Beck et al. (1988) found 25 studies of internal consistency.

In nine studies of psychiatric populations using the BDI-II (with a range of 63-248 participants per study), Cronbach’s alphas ranged from 0.76 to 0.95. In five studies of nonpsychiatric populations (with a range of \(N = 65-214\) per study), alphas ranged from 0.73 to 0.90. The internal consistency reported by the Center for Cognitive Therapy (1978-1979) for 248 consecutive admissions was an alpha value of 0.86. In terms of the validity of the BDI-II, correlations between the BDI-II and other standard measures of depressive symptom severity show high, but not complete concordance across measures.
Measures of construct validity for psychiatric patients range from 0.55 to 0.96, with a mean of 0.72. (Beck & Steer, 2000). Concurrent and discriminative validity measures also indicate that the BDI-II is a valid screening tool for mood disorders when it is combined with other clinical information (Rudd & Rajab, 1995). For nonpsychiatric subjects, correlations range from 0.55 to 0.73, with a mean of 0.60 (Beck & Steer, 2000). Correlations between the BDI-II and the Hamilton Rating Scale for Depression (Ham-D) in psychiatric populations show coefficients that range from 0.61 to 0.86, with a mean of 0.73.

The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-II) is an objectively-scored, self-report questionnaire that comprises 21 items. Each item on the BDI-II is a possible symptom of depression. Statements describe possible symptom severity from low to high. The items are graded in severity along an ordinal continuum from absent or mild (score of 0) to severe (a score of 3). The typical administration time for the BDI-II is 5-10 minutes. Subjects describe how they are feeling “right now.” The depression symptom severity is determined by summing the scores of the statements endorsed for each item on the BDI-II. The most recent scoring guidelines suggest the following interpretation of scores: 0-9 minimal; 10-16 mild; 17-29, moderate; and 30-63, severe. The BDI-II is appropriate to use with participants age 21-60.

Measure of Anxiety

The research couple’s level of depression was measured and monitored weekly by each member of the dyad’s actual performance on the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI; Beck, Epstein, Brown, & Steer, 2000). The BAI, which provides a measure for anxiety
with specific focus on the somatic symptoms of anxiety (Beck et al., 1988), was
designed to discriminate between depression and anxiety.

Sample items include typical symptoms of anxiety: heart pounding or racing,
sweating, and hands trembling. The BAI, which uses a 4-point Likert scale ranging
from not at all (no symptoms) to severely (I could barely stand it), is a brief, self-
administered measure that is simple to score. The typical administration time for the
BAI is 5 minutes. The BAI is appropriate to use with participants age 21-60.

The psychometric properties of the BAI demonstrate that this self-report
inventory is a reliable and well-validated scale of somatic anxiety symptoms found in
anxiety disorders and depression (Beck, et al. 2000). The BAI is found to have high
internal consistency; Cronbach’s alphas (reported in five studies) range from 0.90 to
0.94 in psychiatric populations ($N = 250$), outpatients ($N = 40-160$), and nonpsychiatric
populations ($N = 225$). Item-total correlations range from 0.30-0.71. The test-retest
reliability correlation coefficients range from 0.67 to 0.93 over a 1-week interval ($N =
40-250$). Over a 7-week interval, the correlation coefficient was 0.62 ($N = 326$) (Beck,
et al.). The validity measures indicate that the BAI has good convergence with other
measures of anxiety in adult and adolescent psychiatric patients and community
samples. The BAI measures moderate to high correlations with the Hamilton Anxiety
Rating Scale (HARS) ($r = 0.51$), and the Symptom Checklist –90—Revised (SCL-9-R)
($r = 0.81$). Correlation coefficients between the BAI and the BDI-II are substantial ($r =
0.61$). The BAI was also found to discriminate between anxiety and depression more
accurately than other self-report inventories of anxiety. The BAI’s sensitivity to monitor
change in anxiety symptoms with treatment is also well documented (Brown, Beck, Newman, 1997).

The BAI is composed of 21 items. Each item is a possible symptom of anxiety. Subjects are asked to report how much they have been bothered by each symptom in the past week, including the day of administration. The total score on the BAI may range from 0 to 63. The most recent scoring guidelines suggest the following interpretation of scores: 0-9 normal or no anxiety; 10-18, mild to moderate anxiety; 19-29, moderate to severe anxiety; and 30-63, severe anxiety (Beck et al. 2000).

Measure of Skill Attainment

Direct observations were made by the responsible investigator in each of the eleven scripted instructional sessions. The scripted sessions consist of thirty-nine separate exercises over the course of the study (see Appendix A). The responsible investigator directly observed each of the scripted exercises in which the study participants engaged. Digital-audio-tapes of the sessions were transcribed into a script for the responsible investigator to read and, again, to observe content of communication skills for each member of the dyad. Response cards designated for each of the thirty-nine exercises were included in the investigator-developed workbook. Each member of the dyad wrote down her/his individual responses on each one’s response card prior to engaging in a dialogue. The couple’s response cards were also used as a measure of skill attainment.

Skill attainment was measured through direct observation of the couple in the eleven scripted sessions of the study. Additionally, transcribed digital-audio-tapes
provided the responsible investigator with a script of each session. Couple response cards from the thirty-nine exercise units were also used to measure skill attainment.

*Measure of Participants’ Attitude about the Study*

Subject surveys or social validity measures are used to ensure that the research is considered by consumers to be useful (Llody & Hebusch, 1996). A Subject Survey (see Appendix C) was used to measure the research couple’s opinions of the study. The participants completed a subject survey at the end of the study.

The investigator-developed Subject Survey inquired about the following: (a) planning and implementation of the instructional units, (b) usefulness and ease of the workbook, (c) organization of the sessions, (d) ease in understanding the material, (e) usefulness of the homework assignments, (f) usefulness of the subjects covered in the Workbook, (g) percentage of information that was new to the participants, (h) interest level in the material covered in the sessions, (i) comfort level in asking questions or making comments during the sessions, (j) attainment of specific skills, (k) whether or not they would recommend the workbook to others, (l) what they liked least/most, and (l) whether or not the study increased each member of the dyad’s cooperative communication with her/his spouse.

The subject survey comprises 18 items (16 Likert scale items and 2 short answer items). The couple’s responses are recorded on a 10 point Likert Scale from 1 (Not at all) to 10 (definitely). This is an investigator-developed survey and thus will not be psychometrically evaluated.

*Procedures*

*Participant Recruitment*
Participant Recruitment Flyers (See Appendix L) were placed in commonly used places throughout the community including local libraries, grocery stores, coffee shops, and hair salons.

The participant couple used the phone number from the recruitment flyer to call the private psychology practice where the responsible investigator is employed. The supervisor and the scheduler/office manager were informed of the study. When the scheduler identified potential couples via intake information, the scheduler notified the responsible investigator and an intake interview was scheduled to determine if inclusion and exclusion criteria (noted previously) were met. Information about the potential couple was reviewed with the Chair of the responsible investigator’s doctoral committee.

The potential participant couple had the opportunity to volunteer or decline participation in the study. If declining, the couple also had the opportunity to choose between the study investigator and three other referrals within the community for the purposes of engaging in couple therapy, or referrals to two other couple’s enrichment programs in the local area. If couples declined, recruitment efforts continued as outlined above. If volunteering, the couple had the opportunity to inquire further about the study with the responsible investigator.

_Informed Consent Process_

Upon receipt of the Couple Response Form, the responsible investigator contacted the potential participant couple by phone to schedule an initial meeting to review Assent and Consent Forms with the potential participant couple. The Assent and
informed Consent Forms were signed by each member of the dyad, the responsible investigator, and a witness.

At this point the participant couple began completing the pre intervention measures: (a) Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (Spanier, 1976), (b) The Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI) (Derogatis, 1993), (c) The Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI-R) (Snyder, 1979), (d) Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-II) (Beck et al. 1996), (e) Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) (Beck et al. 1988), and (f) Wechsler Test of Adult Reading (WTAR) (Wechsler, 2001). The instruments just cited were completed on site with the responsible investigator present to answer questions. Upon completion of the pre intervention measures, session one was scheduled.

*Potential Risk to Participants*

Potential risks to participants could include worry or anxiety about their performance in the sessions. If communication skills do not improve, participants may feel disheartened about their relationship. The questionnaires and surveys may be perceived as invasive. The personal history requirements for the study may also be perceived as invasive. The audiotaping could make participants nervous or apprehensive. The researcher is under legal obligation to report domestic abuse if it is determined to be present.

*Potential Benefit to the Participants and Others*

Participants may benefit from this study by increasing their communication skills. Other people in the future may benefit from what the researchers learn from this study.

*Procedure for Maintaining Confidentiality*
Signed consent forms will be kept in a locked cabinet. The dates will be collected in a way that participants will not be identified. The dates will be reported in a way that participants will not be identified.

Administration of the Study

The study was administered by the responsible investigator and conducted over a period of 11 sessions. Each session was approximately one hour. In the first two weeks of the study, sessions were scheduled twice weekly. Each session was be structured using a cognitive-behavioral couple therapy format that includes: (1) BDI-II and BAI inventories, (2) setting the agenda, (3) a brief mood check for each partner (using a Likert scale 1-10), (4) a mood check for the relationship solicited from each partner (Likert scale of 1-10), (5) bridge from the previous session, (6) review of homework, (7) discussion of agenda items (including structured session format), and (8) assigning new homework (Beck, 1995). Each session was digitally audiotaped to provide annotated data.

The Cooperative Communication for Couples Workbook Program

The Cooperative Communication for Couples Workbook (CCCW) is a contextualized approach to instruction that draws on the combined work of H. P. Grice, Immanuel Kant, and Deborah Tannen. The contextualized approach to instruction focuses on the application of skills as they are acquired (Merrifield, 2000). The workbook was designed with thirty-nine exercises that were implemented immediately after learning about each of the gender difference awareness and communication skills. Research shows that knowledge transfers from one context to another more successfully when the student recognizes not only the concepts but also the underlying philosophy,
and relationships that are obtained through the application of knowledge (Glaser, 1992; Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999; Greeno, Resnick, & Collins, 1997).

Response Cards

The workbook includes a binder ring of response cards for each participant for each of the thirty-nine exercises (see Appendix A). Participants wrote their responses to each of the exercise topics prior to discussing the topics and role-playing them with each other in the scripted sessions.

Curriculum

The study was conducted in fifty minute sessions over a 9-week period. The Cooperative Communication for Couples Workbook provided the structure for each of the scripted sessions. The responsible investigator administered the Workbook. The detailed session by session Workbook (Appendix A) was based on Immanuel Kant’s linguistic principles and developed into a couple’s therapy program by the responsible investigator.

Session one is an introduction that includes an overview of the cooperative communication for couple’s curriculum. The importance of establishing goals was introduced in this first session. Response cards were also introduced and utilized to establish each participant’s individual commitment to and goals for the program. This introduction also reviewed the daily checklist (see Appendix F) as homework in between sessions. This session was also used to observe baseline communication skills prior to introducing the curriculum.

Sessions two and three are contextualized instructional units designed to address two aspects of gender difference awareness. Gender difference awareness skills were
presented in the following order: (a) understanding gender differences in communication—report talk versus rapport talk, and (b) troubles talk.

The maxims of cooperative communication were presented in sessions five through nine in the following order: (a) establishing quality, (b) establishing quantity, (c) establishing relation, and (d) establishing manner. The order of the skills taught was chosen based on the investigator’s belief that the earlier skills on gender differences were more straightforward and global; the actual maxims followed and were introduced in order of complexity. The first two skills were selected from Deborah Tannin’s (2001) research on gender differences. As mentioned earlier, the four maxims are based on Grice (1967), who resurrected them from Kant (1781).

Sessions ten and eleven were designed to utilize the gender difference awareness skills with the four maxims of cooperative communication. Pre-established exercises were used to practice the combined skills. Session eleven was also used to gather data on the post intervention measures: (a) Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (Spanier, 1976), (b) The Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI) (Derogatis, 1993), (c) The Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI-R) (Snyder, 1979), (d) Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-II) (Beck et al. 1996), (e) Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) (Beck et al. 1988), and (f) The Subject Survey. The Debriefing Document (see Appendix D) was read at the end of this final session.
Chapter Five: Results

In this chapter, descriptive information is reported on each of the participant’s behavior during the intervention, as noted in the research (Kazdin 1982 & 1198; Franklin, Allison, & Gorman, 1996). The descriptive information is composed of continuous observations of communicative behaviors throughout the study. The basic approach to analyzing samples of a couple’s behavioral interactions is to identify frequencies and sequences of certain communicative acts (Epstein & Baucom, 2002). In addition to direct observation, the annotated data was transcribed to provide validation of the study procedures as well as analysis of baseline and post intervention communication skills. Weekly administrations of the BDI-II (Beck, et al. 1996) and the BAI (Beck, et al. 1988) were used to elucidate mood state. Pre intervention and postintervention measures of psychological symptoms, marital satisfaction, and dyadic adjustment further elucidate the results of this feasibility study.
Analysis

The hypotheses were addressed, using a single-subject design (Kazdin, 1998) with one participant couple. The study evaluated the communication skills of each member of the dyad, using direct observation as well as transcripts of the annotated data gathered in the eleven sessions of the study. Pre intervention and post intervention measures of each participant’s mood state, marital satisfaction, and dyadic adjustment were assessed using the following measures: the BSI, BAI, BDI-II, MSI-R, and DAS respectively (Derogatis, 1993; Beck, 2000, Beck, 1998; Snyder, 1981; Spanier, 1976). Direct observation, as suggested by Kazdin (1998), to assess interpersonal (e.g., marital) communication, as well as analysis of actual transcripts of the annotated data, provided additional sources of continuous assessment.

