Getting to the heart of the matter: Understanding relational satisfaction in modern-day couples

Heather Putney

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GETTING TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER: UNDERSTANDING RELATIONAL SATISFACTION IN MODERN-DAY COUPLES

A Dissertation
Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Heather L. Putney, LMFT

December 2017
GETTING TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER: UNDERSTANDING RELATIONAL SATISFACTION IN MODERN-DAY COUPLES

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ABSTRACT

GETTING TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER: UNDERSTANDING RELATIONAL SATISFACTION IN MODERN-DAY COUPLES

By
Heather L. Putney, LMFT

December 2017

Dissertation supervised by Dr. David Delmonico, Ph.D.

This mixed-methods study is the first of its kind to collect large-scale qualitative and quantitative data from diverse couples. The purpose of the research was to determine what factors (Internal, Relational, or External) most impact relational satisfaction in modern-day couples. Four hundred fifty three participants that represented diverse sexual orientation, age, social economic status, and relational commitments were asked to answer a survey that contained Likert-like scales and open-ended questions to identify what factors most influence their relational satisfaction. The answers were coded and grouped into internal, relational, and external factors. Rich descriptions of the qualitative results are included. The qualitative data were also transposed into numerical representations to identify statistical differences and correlations between groups. The researcher identified a few significant and potentially significant demographic factors that
merit further investigation including: gender, sexual orientation, parental status, commitment level, relationship status, and length of relationship. The qualitative factors found to significantly or practically significantly (small but notable effect sizes) impact relational satisfaction include: Infidelity, Religion/Morals, Parenting, Commitment/Hard Work, Communication, Domestic, Compatibility, Work/Time, Emotional Support, Finances, Extended Family, Friends, Stress/Trials, Addictions/Recovery, Social/Community Support, and Health/Aging. A new framework for understanding the key ingredients of relational satisfaction is proposed. These ingredients include: Trust, Safety, Stability/Security, Connection/Support, and the degree to which the couples perceived their expectations were being met in these areas. Application of Attachment Theory helped explain some of the findings. Implications for assessment of relational satisfaction and future research are discussed.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to those who have loved, will love, and work with those who love. I pray that the insights contained in this document will be helpful for lay people, clinicians, and researchers alike to understand how to be a better partner in their own relationships, support other couples, and help them and their families thrive.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I have been so very blessed to have so many wonderful and supportive people in my life, without whom I would never have made it through my program or completed this dissertation.

First, I want to thank my Mentor and Committee Chair David Delmonico. Your support and encouragement has given me the hope and confidence I needed to push through. Thank you for reigning me in and preventing me from trying to complete my entire life’s research agenda in one paper! I learned so much about writing, teaching, and mentoring from you. I hope I can become half the teacher and mentor to future students as you have been to me.

I want to thank my partner and my love, John Paul Putney. I appreciate your support and willingness to sacrifice time with me and pick up the slack with the kids so I could get my writing done. I also appreciate your mad Excel skills that saved me hours of formatting my data for the appendix!

I also want to thank my parents who allowed me to crash in their basement and feed me good food while I worked around the clock on writing. I could not have done this without you.

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Finally, I want to thank my children Weston and Helena for loving me unconditionally. Your love and smiles made every day brighter. You helped inspire me to keep going so I could finish this paper, restore balance to our lives, and look forward to spending more time with you.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

RS = Relational Satisfaction

CL = Commitment Level

RQ = Relational Quality (this is a sum of the RS + CL scores)
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores relational satisfaction and how it is defined, how it is measured, and what factors impact it. Fewer and fewer couples resemble the old “American ideal” with a married, two-parent, heterosexual couple where the father is the breadwinner and the mother a full-time homemaker with 2.5 kids, a dog, and a white picket fence surrounding a perfectly manicured lawn. Declining marriage rates, increased cohabitation, greater numbers of divorced and blended families, gay marriage, open marriage, and polyamory are just a few of the many cultural changes influencing how we define marriage and families, and relational satisfaction. Hence, current popular measures of relational satisfaction may no longer be applicable to modern day couples. Therefore, the strengths, limitations, and applicability of current assessments for relational satisfaction are reviewed and a mixed-methods study to better understand relational satisfaction in the modern era is proposed. This study examined what factors are most important in how modern-day couples conceptualize and define relational satisfaction (RS) in order to determine if established relational satisfaction surveys are equally relevant for modern couples. If the results differ from the content of previous surveys, this study lays the groundwork for the development of a scale that more accurately measures RS in modern-day couples.

**Study Overview**

This mixed-method study examines what factors are most important in how modern-day couples conceptualize and define relational satisfaction (RS). If the results differ from the content of previous surveys, this study lays the groundwork for the development of a scale that more accurately measures RS in modern-day couples.
Problem Statement

There are many tools and scales for assessing relational satisfaction in marriage. However, many of these scales were created more than 20 years ago, where the primary focus was married, heterosexual couples. Legal changes to the definition of marriage, as well as increased cohabitation in lieu of marriage, create challenges for studying relational satisfaction and quality in modern-day couples. Therefore, it is unknown whether there are any reliable and validated measures for understanding relationship quality in modern day couples. Additionally, no studies have been performed to determine if the factors that influenced relational satisfaction in the past are, in fact, still equally valid in the changing cultural context including increased women in the work force as well as LGBTQ relationships.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to investigate what factors impact RS in modern-day couples. These factors were then compared with existing relational/marital satisfaction assessment tools to determine if they accurately assess for the factors reported to impact RS in modern couples.

Relational Satisfaction

Marriage Satisfaction Versus Relational Satisfaction

The majority of RS research is aimed at understanding RS within the context of marriage. Consequently, most of the scales analyzed and discussed in this dissertation are specifically designed to assess marital satisfaction in heterosexual, married couples. This study intentionally moves away from referring to marital satisfaction (MS) since it is increasingly limited when studying couples due to the increasing number of cohabitating, and other types of relational commitments. Moving forward, MS is considered under the larger umbrella of RS. RS is
defined as the overall satisfaction people experience in their primary romantic relationships, when taking all aspects of relationships into consideration (compatibility, sexual satisfaction, emotional intimacy, etc.). Although the term MS is used throughout this study, it primarily is in reference to previous research that utilized this terminology to ensure accuracy of reporting of findings.

**Relational Satisfaction and the Benefits of Being Married**

Many studies suggest being married, rather than being single, results in greater individual benefits. Several studies have found that married people are healthier, live longer, have greater mental health, and experience lower stress than their non-married counterparts (Fowers, 1991; Gove, 1973; Schumm, Jurich, Bollman, & Bugaighis, 1985; Williams, 2003). A study was conducted to examine the contributions of seven areas of life to global happiness including: friendship, work, and marriage. For Americans, marital satisfaction contributed the most to their overall psychological well-being compared to all other aspects of their life (Glenn & Weaver, 1981). Additionally, RS is linked with positive physical and mental health outcomes in both men and women (Fowers, 1991; Schumm et al., 1985). Glenn (1975) found married people experience substantially greater global happiness than any other unmarried group. One suggestion for this finding is that marriage functions as a buffer to external stresses, namely economic hardship, social isolation, and parental responsibilities, which are risk factors for the development of depression, especially in single parent households (Pearlin & Johnson, 1977). Although marriage status appears to be protective from risk factors, Gove, Hughes, and Style (1983) found that the quality of one’s marriage, rather than being married or not, explains the majority of positive mental health benefits experienced by married persons. One study found depressed wives were more likely to experience lower marital quality due to low marital
satisfaction in areas such as: distribution of decision-making and responsibility for household tasks and childrearing compared to their non-depressed counterparts (Whisman & Jacobson, 1989). Other studies indicate satisfied married couples fare better than singles psychologically; however both groups may fare better than chronically dissatisfied couples (Hawkins & Booth, 2005; Williams, 2003). Another study found that marital quality was more predictive for individual well-being rather compared to the status of being married, and the impact was more profound for women than for men (Williams, 1988). Couples with higher relational quality receive greater benefits (improved physical and mental health) than those with poorer relational quality. Consequently, the children raised within these relationships would likewise receive greater benefits from being raised in a home with higher relational quality.

**Relational Satisfaction and Family Stability**

It is well accepted that happy marriages lead to more stable families. Stable families lead to healthier and happier children raised within them, which translates into healthier families in the next generation. In fact, this is one of the underlying principles of Family Systems theory. The Multigenerational Transmission Process, also known as Intergenerational Family Therapy, was first described by Bowen to explain the intergenerational transmission of behavioral patterns and belief systems observed in families (Kerr & McIntosh, 2000).

Studies have observed the intergenerational transmission of everything from parenting style, communication styles, attachment, divorce, human capital, child abuse, and domestic violence (Amato, 1996; Black, Devereux, & Salvanes, 2003; Bretherton, 1990; Cicchetti & Rizley, 1981; Currie & Moretti, 2003; Ehrensaft et al., 2003; Kalmuss, 1984; Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, & Wu, 1991; Stith et al., 2000). The transmission of intergenerational patterns are a result of a combination of many factors, such as genetic predispositions, overt teaching, and
more subtle learning by observing parents’ emotional and behavioral reactions to each other and the world. This is the environment where children learn about relationships and how to relate to others. Thus, it makes sense that children who observe their parents’ healthier relationships, with higher RS, would acquire better coping skills and behaviors they could emulate when they become parents. On the other hand, children who observe broken marriages and divorce are more likely to experience disruption in their own future marriages (Amato, 1996). Since RS is linked to greater global happiness and health (Glenn, 1975), understanding what contributes to RS can be used to inform supports, interventions and treatment at the clinical, educational, social, and work (economic) level for the betterment of families and society as a whole.

**Internal Factors That Impact Relational Satisfaction**

The literature describes many factors that couples report impact RS. These factors can best be broken into three main categories: internal, relational, and external factors. Internal factors include personality and physical attributes pertaining to the individual. Relational factors include relational skills, commitment level, compatibility, communication, equality in the relationship, family values, and sexual satisfaction. These factors are explored further in Chapter 2.

**External Factors and Their Impact on Relational Satisfaction**

Existing studies have not widely assessed for the impact that external stressors may have on RS, even though research indicates that they may have both positive and negative influences. Certain external stressors have been linked to poorer RS including: economic turmoil, finances, job loss, disabilities, infertility, and addiction (Benazon, Wright, & Sabourin, 1992; Conger et al., 1990; Kerkmann, Lee, Lown, & Allgood, 2000; Parrotta & Johnson, 1998; Vinokur, Price, & Caplan, 1996). Differential use of substances and substance abuse has also been associated with
reduced marital satisfaction (Homish, Leonard, Kozlowski, & Cornelius, 2009; A. B. Kelly, Halford, & Young, 2000). On the other hand, external supports such as societal, social, family, access to therapy, or education may positively impact RS and psychological well-being (Jacobson, Dobson, Fruzzetti, Schmaling, & Salusky, 1991; Tynes, 1990; Walen & Lachman, 2000). Financial success and strong support systems may buffer against stressors resulting in improved RS scores. Without assessing for the existence and impact of external factors, it may be difficult to identify important information that is essential in clinical, institutional or even governmental interventions to strengthen marriages and families. Accordingly, a closer examination of the relationship between external factors and RS provides valuable information that may be useful in serving and strengthening the family unit.

**Marriage and the Economy**

A recent study found that states with the highest percentage of married parents demonstrated greater economic growth, more economic mobility, less child poverty, and higher median family income, even when factoring out impact of age, race and educational demographics of the state. This link between marriage and economic growth is especially strong among young adults (ages 25–35). Additionally, these states reported much lower crime rates (even when controlling socio-demographics), lower quality of life, living standards, poor economic growth, and mobility (Wilcox, Price, & Lerman, 2015). Although marriage can be protective from economic distress, certain groups are more vulnerable to economic pressures than others. A sample of 428 inner-city families found unstable work/income increased emotional distress and lowered parental efficacy. The impact was greater among the African American than White community (Elder, Eccles, Ardelt, & Lord, 1995). **Women in the Work**
Place and Family Role Stress

Economic trends leading to increased women in the work force have had both positive and negative influences on the family system. In 1950, the percentage of working women was 33.9%, compared to 56.7% in 2015. Additionally, the number of women with young children (6 and under) has significantly increased over the years from 39% in 1975 to 63.9% in 2015, whereas the overall percentage of women with children under the age of 18 in the work force rose to 70%, from 47.4% in 1975 (BLS Reports, 2015).

Some of the benefits experienced by the increase of women in the work force may include reduced economic pressure as dual-income may make it easier to pay the bills. It may also lead to increased economic independence, self-development, and potentially higher self-esteem among women—especially if they enjoy their career.

Work culture is presenting a challenge for dual-earner families. Historically, employers expected the job to be the employee’s first priority, especially since women were at home to manage parenting, household, emergencies, and responsibilities. However, with both parents working, but little shift in employers’ mentality of the work-role primacy, parents are finding it increasingly difficult to manage work-life balance and especially parenting responsibilities. Increased role strain has led to increased stress and conflict within the marriage and therefore can be destabilizing to the family unit.

Work Life Impact on Relational Satisfaction

Another cultural trend greatly affecting American families is “work creep,” difficulty establishing boundaries with work, or taking it home. Technological developments have greatly facilitated this trend. Although technological advances have also enabled some increased job flexibility, such as telecommuting, the constant accessibility of people via mobile devices makes
it increasingly difficult to leave work at home. In addition to greater accessibility and poorer work boundaries, Americans are also facing poorer benefits, such as shorter vacations, and less uninterrupted time with family. Reduced quality time and poor work-life balance results in greater family conflicts and stress. In fact, studies show happier employees (as determined by job satisfaction, quality of life, life satisfaction [highly correlated with RS], and positive affect) are more productive (Zelenski, Murphy, & Jenkins, 2008).

**Measuring Relational Satisfaction**

**Relational Satisfaction in the LGBTQ Community**

The relatively new legalization of gay marriage is still too recent a phenomenon to draw conclusions about its bearing on RS. Longitudinal research will be required to better understand its force. However, there are no validated instruments that can sensitively and correctly assess RS in both LGBTQ and heterosexual couples. Although there are several RS surveys in use today, there are none normed for both LGBTQ and heterosexual couples. Belous and Wampler (2016) recently published the first RS survey designed and validated specifically for the LGBTQ population. Since their scale is developed and normed for LGBTQ couples, researchers cannot confidently compare or generalize the results from this survey to others that were designed and validated specifically for heterosexual couples.

Additionally, many of the validated and heavily used RS surveys were designed 20+ years ago and are not likely reflective of some of the cultural and economic shifts influencing RS in the modern era (Locke & Wallace, 1959; Norton, 1983; Spanier, 1976). Hence, an updated, validated, LGBTQ-inclusive, RS scale is a necessary tool to help researchers, lawmakers, policy makers, and clinicians working with modern-day couples to better understand what the special needs and strengths observed between the different groups in order to better serve them.
Additionally, the author is focusing on creating a more inclusive RS tool rather than the more traditional Marital RS tool. This is intentional as there are an increasing number of people choosing to cohabitate in lieu of getting married. By creating a RS scale, it will be able to assess the differences between the groups who choose to cohabitate rather than to marry.

**Impact of Culture on Relational Satisfaction Scale Development**

Not only are the definitions of marriage and families more complex than ever, but many of the most popular assessments used to measure RS were created when the primary focus of the assessments was the heterosexual, married couple. Some scales have since adapted their language to be friendlier to other relationship formations or groupings such as cohabitating, gay, and lesbian couples. This is a step in the right direction, but this does not change the inherent assumptions and influences that were present when the scale was developed.

RS scale development requires researchers to translate their assumptions about RS into as brief and precise of a survey as possible. Typically these have been made up of fixed-option questions and Likert-like scales. The fixed response design means respondents are not able to share any possible factor that they feel is relevant to relationship satisfaction, and are limited to only commenting on the options provided. Consequently, the researcher utilized precedence, intuition, literature, and their theoretical model of RS to inform what items should be included in the survey.

People’s perceptions and assumptions are typically influenced by the culture where they live. Consequently, the perceptions of what makes couples happy today may be different than in 1976, when Spanier’s popular Didactic Assessment Scale (DAS) was created. Since this scale is still widely used today, it is important to consider the cultural context in which RS is being measured. Can RS be reduced to a few principals that are everlasting, regardless of culture,
society, families, life cycle, and relationship agreements (cohabitation, monogamy, polyamory, open)? This dissertation explores the phenomenon of RS and whether it is impacted by time or culture.

**The Impact of Theory on Relational Satisfaction Scale Development**

A review of the literature on scale development of the most popular RS scales shows they were all theory-based, and culturally-informed scales. No qualitative interviewing was utilized to ensure the scales included all the relevant factors impacting RS. Hence, it is impossible to know whether some significant factors may have been missed. There is also the possibility the scales were valid for the era in which they were created, but changing worldviews and cultures have reduced the accuracy of the measures. It is also possible the principles influencing RS are just as relevant today as they were when they were created. Therefore, a qualitative approach to measuring RS would provide valuable information regarding how RS is experienced in modern-day couples as well as how it may be similar or different from earlier measures. Some of the potential changes that could influence the couple’s responses regarding RS may include the development of new technologies impacting the way people meet, date, enter into, and maintain long distance relationships, the definition of marriage, increased acceptance and prevalence of LGBTQ relationships, and changing relationship roles, priorities, and constellations.

**Relational Satisfaction Study Design**

**The Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research is to investigate what factors impact RS in modern-day couples. These factors were then compared with existing relational/marital satisfaction assessment tools to determine if they accurately assess for the factors reported to impact RS in modern couples.
Research Questions

In order to address this purpose, the following research questions were addressed:

Research Question 1: Are there any differences in relational satisfaction according to demographic information, specifically: gender, sexual orientation, length of relationship, whether or not they have children, social economic status, education level, or relationship status?

Research Question 2: What factors (internal, external or relational) negatively or positively influence relational satisfaction?

Research Question 3: Do the factors identified in research question two differ by the demographic groups delineated in research question one?

Expected Research Contributions

The overall goal of the research was to understand better Relational Satisfaction in modern-day couples. The information collected was compared and contrasted with the literature as well as the ways RS has historically been measured to determine if, or how RS has changed, or has remained the same in the face of major cultural shifts. The implications of this study provide suggestions for future research, the applicability of extant RS scales to modern day couples, and suggestions to inform the development of a new Relational Satisfaction Survey.

This study also explored whether current cultural shifts have changed what modern couples value with respect to RS compared to previous generations. To do this, the researcher incorporated the perspectives of diverse couples including married, cohabitating, committed but not cohabitating couples, heterosexual, LGBTQ couples, as well as couples who represent various races, religions, and stages of life to gain a clearer picture as to what factors most impact RS in modern couples. The researcher then compares and contrasts the results with the findings in the literature to identify any emerging trends or agreements with previous studies.
Demographics and general trends were explored to determine if any in-group differences regarding RS preferences were observed. Finally, the impact of external stressors or supports on overall RS was analyzed in order to determine whether they should be incorporated into future scales to produce a more accurate measurement of what factors most greatly determine RS.

The results from this study provide valuable insight into the stability of the basic factors influencing RS and how stable these factors were despite large cultural shifts. It also provided insight into the applicability of applying Relational Satisfaction to more diverse, modern couples. Finally, the results can be used to inform best-practices, increase the research knowledge base, and improve clinical interventions with all couples. A better understanding of RS in modern-day couples will provide important information for clinicians, communities, and policy makers who are concerned with strengthening the families they serve.

**Theoretical Underpinnings**

A mixed-method approach was applied to better understand and describe the phenomenon of relational satisfaction. Since the researcher attempted to describe Relational Satisfaction from the eye of the beholder, without endeavoring to make it fit into a particular theory, it is most closely related to Phenomenology. Attachment theory and Emotionally Focused Couple’s therapy were applied to help us interpret the results.

**Methodology**

This study utilized a mixed-method approach to determine what factors most influence RS and whether currently available assessments are sufficient to measure RS in modern-day couples.

A survey with closed and open-ended questions regarding RS was created to provide qualitative insight into the factors influencing RS. The survey questions were created from an a-
theoretical approach in order to elicit the participants’ perceptions of factors that most influence their perception of RS rather than asking about specific themes the researcher believed was important. Stratified, purposive sampling was utilized to ensure a diverse sample with regards to age, race, sexual identity, gender, commitment level, relational agreements (open v/s monogamous), and spirituality (Patton, 1990). The survey was administered online through Qualtrics and took approximately 10–15 minutes to complete.

After the data were collected, it was coded to identify what factors modern-day couples and families report impacted RS. Statistical analysis was utilized to determine in group differences in the prevalence of themes reported. Recommendations regarding factors that should be included in Relational Satisfaction Surveys were made.

**Definition of Key Terms**

Marital satisfaction—the overall satisfaction someone experiences in his or her marriage when taking all aspects of the relationship into consideration (compatibility, sexual satisfaction, emotional intimacy, etc.).

Relational satisfaction (RS)—the overall satisfaction people experience in their primary romantic relationship when taking all aspects of the relationship into consideration (compatibility, sexual satisfaction, emotional intimacy, etc.).

Sexual satisfaction—the satisfaction one experiences with his or her partner purely due to the sexual aspect of their relationship.