Hypotheses 1

Following intervention, both participants improved their scores from pre intervention to post intervention on overall dyadic adjustment, as evidenced by the DAS. The dyadic adjustment scores (see Figure 1) for each of the participants at pre intervention and at post intervention showed varied results in each of the subscales and established an overall improvement in dyadic adjustment for both participants. The male participant improved in three of the subscale areas including Dyadic Consensus, Affectional Expression, and Dyadic Cohesion. His results for the fourth subscale (Dyadic Satisfaction) remained the same at post intervention. The female participant improved substantially in one of the four subscale areas, Dyadic Satisfaction and her scores worsened in the other three subscale areas including Dyadic Consensus, Affectional Expression, and Dyadic Cohesion.
Hypothesis 2

Following the intervention, both of the participant’s scores for marital satisfaction improved as evidenced by the MSI-R (See Table 1). The interpretive key on the MSI-R stipulates that as the T-score’s increase, the degree of distress increases. The female’s scores improved in 9 of 11 subscales, and her scores were maintained in the two remaining subscales. The male's scores improved in 5 of 11 subscales, stayed the same in 3 subscales, and worsened in the 3 remaining subscales. Both the male and the female demonstrated improvements in the Dissatisfaction With Children (DSC) subscale and the Conflict Over Child Rearing (CCR) subscale. The Family History of Distress (FAM) subscales remained the same for both participants when comparing the pre intervention and post intervention scores. Other notable changes include the Problem-Solving Communication (PSC) subscale, in which both participants’ scores also demonstrated improvements.
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre/Post</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T-score</td>
<td>T-score</td>
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<tr>
<td>Global Distress (GDS)</td>
<td>66/66</td>
<td>65/62</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affective Communication (AFC)</td>
<td>62/62</td>
<td>61/63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-Solving Communication (PSC)</td>
<td>66/62</td>
<td>55/52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aggression (AGG)</td>
<td>53/52</td>
<td>56/56</td>
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<td>Time Together (TTO)</td>
<td>&gt;70/61</td>
<td>60/63</td>
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<td>Disagreement About Finances (FIN)</td>
<td>57/49</td>
<td>37/37</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual Dissatisfaction (SEX)</td>
<td>69/70</td>
<td>52/54</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role Orientation (ROR)</td>
<td>&lt;30/61</td>
<td>70/64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Family History of Distress (FAM) 64/63 41/41
Dissatisfaction With Children (DSC) 56/52 62/41
Conflict Over Child Rearing (CCR) 54/40 53/49

Hypothesis 3

The stated hypothesis was supported because the participant couples demonstrated improvements in individual and in specific areas in which violations of the maxims had been present at baseline. However, it is with the understanding that collecting data by direct observation and through the use of annotated data is subject to interpretation and many threats to validity. Establishing any level of validity would require a rating system and independent raters. Therefore, an approximation of baseline data for each participant’s communication skills was established using direct observation and transcripts of the annotated data. Approximations of baseline data were determined during the first four sessions as the couple established commitment and motivation to the goals, as well as an understanding of gender differences.

According to direct observation and transcripts of the annotated data, the participants have divergent styles of communication. The female participant uses a more emotive, repetitive, run-on style of communication that is, at times, difficult to follow. In sharp contrast, the male participant is less emotive, concise, clear, and easier to follow. The female participant’s voice tone has a lot of volume and emotion, whereas the male participant’s voice tone is soft, and even-toned.

The female participant, herself, noted that she “rants, raves and gives too much information.” This point was supported by direct observation and by reading the
transcripts of the annotated data. Additionally, the female participant recognized that she repeats herself. This was noted in the transcripts of the annotated data. The male participant stated that he prefers “report talk” during which information is concise and is presented in an orderly manner. In fact, the transcripts of the eleven sessions revealed that he spoke in grammatically correct sentences that were devoid of superfluous information, were direct, and were logical.

The four maxims were represented in the couple’s communication style, at baseline, and at post intervention in the following ways:

Quality (see Appendix A) was present in both of the participant’s responses in terms of their communication being “true.” This was agreed upon by both parties during the intervention in response to each other, and found to be true by direct observation and transcripts of the data. However, the female participant demonstrated small violations of the maxim of quality (Grice, 1989) in some of her baseline responses in terms of overstating. At post intervention, the female participant increased her level of quality by discontinuing her habit of overstating her thoughts and ideas in communication with her spouse. The male participant continued to use quality in his communication with his spouse in sessions.

Quantity (See Appendix A) violations were demonstrated by both participants (Grice, 1989). The female participant regularly violated the maxim of quantity by giving too much information, not allowing her listener to respond, and using too much of the “air-time.” The male participant violated the maxim of quantity by giving too little information. After the orientation to quantity at session five, each of the participants
demonstrated an increased ability to use the maxim of quantity in their communications with each other in the sessions following this orientation.

Relation (see Appendix A) violations were demonstrated (Grice, 1989) by the female participant when she would make a vague or murky connection in a dialogue with her spouse. Her answers were, at times, over-emphatic, lengthy, tangential, and vague, violating the maxims of quality, quantity, and relation, respectively. The male participant violated the maxim of relation by being vague. At post intervention, both participants increased their ability to use the maxim of relation in communication with each other in session.

Manner (see Appendix A) violations were violated (Grice, 1989) on a consistent basis by the female participant. In the first four sessions while baseline data were being established, the female participant’s responses were wordy and lacked organization. In sharp contrast, the male participant regularly formulated his answers in a clear and concise manner. At post intervention, the female participant had increased her ability to use the maxim of manner in her communication with her spouse. The male participant continued to use manner in his communication in session with his wife.

In summary, the female participant violated all four maxims of cooperative communication on a regular basis throughout the first four sessions. The male participant violated the maxim of quantity on a regular basis by giving too little quantity. He also demonstrated violations of the maxim of relation by giving vague responses to his spouse. These observations were also supported by the couple in their dialogues about their communication styles throughout the intervention. However, it was the female
participant who was regularly critical of her own maxim violations. The male participant was not self-critical and he made every effort not to be critical of his spouse.

**Hypothesis 4**

The stated hypothesis was supported for a portion of the gender difference awareness skills referring to report talk versus rapport talk and the hypothesis was unable to be supported for the portion designed to improve troubles talk. Following intervention, both participants were able to demonstrate improvements on their gender difference awareness as it applies to report talk versus rapport talk. Unfortunately, the parameters required for demonstrating improvement in troubles talk were not available throughout the rest of the sessions after the orientation to troubles talk at session four.

**Hypothesis 5**

Following intervention, the female participant showed a decrease in her symptoms of anxiety from pre intervention to post intervention as measured by the BAI (see Figure 2). The male participant demonstrated no anxiety at pre intervention and continued to present with no anxiety at post intervention as measured by the BAI (see Figure 2). Both of the study participants demonstrated a decrease in their symptoms of depression from pre intervention to post intervention as evidenced by their individual scores on the BDI-II (see Figure 4). Thus, this hypothesis was supported in terms of depressive symptoms as measured by the BDI-II (Beck, 1996) and also supported by the female participant’s decrease in anxiety symptoms as measured by the BAI (Beck, 1990).
BAI Results: Preintervention /Postintervention

Figure iii.

BAI Continuous Results: Weekly

Figure iv.
BDI results: Preintervention /Postintervention

Figure v.

BDI Continuous Results: Weekly
Additionally, following intervention, both participants demonstrated improvements in their psychological symptoms as measured by the BSI (Derogatis, 1993) (see Figure 6). The female participant’s results demonstrate improvement in 6 of 12 of the BSI subscales. Her results were the same at pre intervention and post intervention on 4 of the subscales, and she demonstrated that her symptoms had worsened in the remaining 2 subscales. The male participant’s results demonstrate improvement in 6 of 12 of the subscales. His results were the same at pre intervention and post intervention for 4 of the subscales and his symptoms worsened in the remaining 2 subscales.

Table ii

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BSI Preintervention /Postintervention Scores</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale</td>
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<tr>
<td>Somatization (SOM)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Obsessive-Compulsive (O-C)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Sensitivity (I-S)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depression (DEP)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anxiety (ANX)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subscale</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hostility (HOS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phobic Anxiety (ANX)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paranoid Ideation (PAR)</td>
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<td>Psychoticism (PSY)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

The depression and anxiety subscale results on the BSI (Derogatis, 1993) demonstrated improvement for both study participants from pre intervention to post intervention on the anxiety subscale. The male participant’s depressive symptoms also demonstrated a decrease at post intervention. The female participant’s pre intervention and post intervention results on the depression subscale of the BSI showed no change.

Results on Behavior Outcomes

Two additional measures were administered during the study. As part of the intervention package, participants self-monitored their performances and behavior on a daily basis. Additionally, subject survey data was collected at post intervention to document the couple’s subjective sense of the intervention.

Participant Survey Results

The scores on the Subject Survey (see Appendix C) ranged from 8-10 (M = 9.6, mode = 10). Overall, participants responded that they strongly agreed that the intervention was useful (M = 9), well planned and organized (M = 9.5); that the intervention increased their cooperative communication with their spouse (M = 9.5); that they had acquired communication skills they could use with their spouse (M = 9.5), percentage of new material (M = 90%); that they would recommend the Cooperative
Communication for Couples intervention to others (M = 10), and that they were glad they attended the Cooperative Communication for Couples intervention (M = 10).

Self-Monitoring

As part of the intervention package, both of the participants were asked to self-monitor (see Appendix F) their daily performances on two behavioral expectations. The two expectations included; (1) awareness of their goal to communicate cooperatively with their spouse, and (2) use of current knowledge of cooperative communication with their spouse. The participants did not reveal their scores to each other.

The female participant tracked and recorded her awareness of her goal to communicate cooperatively with her spouse (M = 5.7, mode = 7). She tracked and recorded her own use of her current knowledge of cooperative communication with her spouse (M = 7.7, mode = 8). The variance of her population of scores was 3.04, with a standard deviation of 1.737, and a standard error of 0.246.

The male participant tracked and recorded his awareness of his goal to communicate cooperatively with his spouse (M = 7.6, mode = 8). He tracked and recorded his own use of his current knowledge of cooperative communication with his spouse (M = 7.0, mode = 8). The variance in scores was 21.78 with a standard deviation of 4.667, and a standard error of 0.660.

Objective-Monitoring

Both participants monitored and recorded their objective observations of their spouse’s daily use of cooperative communication. Analysis of the female participant’s scores (M = 6.03, mode = 7) suggests that she perceived herself, on average, as putting forth more effort than her spouse regarding use of cooperative communication skills.
Analysis of the male participant’s scores (M = 7.3, mode = 8) suggests that he perceived himself, on average, to be putting forth less effort than his spouse.

Chapter Six: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the feasibility of a pilot program designed to increase cooperative communication, and, hence, marital satisfaction in couples. Specifically, this study examined the effectiveness of a contextualized sociolinguistic skills intervention package on creating participant’s cooperative communication skills, and awareness of gender differences in communication, as measured by dyadic adjustment, and psychological characteristics that are positively related to marital satisfaction (Epstein & Baucom, 2002). This contextualized intervention is based on the acknowledgment that the development of expertise requires that a learner develop not only content but also procedural knowledge through practice
and utilization of skills (Pressley & Woloshyn, 1995; Hartman, 2001). The investigator developed a workbook and the exercises therein comprising the tools used to teach and practice the communication skills.

The findings of this study indicated that the intervention improved the couple’s dyadic adjustment, as measured by comparisons of pre-intervention and post-intervention data. This confirms the first hypothesis—that couple’s dyadic adjustment would improve in response to the intervention. Both participants demonstrated an increase in their dyadic adjustment. Each demonstrated some improvement on the overall measure of dyadic adjustment and on certain subscale outcomes. The male participant’s scores increased considerably on the Dyadic Consensus subscale, and on his overall level of Dyadic Adjustment. The female participant’s scores increased considerably in Dyadic Satisfaction, slightly worsened in other subscale scores, and demonstrated slight improvement on her overall level of Dyadic Adjustment.

These findings for dyadic adjustment suggest that the intervention, itself, effects therapeutic changes along certain aspects of dyadic adjustment more easily than other aspects of relationship functioning, and that these changes, themselves, might be gender specific. In fact, this is consistent with the research on gender differences (Tannen, 1993, 1994) when factoring in a male’s reticence to engage in “troubles talk” with his spouse and the difficulties that each gender experiences in forming an impression of her or his spouse’s viewpoint. In other words, prior to the intervention, the male participant may have perceived disagreement, but there actually was consensus. Because of this, the intervention workbook tabled “troubles talk” and resulted in the male participant’s
realization that there is more consensus in the relationship than he had previously thought.

Although there are many potential explanations for the changes demonstrated in dyadic adjustment for this couple, it is possible that being in a situation in which they could discuss difficult issues (troubles talk) with each other assisted them in the realization that they agree more often than they had originally thought.

An interpretation of the male’s results regarding Dyadic Consensus would also involve gender differences. The research suggests that females tend to be less clear and less concise in their communication style (Tannen, 1993, 1994); the resulting effect is that the male listener is inclined to miss a point of view because it is unclear. Thus, with the maxim of manner suggesting that communication be clear and concise, it is possible that the female participant’s attention toward producing clear and concise statements during the intervention, resulted in the male participant’s forming the opinion that there is a greater degree of consensus. In other words, when she was using the maxim of manner he was able to hear her more clearly, versus getting lost in the emotional content and, possibly, a plethora of ideas. In summary, the degree of consensus might have always existed; however, the couple’s innate communication style with each other may have precluded the male from this realization.

In contrast to her husband, the female participant’s scores demonstrated the most profound positive change in the Dyadic Satisfaction subscale. There are many possible explanations for this change in her pre intervention versus post intervention scores on this particular subscale. First, the intervention itself may not have had a direct effect on her sense of satisfaction. In other words, it is possible that her husband’s willingness to
participate in the study and the shared time spent together in the eleven sessions may have led to changes in her sense of satisfaction.

Because the design of the study lacks a control group, the results are subject, overall, to the Hawthorne effect and in this specific case, as noted by Kerlinger (1964), “In short, if we pay attention to people they respond.” Second, the female participant had shared the information that one of the most distressing features of their marriage was her sense of the conflict over child-rearing. Given the fact that this was the most stressful aspect of their marriage, and that the results on the MSI-R in this particular category showed improvement for both participants, it is possible that her sense of satisfaction improved in direct response to the improvement in their Conflict Over Child Rearing (CCR). Last, the possibility exists that the improvement in her communication skills and her gender difference awareness, combined, stimulated an improvement in her sense of satisfaction in the marriage.

In summary, the analysis of a single-subject research design makes it difficult to measure extent to which the specific particulars of the intervention directly resulted in the therapeutic changes demonstrated by the results of the DAS. First, the results indicate that there were small changes for the female in terms of overall dyadic adjustment and more significant changes for the male on overall dyadic adjustment, although the other subscale improvements were specific to each participant. Second, as noted further in this document, the improvements on the MSI-R were consistent with the improvements on the DAS for the female participant in terms of the marital satisfaction subscale. Finally, the experience of improved Dyadic Consensus that was achieved for both participants
might also be related to both participants’ improvements in Conflict over Child Rearing (see discussion on MSI-R).

As mentioned above, there are consistent findings between the DAS and the MSI-R results. Analyses of the MSI-R results supported the second hypothesis—that each of the participants would demonstrate improvements in her/his overall marital satisfaction. In fact, the findings on the MSI-R measure indicate that both participants experienced an increase in their marital satisfaction from pre-treatment to post-treatment. Specific subscale areas in which both participants demonstrated improvements include Conflict Over Child Rearing (CCR), Dissatisfaction With Children (DSC), and Problem-Solving Communication (PSC). These improvements in CCR, DSC, and PSC are related to problem areas identified by the couple during the intervention. Specifically, the female participant identified child rearing conflict as most detrimental to the relationship. Given the facts that this was identified by her as the major problem in the relationship and that both participants demonstrated improvement in the PCS as well as demonstrating improvements, together, in the DSC and CCR subscales, suggest an element of reliability in this specific case. Therefore, relief in this target problem area, itself, might be responsible for producing changes in marital satisfaction for both participants.

Other results for each participant on the marital satisfaction inventory varied. Results on Role Orientation (ROR) worsened substantially for the female participant, whereas, the male’s results from pre intervention to post intervention on ROR demonstrated improvements. Role orientation scores in the high range represent the respondents’ rejection of traditional marital roles (Snyder, 1997). This drastic change in the female participant’s scores from pre intervention to post intervention suggests that in
a relatively short span of time (9 weeks), her scores changed from the low range to the high range. Because of the design of the study, it is difficult to measure extent to which the intervention, itself, had an influence on the female participant’s change in her role orientation. Direct observations during the gender difference awareness portion of the study, as well as confirmation from the transcripts of the annotated data, suggest that she subscribed to classic gender difference orientations relative to her communication style. Although she acknowledged these orientations, and was able to laugh about them, it is possible that she viewed them as negative, and this element alone may have changed her score on the ROR subscale.

To the degree that the design of this study can support data that is directly observed or observed in transcripts by the responsible investigator, hypothesis three was also supported because each of the participants demonstrated improvements in her/his competence with the maxims of cooperative communication. Specifically, each participant demonstrated some improvements in the maxims in which they needed to demonstrate improvements. However, the degree of change was variable and depended on the degree of each participant’s innate skill level at baseline.

First, the baseline data on the maxim of quality (making a contribution one that is true) suggested that both participants demonstrate fairly good levels of quality in their communication at pre intervention. Not only were they in agreement about their ability to be truthful with each other, the responsible investigator observed a high level of truthfulness in their responding as well. The only small violations of the maxim of quality were noted in the female’s presentation with her spouse in regard to her tendency to overstate in her communication style. However, at post intervention, her responses were
less overstated and less repetitious, demonstrating improvements that were consistent with the maxim of quality as well as gender difference awareness.

At the introduction of the maxim of quality, the participant couple, themselves, agreed that they demonstrate truthfulness in their communication with each other. The responsible investigator, through direct observation and through the use of annotated data, agreed. However, the female participant’s baseline data demonstrated a small tendency toward overstating her responses and using repetition, but this tendency decreased throughout the intervention and was less noticeable in the final two sessions. There are many possible explanations for this change. One reason for this change is that the first four sessions represented a false baseline. This is somewhat unlikely, given that the participant, herself, was acutely aware of and, at times, critical of her innate style in regard to her violations of quality. In line with the false baseline, it is possible that her baseline data was skewed because of her heightened anxiety level at the beginning of the study. Again, she may have benefited simply from spending time with her husband on a weekly basis and the overload of information at the beginning of the study represented years of discontent about their communication difficulties. However, given the results, improvements were achieved and the hypotheses were supported by the findings.

The male participant’s baseline data suggests that he regularly uses the maxim of quality in his conversations with his spouse. At intervention he appeared noticeably intrigued by the concept of quality as a communication skill and he also gave thoughtful responses during the exercises and on his response cards. However, it is possible that the presence of the responsible investigator may have influenced his comportment during the baseline and intervention phases of the study. Both participants were engaged in the
dialogues after each exercise and made meaningful contributions to the dialogue regarding the maxim of quality and the response that they had in conversations with individuals who regularly violated this maxim.

Second, although baseline data revealed that the maxim of quantity was violated in opposing directions by the participants, noticeable changes were made, again, supporting the hypothesis that the couple would make improvements in their competence with the maxims. In fact, it was obvious at a glance, in viewing the transcripts of the sessions toward the end of the intervention, that communication had become more balanced in terms of equal air-time in sessions and in both participants’ length of responses and in time spent listening to each other.

Third, the baseline data suggests that the couple demonstrated fairly relevant responding with each other prior to the intervention. However, as noted above, the female participant engaged in “vague and murky” connections in her responses with her spouse. Additionally, some of her responses included information that was irrelevant. Although the male participant’s responses during baseline were brief, he demonstrated relevant responding. At post intervention, positive changes were made regarding the maxim of relation, suggesting that the female participant was able to demonstrate the new skills in communication with her spouse in the sessions. Transcripts of the sessions demonstrate that not only did the female participant avoid being vague, but also that she was able to catch herself prior to and in the midst of her responses, formulating responses that were consistent with the maxim of relation. These changes were demonstrated throughout the sessions delineated for establishing relation, and maintained in the sessions following the introduction of this skill. Possible explanations for these changes include the utilization
of other data collection relative to mood state and marital satisfaction. Because marital satisfaction and mood state can provide a calmer demeanor and assist in one’s ability to focus, it is also possible that having more positive feelings about their marriage created a more amiable comportment for both participants.

Fourth, the maxim of manner was another area in skill development in which the couple demonstrated improvements, suggesting that this concept was able to be learned, practiced and fairly well maintained in the environment of the sessions. At baseline, the female participant regularly engaged in wordiness, the use of insignificant phrases, vague responses, disorganized replies, and unnecessary prolixity. The male participant appeared to have a difficult time at baseline, in being direct. However, during the last couple of sessions during which they were demonstrating all of the maxims, including the gender difference awareness, his skills had improved in this area as well. The responsible investigator observed that to the degree to which the female participant now engaged, quality, quantity, and relation with her spouse, she was also eliciting responses from him that were more thorough, on a consistent basis. It is also possible that changes in his communication repertoire were eliciting changes in her repertoire.

In summary, the changes for both of the participants were particularly remarkable in terms of their use of the four maxims of cooperative communication during the intervention phase of this study. Again, with all the threats to validity that exist in this study, although it is impossible to suggest that the study and the workbook were directly responsible, this couple demonstrated fairly dramatic changes in their conversational style and overall communication with each other as shown in the annotated data.
Gender difference awareness was increased for both the female and the male participants in reference to report talk versus rapport talk. The female participant acknowledged that her husband preferred report talk, but had also jokingly stated that she was not going to give him what he wanted because she did not talk that way. However, direct observation and transcripts of the annotated data demonstrate that she was able to utilize report talk in communication with her spouse. The male participant, throughout the study, was reminded of her preferences for rapport talk and he made an effort to change his style as well. This element of gender difference awareness was further solidified by the instruction and exercises demonstrating the maxim of quantity. The participants were on divergent paths in terms of their styles of communicating. The female participant not only preferred rapport talk, but she also espoused that her spouse’s style of report talk was rude. Therefore, giving credence to each style may have been helpful for the participants to initiate change.

Certainly it is possible that other variables were responsible for these changes; for example, report versus rapport talk was introduced at the third session. At the fourth session, during which a change in gender difference awareness was noted in their behavior, both participants’ levels of anxiety had decreased, as measured by the BAI that was administrated weekly. Therefore anxiety had decreased prior to the gender difference session regarding troubles talk. Therefore another possible reason for the changes in both participants is that their individual and collective anxiety levels had decreased and this had a positive effect on their communication with each other. Although many interpretations exist, the findings of this study suggest that both
participants demonstrated improvements in their communication that were consistent with the workbook used in the study.

The other aspect of gender difference awareness was troubles talk. This was introduced at the fourth session. This topic was received well by both participants. They confirmed that troubles talk in the past had led to arguments and they were interested in having some parameters that would assist them in the future. However, because of the parameters needed to engage in troubles talk, there was not an occasion to see, first hand, if the couple was able to learn and use this aspect of gender difference awareness.

In summary, both participants increased their awareness of gender differences regarding report versus rapport talk. These changes were demonstrated in sessions following their orientation to these communication styles. The female participant’s inclination toward rapport talk and the male participant’s tendency toward report talk are consistent with Tannen’s (2001) findings. No opportunity existed for the couple to demonstrate their knowledge and skills regarding troubles talk.

Regarding the fifth hypothesis, the results varied for both participants in regard to mood state in response to the intervention. For example, the BDI-II (Beck et al. 1996) results revealed that both the male and the female demonstrated improvements from pre intervention to post intervention. However, the more comprehensive measure of psychological symptoms (BSI, Derogatis, 1993) revealed that the female’s depressive symptoms remained unchanged and the male’s symptoms decreased substantially from pre intervention to post intervention. It is possible that the BSI is a more sensitive and comprehensive measure of psychological distress and this could account for the variability in the results. Relative to the female participant’s depressive symptoms
remaining unchanged, the female participant, herself, stated that she suffers from seasonal affective disorder and that the recent weeks of overcast weather had reflected in her mood state. In fact, there was a brief discussion at the beginning of the ninth session in the midst of the administration of the BDI-II, during which the female participant stated that she was really struggling because of the weather. On this date, she reported her highest score on the BDI-II measure.

Results from the two measures (BDI-II, BSI) for the male participant suggested that his depressive symptoms had decreased from pre intervention to post intervention. In fact, at pre intervention, his scores on depression and anxiety had already penetrated the clinical range. At post intervention, his scores were in the average to low-average range.

There are many possible explanations for these changes. First, enrollment in this program, itself, might have resulted in an elevation of his scores for anxiety and depression at pre intervention. Therefore, the changes might actually represent his previous level of functioning without the advent of the program. Second, the annotated data at pre intervention, suggest that the male participant’s communication style and demeanor might preclude him from asserting himself in conversations with his spouse. The intervention, by nature of its focus on sociolinguistic skills and gender difference awareness, might have led to changes in his spouse’s style of communication that resulted in changes in his depressive symptoms. Last, the Hawthorne effect, itself, might have been instrumental in the changes in his self-report of depressive symptoms. The neutral setting and the overall program design provided a safe environment to speak and be heard by his spouse and by the responsible investigator.
Both participants had a decrease in their subjective sense of anxiety as measured by the anxiety subscale of the BSI (Derogatis, 1993) from pre intervention to post intervention. These results were consistent with the BAI (Beck, 1990) for the female participant, in which she also demonstrated a decrease in symptoms. It is possible that both participants were anxious about beginning the program. However, the male participant’s anxiety did not register on the BAI at pre intervention or post intervention. On the continuous measures (weekly) of the BAI, his anxiety peaked at week seven. Annotated data and direct observation may offer a feasible explanation for male participant’s peak in anxiety at week seven due to an extensive home improvement project beginning at this time. A possible reason for the male participant’s anxiety registering in the clinical range on the BSI at pre intervention was due to his anxiety over participating in the study. However, his symptoms on the BSI were in the clinical range at pre intervention, but on the BAI he demonstrated no symptoms. The difference in these findings suggest that the BSI, which is more covert in terms of what it is measuring, might be perceived as a less threatening measure, whereas the BAI clearly states that it is specific for anxiety. Additionally, in the direct observations as well annotated data, the female participant made a joke about the male participant’s anxiety level. In her joke, the suggestion was that he has always been anxious. Therefore it is possible that on an overt measure of anxiety he would be more inclined to minimize his symptoms.

In a single-subject design, such as this, it is difficult to state conclusively that the study, itself, was responsible for the positive changes in mood state. However it is likely, in combination with the other findings such as improvement in marital satisfaction and in
dyadic adjustment, that participation in the study might have had a positive effect on each participant’s mood.

Subjectively, the participants noted on several occasions (including the Subject Survey, Appendix C), and in the annotated data that each felt that the study had improved their communication skills and that the workbook exercises increased their knowledge of gender differences in communication style. However, their responses to the Subject Survey, the inventories, and the comments made in session (the annotated data) were not made anonymously. Additionally, it is entirely possible that the Rosenthal Effect was demonstrated by their responses regarding mood state as well as in other areas of data collection. Both participants had the maturity and the availability with the responsible researcher to share and demonstrate their opinions throughout the entirety of the study. Time was made available at the end of each session to speak freely and openly about their experiences in the study. All indicators including the response forms, the measures used, and the annotated data, suggest that the study was positive and beneficial to both participants. Although not previously mentioned, the couple arrived at each session as originally scheduled at the beginning of the intervention and they arrived on time.