**Conclusion**

This chapter discussed RS, why it is important, what factors impact it, and how we measure it in modern-day couples. It also examines some changing cultural trends such as decreased marriage rates, increased cohabitation, increasingly diverse family constellations, and
legal changes impacting LGBT relationships and Relational Satisfaction. External influences influencing RS such as financial stressors, access to resources, and supports are also discussed. Finally, the chapter described a mixed-methods study to determine which factors (internal and external) most impact RS in modern-day couples. The results discuss the factors that most influence RS and suggestions for what factors should be included in RS surveys moving forward.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

For the purpose of this literature review, the factors impacting relational satisfaction were organized into the following categories as they relate to relational satisfaction: External, Internal, and Relational. External Factors includes the environment in which relationships form and will address changing cultural trends, relational statistics, and economic impact on the decision to marry. Internal Factors have to do with qualities pertaining to the individual such as personality and physical attributes and their influence on relational satisfaction. Relational Factors includes relational skills and qualities the couple share such as communication, compatibility, mutual interests, and conflict resolution that impacts relational satisfaction. These categories have been developed to help organize the information presented; however, the categories are not always mutually exclusive.

This chapter concludes by providing an overview of Relational Satisfaction research trends and popular assessments. Please remember that this study is focusing on RS, not the more limited idea of Marital satisfaction (MS). However, the research in this area has almost exclusively focused on Marital satisfaction, not RS, therefore, in order to be accurate, the term MS is used several times throughout this chapter. This is a function of accurately reporting what is in the literature and what has been studied. Application of these studies to RS is discussed.

**External Factors and Cultural Trends**

This section provides a look at the context of relationship formation. Inevitably, people’s values are influenced by the culture, time, and context in which they live. Thus, this literature reviews external stressors, marriage statistics, and changing cultural trends (such as increased access to education for women, dual-earner families, and the legalization of gay marriage, etc.)
and how these cultural changes correspond with marriage rates, age of marriage, stability, and relational satisfaction.

**Current Relational Statistics**

The following section provides the current state of important relational statistics including marriage and cohabitation rates as well as education and delaying marriage.

**Marriage Rates**

According to national statistics, marriage rates have been declining steadily since the 1980s when they peaked at approximately 11 (per total 1,000 population) to 6.7, the lowest rate since 1870, including during the Great Depression. Similarly, divorce rates have also been steadily declining from their peak in the 1970s from 5.2 to 3.2 (per total 1,000 population) in 2014 (CDC/National Center for Health Statistics, 2002). Several factors may contribute to these trends such as: delaying marriage in order to get an education; increased cohabitation as a precursor or alternative to marriage; and financial hardships as a result of poor economic conditions.

**Delaying Marriage**

Modern-day married couples tend to be older and more educated than those of previous generations. For example, the median age for marriage is now 29 for men and 27 for women compared to 21 and 20 respectively in the late 1950s (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Censuses, n.d.). For adults who remain unmarried, 53% indicate they would like to marry eventually, whereas 32% are unsure and 13% are not interested in marriage (Wang & Parker, 2014). For those interested in marriage, they cite inability to find suitable spouses, financially insecurity, and young age as the primary reasons for their single status.
Education

Level of education also appears to play a large part in marriage rates as well as success. Adults over the age of 26 with Bachelor’s degrees were much more likely to be married than their less educated peers (65% and 53%, respectively). This trend was especially true for men with higher levels of education (Wang, 2015). Education was also correlated with increased marital success wherein 78% of educated celebrated their 20th wedding anniversary, compared to 65% of educated men compared to 50% and 40% of less educated men and women, respectively (Wang, 2015).

Cohabitation was more prevalent among less educated women (70% of women with less than a high school diploma), than women with bachelor’s degrees or higher (47%). Also, more educated women are more likely than their less educated counterparts to progress into marriage within 3 three years (53% vs. 30%; Copen, Daniels, & Mosher, 2013).

Cohabitation

Although there has been an increase of the “never-married” population in the US, it does not mean this group is single. In fact, as marriage rates have been decreasing, cohabitation rates have been on the rise. A 2013 study revealed 44% of women aged 15–44 cohabitated before marriage.

Cohabitation is significantly less stable than marriage. For example, the dissolution rate of married couples within the first 5 years of marriage is 20% compared to 49% of cohabiting couples and 33% versus 62% at 10 years. Additionally, cohabitating couples consistently report lower relational and life satisfaction than married couples thereby increasing relational instability (Hymowitz, Carroll, Wilcox, & Kaye, 2013; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986a). This may occur for various reasons. First, the decision to cohabitate versus getting married may reflect a lower
commitment to the relationship. Also, persons who cohabitate prior to marriage tend to be younger, less educated, and of lower social economic status (Wang & Parker, 2014). This corresponds to increased instability and relational stress. However, several factors that increase probability of success in marriage also apply to cohabitation relationships. For example, increased age, preparation and planning prior to cohabitation, being raised in an intact 2-parent family, religiosity, higher family income, low male unemployment, and poverty are also linked to improved relational outcomes among cohabitating partners (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2002).

The literature reports heterosexual cohabitating couples differ significantly on several measures from cohabitating gay, lesbian, and married heterosexual couples. This suggests there are other factors that differentially influence cohabitating heterosexuals’ relational satisfaction. Kurdek and Schmitt (1986b) examined differences between heterosexual married, heterosexual cohabitating, gay, and lesbian couples. The greatest in-group differences were observed between cohabitating heterosexual couples and all other groups where cohabitating heterosexual couples had significantly poorer Relational Satisfaction markers than the other couples. Cohabiting heterosexual couples demonstrated lowest love for the partner, lowest RS scores, fewest barriers to leaving the relationship (highest disruption/instability), and lowest dyadic attachment (Kurdek and Schmitt, 1986b).

**Cultural Trends**

This section provides an overview of the intersection between economic trends, shifting cultural beliefs, laws and preferences, as well as laws that influence partner preferences and couple formation.
**Finances and Relational Satisfaction**

Economic hardship is negatively correlated with poorer RS. This is especially true for men, who tend to respond to economic distress with increased hostility thereby decreasing warm and supportive behaviors between spouses, and reducing marital satisfaction (Conger et al., 1990). One study of newlywed students found the impact of financial problems explained 15% of the overall marital satisfaction score. Likewise, they found a negative correlation with perceived poor financial management and magnitude of financial problems on marital satisfaction (Kerkmann et al., 2000). Another study investigating the impact of financial stress and marital satisfaction in newlyweds found greater income and the application of sound money-management strategies were associated with increased relational satisfaction (Parrotta & Johnson, 1998). Job loss is another financial stressor leading to increased depression, social isolation, and undermining behaviors that negatively influence marital satisfaction (Vinokur et al., 1996).

Because financial security is closely linked to relational satisfaction and personal mental health, relationship stability is likewise vulnerable to shifts in the economy. Historically, times of financial stress have increased barriers to marriage formation and relationship dissolution. For example, the economic downturn of 2008 resulted in fewer jobs and economic instability, and likely contributed to reduced marriage and divorce rates similar to those previously observed during Great Depression and the economic instability of 1960s (Swanson, 2015).

**Race**

Significant differences in longevity of marriage regarding race and ethnicity have been reported. Asian couples fared the best and had the highest probability of celebrating their 20th
wedding anniversary (69%), followed by Hispanics (54%), Whites (53%), and Blacks (37%; Wang, 2015).

Race also appears to play a role in disproportionate marriage rates as well. The percentage of never-married adults has increased for all major racial and ethnic groups in the US, but the rate of increase has been most dramatic for Blacks. Among Black adults ages 25 and older, the never-married proportion has quadrupled (9% in 1960 to 36% in 2012) whereas their White never-married counterparts only doubled during the same time period (from 8% to 16%; Wang & Parker, 2014). One reason for this difference is unequal access to education among ethnic minorities. Since education and financial stability is associated with higher marriage rates (Wang & Parker, 2014), unequal access to education and good jobs places these groups at a disadvantage for successful marriage. Additionally, economic downturns resulting in poorer labor conditions and reduced wages, especially for unskilled employees, disproportionately affects Black men, who are less likely to hold steady employment than their White counterparts. Interestingly, the Black community reportedly values the institution of marriage more (68%) than Whites (44%; Wang & Parker, 2014). However, poorer educational and employment opportunities result in fewer marriage opportunities for Blacks than Whites.

Cultural Influences on Mate Selection

The personality preferences in mate selection are influenced by the cultural and economic situation where the couples were formed. Lundberg and Pollak (2012) explored how cultural shifts can affect mate personality profiles and preferences by comparing two cohorts of couples from Germany. The “older” couples in this study were born in the post World-War II era when the conservative cultural values of Germany at the time, combined with low availability of work for women outside the home, made more traditional, breadwinner/homemaker pairings more
favorable. Likewise, the preferred personality profiles of the men and women were those congruent with career-oriented men and nurturing, domestic-oriented women.

When the two cohorts were analyzed, the younger cohort demonstrated increased preference for similarities rather than complementarities in personality traits compared to the older cohort. These differences in personality preferences indicate younger couples who chose to marry likely approached marriage from a different perspective than the older cohort. Economic theorists suggest that contemporary couples who adopt less rigid gender roles are more likely to prioritize greater access to combined resources to be mutually enjoyed by the couple as a benefit to marriage (Lundberg & Pollak, 2007). These couples are likely to be more similar in tastes and preferences regarding lifestyle, leisure activities, and artistic interests than the older cohort. This study suggests cultural changes can influence selective mating personality profiles and preferences.

Legalization of Gay Marriage and Impact on LGBTQ Relationships

On June 26, 2015, a historic ruling by the United States Supreme Court in Obergefell v. Hodges resulted in the legalization of same sex marriages nationwide. Although Massachusetts led the US by legalizing gay marriage in 2004, by 2015, when the ruling occurred, 37 states and the District of Columbia had already followed suit. Public opinion and support for gay marriage continued to rise, reaching approximately 55% just prior to legalization nationwide (Pew Report, 2016). Increased social acceptance and legal access to marriage will likely lead to more LGBTQ couples. Inevitably, these trends will influence relationship dynamics and relational satisfaction within the LGBT community. Accordingly, future research will be necessary to better understand how these changes influence LGBTQ couples.
Historically, attempts to understand the similarities and differences in relational satisfaction in heterosexual versus homosexual and lesbian couples were based on studies of cohabiting, and later, civil unions comparing them to cohabitating heterosexual or married couples (Kurdek, 1991, 2004, 2006). Although this was the best approximation for understanding similarities and differences afforded in these pairings during this era, it had several limitations. For example, heterosexual couples who choose to cohabitate versus get married had access and societal approval to marry; subsequently their decision not to marry may have been much different from the LGBT couples who cohabitated. It has been demonstrated that cohabitating heterosexual couples tend to differ from those who choose to marry, as they are more likely to be less-educated, be less religious, have children before marriage, and have poorer job prospects (Wang, 2015). Therefore, it remains to be seen how LGBTQ relationships (with access and increased acceptance to marriage) will be similar or different from their heterosexual peers with respect to deciding to marry, cohabitate, or remain single.

**External factors and LGBT couples.** Kurdek (2004) hypothesized cultural disapproval, low institutional barriers (legal, and financial) contributed to differences in relational disruption between heterosexual and LGBT couples. In fact, homosexual and lesbian couples who were in civil unions, meaning they had increased barriers to dissolution, reported lower disruption rates than the similarly-matched cohabitating counterparts (Balsam, Beauchaine, Rothblum, & Solomon, 2008). It remains unclear, however, whether the dissolution rate differential is due to increased institutional barriers, or a representation of the couples’ increased commitment to each other and the relationship that contributes to these differences. Further research is necessary to determine if any differences exist between gay and lesbian couples who choose cohabitation versus civil union or marriage.
For the most part, however, married heterosexual partners were more similar than different between gay and lesbian couples with respect to overall relational satisfaction and quality. However, unique external stressors for LGBTQ couples were observed. For example, gay and lesbian couples are more likely to experience internalized homophobia and minority stress, that has been linked to poorer interpersonal mental health and relational outcomes (Frost & Meyer, 2009). Furthermore, both gay and lesbian couples perceived less social support from their families than married and cohabitating couples (Kurdek & Schmitt 1986b). However, lesbians seem to be more negatively impacted by their families’ reactions than gay men (Todosijevic, Rothblum, & Solomon, 2005). Conversely, gay men are disproportionately concerned with HIV/AIDS, violence/harassment than lesbian couples, which may lead to poorer relational outcomes (Todosijevic et al., 2005).

Internal Factors impacting Relational Satisfaction. Internal factors such as personality, physical attributes, and internal qualities have been the focus of many studies regarding relational satisfaction. “The Big Five Theory of Personality” is one of the most researched concepts regarding relational satisfaction and stability. This section gives an overview to the extent internal qualities attract potential partners and contribute to overall relational satisfaction.

The Big Five Theory of Personality

One of the most validated theories with a strong predictive power for relational satisfaction, Relational Satisfaction, functioning and outcomes is the Big Five Theory of Personality (Goldberg, 1992). The Big Five Theory of Personality can be broken down into five personality factors:
1. Extraversion versus introversion is the degree to which a person needs attention and social interaction.

2. Conscientiousness versus lack of direction is the degree to which a person is willing to comply with conventional rules and norms.

3. Agreeableness versus antagonism is the degree to which a person needs pleasant and harmonious relations with others.

4. Neuroticism versus emotional stability is the degree that a person experiences the world as threatening and beyond his or her control.

5. Openness versus closedness to experience is the degree that a person needs intellectual stimulation, culture, and new experiences (Hogan & Hogan, 2007).

Low emotional stability (neuroticism) has consistently been correlated with poorer relationship quality and dissolution (Barelds, 2005; Buss, 1991; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kelly & Conley, 1987; Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2000; Shaver & Brennan, 1992). However, martial and sexual happiness are positively correlated with partners who were high in Agreeableness, Emotional Stability, Conscientiousness, and Intellect-Openness (Botwin, Buss, & Shackelford, 1997; Ozer & Benet-Martínez, 2006). The Big Five Personality Theory has become a very valuable measure in the psychological literature as the traits have demonstrated significant stability over time in individuals tracked longitudinally, including during major life events and transitions (Cobb-Clark & Schurer, 2012; Soldz & Vaillant, 1999).

**Big Five and Mate Selection**

The Big Five Personality model has been utilized by researchers to understand which personality profiles are most attractive to potential mates, and how they impact overall relational satisfaction. When evaluating personality preferences in mate selection, both men and women
valued Agreeableness and Intellect-Openness above the other factors (Botwin et al., 1997; Goldberg, 1983).

The 10 most valued personality characteristics of a partner by both men and women were good companionship, considerateness, honesty, affection, dependability, intelligence, kindness, understanding, interesting to talk to, and loyalty. Women, however, tended to prefer men who were considerate, honest, dependable, kind, understanding, fond of children, well-liked by others, ambitious, career-oriented, tall, had good earning capacity, and good family backgrounds. Men preferred women who were physically attractive, good looking, good cooks, and frugal (Bus & Barnes, 1986).

**Sex Differences in Mate Selection**

Consistent with the trends noted above, Botwin et al. (1997) found women demonstrated a strong preference for power, ascendance, and dominance traits within the Surgency factor that correlated with higher earning capacity. Utilizing Triver’s (1972) theory of parental investment, Botwin et al. (1997) hypothesized that women’s disproportionally higher biological investment in children cause them to be more discriminating in choice of partner, preferring mates who are more likely to be better providers. Several studies have documented findings consistent with this theory where females selectively chose partners who were better educated and had greater earning potential (Berscheid & Walster, 1974; Buss, 1985; Buss & Barnes, 1986; Langhorne & Secord, 1955). Wang and Parker (2014) found 78% of women stated steady employment was their first priority when seeking a marriage partner. This is consistent with the findings where men who are more educated and have higher earning potential are considered more desirable and so are more likely to be married than their less educated peers (86% versus 75%; Wang & Parker, 2014). Men, however, were primarily interested in partners with similar ideas in raising
children (62%), which was the second most important criterion for women. Convergence in priorities among men and women were observed in their preference for similar religious beliefs (31% men, 38% women), education (28%), and racial/ethnic background (7% men, 10% women; Wang & Parker, 2014).

**Sex and Relational Satisfaction**

This section explores some of the internal variables (factors related to the individual) identified in the literature that may influence sexual and relational satisfaction including: self-esteem and physical attraction.

**Self esteem.** Individual psychological functioning such as poor self-esteem and body image has been linked to lower sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction. Wives’ perception of sexual attractiveness was linked to higher sexual frequency and greater marital satisfaction for both husbands and wives, but explained even more of the increase in marital satisfaction for the wives than their husbands (Meltzer & McNulty, 2010).

**Physical attraction.** The importance of physical attraction to overall relational satisfaction appears to differ by sex and commitment level. Men seem to value physical attractiveness more than women do (Meltzer, McNulty, Jackson, & Karney, 2014). The role physical attraction plays in relational satisfaction also appears to be linked to commitment level. People in casual dating relationships appear to place a higher value on physical attractiveness than those in more stable relationships. However, physical attraction was also associated with relational satisfaction and feelings of love (intimacy, passion, commitment, idealization) in stable relationships as well (Sangrador & Yela, 2000).
**Relational Satisfaction in LGBT Couples**

Several studies suggest the factors influencing relational satisfaction in married heterosexuals similarly impact global relational satisfaction and quality in homosexual and lesbian couples (Gottman et al., 2003; Kurdek, 1998; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986b). A longitudinal study, Kurdek (2004) compared cohabiting gay and lesbian couples to heterosexual married couples with children and without children. Kurdek concluded that many of the variables predicting relationship quality and stability for heterosexual couples were also predictive in gay and lesbian couples, therefore the same processes are likely to generalize to gay and lesbian couples.

However, some differences between heterosexual, lesbian, and gay couples were observed. For example, gay and lesbian couples were significantly more open to new experiences than their heterosexual counterparts. Lesbians were significantly more agreeable, engaged in more frequent ineffective arguing, but also demonstrated greater relational repair skills. They also reported higher levels of intimacy, more equality, more reciprocal dependency, and more shared decision than the other groups (Kurdek, 1998; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986b). Gay couples were more likely to struggle with demand/withdraw, had more positive interactions, and engaged in more frequent “mindreading” episodes where they expected their partner to know each other’s thoughts and beliefs without stating them.

**Relational Factors That Impact Relational Satisfaction**

This topic is split into two sub-sections: relational themes and theoretical models that have been suggested to impact RS. Relational factors include concepts that are relational in nature such as: communication, commitment level, parenting, and sexual. The second section explores several theoretical models that are related to RS such as: developmental and
longitudinal factors such as sexual satisfaction, relationship stage; and relational satisfaction across the life span.

Commitment Level

Differences among dating and married couples with respect to preferences, similarities, and relational satisfaction has been observed. Both dating and married couples were similar in their preferences for age, religiosity, and substance use (alcohol and cigarettes); however, that is where the similarities end. Married samples were more likely to be matched by religious affiliation, political views, and level of education. Dating couples were not as discriminating in their partner choices. This difference in similarities may be explained by the fact that relationships such as dating have lower commitment levels and may be less selective for certain features they would otherwise choose in marriage partners. Alternatively, the couples who are the most similar may experience greater relational success and will be more likely to make the transition to marriage than those who do not. Regardless of personality similarities, it is clear that relationship status, that is, dating, cohabitating, and marriage, differ significantly in commitment level and may negatively impact other Relational Satisfaction assessments. Furthermore, many of the cohabitating couples were divorcees, who, having had a negative experience in the first marriage, may be less interested in making another lifelong commitment (Botwin et al., 1997).

Sexual and Relational Satisfaction

This subsection gives an overview of the relational factors reported in the literature to impact sexual satisfaction in couples including: frequency, sexuality, communication, and changes over the life-span.
**Frequency.** Previous studies have linked sexual satisfaction and frequency to marital stability (Edwards & Booth, 1994; Oggins, Veroff, & Leber, 1993; White & Keith, 1990; Yeh, Lorenz, Wickrama, Conger, & Elder, 2006). In a study exploring sexual attitudes of couples married for 20 years, the couples reported reduced frequencies, changes from early expectations about sex, and differences in opinions regarding sex (higher libido in men) had produced negative effects in the marriage (Ard, 1977). In a Finnish sample, sexual satisfaction was positively associated with relationship satisfaction in both men and women. Relational satisfaction was negatively associated with higher discrepancies in desire and sexual frequency as well as frequency of masturbation (Santtila et al., 2007). Sexual frequency, however, has been shown to have a differential impact on relational satisfaction and stability in cohabitating versus married couples. Cohabitating couples with low sexual frequency was associated with significantly higher dissolution rates than married couples, suggesting cohabitating couples place a premium on sexuality as one of the benefits of maintaining the relationship (Yabiku & Gager, 2009).