Limitations of the Study

A number of limitations exist in this current study, including the single-subject research design, design flaws, history, investigator bias, and the presence of extraneous variables. Perhaps the greatest limitation is the single-subject research. This small sample
size is a threat to the validity of the study. Other potential threats to internal and external validity are enumerated here.

The threats to internal validity include (a) history, (b) maturation, (c) measurement, (d) investigator bias, and (e) selection bias. History and maturation effects may have influenced the results in this study. Between the dates of March 31, 2008 and June 2, 2008, many other effects occurred while the participants were being administered this intervention. In fact, specific extraneous independent variables were operating on the participants in addition to the study variables. Additionally, general events related to their maturation both individually and as a couple may have influenced the outcome of this study.

Another variable is the possible effect of the measurement procedure itself. In other words, measuring study participants changes the participants (Kerlinger, 1973). It is possible that the pre intervention measures, themselves, created an increased sensitization and, therefore outcome. Additionally, audio-taping the sessions, and the element of measurement therein may have influenced the outcome for this participant couple.

Another limitation to the study is that the responsible investigator used an investigator-developed and investigator-implemented intervention. Although this was the intended protocol, investigator biases have influenced the study. Attempts were made to control for the investigator biases through the use of scripted sessions and explicit instructional procedures. In addition, the responsible investigator attempted to maintain emotional distance throughout the intervention as well as having an awareness of keeping the couple on task even through emotionally difficult moments in the couple’s discourse. However, despite the attention paid to validity, the responsible investigator responded as
a counselor for brief moments on two occasions when emotions were heightened in sessions.

An additional limitation is selection bias. Selection bias suggests that by self-selecting themselves to be in this study, the participant couple may have been highly motivated to be helpful and to have the investigator succeed. Another component of selection bias that also involves self-selection is the fact that the female participant in this study was, herself, hanging up a flyer at the Giant grocery store (for one of the organizations in which she volunteers) when she saw the flyer advertising this study. There is an element of selection bias relative to those who would undertake such an intervention and to what is motivating them to be in a study that operates at many levels and that can be another threat to validity (??). The “Rosenthal Effect” may have also contributed to the limitations of this study, whereby the participants behaved in sessions in the way they believed that they ought to behave, rather than for some other reason.

Threats to external validity limit the generalizability of the findings of this study. Although every attempt was made to draw a couple randomly from the general population, couples that would respond to a flyer for Cooperative Communication for Couples and commit themselves to eleven sessions are themselves a unique group with unique characteristics. Obvious from direct observation, the annotated data, and results from the WTAR, the participant couple also represents a couple that is functioning at a high level cognitively. Finally, an additional potential limitation to the generalizability of this study is the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

*Future Studies*
This intervention appears to have been successful for the participating couple; they participated, basically, in a one-on-one isolated setting while measuring increased marital satisfaction, dyadic adjustment, and the development and utilization of new communication skills. Additionally, the couple enjoyed the intervention and had perfect attendance. Replicating this intervention with other couples would be necessary for generalization and would support the strength of the intervention. If replication with other couples substantiates the findings, perhaps applying the workbook to couples in a group setting would be the next step.

In addition to a larger sample size, future research should also include demographic diversity. Relevant demographics should include multi-racial couples, same sex couples, and unmarried couples possessing a wide variation in backgrounds and socio-economic status. Future research should also compare and combine this intervention with other treatment strategies for couples. Additionally, a follow-up session several weeks or months later would provide data regarding the maintenance of the changes in communication skills, mood state, and changes in overall marital satisfaction and dyadic adjustment. Further research could also target a reliable and valid method for collecting and analyzing communication skills that could be used in a baseline phase of the implementation of this intervention. Additionally, an adaptation of the present Response Cards that would allow for a larger writing surface would be an improvement.

Summary and Conclusion

The focus on communication skills in marital and couple therapy is not new in the research (Datillio & Bevilacqua, 2000; Carlson & Sperry, 1998; Freeman & Dattilio,
however, the unique element in this study is the application of Grice’s four conversational postulates, i.e., the four maxims, to the setting of couple therapy. In addition, Tannen’s research on gender differences is included along with motivation and goal-setting as a multi-faceted approach for establishing baseline communication status for the participant couple. The investigator-developed workbook utilized a contextualized approach to acquisition and utilization of skills. In addition to the workbook, the treatment package included the Daily Checklist as a subjective and an objective measure of awareness of efforts to utilize skills with each other in-between sessions. An additional component involved the Response Cards that were used to formulate opinions and create dialogue specific to each of the four maxims of cooperative communication and the gender difference awareness components of this intervention.

The intervention itself appears to have improved marital satisfaction and dyadic adjustment with results that demonstrate overall improvements in satisfaction and adjustment for each of the participants. Improvements were not made in each subscale for each measure; however, some overall improvements were demonstrated on these scales. Changes in mood state were also demonstrated for both participants on some of the measures used to assess this element for each participant; however, these improvements do not necessarily suggest that the intervention itself was responsible for the improvements. Additionally, each of the participants demonstrated some positive changes in her/his communication skills used in sessions, although this improvement was
measured by direct observation and through the use of the transcripts of the annotated data and is subject to investigator-bias as well as other threats to validity.

This feasibility study, with significant more research and development, could be used in future studies to test the benefit that couples might experience in their efforts to make their communication true, as informative as required, relative, and perspicuous. A safe conclusion from the design and results of this study is that the intervention can be applied and enjoyable. As stated by Grice (1989) “If it is any part of one’s philosophical concern, as it is of mine, to give an accurate general account of the actual meaning of this or that expression in nontechnical discourse, then one simply cannot afford to abandon this kind of maneuver” (p.3).

References


*Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 35: 18-30


*Appendix A*

Cooperative Communication for Couples

*Couples Version*

![cCC]
A practical guide for couples to increase marital satisfaction by using Kantian principles of communication

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*Cooperative Communication for Couples*

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Establishing Manner Exercise #1
Introduction
Welcome to the Cooperative Communication for Couples Workbook! The Cooperative Communication approach is a straightforward design based on four principles (maxims) of communication: quality, quantity, relation and manner. This approach is geared toward assisting couples in achieving cooperative communication. By improving your communication skills and your awareness of male/female communication styles, the Cooperative Communication for Couples Workbook can be a valuable tool in establishing effective communication in all of your relationships.
SESSIONS 1 & 2

Overview of the Cooperative Communication for Couples Method

In all of our communications with others we make choices about our portion of the conversation. We have all had the experience of talking to a stranger and walking away feeling positive about an individual whom we do not even know. We might call the interaction “being in sync” or we might say to ourselves “That was a good conversation,” or we might conclude that the person we just spoke with “is a lot like me.” Suffice it to say, we often reflect on previous conversations with our thoughts. Our thoughts lead us to draw conclusions about how the other person made us feel. Additionally, in response to our thoughts and feelings, we may, in turn, behave differently subsequent to a conversation with another individual.

Conversely, most of us have had the experience of an un-cooperative conversation. In cases in which the communication leaves us with feelings of non cooperation, we also walk away with thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to the conversation. We might call the interaction “frustrating.” We might
say to ourselves “That was a strange conversation,” or we might conclude that
the person we spoke with “is not like me.” Again, we often reflect on previous
conversations with our thoughts. And, as mentioned above, our thoughts lead to
feelings and behaviors.

In this course you will develop an understanding of what it is that creates
uncooperative conversation. One way to think about the difference between a
good conversation versus a strained conversation is to realize that strained or
uncooperative conversations are lacking the four maxims. In fact, the maxims of
cooperative communication are most noticeable in their absence. It is in their
absence that we find ourselves feeling lost in the conversation or thinking that
we have been misunderstood. In this course you will develop an understanding
of what it is that creates cooperative communication. You will be introduced to
the four maxims of cooperative communication and be given the opportunity to
practice them.

The practice exercises in this workbook provide experiences during
which you can observe the maxim violations, but you can also practice
cooperative communication. Communications, in general, as well as the
interconnection between our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are topics of
discussion that we will revisit repeatedly throughout this workbook.

Cooperative communication is established when two individuals are
using the cooperative maxims. Each of these maxims will be explained in detail
and practiced in therapy sessions. As you become aware of these maxims, you
will be practicing them with your spouse during and in-between sessions.
Through an understanding of the maxims of cooperative communication, i.e. quality, quantity, relation, and manner, as well as through an understanding of how males and females communicate differently, you will bring your personal communication skills to a new level.

Cooperative Communication for Couples—Getting Started

With your desire to create cooperative communication in your marriage, the Cooperative Communication for Couples Workbook can guide you toward your goal. The workbook is divided into 6 steps:

Step 1: Commitment to Goals/ Identify Goals

Step 2: Understanding Gender Differences in Communication

Step 3: Understanding and Establishing *Quality* in Your Communication Style

Step 4: Understanding and Establishing *Quantity* in Your Communication Style

Step 5: Understanding and Establishing *Relation* in Your Communication Style

Step 6: Understanding and Establishing *Manner* in Your Communication Style

On the following pages you will find descriptions of each of these steps. Practice exercises and checklists are also included in each section to help you establish that “in sync” feeling that was mentioned in the introduction of this workbook. Completing the practice exercises will help you become more familiar with the skills you need to achieve your goals in communication.

**Commitment to Goals**
As you will discover, the Cooperative Communication Workbook emphasizes creating cooperative communication with your spouse. Mastering these four maxims and acknowledging how males and females differ in communication styles will require determination and hard work. The result will be that you will establish cooperative communication with your spouse. Another consequence will be that you can apply the principles of cooperative communication to other relationships.

The Importance of Goals

Think of your goal to have cooperative communication as the destination point on a map. Like a map, goals are useful only if you know where you are going. Using the map metaphor—there will be many distractions on your way to your goal. However, the key is that the goals you set will help you stay on course. The four maxims of communication and gender difference awareness will be markers along your way to achieving your goals. Each of these markers will demonstrate your progress toward your goal. Goals are particularly important in this course because you and your spouse will be committed to establishing the same goals.

Goals are often divided into the following two categories: short-term and long-term goals. Using the metaphor of a map, if you are traveling a great distance, you may divide your trip into sections. For example, we often think of being “half way to our destination,” or “three-quarters of the way to our destination.” So, your short term goals will become the different sections along your way to your final destination (your long term goal). Your short-term goals can be the 6 steps previously outlined.
Awareness of your short-term goals will help you to reach your long-term goal of having the skills to communicate cooperatively.

**Goal Checklist**

Returning to the map metaphor, we use road signs and mileage to continue orienting ourselves toward our destination. The road signs encourage and assist us in realizing that we are, in fact, going in the right direction. With your goals and commitments to cooperative communication, you will want to know if you are headed in the right direction with your spouse. A daily checklist will help orient each of you. This checklist will be used to direct each of you toward your goal of communicating cooperatively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date: __________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Daily Checklist</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>On a scale of 1-10, with 10 representing “most effort” and 1 representing “least effort” please rate each question.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was aware of my goal to communicate cooperatively with my spouse. Rating ___.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I used my current knowledge of cooperative communication with my spouse today. Rating ___.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My spouse used what he/she knows about cooperative communication with me today. Rating ___.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Commitment to Cooperative Communication**

In this exercise you are asked to write down the reasons why you are committed to the long-term goal of improving communication with your spouse. What we know about having goals and making a commitment to our goals is that we are much more likely to accomplish a goal when we have taken the time to organize our thoughts and
goals on paper. You can think of it as a mission statement for yourself and for your relationship with your spouse. Goals and mission statements have the ability to guide our behaviors by orienting us in a direction. The following exercise entails listing the reasons why you are committed to establishing cooperative communication.

**Commitment to Cooperative Communication Exercise**

Focusing on your long-range goal of cooperative communication, try to come up with at least five reasons why you are committed to achieving this goal.

**Commitment To Cooperative Communication**

**Example:**

1. *Increasing marital satisfaction will help our marriage last.*
2. *Increasing my communication skills will benefit my marriage and my family.*
3. *Practicing cooperative communication skills will also benefit me in other relationships.*

**Discussion:** Read your responses to your spouse. Consider your spouse’s responses. How would your relationship improve if you and your spouse became committed to communicate cooperatively?
Identifying Your Goals for Cooperative Communication Exercise

In this exercise you will identify your goals for cooperative communication. What are your goals for communicating with your spouse? Try to come up with at least three goals for communicating with your spouse.

Identifying Your Goals for Cooperative Communication

1. Have discussions with my spouse without arguing.
2. Improve my relationship with my spouse.
3. Have enjoyable conversations with my spouse.

Discussion: Read your responses to each other. Consider your spouse’s responses. How would your relationship improve if you and your spouse established your goals?

Motivation toward Goals in Relationships

You have already demonstrated your commitment and motivation by reading this workbook. When discussing motivation, there are three essential elements. In relationships, the first element that motivates us is mutual respect. To establish your goal of cooperative communication you need to grant respect to your partner and you need to feel respected by your partner. The second element essential to staying
motivated in relationships is to have the skills necessary to reach your goals. The Cooperative Communication Course will provide learning experiences that will solidify the skills you will need. The third and final element essential for your continued motivation is that you play an active role in your own development as a cooperative communicator. Becoming aware of what it is that is motivating you to develop these skills and keeping your eye on your goals are part of playing an *active role*.

In essence, our motivation to change requires mutual respect, necessary skills, and establishing a role in our development. The Cooperative Communication Course is designed to increase your skills, reinforce your respect for each other, and involve each of you in the learning process.

**Mutual respect—exercise and discussion**

Establishing mutual respect requires that you consider how you speak to and treat each other. Most relationships require a certain amount of respect in order to be effective. Consider one of your relationship in which you respect another individual. What are the elements of respect that you might employ in your communication with this individual? In other words, how do you communicate respect?