**Sexuality.** Dzara (2010) found the impact of early marital sexuality on later disruption is limited. Although men’s sexual satisfaction early in marriage was found to be protective, it was less predictive than overall marital quality on later disruption. Other findings suggest sexual satisfaction most directly correlated with overall marital satisfaction, followed by non-sexual aspects of the relationship, frequency of partner orgasm per sexual encounter, frequency of sexual activity, and sexual uninhibitedness. Overall, sexual satisfaction was best explained by satisfaction in non-sexual aspects of the relationship and could not be compartmentalized into the quality of their sexual interactions.
Sprecher (2002) found sexual satisfaction is positively associated with relational satisfaction, love, and commitment for both men and women; however sexual satisfaction was more predictive of greater relationship quality for men than for women. Similarly, a Chinese study identified increased sexual dysfunction among couples with low marital quality, poor mutual trust, decision-making, gender inequality, and relationship control, suggesting power differentials and the couple’s emotional experience negatively influenced their sexual experience and increased the prevalence of sexual dysfunction (Lau et al., 2006). Brezsnyak and Whisman (2004) found sexual desire was significantly correlated with relational satisfaction but marital power was not. This suggests factors other than marital power have the greatest impact on relational satisfaction and consequently sexual desire.

**Communication.** Finally, an interesting intersection of relational satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and communication is reported in the literature. Litzinger and Gordon (2005) found both sexual satisfaction and communication predicted marital satisfaction. Interestingly, if the couple ranks high in communication, sexual satisfaction fails to contribute significantly to relational satisfaction. But if the couple struggles with communication but has a satisfying sex life, they will fare better in overall marital satisfaction, indicating compatibility in the bedroom may partially compensate for poor communication. This is consistent with Byers’s (2005) observation that the quality of intimate communication partially accounted for simultaneous changes in relational and sexual satisfaction. This observation may suggest communication significantly contributes to feelings of intimacy and corresponds to greater Relational Satisfaction. Greeff and Malherbe (2001) found a positive correlation between all the components of intimacy (sexual, recreational, etc.) and sexual satisfaction for both sexes, with
the exception of social intimacy in women. No differences in intimacy or marital satisfaction for couples at different stages of the life span were observed.

**Romantic Love Across The Life Span**

Several studies suggest infatuation reduces over time, and according to the level of commitment in the marriage. Interestingly, infatuation is also negatively correlated with neuroticism, thus, as long as the couple remains in the state of infatuation, neuroticism is more likely to be suppressed (or ignored). Unlike infatuation, attachment does not change significantly over the course of the relationship and is a much more stable marker in understanding romantic love; though some inter-correlation between infatuation and attachment does exist (Langeslag, Muris, & Franken, 2013).

Similar to infatuation, passionate love decreased over the life span and over the transition from dating to marriage, parenthood, and empty-nesting. However, these decreases were small, indicating a moderate amount of passionate love remained an important factor in marital satisfaction throughout the course of the life span (Tucker & Aron, 1993). A longitudinal study of physical attraction and marital adjustment in middle-aged couples found the couples were similarly matched in terms of attractiveness. However, the assessment of self and spousal perceptions of attractiveness was positively related to the marital adjustment in men, not women, suggesting men value physical attractiveness more than women (Murstein & Christy, 1976).

**Parenthood and Relational Satisfaction**

Declines in relational satisfaction due to the arrival of children have been consistently reported in the literature (Feldman, 2000; Rollins & Feldman, 1970; Rollins & Cannon, 1974; Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2003). Although differences in relational satisfaction appear to be significantly different from non-parent peers, it is important to recognize the magnitude of the
difference appears to be small (explaining only 10% of the variance; Twenge et al., 2003). Studies indicate marital satisfaction may decline with the presence of children as marital stability increases (Waite, Haggstrom, & Kanouse, 1985). Additionally, factors such as increased meaning in life and joy in child-rearing may off-set the decreases in marital satisfaction. Umberson and Gove (1989) found both positive and negative impacts of parenting on the psychological well-being of the parents. Compared to non-parent peers, those with children in the home have lower levels of affective well-being and satisfaction and higher levels of life-meaning. Parents who have launched their children and widows seem to have an advantage over non-parents relative to levels of affective well-being, satisfaction, and life-meaning, whereas divorced single-parents appear to have the greatest psychological costs associated with parenthood. Furthermore, systemic factors such as increased support from husbands in the home, more equitable sharing of responsibilities, access to reliable daycare, SES (Social Economic Status), education level, preparation for the transition to parenthood reduce the negative impact of parenthood on relational satisfaction (Lawrence, Rothman, Cobb, Rothman, & Bradbury, 2008; Twenge et al., 2003).

**Theoretical Models and Relational Satisfaction**

**Similarities Versus Complementarity Theories**

Botwin et al. (1997) reported that individuals, regardless of commitment level (dating, cohabiting, or married) consistently preferred partners who were similar to themselves in age, alcohol and cigarette consumption, religiosity, and personality. Congruence in Intellect-Openness and Conscientiousness were particularly valued. Behavioral trends such as similar consumption habits regarding substance use has been previously noted in studies of assertive mating (Botwin et al., 1997). Other findings suggest that similarity in personality may benefit
the relationship due to similarity in the partners’ shared emotional experience (Gonzaga, Campos, & Bradbury, 2007).

**Similarity Versus Convergence in LGBT Couples**

Many theories have suggested that level of similarity between partners were directly related to improved relational satisfaction. Unlike heterosexual couples, gay and lesbian couple’s relational satisfaction was not influenced by similarity of age, number of previous relationships, level of education, or religiosity. However, similarity in the level of “outness” (publicly open about sexual orientation, and/or the couple’s relationship) has been linked to improved relational satisfaction among both gay and lesbian couples (Todosijevic, Rothblum, & Solomon, 2005). Both lesbian and gay couples experienced more autonomy within the relationship and were more likely to experience relationship disruption compared to married couples.

**Relational Satisfaction Over the Life Span**

Many studies have been conducted looking at relational satisfaction over the life-span. However, the literature remains largely conflicting regarding the trends observed. Several studies cite a U-shaped curve of relational satisfaction over the life-span, whereas others suggest a linear decrease. Researchers who have observed the U-shaped curve note the sharpest decline occurs with the transition to parenting, especially the early/preschool years (Rollins & Feldman, 1970; Rollins & Cannon, 1974). A significant contributing factor to lower relational satisfaction during the child rearing years may be due to role strain and less time devoted to the couple (Rollins & Cannon, 1974). There is an increase in relational satisfaction around the time of launching the children and retirement. Although the decline in relationship is observed in both
sexes, the trend seems more predictive for women than men, suggesting a differential process impacting the sexes (Twenge et al., 2003).

Some of the literature suggests relational satisfaction experiences a slow and steady decline over the years (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Vaillant & Vaillant, 1993) observed an initial decline followed by a relative stable experience of relational satisfaction over the years, irrespective of life-stage, years married, and so forth. One of the reasons for the differences reported in the literature may be methodological in nature. For example, the way relational satisfaction is measured, whether it is a composite score or individual scores of various measures contributing to relational satisfaction, may change the overall trend observed. Rollins and Cannon (1974) attempted to make sense out of the competing findings by measuring and analyzing relational satisfaction using three separate measures. They found particular aspects of relational satisfaction vary differentially over the life-span. For example, three aspects of relational satisfaction experienced a decline over the various life-stages: understanding (first 2 stages), children (middle 4 stages), and love and affection (last 2 stages). Combined, these aspects of relational satisfaction would create a decline over time as observed by some researchers. However, the main culprit in the decline differs by life stage. Conversely, other measures of life satisfaction follow a U-shaped pattern. Specifically, satisfaction with companionship and satisfaction of standard of living decrease initially, but increase later in life. These variable aspects of relational satisfaction may, in effect, cancel each other out and produce a different picture, depending on the measurement tool. It is important to consider exactly how one is measuring relational satisfaction in order to determine the validity of the trend observed. When considering the shifting trends collectively, Rollins and Cannon (1974) observed a slight U-curve to relational satisfaction; however the overall effect size of the measures accounted for
across the life cycle was small—only 8%. This suggests 92% of the variance of relational satisfaction is not impacted by the family life-cycle.

**Relationship Satisfaction and Relational Stage**

Kurdek and Schmitt (1986a) examined relationship quality in childless, monogamous, heterosexual married, heterosexual cohabiting, gay and lesbian couples in relation to relationship stage. In this study, they tracked the first 3 stages (5 years) of relational development using McWhirter and Mattison’s (1984) six stage model. Stage 1 (Blending) comprised the first year and is characterized with high limerance (euphoria), sexual activity, and merging. Stage 2 (Nesting) is the 2–3 years and is represented by homemaking, finding compatibility, reduced limerance, and ambivalence. Stage 3 (Maintaining) is during the 4–5 years and consists of the reappearance of the individual, risk taking, dealing with conflict, and establishing traditions.

Overall, relationship quality was more closely associated with the relationship stage than type of relationship (regardless of orientation or status). The Nesting stage was associated with the least amount of satisfaction with sex, affection, and quality time. The only group difference between the couples was heterosexual, married couples reported less tension than cohabitating couples.

The study also observed relational satisfaction increased over time in alignment with decreased dysfunctional relational beliefs (possible shifts or acceptance, realistic adjustment of expectations), increased perceived rewards, increased emotional investment, and decreased perceived relational costs. Proponents of the curvilinear pattern in relational satisfaction over the lifespan have hypothesized the reduction in satisfaction was due to the presence of children. However, this study found the curvilinear trend also exists in the absence of children, indicating relational development stage (moving out of the honeymoon stage) may significantly impact
Relational Satisfaction regardless of the presence or absence of children (Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986a).

**Conclusion**

So, what really makes marriages strong, lasting, and happy? Is it emotional connection or attachment, similarities, complementarity, personality traits, relational skills (conflict resolution), resilience, religiosity, biological drives, sex, chemistry, economics, cultural/social influences, support systems, SES, classism, race, sexual orientation, family configuration, economics and/or a multitude of other factors? The answer is we don’t know. It is likely a complex interaction of all the above. Also, what makes one couple happy and stable may be different for another couple. The complex interplay between what one values, how those values are supported in cultural, couple compatibility, and practical access to financial stability, and ability to meet the couples’ life goals are likely to produce a different result for every couple. The best the literature can do is report some trends observed among couples. It is up to the researcher, clinician, or family member who is interested in the subject to weigh all the different factors to help inform their conceptualization of what is happening in the scenario with which they are working. As strong families have been associated with economic health, clinicians, social worker, economists, business owners and politicians alike should use these trends to inform clinical or even societal interventions to support the stability of families throughout the US and the world.

This chapter has reviewed the literature regarding the predominant theories and factors that impact relational satisfaction and how we measure it. The following chapter outlines a study designed to provide a contemporary voice as to what people perceive most greatly impacts and detracts from their relationship satisfaction. This study takes a qualitative approach to
understanding modern couples in order to provide valuable insights into important aspects of relational satisfaction that may have been missed, or were not present when many of these models were developed. It also provides valuable information to determine whether the application of existing relational satisfaction surveys adequately assess for the themes modern day couples deem significant in relational satisfaction.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

Research Design and Procedure

This is an exploratory study, whose goal is to analyze qualitative and quantitative data in order to determine what themes most influence relational satisfaction. This is the first study of this kind to undertake the examination of relational satisfaction from a mixed-methods perspective and use qualitatively-derived codes to inform the quantitative analysis. Previous research has been conducted from a theory-based perspective where the information collected was limited to questions the researcher believed were important regarding relational satisfaction. In this study, a broader approach was taken by asking a diverse group of participants to share what they feel most influences relational satisfaction. By taking this approach, the potential of theory bias is reduced, and it gives the researcher the opportunity to identify if any significant themes have been missed by previous studies.

The second goal of the research is to better understand relational satisfaction in modern-day couples. The information was compared and contrasted with the ways relational satisfaction has historically been measured to determine if, or how, relational satisfaction has changed, or remained the same, in the face of major cultural shifts. The results should better help us understand how relational satisfaction is experience in modern day couples, and if these factors are indeed timeless and a-cultural; or, whether relational satisfaction is influenced by shifts in values and couples’ expectations over time. The implications of this study will provide insights into what factors impact the relational satisfaction of modern-day couples and how those factors compare or contrast with previous generation as well as suggestions for future research.
Research Questions

Research Question 1: Are there any differences in relational satisfaction according to demographic information, specifically: gender, sexual orientation, length of relationship, whether or not they have children, social economic status, education level, or relationship status?

Research Question 2: What factors (internal, external or relational) negatively or positively influence relational satisfaction?

Research Question 3: Do the factors identified in research question two differ by the demographic groups delineated in research question one?

Instruments

Data were collected through an online survey. The Relational Satisfaction Survey (see Appendix A) consists of 30 questions (closed and open-ended) and was taken online through the Qualtrics platform. The survey took approximately 10–15 minutes for participants to complete. It utilized open and closed questioning to provide both quantitative and qualitative insight into the factors impacting relational satisfaction.

If participants met study inclusion criteria, they were asked to sign the informed consent to gain access to the online survey. The survey consisted of 20 demographic questions designed to be sensitive to various commitment types (married, cohabitating, committed but not living together) as LGBTQ couples and provided the opportunity for self-identification in several areas. Following the demographic section, the participants answered 10 relational satisfaction questions including two 7-point, bi-polar, Likert-type and 8 open-ended prompts encouraging participants to elaborate about various aspects of relational satisfaction. The goal of the survey was for participants to share their own perspectives regarding what influences relational satisfaction including: why they rate their satisfaction the way they do, what factors cause the couples to get
together and stay together, and stress or support relational satisfaction in the long run. The Relational Satisfaction Scale Questionnaire is included in Appendix A.

**Recruitment of Subjects and Sample Size**

The researcher recruited participants through email or the distribution of a hyperlink through social media, professional contacts, University listservs, and professional organizations requesting their participation in the study. The research recruitment letter explained the purpose of the study; the identity, qualifications, and contact information of the researcher; and the selection criteria to participate.

Stratified, purposive sampling was used to gain a convenience sample of individuals who are in a relationship. Recruitment continued until the sample represented couples in the following categories: heterosexual, homosexual, lesbian and transgender, married or in a committed relationship, ranging from never married, newlywed, families with young children, teens and empty nesters, couples who do not have children, and retired couples who represent a diverse religious, ethnic, and cultural groups. The survey was distributed until sufficient diversity for the statistical analysis was recruited. The target sample size was 100 participants.

The data were collected in three different waves of recruitment. The initial wave included the dissemination of the link through social media, Universities, personal and professional contacts, as well as some organizations. There was a surprisingly high initial response rate with around 350 respondents. However, upon reviewing the sample, it was discovered that an overwhelming abundance of the sample was Caucasian, White, heterosexual females. In order to increase the diversity of the sample, the link was re-disseminated specifically targeting men and the LGBTQ community. Organizations and professionals who
work with the LGBTQ community were also targeted in order to help reach the target audience. This increased the sample to \( N = 620 \), at which time recruitment was terminated.

**Quality Control and Ethics**

**Informed Consent Procedures**

Subjects who clicked on the link to participate in the study from the recruitment email were provided with the “Informed Consent for Survey” for review at the beginning of the survey. By signing the electronic consent, the subjects chose to participate in the study. The student co-investigators’ and primary investigator’s contact information was provided in case there were any questions about the study. Subjects were reminded that participation was voluntary and there would not be any negative consequences for choosing not to participate. Participants were informed that they were able to withdraw from the study at any time and leave questions unanswered if desired. Interested subjects were directed to another screen to begin the survey (Appendix A).

**Interaction With Subjects and Subject Rights**

Given the design of this study, there was no apparent risk to the participants. Subjects were informed that participation was voluntary and confidential. There were no interactions with other subjects and no identifiable information was collected.

**Analysis**

Once an appropriate number of participants was reached, the data were downloaded from Qualtrics. Due to the mixture of closed and open-ended questions in the survey, a mixed-methods approach was used to analyze the data. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics, ANOVAs, MANOVAs and correlations were among the statistical analyses utilized to analyze the data. Rich descriptions derived from the Qualitative
data analysis were also utilized to report the results and provide the most robust description of relational satisfaction in modern couples as possible.

**The Sample**

Participants who did not meet inclusion criteria (18 years or younger, or who were not currently in a committed romantic relationship), or who failed to complete the survey were removed from the sample. That reduced the sample from $N = 620$ to $N = 453$.

**Qualitative Analysis**

The qualitative analysis was conducted by utilizing Excel to organize codes found within the sample into themes. Qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions utilized a combination of inductive and deductive thematic coding. When applicable, the themes were labeled to match themes already reported in the literature to facilitate the comparison of results. Factorial analysis of the Big Five Personality factors and their associated traits have been well established in the literature, therefore these factors were utilized to organize the personality traits reported in this study (Goldberg, 1990; Trapnell & Wiggins, 1990). However, outside of the personality constructs, the researcher incorporated inductive coding to develop new themes with novel constructs as they emerge.

The inductive coding (Patton, 1990) utilized a constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965) in which unique terms, when identified, were placed in different columns (themes) in the Excel sheet. Each time a new concept was identified, a new column was created. As the ideas continued to emerge, some of the columns were combined and labeled into related themes or split into different themes. For example, the theme Domestic was split from Pets/Home because the concepts seemed to differentiate during the analysis. The domestic theme pertained more closely to how the couple interacted in the home, primarily around home maintenance and
chores; whereas the pets/home theme talked more of the idea of the sense of “home” and building a home and space together which frequently included pets and children. Parenting, however, contained so many subthemes that it was distinct from the other themes. A full description of the themes and what pertains to them can be found in Appendix B. The process of sorting, combing, and re-combining themes occurred many times throughout the coding process until the columns and themes became stable and it appeared that thematic saturation had occurred. Some themes that had few responses were grouped together with other, related concepts into a more comprehensive theme. Other themes that had few responses, or did not make sense over time such as personal development, were dropped. Throughout the process the researcher continually checked and rechecked the themes and codes to ensure consistent coding and continued relevance of themes to the data. Some codes that had few responses (5 or less) were either dropped or combined with other similar ideas into an overarching theme.

For the statistical analyses, the qualitative codes were collapsed into themes with conceptually-related terms. The themes were organized into three main categories: internal, relational, and external. These categories were not always mutually exclusive. In some instances, the qualitative data were unclear whether the respondent was talking about the individual or the relationship. For example, a respondent may talk about trust; depending on the context, they may be referring to the trustworthiness of their partner, or the trust within the relationship. Also, the trustworthiness of the partner likely impacts the trust within the relationship, making it difficult for the two categories to be mutually exclusive. Consequently, some overlap among the categories was expected as some of the data were represented in both the internal and relational categories. However, the code was only represented once within the over-arching category, that is: internal, relational, and external in order to ensure the themes
were not multiply represented by an individual. Therefore each theme with corresponding data was reported once per respondent, per category, even if the theme included multiple terms. For specific examples on how this process was approached, please see the detailed descriptions provided in Appendix B.

**Quantitative Analysis**

Descriptive statistics such as mean, median, and standard deviation were reported for demographics and utilized to describe the sample. Bonferroni corrections were applied to address the issue of multiple comparisons as appropriate throughout the analyses.

**Research Question 1 analysis.** In order to answer research question 1, the Relational Satisfaction (RS) score was utilized as the dependent variable and the various demographic variables served as the independent variable for a series of one-way ANOVAs. Pearson’s R bivariate correlations were run between RS score and continuous variables such as Length of Relationship and Social Economic Status.

**Research Question 2 analysis.** In order to convert the qualitative data into a usable format for statistical analysis, for research questions 2 and 3, the data were translated into a numerical format by placing a number +1 in the column where data that positively impacted Relational Satisfaction provided and -1 in a column where negative impacts were reported. A 0 was placed in the cells that had no data. If there is a mixture of positive and negative comments within the theme for the same person, the data in the cell was labeled 0.

Pearson’s R Correlations were also run on the qualitatively-derived themes in order to determine the amount of overlap, if any between the qualitative factors. The transformed qualitative data were then used in a series of One-Way MANOVA to assess whether the presence or absence of the demographic variable as the dependent variable and the qualitative
categories as independent variables to determine if the qualitatively-derived themes positively or negatively influenced Relational Satisfaction. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, a Bonferroni correction was applied to the significance value in order to protect against inflating the familywise (Type I) error rate (i.e., making a false discovery), which can be a consequence of running multiple assessments.

**Research Question 3 analysis.** The transformed qualitative data were utilized to run a series of correlations to determine if there is a correlation between the demographic variables and the qualitatively-derived factors. The data were translated into a numerical format by placing a number +1 in the column where data that positively impacted Relational Satisfaction provided and -1 in column when the data negatively impacted relational satisfaction, while a 0 was utilized to represent no data or neutralized data (participant reported both positive and negative impacts).

**Analysis Summary**

The information was presented by reporting the quantitative results along with qualitative insights and representative stories to give a more complete picture of the factors that most significantly influence relational satisfaction in modern day couples.

**Conclusion**

This chapter provided an overview of the mixed-method approach used to analyze the data in this study. Descriptive statistics such as mean, median, and mode were used to describe the sample. Relational Satisfaction (RS) was utilized to determine whether there were any interactions between relational satisfaction, commitment, and demographics. Finally, descriptive statistics such as frequency of individual terms reported were combined with the qualitative data to provide a rich description of the respondents’ perspectives of each theme. Chapter 4 presents the results of the analysis described in this chapter.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

This chapter reports the results of the qualitative and quantitative analysis. The chapter begins with a description of the sample by demographics, followed by the results to each research question as follows:

Research Question 1: Are there any differences in relational satisfaction according to demographic information, specifically: gender, sexual orientation, length of relationship, whether or not they have children, social economic status, education level, or relationship status?

Research Question 2: What factors (internal, external or relational) negatively or positively influence relational satisfaction?

Research Question 3: Do the factors identified in research question two differ by the demographic groups delineated in research question one?

Research question 1 utilized statistical analyses to determine if differences exist between demographic information and the participants’ Relational Satisfaction Score. Research question 2 analyzed the factors identified through the open-ended questions that contribute to relational satisfaction. These factors are reported in three categories: Internal, Relational, and External. In order to understand the impact of each theme on relational satisfaction, the frequency of times the themes were mentioned, as well as a rich description of the items, are provided. Research question 3 compares the frequency and type of data present in the qualitative categories to demographic information in order to determine whether groups differ in their perceptions of what categories most influence relational satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

The Sample

A summary of the demographic information of the sample is provided in Table 1.
Table 1

Demographic Profile of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N (453)</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Mean ± SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (Years)</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>19-78</td>
<td>36.12±11.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Relationship (Years)</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>1-47</td>
<td>9.76±8.745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Times Married</td>
<td>301*</td>
<td>0-4</td>
<td>1.16±.027</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N (453)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Avg RS Score (± SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>5.99±1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>79.0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Identity†</td>
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<td>.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Relationship Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced/Separated</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Partner/Civil Union</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabitating</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Cohabitating</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Classification</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
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<td>75.7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homosexual</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed-Orientation</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Commitment</td>
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<td>Monogamous</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open</td>
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<td>3.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Polyamorous</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>1.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parental Status</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have Children</td>
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<td>51.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>48.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>$0 - $49,999</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000 - $74,999</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>52</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000 - $124,000</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$125,000 - $149,000</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$150,000+</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * Three outliers were removed because they indicated they had been married 8, 8, and 10 times. Abbreviations used in the table are defined as: N= Number of participants, SD = Standard Deviation

† This group was too small for a stable mean and was excluded from analysis.
Statistical Assumptions

Normality

In order to analyze research question 1, it is important to better understand the data behind the Relational Satisfaction scale, which is the dependent variable for the statistical analysis in research questions 1 and 2. One of the features of the data from the Relational Satisfaction Scale was that it was significantly skewed towards greater relational satisfaction. Therefore, this data violated the assumption of normality within a sample. The majority of participants rated themselves as a 6 or 7 in a 7-point Likert-like scale (see Figure 1). This created a “ceiling effect” where there was a large $N$ in the most satisfied option of the scale, which may indicate that there wasn’t enough variability in options; therefore, there is a restricted range of variability within the sample. Due to the lack of variability within the Relational Satisfaction score, it may be more difficult to determine the effect of relational satisfaction on the groups being studied. Therefore, it is important to remember that the information provided in the statistical and qualitative analysis was provided by participants who largely rated themselves either happy or very happy in their relationships.

In order to overcome the violation of the assumption of normality, we re-grouped the Relational Satisfaction (RS) variable into three groups: very satisfied (RS score of 7), satisfied (RS score 6) and less satisfied (RS score of 1–5). This was done in order to address the ceiling effect. The regrouping reduced the skewness of the data from -2.037 to -1.652 (see Table 2 and Figure 2). This also redistributed the number of participants in the comparison groups, thereby increasing the difference in the means of the two groups, which also increased the probability of identifying group differences when running the ANOVAs.
Figure 1. Histogram of Relational Satisfaction Scale

Table 2

Relational Satisfaction Data Transformation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N (453)</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Mean ± SD</th>
<th>Kurtosis (SE)</th>
<th>Skewness (SE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relational Satisfaction</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>5.96±1.48</td>
<td>3.69 (.23)</td>
<td>-2.04(.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Satisfaction 3 Level (adjusted)</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>2.26±.75</td>
<td>-1.08 (.23)</td>
<td>-.46(.12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The assumption of independent observations was met for this study. There is no reason to think that there was any clustering of the participants beyond what is represented by the variables.

Random Sampling

Another assumption is that of random sampling. This is an online convenience sample that may not be representative of the entire population. The researcher utilized convenience sampling and networking to get the sample. Also, since the sample was offered online, it may not be representative of the segments of the population that don’t have easy access to the Internet or have low technological proficiency. Additionally, the sample may not be representative of the
population because it appears that the sample population is pretty satisfied with their relationship. This may be due to the fact that less satisfied couples self-selected out of the study, or they portrayed their satisfaction as higher than reality potentially due to social desirability bias.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1: Are there any differences in relational satisfaction according to demographic information, specifically: gender, sexual orientation, length of relationship, whether or not they have children, social economic status, education level, or relationship status? Table 3 shows the results of the five separately run one-way ANOVAs using Relational Satisfaction as the Dependent variable and selected demographics as the independent variable.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Partial Eta squared</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>(1, 443)</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>.024†</td>
<td>(3, 439)</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Status</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>(3, 444)</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of Children</td>
<td>6.18</td>
<td>.014†</td>
<td>(1, 446)</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Level</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>.038†</td>
<td>(6, 233)</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

† Practically significant due to Cohen’s (1998) small, but meaningful effect size.

The exploratory nature of this study increases the probability of finding erroneous results. In order to reduce this error, a Bonferroni correction was applied to the ANOVAs reducing the significance from $p = .05$ to $p = .05/7 = p = .007$ to reach significance.
Gender  

An ANOVA for Relational Satisfaction and Gender was run. For the purposes of the analysis, this variable was reduced to Male and Female because the “other” category had an insufficient number of participants \( n = 3 \) to run the analysis. No differences were reported between Males and Females regarding Relational Satisfaction \( (F_{(1,455)} = 0.31, p = .58) \).  

Sexual Orientation  

Due to the small number of participants in the “other” category of sexual orientation \( n = 5 \) they were excluded from the analysis. No significant differences were observed in Relational Satisfaction as a function of Sexual Orientation \( (F_{(3,439)} = 3.655, p = .013) \); however a notable effect size \( n^2 = .024 \) suggests that this finding merits further exploration in future studies to determine its validity.

Length of Relationship  

There was no correlation between the Length of Relationship and Relational satisfaction: \( r(448) = -.071, p = .134 \).

Presence of Children  

No significant differences in relational satisfaction were observed due to the presence of children. However, the presence of children had a small but notable effect size of \( n^2 = .014 \), suggesting that it would be beneficial to include in future studies to better understand its impact.

Social Economic Status (SES)  

There was no correlation between the Social Economic Status (SES), or Household Income and Relational satisfaction: \( r(448) = -.088, p = .182 \).
**Education Level**

No difference was observed between Education Level and relational satisfaction \((F_{(6,223)} = 1.236, p = .289)\).

**Relationship Status**

No difference was observed between Relationship Status (i.e., Married, Cohabiting, Non-Cohabitating) and relational satisfaction \((F_{(3,444)} = .280, p = .840)\).

**Research Question 1 Results Summary**

No significant differences were observed between demographic groups and relational satisfaction, given the Bonferroni-corrected critical value of \(p < .007\). However, given the exploratory nature of these analyses, it is important to note that three results—those for sexual orientations, parental status, and education level—showed potentially practically significant effect sizes. Therefore, further research investigating the possibility of significant differences in relational satisfaction among those with different sexual orientations and parental status is warranted.

**Research Question 2**

What factors (internal, external or relational) negatively or positively influence relational satisfaction? The analysis for this section is a mixed-method approach. Rich descriptions derived from the qualitative analysis are provided in the Qualitative Analysis Portion of this section and Statistical analysis utilizing the information in the codes follow.

**Research Question 2 Qualitative Analysis**

In order to answer research question 2, the responses to the following open-ended questions were coded. “What aspects of the relationship contribute the most to your overall relational satisfaction? What causes the most conflict or dissatisfaction in your relationship?
What external factors (stressors or supports have affected your overall relational satisfaction positively? What external factors (stressors or supports have affected your overall relational satisfaction negatively? The codes were organized into three main categories with their corresponding sub-categories: Individual (meaning factors that correspond to individual personality traits, talents, etc., of one of the partners), relational (factors that are influenced by both partners and how the couple works together such as parenting, communication, emotional support), and external (factors that are outside of the relationship that stress or support the relationship such as extended family members, work, and finances). The overall magnitude of impact by category on relational satisfaction is presented in Figure 3. The results are presented by category: Internal, Relational, and External factors. Each category is broken down into the subcategories contained within it. A brief overview of what terms and ideas that pertain to this category as well some citations that represent the scope of the responses represented within this category are provided. Appendix C provides the comprehensive list of the codes and all of the data that were coded under that subtheme.

Qualitative Factors and Relational Satisfaction by Magnitude of Impact

This section looks at the overall impact of the categories and subcategories derived from the qualitative analysis. We determined the overall impact, or magnitude of impact, by summing the total number of times each category was mentioned, either positively or negatively, as it influenced relational satisfaction. The category with the greatest Magnitude of Impact was Relational Factors (frequency of citations = 1,179, or 48.5% of the responses), followed by External Factors (frequency of citations = 979, or 40.3% of responses), and Internal Factors (frequency of citations = 274, or 11.3% of total responses). This review first looks at the main
categories: Internal, Relational and External (see Figures 4 and 5), and then considers the contribution of the subcategories to relational satisfaction (Figure 6).

**Figure 3.** Positive and negative impact of internal, relational and external factors on relational satisfaction

**Figure 4.** Magnitude of the impact of Relational Satisfaction (RS) categories on relational satisfaction
Figure 5. Magnitude of the impact of Relational Satisfaction (RS) subcategories on relational satisfaction.

* This represents what category the Factor comes from I (internal), R (Relational), and E (External)
†Cut-off = Themes above 45 = more than 10% of the sample talked about it.

Most Common Factors in Order of Total Impact:

1. Emotional Intimacy/Support (275) - R* or 60.7%
2. Communication (210) - R or 46.4%
3. (tie) Extended Family (189) - E* and E or 41.7%
4. (tie) Finances (189) - E* and E or 41.7%
5. Work/School/Time (186) - E or 41.1%
6. Leisure Time (182) - R or 41.1%
7. Agreeableness (167) (Only Internal Factor, can be removed because its represented by Emotional Intimacy/Support.) I* or 36.9%
8. External Trials (129) – E or 28.5%
9. Parenting (126) - R or 27.5% of the sample but 54.3% of Parents
10. Compatibility (110)- R or 24.3%
11. Physical Intimacy (87)-R or 19.2%
12. Friends (83)-E or 18.3%
13. Religion/Values (68)-R or 15.0%
14. Hard Work/Commitment (58)-R or 12.8%
15. Domestic (49) -R + Pets/Home (25)-E = 74 (These were highly related and may have been artificially split between Relational and External, to better understand the magnitude, it is better to add these two categories. – 10.9%
16. (tie) Extroversion (47)-I or 10.6%
17. (tie) Mental Health/Health and Aging (47)-E†

**Internal factors.** The Internal Factors category, consisting of the Big Five Personality Factor’s contribution to overall relational satisfaction, was relatively small, making up only 11.3% of total responses. Of those responses, one subcategory, Agreeableness, accounted for 60.95% of the impact, followed by Extroversion (17.15%), Emotional Stability (12.04%), Conscientiousness (6.93%), and Intellect/Openness (2.92%). There is a possibility that this category is, in fact, over-represented, especially the Agreeableness, Emotional Stability, and Conscientiousness. These categories had a lot of overlap with the Emotional Intimacy/Support
categories in the Relational category. On several occasions, it was difficult to identify if the respondent was talking about individual or relational characteristics; therefore, they would be represented in both categories. The subcategories that appeared to function the most independently were that of Extroversion and Intellect/Openness.

The Big Five Personality traits were used as codes to help organize internal personality factors reported by participants. This was utilized because a substantial research base regarding the five personality factors and associated traits within each factor has been established (Goldberg, 1990; Trapnell & Wiggins, 1990). Therefore, instead of relying on the researcher’s own way of conceptualizing which traits should form a factor, the researcher utilized established theory to organize the personality traits.

The Big Five Personality Factors most frequently mentioned with respect to overall Relational Satisfaction (RS) were (in order of frequency): Agreeableness, Extraversion, Intellect/Openness, Conscientiousness, and Emotional Stability. Although some factors clearly contributed more to RS than others, all five were represented. However, when considering relational Dissatisfaction, the order changed, with Agreeableness, Emotional Stability, and Conscientiousness making up the bulk of the responses. Extraversion and Intellect appeared to contribute very little to dissatisfaction in these couples.

The Big Five Personality Factors are organized into bi-polar scales. Therefore, factors that contributed most to satisfaction were positive attributes whereas dissatisfaction was associated with negative attributes within the same theme. For example: trustworthy versus untrustworthy, or kind/supportive versus impatient/controlling. Figure 6 represents the internal factors that were most frequently reported to impact relational satisfaction.
Figure 6. Internal Factors and Relational Satisfaction

**Factor 1—Extraversion.** There is one predominant personality factor that overwhelmingly represents this category: sense of humor (46). A sense of fun and spontaneity were the next frequently cited combination (6). Therefore the Extraversion factors appear skewed towards someone that makes you laugh or have fun. Although Extraversion has a large impact on relational satisfaction, it appears to have very little impact on relational dissatisfaction.

**Factor 2—Agreeableness.** The Agreeableness Factor 2 was the most frequently mentioned personality factor in both relational satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The most frequently cited subcategories influencing satisfaction included: trust, respect, kind/supportive, affectionate, loving, attentive, faithful/humble, and forgiving. Of these categories, trust appears to be the most important component of this factor, and is mentioned nearly twice as much as Respect and Kindness/Support, which are nearly tied in second. The Factor 2 components most influencing dissatisfaction included: temper, untrustworthy, stubborn, controlling, manipulative, impatient, insensitive, unkind, naggy, and lacking vulnerability.
**Factor 3—Conscientiousness.** This category was primarily represented by how reliable a person was. Reliability/dependability highly influenced relational satisfaction, whereas its absence was the biggest contributor to dissatisfaction. Other factors mentioned related to dissatisfaction were unmotivated/lazy and money/spending issues.

**Factor 4—Emotional stability.** This factor primarily represented the presence or absence mental health/mental illness in the relationship. The presence of mental health disturbances was frequently reported to negatively impact relational satisfaction.

**Factor 5—Intellect/Openness.** This factor was only mentioned when describing attributes that positively influenced relational satisfaction such as the presence of sophistication and intelligence.

**Relational factors.** This category had the greatest Magnitude of Impact for all other categories, accounting for 48.5% of the total responses. Unlike Individual Factors, which might be artificially inflated due to its representation within the Relational Factor’s category, this category may be slightly underrepresented due to the frequency of similar concepts mentioned that were collapsed into the same code. Since each subcategory total represents only whether or not any data were mentioned from the sub-theme, it does not account for the fact that frequently multiple things were mentioned within that same subtheme. This was done to ensure that one person could not be counted more than once in each subcategory for statistical analysis, but may have functioned to suppress the full magnitude of the subcategories, especially under Emotional Intimacy/Support, which was the most salient subcategory of the Relational Factor. The subcategories that contribute the most to the Relational Factor, in order of impact, are Emotional Intimacy (23.32%), Communication (17.81%), Leisure Time (15.44%), Parenting (10.69%), Compatibility (9.33%), Physical Intimacy (7.38%), Religion/Values (5.77%), Hard
Work/Commitment (4.92%), Domestic (4.16%), and Infidelity (1.19%). In fact, if we were to account for the frequency of terms mentioned under Emotional Intimacy, the number would increase from 275 to 353. Therefore, the adjusted Magnitude of Impact of Emotional Intimacy and its subcategories on the Relational Factor increased from 23.32% to 27.51%.

In order to properly assess for Emotional Intimacy/Support, it would be important to assess for the subcategories rather than the overarching theme of Emotional Support. The subthemes of Emotional Intimacy in order of frequency reported included: Emotional Support (166), Trust/Honest (72), Companionship/Friendship, Respect (30), Loving/Adore (27), and Open/Sharing (8).

**Relational Factors and Relational Satisfaction**

The next category of Factors identified was relational in quality, meaning that, relational satisfaction in this category was reflective of the way in which the couple worked together in each area. The predominant factors that were identified and how they differentially influence relational satisfaction and dissatisfaction are displayed below. The sub-themes within this category included: Leisure time, Religion/Values, Domestic, Parenting, Compatibility, Commitment level, Communication, Emotional Support, Physical Intimacy, and Infidelity. A description of the elements that fall into these categories are provided in Figure 7.
**Physical intimacy and relational satisfaction.** Physical Intimacy represented the couple’s satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the quality or frequency of their physical intimacy. Affection, intimacy, sex, and passionate exchanges were perceived to positively impact relational satisfaction.

“We have a crazy attraction to one another.”

“We still have a strong physical relationship.”

“…sleep in the same bed and engage in regular mutually satisfying intimacy, both sexual and nonsexual.”

“Passion for my partner, rooted in the romantic and magical beginnings of the relationship.”

“I think that our open relationship allows us to not place an unrealistic expectation of one person having to be the only person in our lives that provides an outlet for sexual and intimacy needs. In my experience, that can often lead to feelings of disappointment and inadequacy when these needs are not met by that one person expected to do so.”
“Sex is not the most important aspect of our relationship, it is down the list a ways. Intimacy through communication, listening, laughing, crying, and physical touch are all far more important than sex.”

**Physical intimacy and dissatisfaction.** Different preferences in frequency of sex, sex drive, sexual dysfunction, falling out of love, and time constraints were frequently cited as a major source of dissatisfaction in this section.

“Sex, we have come to a mutual understanding, but it has always been a stressor in our relationship. As of the last couple of years, my questions that I have had regarding the affair.”

“My lessened sex drive. His feelings that it is about him (and it is not). His bewilderment at what made it slow down and why. I know that it worries him that I want something/someone else.”

“lack of Sex (with age, obligations, responsibilities, lack of time)”

“Sex. One wants it more the other doesn’t as much. Finding that balance where both needs are met has been hard. Wherein before I fell in love that would have been a deal breaker now I have the urge to make it work because I love him and am attached to our lives together.”

“Differing desires for affection. I really like to touch and be kissed casually, and my partner does not like to receive such affection, will not general give it out without prompting, and often withdraws when I do.”

“One partner expressing love and affection differently than the other leading to feelings of hurt/unwanted/unloved and annoyed/smothered.”

“My partner had no sexual experience prior to me, only societal influences which gave her a misconception of ‘what married sex is like.’”

“I am no longer in love with him or sexually attracted to him.”

“Not much interest (on either of our parts) in sex. Though we stay connected with backrubs and footrubs most every night.”

“The medications caused a ‘dead bedroom’ for a few months. Then a deep depression. The hardest part was that I felt so guilty, but I just couldn’t fix it.”
**Emotional intimacy.** Emotional Intimacy is comprised of several sub-themes that contribute to emotional connection: companionship/friendship, trust/honesty, respect, love/adore, emotional intimacy/support, and open/sharing. This is by far the most frequently mentioned factor that positively influenced relational satisfaction. Conversely, deficits in this area were associated with poor relational satisfaction and was second in its impact behind poor communication as the most damaging to relational satisfaction.

The subthemes and how they impact relational satisfaction and dissatisfaction are presented in Figure 8. Emotional Support was best represented by the sub-themes: Trust/Honesty, Respect, Companionship/Friendship, Loving/Adore, Emotional Intimacy/Support, and Open/Sharing. In order to better represent the magnitude of influence each concept had on Emotional Support, unlike the other figures in this paper, this figure represented the exact frequency of terms mentioned, regardless of whether one respondent shared multiple terms within the sub-categories. This was done to better understand the magnitude of impact each sub-category represented. After the frequencies are reported, the qualitative data were utilized to provide a more descriptive story behind the information provided.
Emotional Intimacy and RS. There are six subthemes observed in the Emotional Support category. The most common of these is Emotional Intimacy/Support, which represents ideas such as: being understood, kindness, connection, empathy, knowing that there is someone there for me, acceptance of each other. The next subtheme was rarely expounded upon, but was frequently mentioned, which is trust and honesty within the relationship. This was also frequently mentioned in conjunction with respect. Trust also played a role in the need for freedoms to be oneself as well as have some healthy autonomy. Companionship and Friendship was another theme observed in this category, which frequently mentioned the importance of being each other’s best friend, companion, and so forth. Additionally, the themes of being in love/loving and adoring the partner in addition to the theme of being emotionally open and sharing with the partner were associated with improved relational satisfaction.

Emotional Intimacy/Support. This subtheme primarily describes the level of emotional support and intimacy the couple has. Frequent concepts include the idea of putting each others’ needs and the marriage first, being there for each other, feeling connected, fully accepting each
other with all of their strengths and weaknesses, feeling truly “known” and accepted by partner, knowing that their partner would support them and be there for them no matter what. Feeling that the partner is kind, compassionate, understanding, empathetic and accepting were also frequently cited. For example:

“Marriage is top priority, relationship built off of long standing friendship, trust”

“we are always praising and providing compliments to each other,”

“take interest in one another’s family, friends and work. We trust one another and celebrate individual successes. It is important to me to know that we can work through rough patches together as well as enjoy each other’s company and have fun.”

“We support each other fully and equally. It isn’t a give and take, and neither of us keep track of who did a something for someone last”

“level of intimacy we have with each other. We truly know each other, mind, body, and spirit”

“Feeling truly accepted and loved for exactly who I am and who I’m working on becoming. Not only am I free to be me, I am also encouraged to be me. I am enough.”