**Mutual Respect Exercise**

Think of an individual whom you respect. Consider how you speak to and treat this particular individual? What are some of the things that you do or say when interacting with this person in order to grant them your respect?

**EXAMPLE:**
**My Boss**

1. I listen to his/her suggestions.
2. I try to impress him/her by doing more than is required at work.
3. I anticipate what needs to be done
4. I arrive at work on time and stay until the work is done.

**Discussion**: Show your responses to your spouse. Consider your partner’s responses.

How would your relationship improve if your spouse were to treat you the same way that he or she treats this individual who was identified in the mutual respect exercise?

**Necessary skills – exercise and discussion**

Developing the necessary skills to overcome relationship distress is one of the key components to the Cooperative Communication Workbook. It is tempting for couples to assume that their spouses are just “that way.” For example, you may have certain thoughts about your spouse; “She is always putting me down,” “He treats everyone like this—it’s just the way he is,” or “He is exactly like his father—rude,” and “She is a nag like her mother.” These thoughts are attributions that we assume are part of our spouses’ characters or personalities.

However, it is entirely possible and, in fact, it is more likely that your spouse may simply lack the skills necessary to communicate with you in a cooperative manner. For example, if you feel as if your spouse is constantly putting you down, it is possible that your spouse lacks the ability to use the maxim of *Quality* in his or her communication. Later in the workbook you will have the opportunity to develop the skill of *Quality*. In order to stay motivated, you must have access to the skills that you need. As discussed earlier, this set of skills involves the four maxims of cooperative
communication: Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Manner, as well as the skill of understanding the differences between the way that males often communicate and the way that females often communicate.

**Necessary Skills Exercise**

Take a couple of minutes to consider your communication skills. Rate your skills with your spouse on a scale of 1-10, using “10” as the best and “1” as the worst. Write down the reasons why you gave yourself this rating.

**EXAMPLE:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills Exercise: Rating My Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rating:</strong> 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I gave myself this rating because I know that I am not a very good listener.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sometimes, I don’t take my spouse very seriously.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I tend to lose my temper if the conversation isn’t going well.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion:** Read your answers aloud to your spouse. Consider each other’s responses. How might your relationship change if each of you improved your skills?

**Playing an active role in my own development—exercise and discussion**
As mentioned earlier, research suggests that the final element of staying motivated is to play an *active role* in your own development. In this instance, you are working on becoming a cooperative communicator. By taking part in these exercises you are already playing an active role in your own development. However, it is also necessary that you take part in the plan.

**Active Role Exercise**

As you consider this journey can you come up with 2 or 3 things that you are going to do to play an active role in your own development?

**EXAMPLE:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Playing an Active Role Exercise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <em>I am going to place post-it notes around my house in places where I will be reminded of what I am trying to accomplish.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <em>I am going to change my computer screen saver to remind myself that I want to become a cooperative communicator.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion:** Read your responses to your spouse. Consider each other’s responses and consider how your relationship would change if each of you concentrated on playing an active role in your development as a cooperative communicator?

**Steps to Creating Cooperative Communication for Couples**

Your long term goal or wide-ranging goal is to create cooperative communication. On your way to achieving your long-term goal there will be short-
term goals or objectives. There are five objectives outlined in this workbook. As an
individual, you may create other short-term objectives that apply to your marriage.

The five short-term goals outlined in this workbook are steps toward attaining
the broad treatment goal of cooperative communication. In essence, objectives can be
thought of as steps toward creating the long-term goal. Target-attainment dates will be
established for each step. Achieving all five steps will signify achievement of the
target goal. Step one is to understand the communication differences between males
and females. In our next session you will be working on this goal!

**Discussion and recap: Motivation Toward Goals**

- How have your thoughts changed?
- How have your feelings changed?
- How will your behaviors change?

**Homework Assignment:**

- Don’t forget your daily checklists!

**SESSION 3**

**Understanding Gender Differences in Communication**

Understanding how you and your spouse communicate differently can increase
the quality of your communication. There are many differences in how males and
females communicate. We will concentrate on the two that occur most often.

We will be considering how males and females communicate differently in two
areas; report talk versus rapport talk and troubles talk. In short, we will be working on
exercises that will increase your understanding of both areas:

1) Understanding the difference between “*Report Talk*” versus “*Rapport Talk.*”
a. Report Talk - is essentially giving a report

b. Rapport Talk - is a time when you describe a person, place, thing, or situation in an effort to create rapport

2) Understanding how “Troubles Talk” differs for men and women.

a. Troubles Talk - is time set aside to talk about difficulties or problems that you would like to confront with your spouse.

**Report Talk versus Rapport Talk**

*Example:* In working with Jim and Karen, Karen mentioned that Jim never wanted to talk about anything. I asked Karen to give me an example. She remembered that two nights ago, she and Jim were sitting in their living room when she began talking about her brother’s job search. Reportedly, Jim didn’t hear a word. She concluded that he wasn’t interested in anything she had to say. In his defense, Jim stated that “together” they had previously discussed watching *Law and Order* on television. He thought they were having a good time watching television together and couldn’t understand why Karen would want to interrupt their “couple’s time” to talk about her brother’s job search. Jim was baffled. He was enjoying their time together and didn’t really want it interrupted by what he perceived as “other people’s problems.”

For Jim, the comfortable intimacy of marriage includes doing things together such as sitting together and watching a favorite television show. For Karen, the comfortable intimacy of marriage includes talking about things, people, and ideas. In fact, the topic (her brother’s job search) was important to Karen; her intent, however, was not to embroil Jim in her brother’s job search, but rather to interact with Jim
through “rapport talk.” If Jim had changed the subject to careers (in general) or even to the television show, Karen would have been quite fine with their “talk.” The importance, for Karen, was placed on having a discussion not on the topic per se. In fact, she views their discussions as building their relationship and building intimacy in their marriage.

*Report talk*, for Jim and for men in general, is a statement of the facts about a situation. At times, the emotional content is not as important to males as are the facts of the situation. Many men view the conversation between them and their wives as an exchange of information that keeps their relationship up to date on the facts. Jim confirmed the fact that he would have preferred that Karen simply state the latest news on her brother’s job search. In other words, Jim was looking for a report on what was new with regard to the job search. Jim was looking for *Report Talk* with Karen. So, Jim would have been O.K. hearing the latest news. However, he did not want to become involved in a hypothetical conversation, a “what-if” or an “if-then” conversation about his brother-in-law’s employment possibilities. Additionally, Jim did not want to “problem solve” his brother-in-law’s situation. Jim wanted to enjoy his evening with his wife. For Jim, sitting quietly watching television with Karen builds their relationship. In fact, the comfort that has been established in the relationship is reflected, for Jim, in the ease with which they can spend an evening enjoying each other’s company.

*Rapport talk*, for Karen, and for many women, is the give-and-take of conversation that builds intimacy in a relationship. At times, the topic is not as important as the fact that rapport (harmony, solidarity, and intimacy) is being
developed. Women tend to view the conversation between them and their husbands as an essential tool that makes their relationship intimate, solid, and cooperative. For Karen, in this specific situation with her husband, talking about her brother and his job search was simply a way to establish *rapport talk* (a verbal give-and-take) with her husband Jim.

For Jim, the update on the job search could have been accomplished during a commercial break in the program instead of interrupting what he viewed as their “time together” watching their show. For Karen, the give-and-take of *rapport talk* is essential to feeling connected to Jim and feeling a connection in their relationship. For Jim, feeling connected to Karen could have been accomplished by sharing an activity such as quietly watching their favorite television show. The fact of Karen’s bringing up the topic of her brother’s job made Jim feel as if he and Karen were not spending quality time together. In fact, he felt as if the conversation took away from their intimacy instead of building on their intimacy.

Have you ever had the experience in your marriage when you felt as if you are on two different playing fields when it comes to communication? Take the time now to discuss a time when you had a situation similar to the one that Karen and Jim experienced. A time when you and your spouse were thinking in opposite directions about your communication?

**Report Talk vs. Rapport Talk Exercise**

Using the designated card –take a few minutes to write some brief notes about a time when you and your spouse shared a similar situation—when one of you wanted to
establish rapport and the other would have been very happy with a brief report.

EXAMPLE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example of a time when one of us was looking for a Report and the other was attempting to establish Rapport.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. *Chair lift on the ski slope, my spouse wants to discuss her aging parents. For me, the skiing is something we share together. I didn’t want to combine our “down time” with discussing her parents—maybe a brief synopsis of how they are doing—but not a discussion.*

2. *I was having a great time skiing with my spouse. There was a lull in the conversation and I just wanted to enjoy the scenery and talk about skiing. She might as well have mentioned burial plots at the cemetery. After that, I didn’t want to talk about anything.*

**Discussion:** Read your responses to your spouse. Consider your partner’s responses. How would your relationship have improved had you and your partner understood each other’s preferences for report versus rapport talk?

*Report talk* tends to stick with basic facts. In the following sample discussion, one spouse is giving another a *report* about who bought the house next door to them. For example, “I met the couple who are buying the house next door. His name is Rich
and her name is Jan. They are planning to move in some time after the holiday.” In this example you can see that *report talk* is essentially a commentary on what we know about a subject.

*Rapport talk* is less about what we may know and, perhaps, more about our thoughts and ideas on a subject. Regarding the same situation as the one noted above, here is another example; “A young couple bought the house next door. Their names are Rich and Jan, and they have a four-year-old daughter—Bridget. You should see what they have done with the inside of the house. It looks great. I think they have great taste. If it’s any indication of what they are going to do with the rest of the house, it should be nice. Have you seen them? Met them? Do you think they will be good neighbors?” As you can see, *Rapport talk* is a giant connection maneuver. Rapport talk goes beyond the essentials in an attempt to chat about a topic and establish rapport.

Regarding the question “Do you think they will be good neighbors?” , some males would not know how to answer such a question and would not view this question as valid. If you are a male, you might think, “Based on what?” and “How would I know if they are going to be good neighbors?” It’s almost an irritant to be asked such questions, especially if you take them literally. For many women, however, there is no literal translation for such a question. In fact, it may simply be a way to create a conversation about the neighbors, the neighborhood, or any other topic. The relevance is not about the neighbors or how good they are or aren’t; in fact, the relevance of this *rapport talk* is that two people are conversing and that means that
they are creating a connection. In the next exercise you will be asked to come up with an example of *report talk*.

### Report Talk Exercise

Using the designated card, spend a few minutes coming up with **report talk** topics that you would like to discuss with your spouse.

**EXAMPLE:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report Talk Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <em>I found some indoor paint samples at the hardware store. Here they are. I circled the two colors that I liked the most.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <em>I checked the photography program for our computer; you can use a disposal camera to take the beach pictures. When you have them developed have them placed on a CD. This will integrate with your computer program.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion:** Read your topic to your partner. Discuss the topic using report talk.

Consider your partner’s responses. How would your relationship improve if you and your partner were able to engage in report talk as well as rapport talk?

You are creating an awareness of each other’s preferences. This awareness can help you and your spouse create intimacy and a deeper connection. This may involve your coming up with a *report* or *rapport talk* topic that you know your spouse is interested in. This also may involve your asking questions or making comments about the topic. Remember that *rapport talk* tends to be full of hypothetical statements, inferences, thoughts, and ideas.

The next exercise is a *rapport talk* exercise.
Rapport Talk Exercise

Using the designated card, take a few minutes to write down an example of rapport talk. Include one to two sentences of rapport talk on your card.

EXAMPLE:

Rapport Talk Examples:

1. I was thinking about the beach vacation we are taking this summer, and I was hoping we could get some photos to use in my new computer program. We could set them to music like Aunt Carol does. What do you think?

2. I know you were interested in redoing your office; have you thought about what color you would like the walls?

Discussion: Read your responses to your spouse. Consider your spouse’s responses.

How would your relationship improve if you and your partner were able to use rapport talk in your relationship? Try using rapport talk now for the next five minutes.

In this next exercise you will be examining your spouse’s preference for report versus rapport talk.
Preferences for Report Talk / Rapport Talk

In your relationship with your spouse, do you engage in report talk more often or do you engage in rapport talk? Write your preference and your spouse’s preference on the designated card. Also write down the evidence that you have gathered to establish your hunch about your spouse’s preference.

Preferences for Report Talk vs. Rapport Talk Exercise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My Preference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My Spouse’s Preference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence: My spouse loves to rattle on about almost any topic; he/she doesn’t even have to know anything about the topic—always at the ready to give an opinion!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion: Read your responses to each other. Discuss your evidence for the response you came up with for your spouse. How might your relationship improve if you and your spouse understood each other’s preferences?

For some couples report talk and rapport talk happen when couples come back together after being apart from each other during the workday. Realizing that your
spouse has certain preferences regarding his or her communication style is very important. This is also part of cooperative communication.

In this next exercise you and your spouse will be considering occasions when each of you is more likely to engage in either report talk or rapport talk.

**Occasions to Use Report / Rapport Talk Exercise**

1. When is each of you more likely to engage in report talk and rapport talk?
2. What could you do to accommodate your spouse’s preferences?

**EXAMPLE:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>When am I most likely to engage in report/rapport talk</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <em>I engage in rapport talk whenever I can:</em> when we are lying in bed, riding in the car, and when we watch television.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <em>I engage in report talk when I am asked a very specific question and the person I am talking to seems to require a quick response.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <em>I always engage in report talk when I am asked a specific question or when I am upset about something.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**EXAMPLE:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>When is my spouse is more likely to engage in report/rapport talk:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
1. My spouse does rapport most often when talking about sports. That’s a topic on which he will give his thoughts, ideas, and opinions.

2. My spouse does report talking most often when I ask him how his day was. He usually gives me a report on his day. Sometimes it’s very brief, if nothing out of the ordinary happened to him that day.