“Loads of understanding, kindness, support, calming one another in crisis, of which we have had many. An attitude of “it will be OK.”

“The fact that my spouse also has learned to be self sacrificing and puts my needs, wants, and desires ahead of his own has also been a strongly positive dynamic in our life long relationship. . . . Intimacy through communication, listening, laughing, crying, physical touch are all far more important than sex.”

**Trust/Honesty.** Trust and honesty was the second most frequently cited subtheme under emotional intimacy. Although emotional intimacy is a slightly larger subcategory, no individual term was reported more frequently than trust. Trust also frequently appeared with the concept of freedom. The presence of trust in the relationship appeared to make it easier for either partner to enjoy freedoms within and without the relationship. Freedoms to have other social contacts or participate in individual hobbies, which positively influenced satisfaction within the relationship, were frequently associated with trust.
“Also trust is another huge factor, you have to establish trust first and foremost before anything else.”

“The aspects that contribute to our overall happiness is the freedom we allow each other to pursue our own goals outside of the relationship. Career and educational goals for both of us are encouraged by each other”

“trust enough to let each have their own social life, work life and interests outside the relationship”

“Trust, support, respect, and occasional personal space.”

“The fact we have no restrictions in our relationship and trust.”

“I trust her 100% and she recognizes my needs to sometimes have a night with the boys and vice Versa. We are perfectly happy being apart because the trust is there”

“We trust each other. That should probably be in caps because it is so hard won and I trust so few people. I think we are both a little codependent, getting less so. That makes it hard and makes it easier in some ways.”

*Companionship/Friendship.* This subsection primarily refers to the benefits of companionship and the unique friendship the partnership provides and how positively impacts relational satisfaction.

“I look at him and know I could marry him today tomorrow or in 10 years. Over the course of our relationship I’ve gained a best friend that is unlike any other.”

“He is my best friend”

“Having someone to bounce ideas off of, to laugh and joke with, to do things together that we both like, and knowing someone will be there that has my back, will listen and sympathize if I have a bad day, and will be my biggest supporter when I try new things.”

“For me knowing I have someone to talk to, someone to vent to, someone I can be 100% myself with--flaws and all.”

*Respect.* Similar to trust, respect was rarely elaborated upon, but frequently cited as positively impacting relational satisfaction.

“We are both very independent and respectful of each other. We became friends first and then started dating.”
“Reciprocal love and respect.”

“We respect each other, help each other. Nothing is one person’s job we share everything.”

“Mutual respect, good boundaries, good self-care, interdependence,”

**Loving/Adore.** This subtheme is primarily made up of comments that reflect the experience of loving or adoring or being loved and adored by the partner.

“We have enough love to last us 4 lifetimes together and that’s what I truly love most. We love each other through the absolute worst times and through the greatest!!”

“Our love and adoration for the other”

“Love is the number one and caring for each other’s needs, even tho we might not always agree with each other.”

“And love. Deep, abiding, unsentimental love. My knowing there is nothing in the world he wouldn’t do for me, if I asked . . . ”

“Coming home to someone who loves me for me”

**Open/Sharing.** The final subsection primarily discusses emotional connection and being open and sharing with each other.

“The openness my partner and I have with one another and the ability to just relax with my partner.”

“Being open with one another about our needs and feelings, being honest.”

**Emotional intimacy and dissatisfaction.** Whereas Emotional Intimacy is supportive of Relational Satisfaction, its absence is also correlated with Relational Dissatisfaction. Responses in this theme found that lack of emotional connection was the most frequently cited, followed by dissatisfaction with emotional support, emotional abuse, dishonesty, different emotional needs, insecurity, lack of romance/love, naggy and pressuring. Many of the themes expressed around dissatisfaction include different emotional needs and expectations that aren’t
being met, dishonest, lack of trust, lying, lack of effort/support, one partner being emotionally disengaged, distracted or shut off, anger and abrasiveness.

**Lack of emotional connection.** This subsection primarily refers to feeling like a partner is emotionally distant, disconnected, or unavailable.

“He can be stubborn or deny the importance of his feelings.”

“My wife has a difficulty expressing emotion properly. This can cause her to obsess about things”

“His addiction to his cell phone and social media. Very distracting!!!! He is not ever fully present at home bc of the constant “connection to the outside world”

**Lack of emotional support/Abuse.** This subtheme covers failure to support emotionally to feeling criticized, nagged, or even emotionally abused.

“My wife says I’m abrasive, and I say she’s sensitive.”

“He can be a bitch . . . naggy, complaining about very small things. He tells everyone I’m the easiest woman to get along with, mostly I think, because I let him bitch. It’s a good thing.”

“Different expectations about what support we need to give each other; about empathy levels of the other person.”

“Partner is constantly angry, yells and is unkind”

**Dishonesty/Lack of trust.** This subsection primarily refers to the lack of trust, or presence of dishonesty/lies in the relationship.

“constant state of stress and new trauma, dishonesty/lack of vulnerability.”

“Jealousy. Which I equate to lack of trust.”

“when she tries to hide the smallest stuff from me.”

“Him lying to me about what he has done in the past and where he is going and with whom out of fear of me getting mad when in reality I appreciate the honesty”
**Unmet expectations.** This subsection covers ideas from unmet or unrealistic expectations, not feeling cared about, or satisfied in various aspects of the relationship.

“I think the love language differences. Not feeling we get those needs met as much as either of us want.”

“I think we are still figuring out how to best support one another through challenges. My style is more focused on emotional support while he is more focused on the practical. So, for example, if I have a hard day at work, I would prefer for him to support me emotionally by listening and empathizing with my problems. He tends to focus more on practical solutions and advice giving.”

“Unrealistic expectations. I personally think this is the root cause of almost any conflict.”

I’m emotional and expressive he isn’t emotional and or expressive. I’m expressive about my emotions and feelings I say I love you he doesn’t express his feelings.

“Lack of communication and what appears to be lack of trying on his part (but I’m sure it’s just him forgetting). I need words of affirmation and touch to feel connected, loved and appreciated. I’ve told him in very plain terms what I need and even some ideas on how to apply it (examples: hug and kiss before we part and when we join up again, verbal appreciation for meals or a clean home, verbal declarations of love and admiration, etc) yet it doesn’t happen. Eventually we have a blow up about emotional needs not being met and he says things like “Why did you marry me then” and we don’t talk for the rest of the night and then it gets reset in the morning until another blowup happens.”

“Different expectations of how the other should be. He always nags me to go to the gym and eat healthy as he’s worried that I will “let myself go.” I honestly wouldn’t be bothered if he put on weight but he does not feel the same way about me.”

**Communication.** Communication is the second most commonly mentioned factor impacting relational satisfaction. Although they are separate themes, there is a lot of overlap between communication and emotional intimacy. As couples improve their communication skills, they typically feel more heard, respected, and closer, thereby increasing emotional intimacy. People who have good communication skills, feel heard and understood, experience increased relational satisfaction, whereas those who struggle in this area are less satisfied. The following examples explore the difference between good communicators and poor ones.
**Good communication.** Couples with good communication frequently reported open communication, frequently talking together, honesty, the willingness to work through tough discussions respectfully, ability to compromise, agree to disagree, remain mature even when disagreeing, and addressing conflict in a timely manner.

“open communication, dedication to discussing and setting clear expectations,”

“talking openly about our needs and wants, being willing to compromise and say that we’re sorry first, and remembering to be kind to one another even when we’re in a bad mood”

“an ability to ignore the negatives. Knowing which battles are worth fighting.”

“Partnership. When we do have disagreements, it is handled in a mature manner. Regardless how mad one of us is.”

“Our ability to communicate and talk about both good and bad. While we may not always agree, at least we understand what the other is thinking and feeling.”

“We talk about everything. If we have a problem with one another we speak about it and try to find a solution to the problem.”

“Constant communication! Being honest and open and willing to work together to be happy.”

“When we communicate freely, choosing to forgive quickly, speak our minds openly,”

“…communicate with each other well and trust each other. We respect each other and always sit to talk out any conflicts that may arise. We have a relationship based on trust, communication, and respect.”

“flexibility, acceptance of the other person ability to talk out concerns and frustrations and find an actionable solution.”

“Good communication, spending time with each other, limiting the use of electronic devices when around each other”

“We have rational discussions about our feelings rather than arguments.”

“if there is ever any disagreement or miscommunication we make sure to address it calmly and in a timely manner. Neither of us let issues brew before getting upset at one another.”
“Listening to one another. We have disagreements but we discuss it that same day and do not let it go till the next day.”

“open communication. We have made keeping an open dialogue a priority in our relationship and I believe it has allowed us to move to such a healthy and close level.”

**Poor communication.** Anger issues, miscommunication, misunderstandings, stubbornness, lack of communication, lack of time for communication, unwillingness to talk or work through things, different conflict resolution styles, unwillingness to compromise, indecisiveness, both having the need to be right, failing to admit fault or apologize, and tuning the other person out/not listening.

“We tend to disagree about things more often than we would like. We both have anger issues, and have trouble communicating correctly to each other.”

“We are both stubborn and not willing to give in on disagreements at times.”

“Lack of communication. 100%. He is very quiet and a man of few words while I know for sure my love language is communication and words of affirmation. If he would just out of the blue compliment me it would make my world. Or simple things like decisions to be made or conversations to be had, it’s always my initiation.”

“Communication. He never wants to talk about feelings but then gets mad because ‘I never know what he’s going through at work’”

“Most of the time our biggest problem is us misunderstanding one another and not listening enough to what the other is saying before jumping to conclusions.”

“When he has his earbuds in and isn’t listening to me.”

“Communication. He’d rather vent to other people than talk to me, and I’d rather shut him out than talk.”

“He’s not always willing to discuss things with me when I’m feeling over emotional. He tends to just ignore the conflict until I’m in a better mood.”

“Communication failure. I believe his ADD is causing communication failures. Forgetfulness, I have to remember everything for the house. Forgetting or not working at remembering a conversation we had yesterday”

“I think we are still figuring out how to best support one another through challenges. My style is more focused on emotional support while he is more focused on the practical. So,
for example, if I have a hard day at work, I would prefer for him to support me emotionally by listening and empathizing with my problems. He tends to focus more on practical solutions and advice giving.”

“Failing to admit to any fault in the relationship. Unwillingness to work on problems.”

“My partner has mild depression and anxiety. When these overwhelm her, it makes it difficult to communicate and make it hard to feel like I am being emotionally supported because everything is focused on her.”

“Communication! Our communication styles and how we perceive things are very different. We often spend time trying to understand each other’s perspective. I’d like to think it’s because she’s right-handed and I’m left-handed.”

“Misunderstandings or not respecting sensitivity from past relationships (i.e., insecurities); being stubborn instead if communicating in a healthy and open way”

“Miscommunication has caused the most conflict. We are both very busy with our careers and have tried to make attempts to connect frequently, but sometimes the communication falls apart.”

“In the past, conflict arose out of lack of communication and understanding. Now, it’s more about impatience in some aspects of life that influence our attitudes.”

“Miscommunication. After 7 years we sometimes anticipate certain gestures and tone to imply certain behaviors or feelings, and we respond based on those assumptions rather than seeking clarification.”

“Often it is miscommunication and unfair expectations that we have on each other and haven’t communicated.”

“Insistence on doing everything in her time and in her way”

**Hard Work/Commitment.** Hard Work/Commitment is the fifth most cited factor that seemed to improve Relational Satisfaction, but it did not appear to largely impact relational dissatisfaction. Therefore, only the interaction between and relational satisfaction were explored. Three main subthemes are observed under the category of Hard Work/Commitment (in order of frequency): overall commitment level, resiliency, and hard work. When unwavering commitment is expressed within the relationship, it has a major impact on satisfaction. It is important to note that hard work/commitment level and relational satisfaction, although
seemingly closely associated for the most part, are not always the same thing. Some people are very committed to staying in relationships due to religious, personal beliefs, the sake of the children, or financial constraints that don’t necessarily reflect their personal level of satisfaction and joy in their primary relationship. However, other couples express a sense of security and safety that comes from their commitment or the knowledge of their partner’s commitment. For these emotionally committed couples, the themes of resiliency and hard work are also observed.

**Hard Work/Commitment level and Relational Satisfaction.** Frequent terms include: loyalty, commitment, faithfulness, fidelity, security, and dedication.

“unwavering commitment to the relationship on both sides”

“Looking forward to having a future together. Willing to face what may come ahead. Faith in each other.”

**Resiliency.** Resiliency is demonstrated by the couples’ willingness or ability to overcome difficult challenges together as a couple. Frequently many things that many people would expect to be stressors on a relationship, were cited by the participants as being the very thing that brought them closer. Frequent ideas include: overcoming trials, emergencies, and obstacles together and coming out stronger.

“honestly there are many aspects of the relationship but I think number one is that hate that others have for lesbian couples. when we hear how much someone hates our relationship it makes us love each other more because we appreciate each other more.”

“It’s hard to quantify. My fiancé is trans, and we’ve been learning together what that means, and how to be stronger together. We have a lot of shared moments which is important. We have a lot in common, but are different in important ways. It keeps things interesting. So, maybe that’s it.”

“We have a knack for weathering the monotony of day to day and do well in personal and family crisis which is a real relationship tester.”

**Hard Work.** Closely related to resiliency is the theme of Hard Work. This is a demonstration of the commitment level by the participant’s willingness to do hard things and
dedication to the relationship. Frequent terms in this sub-theme include effort, equally committed, teamwork, and willingness to go to counseling.

“The fact that we both put the same amount of effort into the relationship is amazing. We both pick up the other’s slack when it’s needed, either emotionally or with things around the house.”

“We’re both in it for the long haul, we each take turns pulling more than ‘our share’, we have the same long-term goals.”

“We’ve utilized counseling in the past to help us know ourselves and each other better and learn how to meet each other’s emotional needs, after experiencing infidelity on both sides.”

“team relational work---we both are involved in the relationship”

“We have gone to therapy to work on communication. We try to be healthy in all aspects and respect each other in getting healthy as long as it stays within our marriage covenants. We are completely open in communication and fully committed. Our marriage is eternal which allows us to think beyond this earthly trial.”

**Compatibility.** Compatibility, or lack thereof, contribute to both relational satisfaction and dissatisfaction, although its positive contribution appears to surpasses its negative impact by nearly two times.

**Compatibility and Relational Satisfaction.** This theme primarily represents shared goals, teamwork, companionship, working together well, and just “clicking.” Frequent terms: teamwork, partnership, similarity, compatibility, companionship, complementarity, shared/mutual goals and interests, cooperation, commonalities.

“We have lots of shared interests and are able to work together as a team very well. We generally enjoy each other’s company.”

“Balanced partnership with shared goals, similar senses of humor”

“We have similar work ethics and common goals.”

“Same moral value system. Family background similarities”
“When he’s not super stressed, he is the Ying to my yang. I’m loud, obnoxious, spur of the moment. He’s quiet, plans everything, level headed.”

“Compatibility with my husband. We compliment each others strengths and weaknesses.”

“It’s nice always having a companion to do things with, spend time with, vent about my day to. We have a lot in common, I.e., Eating healthy and exercise and that makes me happy we are both committed to that.”

“We work together really well, we both are passionate about the same things and both have similar goals towards our future.”

**Compatibility and Relational Dissatisfaction.** There are many ways in which the participants described their incompatibility. Some of the ideas have already been addressed in larger themes such as differences in emotional needs/compatibility and physical intimacy. Other themes observed in this section include: cultural differences, different habits, personal preferences, values, work ethic, financial views/management, political views, social preferences, cleanliness, and personality differences.

“I’m a neat freak and she is very messy”

“Different cultural backgrounds, especially with regards to social interaction and entertaining. I find promptness at social gatherings startling and often awkward, she hates to be late to anything. As a host I feel I should anticipate and provide for all of my guests needs, she only feels called to cover the basics. My partner is much more introverted and requires much more sleep than I do, and often wants to come home earlier from social events far earlier than I (an extrovert and poor sleeper) do, or would when left to my own devices.”

“mismatched Interest in sex, mismatched interest in outside activities, social life”

“Finances. I’m a saver and he tends to be a spender which causes a lot of friction.”

“I go out more and am more social with friends than he is.”

“Deciding what to eat. We have different tastes in food.”

“Also the temperate of the house he likes it like an ice box! He freezes me out. & I make him Sweat oopps!”
“I would say it is the difference in approaching important discussion (finances, future work goals). It has required a lot of patience and learning to meet him halfway.”

“We have different taste in just about everything, so living in the same space can be a challenge sometimes. Luckily he is very laid back and often lets me do what id like :)

“The language barrier and different cultural expectations towards what it means to be a spouse.”

“Disagreements on our point of view in life. I am extremely loving and optimistic and he is very traditional and old school in thinking, along with being a huge pessimist. For the most part we level each other out, but on occasion we see things completely different for example politics this year.”

“We have differing work values and learning styles. He learns by trial and error and is impulsive and I’m very cautious in my decision making. I’m very career oriented and he is just very ungrounded. He has a degree and is willing to work obviously but is less driven to pursue conventional career goals.”

**Domestic.** This theme primarily represents how the couple fares around household chores/responsibilities. Themes of equality are prevalent in this category.

**Domestic and Relational Satisfaction.** Some of the most common terms include: equal partners, working together, shared responsibilities, equal contributions to household, chores, responsibilities, helpfulness around the house, housework, building a home together, and pet ownership. Equality and equal contribution to the household, both financially and splitting of chores was the most frequently mentioned sub-theme.

“We share responsibilities financially and around the house.”

“We are equal partners in everything with the house, family, finances. She may have strengths or preferences in some areas of home/family management, while I have other strengths. It’s all shared.”

“My husband and I make I huge effort to do as many things together as possible . . . cook dinner, clean house, grocery shop, household decisions, doctors appointments etc.”

“We both pick up the other’s slack when it’s needed, either emotionally or with things around the house.”
“I don’t have to worry about a male dominant relationship forming because he’s a feminist and we act as equals.”

“Additionally, we are building a house together, and working together and choosing options has helped communication.”

**Domestic and Relational Dissatisfaction.** This subtheme frequently cites inequality and lack of responsibility of a partner pertaining to household chores, responsibilities, and financial contributions. Differences in preferences in maintain the household, such as cleanliness, timeliness of taking care of chores, laziness, disorganization, buying a home, and inequality in who is doing the majority of the work were the predominant contributions to relational dissatisfaction.

“Her lack of adult skills. There are a lot of times I need to show her how to pay bills, or manage other things that I think adults should know how to do.”

“Different domestic habits like neatness and motivation for unpleasant chores. I am more motivated and feel slighted when she isn’t and let’s me do all the work”

“different views on housekeeping, his OCD tendencies, my ADD tendencies but these are truly minor”

“Cleaning. Would like everyone to do there fair share instead of me doing the majority of it”

“Additional conflict typically relates to household items (when it occurs, which is not often) - clutter accumulating, things needing cleaned, repairs needing made, home improvement projects needing finished.”

“Lack of follow through on home and financial commitments.”

“Sometimes he skips work which makes me feel like I’m pulling the weight of the relationship. It makes me feel like he is unmotivated and doesn’t value the importance of a job.”

“unequal home roles—like when I feel that I have to do all the dishes, laundry, and cleaning on my own”
**Parenting.** This theme references how the couple navigates parenting, co-parenting or even extended family responsibilities.

**Parenting and Relational Satisfaction.** The presence of children in the relationship seemed to positively impact relational satisfaction. Frequent themes include: raising children, being a parent or grandparent, sense of family/being part of a family, admiration for partner in the parenting role. Having children and raising a family together was predominantly perceived a bonding experience.

“The happiness felt in . . . raising a family together.”

“equal partners in raising our son”

“being a great parent to my child,”

“Our son initially caused stress but it became positive because we were both learning how to be parents”

“Our son brightens up any stressful day.”

“Having children and watching them grow to become well adjusted, educated, financially independent and civic minded adults and marrying and having their own children.”

“Supporting our grown kids through tough times has brought us closer together. We have discussions about how we each think we should handle things, what support we should offer, and then talk to them together, no matter who’s biological kids they are.”

“having a kid has deepened her . . . it helps”

**Parenting and Relational Dissatisfaction.** Different parenting styles/techniques, lack of time due to children, young children, kids with addictions or special needs, difficulty parenting, co-parenting, blended families, raising children, lack of support with kids, kids’ extra-curricular activities, infertility, and adoption issues are frequent themes in this section.

“we were so “in sync”, were very emotionally and physically close (until our 4 yr old was born),”

“Difference in parenting techniques.”
“how difficult it is to have children (expense, lack of social structure, intragroup stereotypes)”

“Disagreements over parenting styles.”

“We moved here form out of state. We don’t have anyone to help with the kids most of the time. So it’s just us. And it’s usually fights over rules with the kids or not getting help with chores (me) or errands.”

“Trying to have a baby”

“Adult children drama.”

“Parenting. I’m the biological mother and was a single parent for a few years before we got together. She’s a great parent, but more strict which has been difficult”

“She won’t allow me to coparent my child, or have equal decisions in her life. I basically feel lien a placeholder in her life.”

“He doesn’t enjoy having the grandchildren around. He finds children chaotic and nerve-racking. I ADORE our grandchildren, and I want them around a lot. It makes me sad that children bring me such joy, and we can’t share this feeling together.”

“Parenting our children seems to be the most heated area in our relationship now. When my husband is in a good place in his recovery then we seem to be on the same page but when he is in a downward spiral his parenting becomes much more about control and fear.”

“Our differing options on the children and how they should be treated and disciplined”

“Children - they constantly need attention which detracts from us being able to enjoy time together.”

“kinds. we naturally parent very different from each other & have very different aspirations for our kids which is the source of almost all conflict we experience. he wants to homeschool our kids, i dont. im a lot more guarded than he is--i dont want my kids listening to certain songs and he has them dancing to them and signing along. so many different little things.”

“Whose responsibility is it to care for the kids when they are ill or one must work late etc . . . . Two parents working full time is tough to juggle quality time with kids”

“We are adjusting to life as parents and working through how to divide up responsibility and parent together.”
“When we aren’t on the same page when it comes to parenting and being a blended family”

“Disagreements about when to grow our family.”

“Our parenting styles are different, we cannot see eye to eye on it.”

“infertility, adoption of older children who caused trauma within the family,”

“special needs children, addictions with children”

“My middle son (16), he has caused great strife in the household for all members, he currently is not living with us due to the stress levels created while he has resided with us.”

“adoption issues, different ideas about parenting”

“birth of a new child,”

“infertility”

“stressors: we didn’t ever get childcare until our oldest was 13 yrs old, youngest was 8. HUGE mistake as this caused us to develop separate interests when we had not adult time together.”

“Having kids (ha ha ha--but it’s true). We have one child with very serious mental illness and two others who show early signs of mental illness.”

“extra curricular activities of our kids, work schedules being opposite and one of us frequently being alone with the kids”

“Having to balance being a parent and less of a wife or lover. Missing the excitement of other men’s attention.”

“having small children.”

**Religion/Values.** This theme primarily represents similarity in values, morality and world views.

**Religion/Values and Relational Satisfaction.** Frequent terms include: shared life values, religious beliefs, similar morals, faith, and spiritual beliefs, and respect and acceptance of differences in this area.
“While our personalities are polar opposites, our beliefs, values, and ethics are very similar.”

“She understands my core values and why they are important to me”

“We have different views on many important topics (politics and religion) and we accept this and are supportive of each other’s passions.”

“religious worship together, similar political/ethical/moral/religious values”

**Religion/Values and Relational Dissatisfaction.** This section had very few references. The primary ideas revolved around differences in Religious views, values and political views.

“Religion and deciding what our kids will do when they are old enough”

“Values. Different political views.”

**Leisure Time.** This theme primarily references the amount and quality of time spent together as a couple and family. For the most part, quality time spent together equated greater relational satisfaction. However, for some couples/families who don’t get along well, quality time was not a positive indicator of relational satisfaction.

**Leisure Time and Relational Satisfaction.** Frequent terms include: fun, laugh together, silliness, similar interests/hobbies, activities, enjoying time together, traveling/adventures, romantic, date nights, ability to enjoy hobbies and time together as well as independently, intentionally making time for the relationship, and having a good balance between together time and personal space.

“Laughing together. Talking together. Being active with each other”

“maintaining special “just us” times like date night,“

“hanging out with friends”

“We enjoy each other’s company, have enough interests that we can share a lot while also discovering a lot. We laugh alot.”
“I really enjoy spending time with my wife. She’s the person that I find easiest to hang out with and she puts up with me so that’s always a bonus.”

“love traveling and adventures.”

“taking one trip a year with no kids”

“When there is time alone as a couple,. and a balance of work, play and time to relax.”

“I enjoy spending time with my spouse. watching tv shows together is about all we have time for since he has a busy schedule.”

“we’ve maintained our individuality (I love to be outdoors, he loves to read, so we book a hotel in the mountains and my son and I go hiking while he stays in the hotel reading),”

“My husband and I make I huge effort to do as many things together as possible…. date night, and of course being able to HAVE FUN!”

“spending time with each other, limiting the use of electronic devices when around each other and taking mini vacations.”

“Common interests brought us together but it is the things we took up or learned together after meeting that make our relationship long lasting.”

“Spending alone time together talking or “doing” something (not watching TV/movies which is passive)”

“enjoying activities together, making time to spend time with one another’s family, being able to take a time out from stressful lives in order to make time for relationship”

“Shared hobbies and activities. Making time for each other, but also knowing when they need space alone or with friends.”

“We enjoy some of the same things and enjoy it with each other. We also spend time apart letting him enjoy his time alone and me enjoy my time with family or friends.”

“Shared interests, trust enough to let each have their own social life, work life and interests outside the relationship”

“He prefers to spend time with me over anyone else.”

“Quality time together, having similar interest, we laugh together,“

“Trying new experiences together and allowing each other to also have individual interests and alone time.”
Leisure Time and Relational Dissatisfaction. Frequent themes in this sub-section include: lack of time, dissimilar interests, being over-committed/scheduled, not making time for each other, one partner being overly-involved with a hobby or extra-curricular activities, lack of attention, not enough time for sex, long-distance, difference in personality (introverted v/s extroverted), and work, school or hobbies getting in way of together time.

“Quality time is non-existent”

“My husband enjoys a larger social life than I do. He wants to go out, see friends, have parties to a much larger degree than me. I prefer a smaller, quieter life. It is a very basic problem. I would like to think that we meet in the middle between our natural inclinations, but I suspect that the larger share of the compromise on this issue is on him, not me.”

“balancing the time between the relationship, work, home, and community commitments”

“Conflicting schedules, Failing to make time for each other”

“He is an introvert and I’m an extrovert and sometimes those two ways of being can cause friction, but over the years we’ve learned ways to give each other what we need while still meeting our needs. An example would be going to a party and how we now plan ahead of time on how long to stay so that he doesn’t feel overwhelmed and don’t feel deprived of social stimulation.”

“He is extremely involved in extracurricular (that is not a euphemism) activities in the community, which takes him away from home.”

“My husband’s gay/SSA friends and the amount of time my husband spends with them.”

“Not enough down time.”

“Overscheduling our time. Not having enough alone time.”

“Finding time to just be a couple can be very frustrating. It’s difficult to get away for more than a couple hours a week as a couple (because of the mental illness). Also one child won’t go to bed easily so its difficult even to have pillow talk time.”

“We also find it hard to enjoy time spent together as a family or as a couple”

“While I admire my spouse’s passion for his artwork, sometimes he spends too much time away from me and our daughter.”
“My definition of ‘fun’” and his definition of ‘fun’ at certain times.”

“Finding the time to be together. Its a balancing act of work, kids, sleep, working out . . . etc. Our relationship often gets put on the back burner.”

“Our lack of time together as a result of our long distance relationship and work commitments causes the most conflict. It’s hard when you want to plan little trips together or even just spend an evening together sitting at home. But it makes us both appreciate the time we do have together and it also allows us to have separate interests and grow as individuals.”

“Social outings because I am more comfortable trying new things and talking with strangers and he is more reserved.”

**Infidelity and Relational Dissatisfaction.** The contents of this category is linked with increased relational dissatisfaction. Frequent terms include: trauma, betrayal, sexual addiction, affairs, and cheating.

**LGBT, Infidelity and Relational Dissatisfaction.**

“The affair put a lot of stress on our relationship and my overall happiness in our marriage. Questioning whether she was attracted to me or staying with me for other reasons”

“sexual addiction trauma, betrayal trauma.”

(Mixed-Orientation Marriage) “Discovering he experienced ssa and had been emotionally unfaithful”

(Mixed-Orientation Marriage) “We had a time in our relationship where my husband was not faithful to our marriage vows. That was due to and led to more mis-trust, poor of communication, and limited sexual connection for more than a year.”

**Non-LGBT, Infidelity and Relational Dissatisfaction.**

“unwanted emotional affairs, infidelity”

“The infidelity was brutal, multiple escorts etc, much lying and deceit through years of our marriage”

“social media affair”
“My husband is a sex addict and I learned of this in 2013. He has had multiple affairs and is addicted to masturbation and pornography. He is working on recovery, but the trauma of this realization is something that I work with everyday.”

External Factors

This category came in second, behind Relational Factors, with respect to magnitude of impact on Relational Satisfaction accounting for 40.3% of the total responses. The subcategories that had the most influence on External Factors were (in order of impact): Finances and Extended Family, which were tied at 19.31%, Work/School/Time (19%), External Trials (13.81%), Friends (8.48%), Mental Health/Aging (4.8%), Addiction/Recovery (4.29%), Distance (3.68%), Previous Relationships (2.55%), Social Support (1.74%), and Therapy (1.12%).

The following section provides an overview of the external factors that couples reported impact relational satisfaction. External Factors were divided into 12 subthemes: Distance, Work/School/Time, Finances, Extended Family, Friends, Pets/Home, Previous Relationships, External Trials, Addiction/Recovery, Social Support, Mental Health/Health/Aging, and Therapy. Many of the factors have both positive and negative influences; however Therapy was reported exclusively as a positive influence. Figure 9 describes the external factors and their overall impact, either positive or negative on Relational Satisfaction.
Figure 9. External Factor’s Impact on Relational Satisfaction

**Finances.** Finances was the most frequently cited external factor that impacted relational satisfaction. Although finances also have positive impacts on relational satisfaction, it only accounts for approximately 16% of the total influence.

**Finance and Relational Satisfaction.** Finances positively influenced relational satisfaction when the participants felt that there was adequate or stable financial situations, good jobs, when they were able to work well together regarding money, and when they influenced money, and financial success.

“Money is always a stressor but we’re both always learning and growing and figuring out what works best for us. Being able to have that growth with her and successfully come out on the other side always makes me happier.”

“We have a roof over our heads & reliable cars to drive & enough to pay the bills & extra to help out others.”

“We learned to manage money while he went back to school and then when I went back to school.”
“Being financially supported by him. Him taking care of things for me. His kindness.”

equally being able to provide financial support”

“income/job. (I don’t care if people say money doesn’t affect happiness- it does)”

“Having more financial stability helps as well- we have more freedom to do the things we
enjoy together.”

“We are very financially stable. We agree on how finances should be spent and
gathered.”

**Finance and Relational Dissatisfaction.** Frequent themes in this category include: lack
of money, debt, financial hardships/stress, unwillingness or inability to hold down a job, job
instability or lack of employment, inequality in incomes, prior financial obligations, home
ownership, disagreements in spending, the recession, financial emergencies such as house
fires/accidents, trying to keep up with the Jones’, failed businesses, student loans, and inability to
vacation or spend money due to financial hardship.

“we are also now a single income family because she is now unable to work.”

“Money. We had very different incomes for a while. Thankfully now we are very
similar.”

“The years when we were building our careers and money was tight”

“Employment or unemployment have been stressors that affect our relationship. for me
specifically, a time of brief unemployment made me feel like a leech and a failure which
negatively affected my own sense of self in our relationship. My partner never voiced
these concerns, however.”

“Money. I’m earning most of the money right now, and if we fight about anything, it’s
that.”

“We we’re thrown into being home owners early on into our relationship so that’s been a
large strain and the stress for money would happen to go along with that”

“not enough money to get the things we want (like money for me to finally finish college
and get back in the workforce. It’s hard being dependent on someone who has a degree
and I dont . . . and having to feel less than because others can easily slide back into
working after kids. Or having a house that is ours, not a rental. Stuff like that . . . not like clothes or cars or whatever related to money.)”

“Prior financial obligations”

“house fires and floods, involvement in car accidents,”

“He seems very bitter that he makes all the money, yet balks when I offer to get a job”

“Years ago, money and feeling we needed things to be like others.”

“Financial problems: profligate spending, lack of consistent employment. We own 2 houses that have stalled in renovations that we have become completely stymied on. We are broke, but land rich. Home ownership is the biggest stress.”

“We had a business that failed and struggled financially.”

“Financial issues, but this also made us stronger as a team supporting each other”

“Fear of losing job and decreased sleep.”

“Debt as well.”

“The loss of his job (our main income)”

“Fixing up our home, owning multiple homes prior to marriage and trying to sell them . . . finances”

“Both of us have gone through unemployment and financial issues and it affected us very negatively.”

“Money and student loans, living situation”

“Also, we don’t have the time or money to take a real vacation together right now”

**Work/School/Time.** The second most frequently cited external factor impacting relational satisfaction was Work/Time. The category had both positive and negative impacts on relational satisfaction. This category represents two main ideas: lack of time due to work, school and life responsibilities and the emotional impact/satisfaction of work, school and careers on the family. The majority of responses referred to a lack of quality/connecting time due to conflicting or excessive busyness due to work, school or community responsibilities, commutes, and job
stability. However, career satisfaction due to education, work environment, stability of work and opportunities for growth and success was the second most salient theme.

**Work/School/Time positive impact on Relational Satisfaction.** Some of the frequent themes in this category include: work, career, jobs, job/career success and satisfaction, steady employment, positive work environments and schedules.

“We have been blessed with a good career,”

“Our working daily together (we own 2 WVU stores) is often fun. We get to do lots of things Together. And when the team is doing well we have so much fun positive work environments,”

“Both of our careers keep us happy.”

“Time apart. He works swing shift. Absence makes the heart grow fonder”

“succeeded in jobs”

“Both of us having jobs”

“My job is major stressor and has pushed us closer together.”

“Our schedule helps our relationship flourish. We’re able to sleep, eat, work, exercise, hangout on the weekends together.”

**Work/School/Time and Relational Dissatisfaction.** Common terms/themes: conflicting schedules, work, work stress, long work hours, lack of time, long commutes, job security, lack of job, school stress, and military.

“Work stress finds its way home from time to time making that person irritable and then the other one gets the same way as a result.”

“Long periods of separation (military) and the stress of many moves and having small children.”

“We work excessive hours and have high stress jobs. Sometimes that leaves us drained for home life.”

“My job and the fact that I work night shift has made it a little difficult for our relationship.”
“Working geographically far from home, “

“Right now, he’s in school and I’m starting a new job. We’re facing different obstacles, and we’re both dealing with the stress involved with each. That has definitely had some negative impact on our relationship.”

“He was in law school for 3 years, and it did have some negative effects on our relationship.”

“Stress of school and work, taking frustrations out on one another at times”

“Sometimes we don’t see each other for 3 or 4 days because I conflicts in schedules. His work, and my commitments.”

“Job expectations, his struggles with finishing his education, his ability to manage real world responsibilities”

**Extended family.** Extended family is a very important factor affecting relational satisfaction in couples. This factor is unique in the sense that when it is positive, it is extremely positive. It was the number one external factor that positively influenced relational satisfaction in couples. Consequently, when it is negative, it appears to be extremely negative. Extended family was the third most influential factor negatively impacting relational satisfaction, behind work/time and finances. Interestingly, some of the positive and negative comments were similar; therefore the quality of the relationship with the family seemed to determine whether the impact was positive or negative, not the behavior itself. For example, moving 1,000 miles away from family was stated multiple times in both the positive and negative impact side. Therefore, it appears that the quality of the relationship, approval or disapproval of the relationship, and access to support (if it is perceived as positive) from the extended family, greatly determines whether the impact is deemed positive or negative.

**Extended family and relational satisfaction.** Frequent themes in this factor include: family acceptance, understanding, and support. There appeared to be some minor content
differences between LGBT and heterosexual responses. LGBT respondents were more likely to talk about the importance of acceptance of the relationship and understanding of their situation than heterosexual couples. Heterosexual couples were more likely to talk about viewing their family as good role models, and practical support, such as babysitting. Other than those small distinctions, the overall benefits of acceptance and support of the relationship appeared to be equally appreciated in all relationship combinations. For this section, I have distinguished between the LGBT responses and Heterosexual responses, in order to better appreciate both their similarities and small differences.

**LGBT extended family and relational satisfaction.**

“Family members being understanding of our situation.”

“His family is very supportive and mine has become more accepting over time.”

“We are accepted as a couple but our families, friends and professional and social worlds.”

“Acceptance from both of our families”

“strong support network within the family we have chosen, my biological family’s support”

“Probably the fact we both have very close and supportive families”

“Encouragement of friends and family."

“Him meeting my family and becoming part of my family unit. Me being introduced to his family and they accepted him and me.”

“Supports would be his parents constant approval of our relationship”

“support from family and church has also been valuable”

“Moving away from family.”

“The love and support of both our families towards our relationship.”
Non-LGBT extended family and relational satisfaction.

“Support on both family’s sides. Good role models.”

“Family support and acceptance by each other’s family”

“Support from our family and friends has really helped keep our relationship together.”

“My extended family loves him, his daughter and her family are supportive and we have fun with all of them.”

“Our parents are highly supportive of our relationship.”

“Watching my grandparents marriage.”

“Moving away from my parents.”

“Having family assist with kids to have some alone time.”

“He comes from a really good, stable, supportive family. Marrying into his family has been really nice. I really couldn’t ask for better in-laws.”

“Positive role models and successful marriages in our families.”

“We also have great family support emotionally and occasionally financially.”

“The strong support system we have built with our families and friends”

“Both of our parents being married for over 35 years. They are such wonderful role models and a great support system when we need to talk.”

“Family. Our family is our greatest strength. They won’t take a side during an argument and the always have been there for us both.”

“Being distanced from poor family relations.”

“Our friends and his family are extremely supportive of our relationship. They comment on how well we complement each other and being accepted by and close to his family is very important to me.”

Extended family and relational dissatisfaction. This section describes the negative impact extended family has on relational satisfaction. Common themes include: lack of acceptance of partner, differences in religion, politics and values, mental health and addictions.
issues in extended family, family trying to drive the couple apart, and poor family boundaries, and stress. On the flip side, being geographically isolated from extended family members who were supportive also contributed to relational dissatisfaction. No major differences were noted between LGBT and Non-LGBT participants in this section, but the responses were separated in order to be consistent with the section above.

**LGBT extended family and relational dissatisfaction.**

“My family is also religiously fundamentalist and they’re convinced we’re going to Hell . . . This makes holidays interesting.”

“spouse’s family’s lack of support”

“Also, he is pretty sensitive so sometimes family issues make him doubt his good relationships.”

“my family that I walked away from. My family was hazardous to my relationship with my wife.”

“We’ve had stressors regarding family health issues that we didn’t agree on, as well as a divorce”

“Both of us are the oldest child in our families and family members attempting to bring us into their crisis”

“Her mother passing away was negative. Her guilt and sleepless nights were hard on us both.”

“lack of familial support, substance abuse in immediate family.”

**LGBT extended family and relational dissatisfaction.**

“She has complained about my mother or even sometimes my father saying things that are judgmental. Both of us have had problems with her family. They can cause stress between us and I have observed them causing her a lot of stress as they have expected her to solve their problems for them.”

“Issues with his family and mine caused us to move 500 miles away from all of them. His family has loads of chemical dependency and mine was very enmeshed. Too much pressure.”

“Moving away from family. (too far from family)”
“Family issues: his family, when they were alive, were big sources of fighting. (My husband had zero boundaries and a lot of pent up emotional crap with them that came out at me. His mother was a total narcissist and became physically infirm the last 7 years of her life and made everyone wait on her and was small and spiteful and demanding. A tyrant . . . )”

My spouse’s mother, sometimes uses passive aggressive behaviors or comments toward me. It makes me less likely to want to spend time with his family.

“My family was resistant to our relationship at first.”

“Partners family and family values, political views”

“My mother is crazy, and she’s (almost) driven a wedge between us.”

“Seeing my family/friends requires 5 hours of travel.”

“Moving 1000 miles away from family”

“Also, while I get along with his family, some of their values I do not agree with and its caused a little stress.”

“My family is not as supportive as I would like for them to be. They see that he is good for me and they admit that, but they resent that this relationship has changed some of my perspectives, which used to align more with theirs.”

“His parents influence, they aren’t the best people to look up to and can some days have a negative impact on us.”

**Friends and relational satisfaction.** The importance of supportive friends was frequently mentioned in conjunction with family as part of the couples’ support network. For the most part this category was overwhelmingly positive and greatly contributed to the couples’ relational satisfaction. Themes such as friend’s support, encouragement, and acceptance dominate this section. There are little differences between the LGBT and Non-LGBT groups in this section. But, there are some responses that are unique to the different groups in the dissatisfaction category. Therefore, the citations are reported by LGBT and Non-LGBT in this section as well.
**LGBT friends and satisfaction.**

“Positive feelings from friends. (Approval of our friends for the relationship.)”

“We have a large community of friends and acquaintances that make our lives feel validated.”

“My friends see the connection and encourage the relationship”

“We have some great friends who are supportive and understanding.”

“friends and making sure we always make time for our own separate friends,”

**Non-LGBT friends and satisfaction.**

“common friendships”

“having friends who have stable marriages”

“Friendships outside of the relationship”

“All, my close female friendships have continued to be very important in helping me navigate the ups and downs of life (relationship included). I think my friends help me be a better partner.”

“Emotional support from our friends.”

“It helps that my friends and family love him and vice versa. I like that other people who I trust agree that he is a great partner for me.”

“wide variety of interests that bring many friends into our lives”

**Friends and dissatisfaction.** There were far fewer responses in which friendships negatively impacted relational satisfaction. But, for those that did occur, there were a few consistent themes. The most frequent response revolved around distrust of the partners’ friends, perhaps due to fears of attraction, or distrust of the friends’ support of the relationship, or friends dominating too much of the partner’s time.