3. I could accommodate my spouse better by following his lead.

**Discussion:** Read your responses to each other. Consider your spouse’s responses. Do you agree or disagree? How would your communication improve if you remain aware of your spouse’s preferences and the times when they are more likely to engage in each type of talk?

**Discussion and recap: Report vs. Rapport talk**

- How have your thoughts changed?
- How have your feelings changed?
- How will your behaviors change?

**Homework:**

- Don’t forget your daily checklists

**SESSION 4**

**Troubles Talk**

*Troubles talk* is the time when you talk about problems, issues, or difficulties. *Troubles talk* is another area in which males and females may differ. Talking about difficulties may be more (or less) inviting for you than it is for your spouse. You
probably already have a strong opinion about whether or not you enjoy talking about and sorting out difficulties or whether or not the whole topic sends a shiver up your spine.

In this first troubles talk exercise, you will be organizing your thoughts about how you and your spouse feel about troubles talk.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Troubles Talk Exercise #1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Write down how each of you feels about discussing problems and difficulties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Are you or your spouse more reluctant to discuss troubles?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What has happened in the past when you and your spouse discuss problems or “troubles”? In general, do things get better, worse or stay the same?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EXAMPLE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My Spouse and “Troubles Talk”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <em>My husband does not like to discuss our problems or anybody’s problems really.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <em>My wife seems genuinely to enjoy discussing troubles.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <em>When we discuss the problems we are having, we don’t come up with resolutions—things get worse!</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion: Read your responses to each other. Consider how your spouse responded. Do you agree or disagree? How would your communication improve if you remain aware of the preferences that your spouse has in regard to troubles talk?
For many women, building rapport and connecting with others involves being able to discuss *troubles* and problems. In fact, the *troubles* do not have to be really big to be important enough to be considered for discussion. For people who believe that connections are established through sharing of information, there is no trouble too small to be discussed. However, if you view talking about problems as leading to an argument or disagreement, then *troubles talk* is not going to be inviting to you at all.

It might be helpful to come up with parameters for your *troubles talk*. You may want to develop a list of parameters that you and your spouse can live with. Below is an example.

**Troubles Talk Exercise #2**

Take 5 minutes to come up with some rules (guidelines) for your Troubles Talks with your spouse. When you are finished, we will discuss the rules that each of you finds important. Next, we will combine the rules into a short list of guidelines for your troubles talks.

**EXAMPLE:**

**Guidelines for our Troubles Talk**

1. *Try not to discuss “*troubles*” when we are out on a date.*
2. *Limit our “*troubles talk*” to ½ hour.*
3. *Decide ahead of time how we will disengage if the talk gets heated.*

**Discussion:** Read your responses to each other. Can you combine your preferences? How would your communication improve if both of you were able to stick with your combined preferences?
Use the “Guidelines for our Troubles Talk” 3x5 card to write down the rules that you would like to follow for your “troubles talk” with your spouse. Discuss the parameters that each of you has established.

Conflicts, troubles, and difficulties are important aspects of getting to know someone. Conflicts in marriage result from perceived incompatibility in goals, behaviors, and wants. Resolving conflicts successfully often requires that both individuals adapt to each other. Nonaggressive conflict and conflict resolution can provide a form of solidarity when the conflict or trouble is resolved and the harmony is restored. The goal in relationships should be successful resolution of conflict rather than to have a “conflict free” relationship.

In this third exercise you and your spouse will each present a difficulty or conflict in the relationship. We will be using a timer that is set to the time that you and your spouse were able to agree upon. Remember to focus on the solution instead of the problem.

Troubles Talk Exercise #3

In this exercise you will carry out a troubles talk with your spouse, using the guidelines that you established. Set your timer for the allotted time and review how you will disengage if the talk gets heated. Remember to focus on a solution instead of focusing on the problem.

Each of you should come up with an issue that you are having. Use your blue index cards. On one side, write down the problem. On the other side of the card, write down the solution. Decide which one of you will present your troubles talk first.
**EXAMPLE:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem: When my spouse uses our cordless phones, he does not place them back in the charger. I have to hunt for a phone every time it rings. We have discussed this before and still it keeps happening. The phones are here, there, and everywhere; consequently, they lose their charge. The worst is when the phone has been misplaced for too long that the phone finder doesn’t even work.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Solution: What we decided is that we should establish one of the phones as his and one as mine. We are going to try a “hands off” policy to see if that will solve the problem.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion:** Read your responses to each other. Consider your spouse’s responses. Do you agree or disagree? How would your communication improve if you remain aware of your spouse’s preference for troubles talk?

**Discussion and recap: Troubles Talk**

- How have your thoughts about *troubles talk* changed?
- How have your feelings about *troubles talk* changed?
- How will your behaviors change regarding *troubles talk*?

**Homework:**
• Over the next week, keep track of and note the time that you spend doing troubles talk.

• Don’t forget your daily checklist.

SESSION 5

Establishing Quality in Couples Communication

There are four maxims of cooperative communication. The first maxim that you will be learning about is the maxim of quality. The idea behind establishing quality is that you want your listener to have faith that your communication is genuine. This is an important aspect in all relationships. Quality is particularly important in your relationship with your spouse. In this section we are going to practice the elements of quality.

The maxim of quality in communication suggests that you should “Try to make your communication one that is true.” Additionally, there are three more specific sub-maxims:

1. Do not say what you think to be false, fake, bogus, or phony.
2. Do not exaggerate, inflate, overstate, or embellish.
3. Do not say that for which you lack sufficient evidence or proof.

Quality in relationships is best understood when there is an absence of quality.

For example, can you remember the last time someone told you something that was not true? The following exercise will help solidify the importance of quality in communication:
Establishing Quality – Exercise #1

Briefly: Try to think of the last time you were aware that someone was giving you false or bogus information and answer the following questions about that situation:

1. How did you feel receiving this false information?
2. How did you know it was false or bogus?
3. What did you think of the person who gave you false information?
4. How will you feel about receiving information from this individual in the future?

EXAMPLE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>False Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Miserable, I needed to hear the truth!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I could tell by the person’s eye contact, and the way he /she was telling the story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I was changing my opinion of them; I had previously thought of this person as a trusted friend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I was mad.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion: Read your responses to each other. Consider your spouse’s responses. Is the concept of quality in communication important to each of you?

Now that you have re-experienced a prior experience with lack of quality, let’s move on to the next exercise:
Establishing Quality—Exercise #2

Briefly: Try to think of the last time you were aware that someone was telling you the truth, even though the truth was painful to you or to them.

1. How did you feel in receiving this information?
2. What led you to believe that it was difficult for the other person to tell you the truth?
3. How did this change your opinion of the other person?
4. How will you feel about receiving information from this individual in the future?

EXAMPLE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficult, But Truthful, Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Not happy, but grateful to know the truth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I could tell by his/her tone of voice and his/her facial expression that this information was difficult for him/her to say?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I was more impressed with this individual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I will trust that this person feels comfortable telling me the truth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion: Read your responses to each other. Consider your spouse’s responses.

What are the common themes in each of your responses? How might your relationship change if you were both committed to establishing quality in your relationship with each other?

The quality of our communication is altered by how much we attempt to amplify our communication. It is necessary in a fearful situation to intensify our communication by changing our tone and volume. For example, if we have let go of a heavy object, and it is heading toward another person, we may yell – “Get out of the way!”, or “Look out below!” However, in general conversation, our communication should not require
amplification to get the other person’s attention. In fact, unnecessary intensity will become discounted and unwelcome. Can you think of someone who regularly amplifies, intensifies, or has a dramatic style of communication?

**Establishing Quality—Exercise #3**

As you are considering this person who frequently over-emphasizes his or her communication, answer the following questions:

1. How do you feel when this person is telling you a story?
2. How do you feel after communication with this individual?
3. What are you thinking when this person is trying to communicate with you?
4. Does their way of overstating the facts make you act/ behave differently?
5. What would make your communication with him or her more enjoyable?
6. What happens when you try to respond to him or her?

**EXAMPLE:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amplified Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I feel nervous and hyped-up when talking to this person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. After talking to this person, I just feel out of sorts, it takes a few minutes for me to go back to what I was thinking about or doing before he or she started talking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I would enjoy communicating with him or her more, if this person could just state the facts without so much emotion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I have found that when I try to respond, I can’t match this person’s intensity and it seems as if he or she isn’t really listening.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. ?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion:** Read your responses to each other. Consider your spouse’s responses.

What are the common themes in each of your responses? How might your relationship change if you were both committed to speaking with each other without unnecessary intensity?

The *quality* of our communication decreases when we state, as fact, something for which we have no proof or evidence. Although this mistake is subtle, the person
with whom we are communicating takes notice of this offense. Often this communication error is combined with some level of exaggeration or over-emphasizing. The key here is that the speaker is presupposing an outcome for which he or she has no evidence. For example, an individual in my neighborhood told me that the house two doors away sold for $350,000. I knew that the sold sign had just been placed on the front lawn, so, I inquired about how he got his information so fast. He asked me “What information?” I said “the information about the selling price of the house.” “Well,” he said, “that’s the price they were asking for the house.” Unfortunately this was after a long string of statements that were offered as fact despite a lack of concrete knowledge. This lack of quality stresses a relationship—making it difficult to honor and trust the other person’s communication.

Can you think of a time when someone gave you information that they portrayed as fact, when the reality was that there was no concrete proof or certainty?

**Establishing Quality—Exercise #4**

As you are considering an individual who presupposes the truth and makes statements that appear factual, even though you know there is a lack of evidence, answer the following questions:

1. How do you feel when you know that this individual’s statements lack validity?
2. What are you thinking about as this individual is talking to you?
3. How does this information make you behave toward this individual?

**EXAMPLE:**
Portraying Information as Factual

1. I feel as if this person is insulting my intelligence
2. Throughout the conversation, I am actively tuning the person out.
3. My behavior changes toward this individual—I don’t ask his or her opinion on anything anymore.

**Discussion:** Read your responses to each other. Consider your spouse’s responses.

What are the common themes in each of your responses? How might your relationship change if you were both committed to speaking with each other without presupposing or without the unnecessary intensity?

**Discussion and recap: Establishing Quality**

- How have your thoughts changed about the notion of quality?
- How have your feelings changed about establishing quality?
- How will your behaviors change with your spouse regarding quality?

**Homework:**

- Over the next week, keep track of and note and times that you notice the presence of the absence of quality in your communication with your spouse.
- Don’t forget your daily checklist!

**SESSION 6**

**Establishing Quantity in Couples Communication**
Quantity in communication relates to the amount of or quantity of information to be provided. If your goal is to establish the maxim of quantity in your relationship with your spouse, the short-term goals on your way to establishing quantity include:

1. Avoid giving “too little” information.
2. Avoid giving “too much” information.

Additional maxims of quantity can be applied to the quantity of time spent communicating. In other words, there should be a mutual sharing of the time allotted for communication. This idea is best stated in the following ways:

1. Organize your communication so there is equal “air-time.”
2. Allow your listener time to respond.
3. When it comes to quantity—by using your listener’s nonverbal information, you can adjust your response accordingly.

For example, when you ask your spouse what he/she would like to do for dinner, what is his/her usual reply? Does your spouse give too much information in response to this question?

**EXAMPLE:**

**Quantity: Too much information**

1. Well, I’m not really sure because I thought about cooking on the grill; then, I was considering using the gift certificate we received to Red Lobster, but I wasn’t sure if I was in the mood for seafood, and I have had pizza too much this week so I know I don’t want pizza take-out. Its 5:30 and the good restaurants aren’t busy yet; if we wait too long, we will be standing in line. What do you think we should do?
Does your spouse give you too little information?

**Quantity: Too little information**

Example:

*I want to eat!*

Or is your spouse’s response appropriate?

**Quantity: Appropriate responding**

1. *I am in the mood for a steak; we could pick up steaks at Karn’s and prepare them on the grill, or we could go to Ruby Tuesday’s and I could order a steak there. Is this agreeable to you?*

When the maxim of *quantity* is violated—we notice! For example, if you are in a large city, such as New York City and you are lost and you ask someone where the train station is and they reply “Head east”, this brief reply may be meaningless to you; thus, the maxim of *quantity* is violated by being too brief. There is not enough information in this response to be helpful to you.

On the other hand, if you ask where the train station is and the answer is something like this: “To get to the train station you must go 42 yards; cross Fifty-Ninth Street; go another 27 yards; cross Fifty-Eighth Street, and so on…” If a response is given in number of yards with descriptions of each cross street, this response will then violate the maxim of *quantity* because it supplies you with too much information. In fact, you could be at the train station by the time the response is finished. An
example of appropriate quantity might be to say “Go down Madison Avenue until you reach Thirty-First Street; take a right on Thirty-First Street, and proceed another 3-4 blocks until you arrive at the corner of Thirty-First Street and Seventh Avenue.”

**Establishing Quantity—Exercise #1**

Try to think of the last time someone gave you too little information in response to one of your questions. When you have recaptured the scene in your mind, answer the following questions:

1. What did you think when this happened to you?
2. How did it make you feel?
3. What was your immediate reaction? How about long-term reaction?
4. Did it change how you felt about the individual with whom you were interacting?

**EXAMPLE:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Too Little Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <em>I thought the other person was bothered or annoyed by my question.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <em>I felt a little foolish for asking the question.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <em>I remember shrinking away from this person after he/she answered my question.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <em>I made a mental note to keep interactions with</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion: Read your responses to each other. Consider your spouse’s responses. What are the common themes in each of your responses? How might your relationship change if you were both committed to avoiding too little quantity in your relationship?