The Mixed-Orientation group, a subgroup of LGBT, reported a higher frequency of feeling threatened by the partner’s friends than all other groups. Mixed orientation marriages or
relationships consist of couple in which at least one partner’s primary sexual orientation is opposite of the relationship in which they are currently involved. Kinsey, a famous sexuality researcher, was famous for the creation of a sexual scale that provided a more nuanced option than strictly heterosexual or homosexual. His scale provides 6 options from which a person may self-identify ranging from exclusively heterosexual (0) to exclusively homosexual (6; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Sloan, 1948). For example, a person in a mixed-orientation relationship may have someone who identifies as exclusively or predominately heterosexual married to a person who is exclusively or predominantly heterosexual. In this situation, one person is in a relationship that is more congruent with their predominate sexual orientation than the other. This can represent some challenges on the part of both partners. Due to the responses below, it appeared that partners in mixed-orientation relationships more frequently felt threatened by their partners’ friends than other relationships. Although a similar theme was also noted in heterosexual couples who felt threatened by their partners’ opposite sex-friends or co-workers, the frequency in which it was reported was much less than the mixed-orientation couples.

**Friendships and relational dissatisfaction in Mixed-Orientation relationships.**

“Being able to trust my spouses friends that also experience SSA.” [SSA = Same Sex Attraction]

“my husband’s gay friends”

“He joined a support group for ssa and his friendships feel as though they take priority over emotion intimacy with me.”

**Friendships and relational dissatisfaction in heterosexual relationships.**

“Her male friends.”

“Friends that try to dominate the time and attention of one of us.”

“friends of both mine and his who voiced negative opinions toward the relationship”
“other guys. Certain “friends””

toxic friend relationships.”

**External Trial’s impact on Relational Satisfaction.** When analyzing the external factors’ impact on relational satisfaction, the category of External Trials emerged. This category ultimately evolved to represent unexpected stress, trials, tragedies, and so forth, that the couple experienced and how it impacted the couple. In the face of External Trials, the majority of the couples displayed a surprising level of resiliency. More frequently than not, the couples were able to overcome stress, trials, and even tragic events and end up even stronger for having weathered the storm together. Interestingly, the External Trial category represented a greater net positive than negative impact on relational satisfaction as a whole. Since the context of the relationship is sometimes helpful to understand the content, the responses are divided into LGBT and Non-LGBT for this category. One sub-category of this section was moving/relocation. It was the most commonly mentioned stressor in this section, yet its net impact was negligible as the responses were equally positive and negative.

**External Trials and Relational Satisfaction.** Common themes in this category demonstrate the closeness a couple developed by overcoming a trauma or obstacle together, whether it was lack of the support from the community, family, or friends, addictions, loss of children or family members, moving, job loss or home loss, and illness.

**LGBT and External Trials.**

“trauma and crisis has brought us both to greater vulnerability. She is in recovery from drugs, and this has brought some criticism from others, but it has made our relationship stronger, more honest, and more communicative. I recently transitioned from FtM, and that has had the same reaction.”

“He has stood with me and been very supportive in the loss of my father to cancer a few months ago and the strife with my biological family since then.”
“Family stress, deaths in family, job challenges - all bring us together”

“a stressor would be when we each went to grad school while working full time but we supported each other through those years; when we entered into a triad 5 years ago”

“the fight against heteronormative culture”

“He has been there for me in emotional times of need again and again. When I have needed him, he has been there.”

“Death of a friend and his supporting me.”

“Stressor would be a loss of a close family member that he was able to comfort me through and we lost a child together which brought us closer together.”

“Financial strain has at times proven to be times when we can really work together, reassuring each other and working as a team to make the necessary changes.”

“trials and difficulties, although initially negative have ended up effecting us positively as we have worked through them together”

“Additional, the death of our infant daughter played positively in our relationship as it both allowed and forced us to draw more closely together.”

“We have stuck together through family members on both sides passing away and were a good support system for each other.”

“My mother passed away and her mother is suffering from Alzheimer’s. We have both been there for each other in ways that I didn’t anticipate.”

**Non-LGBT and External Trials.**

“Through sickness and health; always supportive.”

“Her recent disabilities & health problems have given me opportunity to bond with her in new ways. She requires assistance to donmost simple tasks, & it gives me great pleasure to do those tasks for her to help her & serve her needs.”

“Getting through my doctorate,”

“We lost ALL our money in 1984 when Rob’s business failed. I had closed my practice and we had a new born baby and a 7 year old. It took 10 years to pay off the debt and longer to buy a house as we had lost our house. I was diagnosed with uterine sarcoma in 1990. Terminal diagnosis. I didn’t die, but it was pretty scary.”
“We committed to caring for an elderly parent afflicted with Alzheimer’s, cancer, and age related disabilities. Our opposite personalities came to a balancing point as we complimented and compensated for each other’s strengths and weaknesses as we carried out this commitment far longer than we expected.”

“Death of parents and siblings, job changes, going through pilot trading and graduate school Together.”

“Our house fire. It showed us what is important and what we need to let go. Material things mean nothing. Health, that showed us how much we mean to each other.”

“Loss of jobs, loss of pets, midlife crises, inability to have children . . . We’ve weathered many storms together. but coming through them together is part of it.”

“Being there for one another I have physical disabilities but I know if I was unable to care for myself physically he would be that guy who would still be by my side in sickness and in health”

“Debt and the ability to overcome it.”

“We have faced health issues, child rearing and both of our parents marriages breaking up. It has brought us closer together”

“My cancer reoccurrence has actually effected our relationship for the better! He was and is my rock! Stepped up when I needed him most and never let me down”

“Sometes hard times make you realize what’s important, it isn’t money it’s each other.”

“We had a house fire and got through that together. In the end it made our relationship stronger. Now we have a good home.”

“My husband is a medical resident with a grueling schedule, isn’t home often, and cannot do his ‘share’ of housework. This sounds negative, and it is hard on the relationship because you can’t count on him for much. However, it has been really positive for us because I know how much he gives at work and how little he has left, so every effort and feature means so much more now.”

“Going through problems with friends and family as well as him supporting me after having a year of depression and snapping out of it. He was the reason I had hope.”

“We’ve moved several times to different states/cities. I think moves really show you if you are true partners.”

“I developed epilepsy early on in our relationship. He stayed with me and helped me through the seizures when he didn’t have to.”
“We’ve had a lot of turmoil in our relationship and by practicing communication skills we were able to work through them and that had made us more intimate”

“Getting through financial and familial stress situations makes us stronger and happier.”

“My difficulty in adjusting to changes has positively affected our relationship because I have seen him try to understand and try to do anything to make me feel better.”

“I think living on our own, away from all our family, has affected our relationship positively. We had to learn how to rely on only each other for everything so it has made us a stronger and more independent couple.”

“Being made to work things out no matter what happens has made a huge impact on our relationship.”

“Our child has been battling cancer for nearly 3 years and we have relied on each other more as we have had to be more isolated from people as our son’s immune system was so low.”

“Infertility issues have been a struggle to come to an agreement on as well as the let downs when treatments have been unsuccessful. Overall, I feel it has helped us to grow closer by being able to communicate about our feelings. We were in a car wreck on our honeymoon that has left a lasting impart due to trauma and anxiety. We have had to learn how to be patient with each other and communicate needs and fears.”

**External Trials and Relational Dissatisfaction.**

*LGBT, External trials and relational dissatisfaction.* This subsection included themes regarding the partners’ sexuality and the impact on the relationship, culture and community and impact on the relationship, family pressures, losses etc.

“mixed orientation marriage realities,”

“Fear of coming out”

“Discovering he experienced ssa”

“Death of a family member (my father in law), birth of a new child, serious illness of a family member (mother in law had cancer), my own personal health issues.”

“My wife is considering transitioning and although it doesn’t effect my attraction to her it definitely creates outside stress.”

“The deaths of both our sisters.”
“other people putting pressures on our relationship or bringing up past relationships that we’ve been in”

_Non-LGBT, External trials and relational dissatisfaction._ This section represents a whole lot of different situations and things that stress out or negatively impact the relationship ranging from other people hitting on the partner, death and loss of family members, technology internet, media, comparison to others, illness, wedding planning, road rage, and partner’s hobbies.

“Individuals making inappropriate advances”

“Overwhelming external stresses in life are sometimes expressed in the marriage relationship. Shorter tempers, easier to anger or irritation, etc.”

“Death of family members, relationship with another couple”

“Early and untimely deaths of siblings on both sides, along with death of parents and one miscarriage.”

“social media affair”

“Comparison to others”

“media’s portrayal of ‘perfect’ relationships”

“Living in another country (that is not my own), finances, and immigration issues.”

“His response (or lack thereof) to tough times- death in the family, career related stressors etc-in our relationship make me nervous about our future. He lacks a certain amount of empathy and has trouble expressing his emotions.”

“Deaths in family, me personally being on edge certain days that remind me of that person and him not always being able to understand or support me the way I need”

“Secrets I have kept about my past. My past as a “party girl” and him not being as open about my use of marijuana.”

“Increased responsibility”

“Gossip. Gossip and busy bodies are a killer for a good time or mood. We had someone ruin our announcement that we were pregnant just out of spite.”
“We argue a lot due to language barriers and different expectations.”

“Perspectives of other people regarding our significant age difference; stressors related to his previous marriage;”

“‘dumb drivers’, future decisions”

“Planning a wedding”

“He is constantly on his phone. He cannot put it down. Even at dinner.”

“Moving!!! I hate moving. Don’t do it!!!”

**Previous relationships.** This section primarily discusses the negative impact that previous relationships have on current ones. However, there were a few responses in which the previous relationships have helped them appreciate their current relationship more.

**Previous relationships and relational satisfaction.**

“My first marriage really offered perspective on my second marriage.”

“I think the fact that we both had spouses that cheated and now we’ve found each other and are so happy.”

**Previous relationships and dissatisfaction.** This section primarily refers to the impact of previous relationships on relationships including ex-spouses, co-parenting, step-children, exes, and blended families.

“I was divorced. She wasn’t. The wedding was difficult for her and it still comes up time to time.”

“My partner’s friendships with exes.”

“Expectations of sex from previous relationships and society. Partner was a virgin until marriage, I was not.”

“He has a son living with him and has to communicate occasionally to his former spouse this makes him extremely anxious and has impeded on our relationship occasionally”

“Issues with adult step children”
“Situations with stepchildren”

“My children’s father can be a stressor for us both because we get frustrated at how he treats the kids.”

“Difficulty with parenting a blended family at times”

“He has an 8 year old with his ex-wife. Their custody arrangement has limited our ability to live where we want.”

“My ex - I was previously in a homosexual relationship and we had 2 children together. Because of the kids we have both committed to stay on good terms but it has been difficult because she still wants us to get back together and is unaccepting of him”

**Pets/Home.** This section primarily refers to the external pressure pets, home ownership, and living situations puts on the family. This section is sometimes positive and sometimes negative.

**Pets/Home and Relational Satisfaction.** Frequent ideas included: getting pets together, building/buying a home together.

“we have two dogs that make us feel like we’re one big happy family.”

“having a dog and a nice house”

**Pets/Home and Relational Dissatisfaction.** Frequent terms include buying or building a house, problematic living situations, pets that pre-existed the relationship, and house emergencies.

“Our previous living situation was difficult due to problems with the conditions and the landlord.”

“Pets we both had prior to our relationship and learning how to share the responsibility of them. buying a home. His large dog being in the house constantly.”

“Our ability to handle stressful situations- like buying a house and the basement flooding.”

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Mental Health/Health/Aging. The mental health/health/aging factor primarily describes the way poor health, mental health or aging negatively impact the relationship. There are a few respondents who reported gratitude to improved mental health, or general good health relative to their age as a positive influence.

Mental Health/Health/Aging and Relational Satisfaction.

“He is no longer clinically depressed”

“have enjoyed reasonably good health.”

“Stress would be the aging process although we are both incredibly healthy for our ages.”

Mental Health/Health/Aging and Relational Dissatisfaction. This section frequently describes poor mental health, illness of partner, self or family members, and the negative impacts of aging on the couple. Frequent terms include: depression, anxiety, PTSD cancer, chronic poor health, infertility, mental illness, and aging.

“My wife was diagnosed with a chronic illness, including chronic pain, 2 years ago. I am her primary caregiver (she is only 27, and I am 31), and we are also now a single income family because she is now unable to work. My testosterone has changed some of my reactions or personality in some small but significant ways, and navigating that has been a challenge. Her physical health affects every piece of our relationship. Financial struggles, mental health, our social life, everything. It has made us a stronger couple, but it is the hardest thing on our relationship and both of our overall happiness and frustration levels with each other and with life.”

“My declining health. It often makes me feel as if I don’t contribute much to the relationship although he strongly disagrees.”

“Aging. He is turning into an elderly man right in front of me, while I, in the meantime am struggling with middle age. At ages 69 and 56 the age gap is much more pronounced”

“The extent of her health & disability, but not in the way you might think. I feel a great amount of sorrow that she went from being the most active person I know to being mostly bedridden. It’s not sorrow for myself or lost opportunities, its a shared sorrow for the pain & limitations she now faces. I wish I could take her suffering on myself so as to alleviate it from her.”
“For sex, I have medical issues that make relations painful and near impossible, so that is causing stress until we can get the money for surgery”

“My wife has extreme control and narcissism issues resulting from childhood abuse, and these are especially bad when there are external stresses.. my own personal health issues.”

“Poor health. Discussions about retirement and fear of not having enough in pension to make it through.”

“Our life goals have been challenged by my progressive and debilitating illness. We see the world, religion, politics, differently now than when we were young.”

“Financial, his PTSD, my anxiety over PTSD, his health, and finances. These issues have defined our married and engaged life as they have been present since 5 months of initially meeting. He got physically sick around this time..Chronic illness, my anxiety”

“I also have a lot of health problems for my age-this limits my energy level and the activities that we can do but we found ways to deal with it. Going through seasonal depressions can be hard on a relationship too-its hard to live with someone when you want to isolate yourself.”

**Addictions/Recovery.** Whereas active addiction had a negative impact on relational satisfaction, being in good recovery had a positive influence. Frequent themes in this section included the impact of the partner’s addiction on the family, addiction in the extended family, and recovery from addiction.

**Recovery and Relational Satisfaction.** Recovery positively impacted relational satisfaction.

“She is in recovery from drugs, and this has brought some criticism from others, but it has made our relationship stronger, more honest, and more communicative”

“Sobriety. 23 years for me, 12 for him.”

“We are both sober and actively involved in recovery.”

**Addiction and Relational Dissatisfaction.** Several addictions were referred to in this section. The most common addiction was sex and porn addiction, followed by alcohol, gambling
and various other substances. The impact of the addiction included self-report, concerns about the partner, extended family, and children.

“Gambling, pornography, drug use”

“unwanted emotional affairs, bullying, entitlement, arrogance, sarcasm, manipulation, deceit, infidelity, sex addiction, rage, alcoholism.”

“The infidelity was brutal, multiple escorts etc, much lying and deceit through years of our marriage”

“My husband is a sex addict and I learned of this in 2013. He has had multiple affairs and is addicted to masturbation and pornography. He is working on recovery, but the trauma of this realization is something that I work with everyday.”

“substance abuse in immediate family.”

attempt to stop using nicotine.

“Spouse is an addict which limits my social fun.”

**Social community support.** This subtheme was predominantly expressed among LGBT participants. Although a few Non-LGBT participants talked about the importance of community, it was not a prevalent theme among that group. LGBT participants much more frequently discussed the importance of acceptance and support at the community and social level as positive, whereas in areas where they felt more isolated or judged, it negatively affected the couples’ relational satisfaction. Due to the paucity of Non-LGBT responses, only LGBT perspectives are presented below.

**Social/Community Support and Relational Satisfaction in the LGBT Community.**

Frequent themes included: legal and social acceptance/support, and sense of community.

“We live in Austin, which is a rather liberal, supportive environment.”

“The widespread acceptance, for the most part, of gay relationships has had a large impact on our public lives. We are accepted as a couple but our families, friends and professional and social worlds.”
“Legal status - being able to be married and have benefits has been hugely supportive.”

“Women’s community.”

“The change in lgbt laws, including social acceptance.”

“Good social network”

_Social/Community Support and Relational Dissatisfaction in the LGBT Community._

“We live in Texas and when we leave the Austin area you can’t help but feel the conservative nature of the state and that means an awful lot of people don’t approve of a gay relationship.”

“immigration policy; discrimination”

“Having to come to terms that we loved each other, who happened to be the same sex, and wrap our heads around it. I’ve caught her making statements such as, “if we were a heterosexual couple we would have been married by now.” It took time to accept that we love each other, mainly due to society and religion.”

“Generalized homophobia. Heterosexual, misogynistic expectations about what roles two people in a relationship should be filling.”

**Therapy.** The impact of therapy and relational satisfaction was exclusively limited to a positive impact. Frequent themes included: improvement in communication styles, benefiting from individual as well as couples’ therapy as well as group or intensive therapy experiences which positively impacted the relationship.

“We didn’t have good communication styles until we went to counseling,”

“Talking with a therapist helped a lot with not only repairing our relationship but to also strengthen it.”

“Individual and couples therapy”

“Counseling, appropriate literature”

“Counseling about how to talk about feelings.”

“Our therapist,…… Without her, we would not have made it.”
“I have participated in some amazing therapy groups and have built a ‘tribe’ of women to support me and the needs that cannot be met by my husband currently.”

**Statistical Analysis of Qualitative Factors**

**Commitment Scale**

Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement to the statement “I am committed to my relationship” (See appendix A). They were given a 7-point Likert-like, bipolar scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*. Similar to the Relational Satisfaction (RS) score, the Commitment Scale data were highly skewed in favor of couples who were very committed. In order to adjust for the skewness of the data, the variable was collapsed from 7 into 3 categories: less committed (1–4), \( N = 14 \), Committed (4–5, \( N = 50 \)) and Very Committed (7, \( N = 339 \)). This reduced the skewness of the data from -4.205 to -2.471 (See Table 4). All the calculations including commitment scale were run using the adjusted Commitment scale score.

Correlations between the two Likert-type questions reflecting relational satisfaction and commitment scale were run. Relational Satisfaction (RS) and Commitment Scale were weakly positively correlated \( r(452) = .27, p < .001 \). Although this is a relatively weak correlation, it is possibly a reflection of the impact of the restricted range of the reported variables because the highest proportion of answers for both responses were in the 6–7 range.

**Table 4**

*Commitment Scale Data Transformations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N (453)</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Mean ± SD</th>
<th>Kurtosis (SE)</th>
<th>Skewness (SE)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commitment Scale</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>6.67±1.01</td>
<td>18.90 (.24)</td>
<td>-4.21 (.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment Scale Reduced</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>3.81±.02</td>
<td>5.41 (.25)</td>
<td>-2.47 (.12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Relational Satisfaction and Qualitative Factors

The qualitative data was transposed into numerical values in order to statistically analyze the impact of the Qualitative Factors on Relational Satisfaction. Each statement under the coded themes were analyzed and given a value of 0 if there were no data, +1 if the comment was positive, -1 if the comment was negative. Some participants mentioned both positive and negative information under the same theme, therefore their data canceled itself out and it was given a value of 0.

Correlations between Relational Satisfaction and the Qualitative Factors were run. In order to reduce the number of analyses and consequent error, we eliminated Internal Factors from the analysis due to the amount of overlap observed from the qualitative analysis. A threshold of 10% of the sample, or less than 45 mentions, was implemented upon consultation with an expert in the field to determine the number of mentions sufficient to include in the results. Consequently, Pets/Home, Distance, Previous Relationships, and Therapy were removed from the analysis because they failed to meet the threshold of at least 10% of the sample mentioning the theme (less than 45 mentions). Therefore, the correlations between the following Qualitative Factors and Relational Satisfaction were run: Emotional Intimacy/Support, Communication, Extended Family, Finances, Work/School/Time, Leisure Time, External Trials, Parenting, Compatibility, Physical Intimacy, Friends, Religion/Values, Hard work/Commitment, Domestic, Mental Health/Health and Aging, Social Support, Addiction/Recovery and Infidelity. Although Social Support (Kurdek, 1992), Addiction/Recovery (Homish et al., 2009; Kelly et al., 2000), and Infidelity (Atkins, Baucom, & Jacobson, 2001; Blow & Hartnett, 2005) failed to meet the threshold, these factors were retained due to the substantial impact these factors would likely have on Relational Satisfaction, even though only a small percentage of the population reported
these experiences. We hypothesized that the low frequency of these factors may have been due to a skewed sample in which we had a very high percentage of Very Satisfied participants. The literature also suggests that Social Support is especially important to the LGBT populations (Kurdek, 1992); therefore this factor was also retained for analysis. The results are presented in Table 5.

All correlations observed between variables in the data set were weak. This is likely due to the restricted range among both the Relational Satisfaction Variable (1-3) and Qualitative variables (-1, 0 +1). Although the correlations were weak, several significant differences were observed. A Bonferroni correction was applied to the correlations due to the exploratory nature of the data, resulting in \( p = .003 \) (\( p = .05/18 \)) to reach significance. Relational Satisfaction was positively correlated with Emotional Support (\( r(451) = .16, p < .01 \)), and negatively correlated with Infidelity \( r(451) = -.17, p < .01 \).