Establishing Quantity—Exercise #2

Now, imagine the last time you had a conversation with someone who gave you too much information. Conjure up the setting and the individual and answer the following questions:

1. What were you thinking as this speaker gave his/her long-winded answer?
2. How did this long answer make you feel?
3. What was your immediate reaction?
4. What stance or reaction have you employed since this interaction?

EXAMPLE:

Too Much Information
1. I was thinking that this person was probably lonely, or liked to talk a lot.

2. The Long answer made me feel antsy and anxious to disengage.

3. My immediate reaction was to be polite and appropriate, even though I thought his/her answer was inappropriate.

4. Since this interaction, I try to avoid this person.

**Discussion:** Read your responses to each other. Consider your spouse’s responses.

What are the common themes in each of your responses? How might your relationship change if you were both committed to avoiding too much information in your relationship?

Establishing appropriate *quantity* in your communication also involves noting the body language of the other individual. An important aspect of communication is being aware of your listener’s nonverbal behavior. There are definite clues in nonverbal behavior that let us know how much time the hearer is able to spend being engaged in conversation.

In this next exercise, you will be searching your memory for what your spouse does to let others know that they don’t have a lot of time to communicate.

**Establishing Quantity: Exercise #3**

As you think back, when was the last time you remember your spouse using non-
As you contemplate how your spouse communicates nonverbally, answer the following questions:

1. What are the exact nonverbal movements your spouse employs to let you and others know that he/she is short on time?
2. In what direction does your spouse orient his or her eye contact when trying to let you know he/she is out of time?
3. What does your spouse do with his/her body posture when sensing that he/she is out of time, but is attempting to do the right thing by you, i.e., by listening?
4. In general, try to summarize your spouse’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors when he or she is running out of time to communicate?
5. Last, what keeps you from noticing these cues when you are communicating with your spouse?

**EXAMPLE:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noticing my spouse’s non-verbal communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. My husband starts fidgeting when he can no longer attend to the communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. His eye contact is lost, and he begins looking down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. His posture becomes more rigid, and he folds his arms across his chest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. He starts thinking, “When is this going to end?” He feels as if he is being put-upon or tortured, and behaves very much like an adolescent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. In summary, I know when my husband is not interested because he stops asking questions, starts looking at the floor, and crosses his arms over his chest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What keeps me from noticing often is the fact that I am emotional and I am venting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion:** Read your responses to each other. Consider your spouse’s responses. What are the common themes in each of your responses? How might your relationship change if you were both committed to noticing each other’s nonverbal communication?

**Discussion and recap: Establishing Quantity**

- How have your thoughts changed about the notion of quantity?
• How have your feelings changed about establishing quantity?

• How will your behaviors change with your spouse regarding quantity?

Homework:

• Over the next week, keep track of and note times when quantity is present and times when the maxim of quantity is violated during communication with your spouse.

• Don’t forget your daily checklist.

SESSIONS 7 & 8

Establishing Relation in Couples Communication

Relation refers to how your communication—your responses and your questions—are “related to” the conversation. The maxim in this case is “be relevant.” What this means in terms of cooperative communication is that your communication with your spouse should be related to the conversation. In other words, your questions and answers in communication with your spouse should, for the most part, relate to the topic being discussed. If your goal is to establish the maxim of relation in your relationship with your spouse, the short-term goals on your way to establishing relation include:

1. Make every attempt to be relevant in communicating with your spouse.

2. Avoid irrelevant questions and responses.

3. If you make a vague or murky connection, point out how the response, question or idea is related to the conversation.
When we are addressing the maxim of relation, think in terms of relevance or being related to the topic of discussion. When we are making every attempt to be relevant, we attempt to answer all aspects of a question, or address the important theme in our spouse’s communication with us. When the theme or most important element of your spouse’s communication is vague, it is important to ask for clarity. This brief clarification may assist you in eliminating irrelevant responses.

The following exercise involves a fairly complex dialogue. Read the dialogue and create a relevant response on your blue index card. You can also come up with questions you might ask if you would like more information regarding the important theme or idea conveyed in the communication.

**Relevant Responding Exercise #1**

Your spouse says “I hate this time of the year. All of our relatives want to know if we are going to get together with them for the holidays. We can never make everyone happy. Sometimes I wonder if we are happy with our choices. I really hate letting people down. I would like us to plan ahead this year and make our decisions now so that no one is surprised by our choices. How do you think we should divide our time?”

Take time now to formulate a relevant response to thoughts and question expressed above.

**EXAMPLE:**
Discussion: Read your responses to each other. Consider your spouse responses. What are the common themes in each of your responses? How might your relationship change if you were both committed to relevant responding?

Now, we will take time to look at the relevant responses that you and your spouse have created. The object of this exercise is to have your communication be related. However, you can also be examining the gender differences that may be noticeable in these responses.

In this next exercise each of you will consider situations in which your spouse may give an irrelevant response. Think about times when this occurs. Is there a particular situation, for example, when your spouse is watching a sporting event, or when he or she is tired? Take some time now to come up with particular situations that
cause or create irrelevant responding. Also, read and answer the following questions in exercise 2.

**Establishing Relation: Exercise #2**

In this exercise you will think about and write down the situations in which your spouse is most guilty of irrelevant responses. After writing down the situations in which this occurs, consider the following questions:

1. What do you think when your spouse gives you an irrelevant response?
2. How does it make you feel?
3. How do you behave or act in response to this situation?

**EXAMPLE:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Irrelevant Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>My spouse gives me unrelated responses when he or she is distracted. He or she usually doesn’t ask for clarity; he or she simply tries to bluff his or her way through the conversation.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I think he or she is being insincere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I feel angry and upset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I usually throw up my hands and walk away. After this has happened I don’t want to communicate at all.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion:** Read your responses to each other. Consider your spouse’s responses. What are the common themes in each of your responses? How might your relationship change if you were both committed to noticing the times when each of you is most likely to respond irrelevantly?
Now we will consider another sample in which the communication is vague. The key to this exercise is asking for clarity. The example is displays in exercise 3.

**Establishing Relation: Exercise 3**

In this exercise, the dialogue below is presented to you as an example of a time when your spouse is emotional and trying to communicate the reason why he or she is so distressed.

“You know I hate when this happens. We have talked about this many times before. I really think that you are purposely doing this to make me upset. Ya know I’m through; I am absolutely at the end of my rope with the way you treat me. I have really tried here and nothing is working.”

Again, the main point of this exercise is to know what your spouse is talking about before you can respond with a relevant answer. Formulate the questions you would like to ask on the card provided for this exercise.

**EXAMPLE:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions I might ask when communication is vague</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. It sounds as if you are really upset with me. I want to understand what this is about. Can you give me an example of what’s upsetting you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. It also sounds as if you are thinking that I am purposely upsetting you. Do you really believe this to be true?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Also, either I do this a lot or it is something that really offends you. I want to understand this too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I can understand your being really frustrated if you feel as if we have discussed this before. Maybe I will remember as you give me an example.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Discussion:** Read your responses to each other. Consider your spouse’s responses. What are the common themes in each of your responses? How might your relationship change if you were both committed to making relevant connections even when one or both of you are emotional?

In this next exercise we will examine another aspect of establishing *relation.* Have you ever had the experience in which it appears that your spouse’s response is irrelevant and later you discover that it was relevant or tied into the discussion? This is an important distinction to make when you are evaluating “relation” in cooperative communication. It is not uncommon to have a topic or an idea trigger another thought; however, if your response is only vaguely related to the original topic, cooperative communication suggests that you point out the connection or the relationship between the original topic and your comment. For example, if you want to make a brief comment and then move on to a new subject, you can point that out to your listener, “Do you mind if I change the subject?”

### Establishing Relation: Exercise 4

Consider the times when either you or your spouse has made a vague connection between what they are thinking and the actual conversation or communication. Knowing what you know about cooperative communication, take the time now to answer the following questions related to this topic.

1. What would you like to be thinking or how would you like your spouse to consider these *faux pas* when they occur?
2. What do you want to feel and how would you like your spouse to feel when such mistakes occur in your communication?
3. How would you like to behave and how would you like your spouse to behave when these inevitable mistakes are made in your daily communication with each other?
EXAMPLE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that I would like to have for my self and my spouse when vague communication occurs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. When mistakes occur I want my spouse and me to think that these mistakes are to be expected and that they can be worked through.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I would like each of us to feel that we can address and correct the mistakes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I would like to act in a way that promotes positive feelings for my spouse and me, even when there is a mistake in the way we communicate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion: Read your responses to each other. Consider your spouse’s responses.

What are the common themes in each of your responses? How might your relationship change if you were both committed to establishing relevance even when a response appears irrelevant?

As you can see, establishing relation requires deliberate concentration. The benefit is that with efforts placed on concentration and relevant responding, less effort can be placed on the dramatic effects of irrelevant responding.

Keep in mind that cooperative conversation is very satisfying to both parties. Your efforts to improve your communication will be rewarded!

In this next exercise, take a minute to consider someone who consistently violates the maxim of relation. This may or may not be an individual whom your spouse knows.
Establishing Relation: Exercise #5

Can you think of an individual who consistently misses the mark in terms of the maxim of relation?

1. When confronted with having to communicate with this individual, what are your thoughts?
2. How do you feel when you are attempting to establish an important point with this person?
3. How do you behave, respond, or act when the conversation becomes a chore?

Now, take time to answer the questions above, using the relevant card for exercise 5.

**EXAMPLE:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My experience with an irrelevant communicator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. My thoughts about communicating with this person revolve around how difficult it is going to be to establish any clear communication with him or her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I usually feel agitated when I need to address a particular issue with this person. I am pretty certain that it is going to take several attempts before he or she will get the point and respond accordingly. The conversation usually feels disjointed to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I try not to engage him or her in conversations unless I have to.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion:** Read your responses to each other. Consider your spouse’s responses.

What are the common themes in each of your responses? How might your relationship change if you were both committed to relevant responding?
Discussion and recap: Establishing Relation

- How have your thoughts about relevant responding changed?
- How have your feelings about establishing relation changed?
- How will your behaviors change regarding establishing relation with your spouse?

Homework

- Keep track of and note times when you note times when the maxim of relation is either present or is absent in your communication with your spouse.
- Don’t forget your daily checklist.

SESSION 9

Establishing Manner in Couples Communication

*Manner,* relates more importantly on *how* you speak rather than what you say. In the other three maxims: quality, quantity, and relation—you concentrated your efforts on “what” was being said. With the concept of *manner*—you are concentrating on “how” you say things. The maxim of *manner* has one supermaxim—be clear! What this means in terms of cooperative communication is that your communication with your spouse should be clearly expressed so that it can be easily understood. Your goal is to establish the maxim of manner in your relationship with your spouse. This goal includes establishing several other maxims on your way to establishing the goal of *manner*:

1. Be brief (avoid unnecessary wordiness).
2. Avoid insignificance phrases and expressions.
3. Avoid vagueness in your communication with your spouse.

4. Be orderly in your communication.

When you address the maxim of manner, make your communication clear and concise. In the following exercise you and your spouse will take the responses given below and rewrite them so that they avoid insignificant phrases and expressions.

**Establishing Manner: Exercise #1**

In this exercise, you will examine dialogues between two people. You will answer the usual questions about the dialogue. Your additional task is to rework the answer portion of each dialogue to create answers that are brief and to-the-point.

Example:

Q: “Did you get a gym membership?”

A: “Well, let me tell you about the gym. First of all, the childcare, or the nursery, or babysitting, whatever they call it—it’s limited to times that just don’t work for us. Second, what I like about a gym is easy access, and, let me tell ya, this gym is anything but easy to get to, like, first of all—the entrance is on a one-way street, and second—the parking lot, itself, is a maze.”

**Questions about the dialogue above:**

1. What would you be thinking if you received this answer?
2. How would this answer make you feel?
3. How would you react?
Be Brief

Example:

1. I would be wondering what I should infer from this answer.
2. I might feel as if the question has become lost.
3. I might ask the question again.

Example of a response that uses the maxim of manner:

Q: “Did you get a gym membership?”
A: “No—both the childcare and the access to the gym are limited”.

Discussion: Read your responses to each other. Consider your spouse’s responses.

What are the common themes in each of your responses? How might your relationship change if you were both committed to establishing manner in your relationship?

Using the following dialogues, create answers that avoid insignificant phrases and unnecessary expressions. Consider, briefly, what you think of each these dialogues; how you might feel if you were addressed this way, and how you might respond.
Q: “Can you pick-up the dry cleaning?”
A: “Of course I can.” “Are you asking me if I will pick up the dry-cleaning?”

Q: “I thought you wanted to go the movies?”
A: “Well, I thought you didn’t want to go. I did want to go to the movies yesterday; I mean, yesterday, it sounded like a great idea. I have since heard some comments about that movie, and I wasn’t sure if I would like that movie. Furthermore, I think I am coming down with something.”

Q: “Are you going to township meeting?”
A: “To be honest with you, I’m sorry. I was trying to make every effort to go to the meeting and I was hoping to be able to go; however, something came up at the last minute, and I am afraid I might have to change my plans, and not attend the meeting.

Use the blue index card for this exercise to formulate your answers.

Discussion: Read your responses to each other. Consider your spouse’s responses.

What are the common themes in each of your responses? How might your relationship change if you were both committed to avoiding insignificant phrases in your communication?

The third element in establishing manner is to avoid being vague. When the speaker is vague, the listener assumes that he or she is missing something. This creates
several issues. First, the listener is busy trying to sort through the vague answer. Sometimes this leads to the wrong interpretation or assumption. At this point the listener tends to use history as a guide for what the speaker really means. Accuracy is compromised and the listener, who was vague to begin with, now feels he or she was not heard. There are other problems with this type of communication. However, the solution is to avoid being vague. The next exercise focuses on this issue.

To Establish Manner—Avoid being Vague Exercise #3

Q: What are you doing this weekend?

A: There are lots of things I want to do, but I think I need to get some work done.

What are your thoughts about this response?

What are your feelings about this response?

What do you do when someone responds like this to one of your questions?

EXAMPLE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avoid being Vague</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I would think that the person really didn’t want to answer my question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I would feel as if he or she was making excuses for reasons why he or she didn’t want to get together and do something with me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I might back off and wait for that person to invite me to do something.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion: Read your responses to each other. Consider your spouse’s responses.

What are the common themes in each of your responses? How might your relationship
change if you were both committed to being clear and less vague in your communication?

The fourth element to establishing *manner* in communication is to be orderly about your communication. When order is absent, communication can become confusing. Order is often lost when emotions are running at a high level. In the following dialogue you will be answering the usual questions about thoughts, feelings, and behaviors or actions. Additionally, you will be reconstructing answers that are orderly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To Establish Manner—Be orderly</th>
<th>Exercise #4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q: Hey, I was wondering where you were headed—I thought we could meet for coffee.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: “Hi. I was hoping you would call me. You won’t believe what happened to me at work this morning. You remember the new guy they hired? Well, he came into work all fired up about something having to do with his jeep and not having enough room to park it in the parking lot. What happened next is indescribable. Oh…I am on my way downtown. Where are you? What did you say about meeting?”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What are your thoughts about this response?

How does this response make you feel?

What would you do, or, how would you act?
EXAMPLE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Be Orderly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I would wonder if the person heard me. And I might think that he or she was not tuned in to anything I had said.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Though I made the phone call, I might feel as if I were out of the communication loop—as if I could be anyone on the end of that line listening.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I might consider doing the coffee/talk another day or time because I would assume that my spouse had a lot on his/her mind about another topic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion: Read your responses to each other. Consider your spouse’s responses.

What are the common themes in each of your responses? How might your relationship change if you were both committed to being orderly in your communication with each other?

Discussion and recap: Establishing Manner

- How have your thoughts about establishing manner in your relationship changed?
- How have your feelings about establishing manner changed?
- How will your behaviors change regarding establishing manner with your spouse?

Homework:

- Over the next week, keep track of and note times when you notice the presence or the absence of manner in your relationship with your spouse. Don’t forget your checklists.
The next two sessions will pull together not only the four maxims of cooperative communication but also the importance of gender differences. First, we will revisit gender differences and combine these ideas with the first maxim—establishing quality.

As you recall, the gender difference awareness was highlighted by two basic ideas: report talk versus rapport talk and troubles talk, and communication goals. Studies show that men prefer report talk, in which communication is informative and goal directed. By contrast, women prefer rapport talk in which the purpose of the conversation is to establish understanding and make a connection. Troubles talk differences are highlighted by gender differences; women feel that there is no problem too small to warrant a discussion. In stark contrast, men feel that a problem has to be substantial to warrant a discussion.

Quality in communication suggests that you should try to make your communication one that is true. Do not say what you think to be false, do not exaggerate, and do not make statements that lack evidence.

In this next exercise, you will be working on quality as well as keeping in mind the gender differences that exist in your relationship with your spouse. In the following exercise, concentrate on increasing the quality in your communication as well as incorporating your awareness of your spouse’s communication preferences.
Pulling it Together: Exercise #1 Quality and Gender Differences

His Exercise: Your wife has asked you if you know anything about the new movie—Zanthura. Your objective is to create a response that demonstrates quality as well as her communication preferences.

Her Exercise: Your husband has asked you what you think of the movie Zanthura. Your objective is to create a response that demonstrates quality as well as his communication preferences.

Write your response on the card supplied. We will also role-play this exercise.

EXAMPLE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality and Gender Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>His Response:</strong> I have heard the name, but I don’t know anything about it. What have you heard? Is this a movie you would like to go see?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Her Response:</strong> I haven’t heard anything. Have you? Do you want to see Zanthura?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion: Read your responses to each other. Consider your spouse’s responses. What are the common themes in each of your responses? How might your relationship change if you were both committed to combining your gender difference awareness with the maxim of quality?
As we do this role-play, consider your thoughts, feelings, and likely, actions associated with your spouse’s response to this question.

In the next exercise you will be organizing your communication around the elements of quantity as well as gender difference awareness. As you recall, the maxim of quantity suggests that your communication should avoid giving “too little” or “too much” information. Additionally, give your spouse time to respond; give your spouse equal air-time, and notice nonverbal communication. In the following exercise you will be using a commonly asked question; consider the quantity of your response as well as gender differences (report vs. rapport talk, and troubles talk).

### Pulling it together: Exercise #2 Quantity and Gender Differences

In this exercise each of you will be answering the same question: “Where would you like to go on vacation this summer?” Answer the question as if your spouse were asking you this question. Formulate a response using your awareness of your spouse’s preference for report vs. rapport talk as well as keeping the maxim of quantity in mind. Remember quantity suggests that the information be just enough and that each of you gets equal airtime to share your responses.

**EXAMPLE:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pulling it together; Quantity and Gender Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would like to spend a week in August at Bethany Beach. I prefer Sea Colony, the ocean front condos. What were you thinking?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion: Read your responses to each other. Consider your spouse’s responses.

Discuss the topic with your spouse as if you are attempting to come to a decision about your summer vacation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pulling it together: Exercise #3—Managing Quality, Quantity, and Gender Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using the exercise above, answer the following questions:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. How did your spouse manage quality in this conversation?
2. How did you manage quality in this conversation?
3. How did your spouse manage quantity in this conversation?
4. How did you manage quantity in this conversation?

Next, we will be referring to another maxim of cooperative communication, relation. As you might recall, relation is the maxim by which you focus on your communication so that it is related to the other person’s communication. In other words, your communication should be related to the conversation. If your topic is unrelated you need to mention to the listener that you are changing the topic of the conversation. In this next exercise you are being asked to concentrate on three of the maxims; quantity, quality, and relation, as well as gender differences in communication.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pulling it together; Managing Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Gender Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You will be having another, partially planned discussion with your spouse. In this exercise I would like each of you to pick topics that have been very difficult to discuss in the past. Write your topics down on one side of the Topic Card and on the other side write down the issues and problems you have encountered in the past when you were trying to have a discussion about these topics.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
example:

### Pulling it together: Topic Card #1

1. Money-spending and savings
2. Portioning out the house and yard work

### Historical Problems Related to These Discussions

1. Each of us has different views about money and we can’t seem to come up with solutions for this problem.
2. He is a spender; I am a saver. This really bothers me because I end up feeling really insecure about our financial future.
3. We have discussed an equal sharing of housework—and somehow I still end up doing the majority of it.

**Discussion:** Read your responses to each other. Consider your spouse’s responses.

Choose one of the topics to discuss with your spouse. Discuss the topic as though you are attempting to come up with some solutions. Keep in mind—gender differences, quantity, quality, and relation.

**Discussion and recap: Pulling it together using Quality, Quantity, Relation and Gender Differences**

- How have your thoughts about establishing quantity, quality, relation and gender differences in your relationship changed?
• How have your feelings about establishing quantity, quality, relation, and gender differences changed?

• How will your behaviors change regarding establishing this cooperative communication with your spouse?

**Homework:**

• Over the next week, keep track of and note times when you and your spouse are “pulling it together” and using what you know about cooperative communication.

• Don’t forget your checklists.

**SESSION 12**

**Pulling it Together II**

In the two previous sessions you were working on pulling together three of the four maxims along with gender difference awareness. In this session you will be working on pulling together all four maxims along with the gender difference awareness. Keep in mind that the gender differences we are concentrating on have to do with report versus rapport talk and troubles talk.

The last maxim to be incorporated is the maxim of manner. As you may recall, manner focuses on the following elements of communication—be brief (avoid unnecessary wordiness), avoid insignificance phrases and expressions, avoid vagueness in your communication with your spouse, and be orderly in your communication.

Again, manner, as with the other maxims of cooperative communication, is best seen in its absence; that is, it is a time when an individual is not employing manner! In
the next exercise, you and your spouse will concentrate on employing manner along
with quality, quantity, relation, manner, and gender differences.

Pulling it together I: Exercise #1—Quality, Quantity, Relation, Manner, and
Gender Differences

At our last session you and your spouse jotted down a couple of topics that have
been difficult for the two of you to discuss. Take a look at those topics and come to a
decision about which topic you would like to discuss.

Write the topic on your Topic Card.

Try to keep the maxims of cooperative communication in mind as you have this
discussion.

EXAMPLE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pulling it together; Topic Card 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sharing the house work/yard work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After you have made a decision about the topic of choice, open this topic up for
discussion with your spouse; you can use the outline below to focus on different aspects
of this issue.
Pulling it together II: Exercise #2 Questions to ask about your topic

1. Do both of you see this as a problem?
2. Are you in agreement about discussing the issue and coming up with a solution?
3. What has worked in the past?
4. How is each of you contributing to the problem?
5. How can each of you contribute to the solution?

Discussion: Read your topics to each other. Choose one of the topics to begin with.

Discuss the topic as though you are attempting to come up with some solutions. Keep in mind: gender differences, quality, quantity, relation, and manner.

Assuming that you started this exercise with a topic that one of you had come up with, you can now use a topic from the other person’s list. Repeat the above exercise including the questions and discussion. Write this new topic down on your other topic card.

EXAMPLE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pulling it together: Topic Card 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finances</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Open this topic up for discussion with your spouse; you can use the outline below to focus on different aspects of this issue.
Pulling it together; Questions to ask about your topic

6. Do both of you see this as a problem?
7. Are you in agreement about discussing the issue and coming up with a solution?
8. What has worked in the past?
9. How is each of you contributing to the problem?
10. How can each of you contribute to the solution?

Discussion: Read your topic to each other. Choose one of the topics to begin with.

Discuss the topic as though you are attempting to come up with some solutions. Keep in mind: gender differences, quality, quantity, relation, and manner.

Discussion and Recap

Debriefing
Appendix B

Study Survey

Please circle your answer

The couple therapy sessions were well planned and implemented?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not at all somewhat definitely

The workbook was useful and easy to use?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not at all somewhat definitely

Therapy sessions were well organized?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not at all somewhat definitely

The material presented in the sessions was easy to understand?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not at all somewhat definitely

The material presented was too difficult to understand?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not at all somewhat definitely
The material presented was too easy?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

*Not at all*  *somewhat*  *definitely*

The homework assignments were useful in helping me understand the maxims of Cooperative Communication?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

*Not at all*  *somewhat*  *definitely*

The subjects covered in the CCC workbook were helpful and useful?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

*Not at all*  *somewhat*  *definitely*

What percentage of information presented in the program was new to you (0-100%)?

The Couple’s Therapy sessions were interesting?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

*Not at all*  *somewhat*  *definitely*
Lee Morand seem to understand the information she was teaching?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at all somewhat definitely

I would recommend this program to another couple?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at all somewhat definitely

I felt comfortable asking questions and making comments during the therapy sessions?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at all somewhat definitely

This program increased my cooperative communication with my spouse?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at all somewhat definitely

I have some specific communication skills that I can use with my spouse?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at all somewhat definitely

What I liked most about the Cooperative Communication for Couples program was?

(Please describe)
What I liked least about the Cooperative Communication for Couples program was?

All things considered, I am glad I attended the Cooperative Communication for Couples program?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at all somewhat definitely
Appendix C

Debriefing Script

Today, you have completed the tenth and final session of Cooperative Communication for Couples, a couple’s enrichment program.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the value of the Cooperative Communication for Couples Program in terms of marital satisfaction. In other words, the responsible investigator is interested in whether or not marital satisfaction was increased, decreased, or remained the same as a result of your participation in this study.

On the original informed consent forms, you were asked to place a check mark here (show signed consent) to receive a summary of the research findings. If you did not place a check mark but would like to receive a summary of findings, you can do that now.
Appendix D

Couple Response Form

In the space below, please indicate your response and return this form, in the enclosed self-addressed and stamped envelope, to the responsible investigator. Thank you.

___ Yes, we, as a couple would like to enroll in the study. We are aware that participation in this study is entirely voluntary. We are also aware that we can withdraw from the study anytime, for any reason. We would like to be contacted to arrange a meeting to review the study’s Informed Consent Form.

___ No, we not wish to enroll in this study.

Couple’s names: ___________________________________________________________________________

Couple’s signatures: ________________________, ____________________________

Date: ___________
Appendix E

Date: _______

Daily Checklist

On a scale of 1-10, with 10 representing “best effort” and 1 representing “least effort” please rate each question.

I was aware of my goal to communicate cooperatively with my spouse. Rating ___.
I used my current knowledge of cooperative communication with my spouse today. Rating ___.
My spouse used what he/she knows about cooperative communication with me today. Rating __.
Appendix F

Participant Recruitment Flyer for Psy.D. Doctoral Studies

**Cooperative Communication for Couples**

Professional student investigator from the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine (PCOM) is seeking a couple to volunteer and partake in 10 – 12 sessions of Couple’s Therapy. Therapy sessions would take place in Mechanicsburg, Pa. The therapy is designed to increase couple’s communication. This project is part of the student’s doctoral dissertation. Student investigator is a licensed and board certified professional counselor.

Student Investigator: Ms. Lee Wood Morand, M.S., N.B.C.C., L.P.C.

Principle Investigator: Stephanie Felgoise, Ph.D., ABPP

Institution: Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine (PCOM)

Location: Private practice office in Mechanicsburg

Requirements: To qualify for this study candidates must be a married couple, living together, and be 21 years of age or older.

All aspects of the information collected and of the analysis will be kept confidential and anonymous and in the sole possession of the researcher (Ms. Morand). This research plan has been approved by Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine (PCOM) and the Institutional Review Board.

**If you are interested in helping with this research** by allowing me to provide 10 – 12 sessions of Couple’s Therapy to you, or if you have any questions about the research, please notify me at 717-795-8588 (business) **no later than Monday, March 31, 2008.**