Despite failing to meet statistical significance, several other categories have a practically significant correlation, and thus remain candidates for future investigations of their relations with relational satisfaction. Specifically, future studies should also include Communication, Hard Work/Commitment and Addiction/Recovery better understand their potential impact on relational satisfaction.
### Table 5

**Relational Satisfaction and Qualitative Factors Correlation Table (N=450)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
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<td>-.04</td>
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<td>.05</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<td>15. Addictions/Recovery</td>
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<td>.03</td>
<td>-.05</td>
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<td>17. Mental Health/Aging</td>
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<td>-.02</td>
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<td>.02</td>
<td>.13†</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

† Practically significant due to small, but meaningful correlation size.

* Statistically significant at the $p < .003$ Bonferroni-corrected level (2-tailed)
Research Question 3

Do the factors identified in research question two differ by the demographic groups delineated in research question one: gender, sexual orientation, length of relationship, parenthood, social economic status (SES), education level and Relational Status? Due to the exploratory nature of the study, a Bonferroni adjustment of $p = .05/7 = .007$ was applied to the data. The results are presented below.

Gender

The results from a One-Way MANOVA where Gender is the Independent Variable and the Qualitative Factors are the Dependent Variables are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infidelity</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>(2, 445)</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure Time</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>(2, 445)</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious/Morals</td>
<td>7.03</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>(2, 445)</td>
<td>.001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>(2, 445)</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>(2, 445)</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compatibility</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>(2, 445)</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment/Hard Work</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>(2, 445)</td>
<td>.29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
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<td>.012†</td>
<td>(2, 445)</td>
<td>.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional Support</td>
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<td>.018†</td>
<td>(2, 445)</td>
<td>.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work/Time</td>
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<td>.015†</td>
<td>(2, 445)</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finances</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>(2, 445)</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended Family</td>
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<td>.002</td>
<td>(2, 445)</td>
<td>.60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
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<td>.003</td>
<td>(2, 445)</td>
<td>.54</td>
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<td>Stress/Trials</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>(2, 445)</td>
<td>.42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Addictions/Recovery</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>(2, 445)</td>
<td>.45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social/Community Support</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>(2, 445)</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/Aging</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>(2, 445)</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

† Practically significant due to Cohen’s (1998) small, but meaningful effect size.

* Statistically significant at the $p < .007$ Bonferroni-corrected level (2-tailed)
Religion/Morals were the only qualitative factors that was significant and had a small effect size of $n^2 = .031$. However, the categories of communication, emotional support, and work/time were practically significant and had small, but notable effect sizes, therefore they should also be considered in future research to determine their potential impact on relational satisfaction. The mean impact of religion and emotional support on relational satisfaction seemed to be lower for men than women (Religion [Men $M = -.0217, SD = .147$ and Women $M = -.0028, SD = .341$]; Emotional Support [Men $M = -.0761, SD = .425$ and Women $M = .0425, SD = .400$]). Women appeared to be more negatively impacted by Work/School/Time than men (Women $M = -.2125, SD = .546$ and Men $M = -.1848, SD = .512$).

**Sexual Orientation**

The results from a One-Way MANOVA where Sexual Orientation is the Independent Variable and the Qualitative Factors are the Dependent Variables are presented in Table 7. Tukey Post Hoc tests revealed that the only significant finding observed in the data was infidelity more negatively impacted the relational satisfaction of Mixed Orientation Relationships than all other groups ($F_{(3,439)} = 7.848, p < .001, n^2 = .051$). Mixed Orientation couples score was $M = -.18, SD = .390$ compared to Heterosexuals ($M = -.03, SD = .161$), Homosexual and Lesbian couples’ scores were identical. Several other factors were practically significant due to small, but notable effect sizes according to Cohen (1998) including leisure time, domestic, compatibility, emotional support, finances, extended family, stress/trial, and health/aging that could potentially impact relational satisfaction by sexual orientation; therefore further exploration of the impact of sexual orientation on relational satisfaction is merited.
Table 7

Sexual Orientation and Qualitative Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
<th>df</th>
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</thead>
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<td>(3, 439)</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
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<td>Religious/Morals</td>
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<td>.005</td>
<td>(3, 439)</td>
<td>.97</td>
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<td>Domestic</td>
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<td>.012†</td>
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<td>.25</td>
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<td>Parenting</td>
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<td>.031†</td>
<td>(3, 439)</td>
<td>.35</td>
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<td>Commitment/Hard Work</td>
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<td>(3, 439)</td>
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<td>.017†</td>
<td>(3, 439)</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work/Time</td>
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<td>.005</td>
<td>(3, 439)</td>
<td>.66</td>
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<td>Finances</td>
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<td>.57</td>
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<td>Friends</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>(3, 439)</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress/Trials</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.010†</td>
<td>(3, 439)</td>
<td>.65</td>
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<td>Addictions/Recovery</td>
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<td>.008</td>
<td>(3, 439)</td>
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<td>Social/Community Support</td>
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<td>Health/Aging</td>
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<td>.012†</td>
<td>(3, 439)</td>
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</table>

† Practically significant due to Cohen’s (1998) small, but meaningful effect size.

* Statistically significant at the $p < .001$

Parenthood

The results from a One-Way MANOVA where Presence of Children is the Independent Variable and the Qualitative Factors are the Dependent Variables are presented in Table 8.
Table 8

*Presence of Children and Qualitative Factors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<td>Parenting</td>
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<td>.000</td>
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<td>.79</td>
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<td>Communication</td>
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<td>.034†</td>
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<td>Work/Time</td>
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<td>.54</td>
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<td>Finances</td>
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<td>.000</td>
<td>(1, 448)</td>
<td>.65</td>
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*= Significant according to Bonferroni Adjustment of p=.007.
†= Practically significant due to Cohen’s (1998) small, but meaningful effect size.

Parenthood status negatively impacted the roles of communication (p < .001) and friends (p < .001) in relational satisfaction (see Table 9). Infidelity, although insignificant, had a small, but notable effect size of $n^2 = .015$, in which the relational satisfaction of parents was more likely to be negatively affected by infidelity than non-parents. The role of Extended Family in relational satisfaction was positively, although not significantly, associated with parenthood. Although the roles of Infidelity and Extended Family in relational satisfaction were not significant with the Bonferroni correction, they both had a small but notable effect size (Infidelity $n^2 = .015$, Extended Family $n^2 = .012$) and therefore should be considered in future
studies to confirm whether they are impacted by parenthood, or if it was an artifact of the exploratory nature of this study.

Table 9

*MANOVA Comparisons of Parents v/s Non-Parents by Qualitative Factors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Parental Status</th>
<th>Mean ± SD</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infidelity</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>-.05 ± .22</td>
<td>p = .009†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Parent</td>
<td>-.01 ± .10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>.30 ± .58</td>
<td>p &lt; .001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Parent</td>
<td>.51 ± .55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended Family</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>.06 ± .49</td>
<td>p = .021†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Parent</td>
<td>.17 ± .55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>.06 ± .34</td>
<td>p = .001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Parent</td>
<td>.19 ± .39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*= Significant according to Bonferroni Adjustment of p=.007.
†= Practically significant due to Cohen’s (1998) small, but meaningful effect size.

**Length of Relationship**

Pearson’s r correlations were run between Length of Relationship and the Qualitative Factors. Length of relationship was weakly negatively correlated with communication $r(451) = -.126, p = .001$.

**Household Income (SES)**

Pearson’s r correlations were run between Household Income and the Qualitative Factors. There were no significant correlations between SES and any of the Qualitative Factors, including finances.
Relational Status

The results from a One-Way MANOVA where Relational Status is the Independent Variable and the Qualitative Factors are the Dependent Variables are presented in Table 10.

Table 10

Relational Status and Qualitative Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infidelity</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>.012†</td>
<td>(3, 444)</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure Time</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>(3, 444)</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious/Morals</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>(3, 444)</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>(3, 444)</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>(3, 444)</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compatibility</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>(3, 444)</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment/Hard Work</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>(3, 444)</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>5.31</td>
<td>.035†</td>
<td>(3, 444)</td>
<td>.001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Support</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>.024†</td>
<td>(3, 444)</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work/Time</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>(3, 444)</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finances</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>.015†</td>
<td>(3, 444)</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended Family</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>(3, 444)</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>.011†</td>
<td>(3, 444)</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress/Trials</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>(3, 444)</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addictions/Recovery</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>.010†</td>
<td>(3, 444)</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/Community Support</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>.017†</td>
<td>(3, 444)</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/Aging</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>(3, 444)</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant according to Bonferroni Adjustment of p=.007.
†= Practically significant due to Cohen’s (1998) small, but meaningful effect size.

Tukey HSD Post Hoc tests suggest that Married couples more negatively experience the role of communication in relational satisfaction (M = .3345, SD = .5642) than both Cohabitating (M = .5591, SD = .57997) and Non-Cohabitating Couples (M = .5946, SD = .55073). Also, a small but notable effect size was observed for Cohabitating couples (η² = .024) who reported a stronger role of Emotional Support toward relational satisfaction (M =.12901, SD = .39634) than Married couples (M = -.02361, SD = .40687); though this result was not statistically significant,
the practically significant effect size makes it worthy of further exploration. Infidelity, finances, friends, addiction/recovery, and social/community support had small, but notable, practically significant effect sizes also make these factors worth further investigation into their potential impact.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses some of the implications of the findings reported in Chapter 4. It organizes the discussion by research question. The chapter ends by presenting the overall findings, trends, and implications. Conclusions, limitations, as well as suggestions for future research are also presented.

Discussion and Implications of Research Question 1

Research Question 1: Are there any differences in relational satisfaction according to demographic information, specifically: gender, sexual orientation, length of relationship, whether or not they have children, social economic status, education level, or relationship status?

No demographic factors significantly impacted Relational Satisfaction scores. Two factors, Sexual Orientation and Length of Relationship, had small but notable effect sizes according to Cohen’s (1988) criteria for strength of effect sizes, but nonetheless did not meet the Bonferroni-adjusted critical value of $p < .007$. Therefore they cannot be considered statistically significant in the context of the present study. Given their notable effect sizes and the exploratory nature of this investigation, further research exploring the potential impact Sexual Orientation and Length of Relationship may have on Relational Satisfaction is merited.

It is interesting to note that demographic variables alone appeared to have very little impact on relational satisfaction. These findings differ from the literature review, which suggested that Social Economic Status, Relationship Status, Education Level, Gender, and potentially Race may influence relational satisfaction (Conger et al., 1990; Wang, 2015; Wilcox et al., 2015). Due to insufficient data, race was excluded from the variables in this study. It is unclear as to why this study found no impact of demographic information on relational
satisfaction while previous studies suggested that these factors influence it. The primary hypothesis for these findings is possibly due to limitations in the sampling as well as survey construction of this study. These ideas are discussed further in the following paragraph.

One of the most surprising non-findings in this study was the fact that relationship status (married, cohabitating, etc.) did not differ significantly from each other among the various factors including relational satisfaction and commitment. There were also no obvious distinctions between the themes mentioned in the cohabitating versus other relational groups in the qualitative data. The literature has consistently reported that cohabitating couples tend to be less stable, less committed, and less satisfied sexually than their married counterparts (Whitehead & Popenoe, 2001; Stanley, 2005; Wilcox et al., 2005). It is unclear why no differences were observed in this study. One of the reasons for this finding may be that the couples who answered the survey tended to be very satisfied and committed. Therefore, it was not a representative sample of all couples’ experiences. The cohabitating and married couples that answered the survey may have been more dedicated to the relationship (and therefore more similar) than those who chose not to answer. The open ended nature of the study may not have asked specific enough questions regarding commitment, dedication, sexual satisfaction, and so forth, to distinguish the difference. Only two single-item Likert-like scales were provided to measure relational satisfaction and commitment level. All other information was collected through open-ended narratives. The limitation of these narratives may be that the couples may not have thought to discuss certain areas that are important to them. The absence of a commentary does not necessarily mean that it is not important to the participant. Therefore, it may be necessary to ask more specific questions regarding certain content areas to get a better sense of its true level of significance to the couple. The value that this study provides is that it identifies some of the
most salient factors that appear to impact relational satisfaction. Further research may utilize these factors to create more specific questions about each factor in order to get a better understanding of which factors have the greatest impact. The specificity of a questionnaire like this will reduce the likelihood that data omission will skew the data. Furthermore, surveys that asked more detailed questions about the commitment level, individual dedication, as well as future plans of the couple (marriage versus remaining cohabitating) may have revealed more in-group differences.

The absence of Social Economic Status (SES) as a predictor for Relational Satisfaction was interesting to the researcher due to implications in the literature that SES was predictive of financial and relational stress. Although conflict around finances and financial stress were frequently reported in the data set, it appears that these challenges were less related to household income than other factors. This may indicate that the issue is really management of finances, rather than the actual money coming into the household that is the greatest stressor. Similarly, Kerkmann et al. (2000) found financial management behaviors, financial problems, and perceptions of the magnitude of problems and how well the financial problems were managed, predicted 15% of the marital satisfaction in newlywed college students. Further studies may benefit from asking questions regarding financial agreement, perceptions, and money handling skills to better understand the impact of finances on relational satisfaction.

The lack of findings of demographic influences on Relational Satisfaction may suggest that Relational Satisfaction is more about the relationship itself than the demographic characteristics that define the couple. In essence, the greater impact on relational satisfaction may be how the needs (emotional, physical, etc.) are handled/met within the relationship, irrespective of Social Economic Status, education, gender, race or sexual orientation. Further
research to validate the impact, or lack thereof, of demographics and its potential influence on Relational Satisfaction is warranted.

Discussion and Implications of Research Question 2

Research Question 2: What factors (internal, external or relational) negatively or positively influence relational satisfaction?

Research question 2 was analyzed by coding qualitative data as well as running statistical analysis of the impact of the qualitatively-derived factors on relational satisfaction. Relational Satisfaction was positively correlated with Emotional Support, and negatively correlated with Infidelity. Consistent with the qualitative data observed in the hard work/commitment theme, the Likert-like commitment scale also demonstrated a significant positive correlation with Relational Satisfaction. These results are all consistent with the themes reported in the Qualitative findings.

Although the majority of the sample reported being happy in their relationships, quite a bit of information, both positive and negative, was provided by the participants on factors that impact relational satisfaction. Therefore, it seems that the Global Relational Satisfaction scale, or how the couple thought of their relationship as a whole, appeared to be more immune to the negative factors than the researcher anticipated. This calls into question whether global satisfaction scores are an accurate assessment of the relationship, or are global scores more susceptible to social desirability. Would breaking down the assessment into some of the important subcategories that were identified from the qualitative approach provide a more accurate picture of where the couple really is? Further research comparing individual factors to global relational satisfaction scores would provide better insight into the validity of utilizing
global measures versus individual subthemes, or both, for accurate assessments of relational satisfaction.

**Individual Factors**

After analyzing the data, it appeared to the researcher that the Individual Personality Trait factors were at times distinct from, and yet highly influenced the relational factors in their corresponding categories. For example if one or both partners has a “kind” personality, it was common to have the respondent mention kindness, or a form thereof, in a relational way. In fact, the open-ended nature of the questions may result in the participant responding with “kindness” without further explanation. In these situations, it was frequently difficult to decipher if the participant was referring to a personality trait or a quality found within the relationship. Also, since the study did not have the respondents take a Big Five personality assessment, it was difficult to tell whether the responses were reflecting personality traits versus qualities exhibited within the relationship, but were not consistent elsewhere. For example, a person who is generally impatient with others may be able to exhibit patience when working with his or her young children. Therefore, patience, in this situation, is more reflective of a quality within the relationship than the person’s personality type. This was one of the major limitations of the study, making it challenging to determine the impact of individual versus relational factors on relational satisfaction and how much they may have overlapped. The lack of confirmatory personality assessments, and overlap between related relational codes made the individual factors of questionable validity in this study. Additionally, the open-ended questioning in this study, along with the anonymous nature of the responses, made it impossible to know, or to confirm or clarify this information with respondents. Future studies interested in the impact of personality versus relational factors may want to ask more specific questions about personality versus
relational qualities to better decipher, which the participant was discussing. It would also be helpful to collect data on couples and have each partner take a personality assessment in addition to answering the questions to better distinguish their impact.

The individual personality factors from the Big Five Personality Theory that most influenced Relational Satisfaction pertained to Factor II, Agreeableness. The most frequent traits reported were: kind, supportive, trust, respect, affectionate, loving, attentive, and forgiving. These traits frequently overlapped with the Relational Factor of Emotional Intimacy/Support, either by the participant mentioning a personality trait and a similar relational factor, or by the fact that it was impossible to distinguish whether their response was individualistic or relational in nature.

Factor IV, Conscientiousness, which addresses how reliable or dependable a person is, also appeared to have a strong presence in the Relational category as these factors were also mentioned by feeling supported in running the home, parenting, as well as feeling emotionally supported by being able to depend on their partner in practical ways which had emotional rewards. Factor I, Extroversion, which was primarily represented by sense of humor, fun and spontaneity, may also be represented in the relational factor, Leisure Time. Emotional Stability, which primarily represented mental health issues, frequently presented as a relational stressor that negatively impacted relational satisfaction, rendering the affected partner less available for emotional support, less dependable, or reliable. Factor V, Intellect/Openness, predominately represented intelligence, but occasionally reflected openness to new experiences. This factor appeared to be the most independent from overlap with relational factors of all the personality traits. However, some overlap may also be observed in Compatibility or Leisure Time by couples who love to travel and have new experiences.
Due to the high amount of overlap (similarities in responses) between the Individual and Relational Factors in this study, it appeared unnecessary to assess for the individual factors for novel information. From a researcher or clinician’s perspective, assessing for Big Five Personality factors may be of less value than the relational factors they influence. Additionally, if the clinician is interested in potential interventions to assist the couple, focusing on personality would be less productive than relational factors, since personality tends to be very stable. The areas in which personalities influence relational satisfaction are logically highly likely to impact Relational Factors. For example, persons whose personalities typify kindness, patience, and empathy are likely to also be represented positively in the emotional connection support category in the relational factors. Therefore, for the remainder of the analysis, the researcher focused primarily on the Relational and External Factors and their impact on Relational Satisfaction rather than Individual Factors.

**Relational Factors**

Emotional Intimacy/Support was the number one reported theme that impacted relational satisfaction, followed by communication (which is closely linked to emotional satisfaction).

**Emotional support.** The most striking result in the Relational Factors category is the magnitude of impact the Emotional Intimacy/Support subcategory had on Relational Satisfaction. It appeared that the most important thing for relational satisfaction is to feel supported both emotionally, and functionally by one’s partner. Support seemed to provide a sense of love, safety, and security for the couples that greatly contributed to overall relational satisfaction. The subthemes trust, honesty, and respect contribute to a secure foundation for the couples, and appear to be vital to relational satisfaction. In fact, trust was the most frequently cited individual concept in the study. Interestingly, trust was frequently paired with the idea of
freedom. In relationships where trust was present, couples reported increased freedom to be themselves, be social, and enjoy outside goals while feeling safe and supported by each other. This is strikingly similar to the concept of a Secure Base in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982). The findings seem to validate Johnson, Hunsley, Greenberg, and Schindler’s (1999) assertions that, in adults, the couple relationship becomes the new secure base. As long as there is a secure attachment (highly influenced by trust and emotional support), the couple is free to explore and grow in ways that would not be the case in an anxious or less stable pairing (Johnson et al., 1999). Similarly, the lack of safety and emotional support by the partner was among the most distressing situations for couples, which negatively impacted relational satisfaction.

The subthemes companionship and friendship also positively impacted relational satisfaction as partners expressed the benefit they felt from having a companion to do life with. It likely functions as a protective factor from loneliness and isolation when it is present.

**Communication.** Communication is the second most frequently cited factor impacting relational satisfaction. For example, when a couple has good communication, they tend to be able to resolve conflicts quickly and respectfully. They feel heard, respected, cared about, and ultimately closer for having shared vulnerable feelings with a partner and gained a healthy resolution. Couples who experienced good communication demonstrated solid relational skills and ways to navigate conflict. Some of the positive communication skills reported included: prioritizing time to talk, dedication to work through issues in a respectful way until they are resolved, and learning to compromise or agree to disagree.

**Parenting and relational satisfaction.** The qualitative results revealed both positive and negative impacts of parenthood. The positive comments (69) were greater than the negative ones (57). The positive impacts referred to feeling closer to their partner, feeling increased joy in their
lives due to the presence of the children, and feeling more love towards their partner as they watch them interact with the children in positive ways. The negative impacts included: different parenting styles, difficulty co-parenting with blended families, lack of time or support from partner with kids, infertility and adoption issues, and mental health and addiction issues with the children. Interestingly, the negative comments were more frequently related to the context in which the parenting occurred (blended families, adoption, mental health etc.) rather than the actual relationship; which was more frequently referenced in the positive commentary.

**Expectations, culture and relational satisfaction.** The Domestic subtheme under Relational Factors frequently referred to support around the household. The frequent terms included equality, shared household roles, tasks and chores as well as feeling like equal partners in the home and the relationship. This factor appeared to be the most influenced by current cultural trends than all of the others, causing the researcher to reflect further on the role of culture and Relational Satisfaction. Is it true that equality of chores around the household leads to greater relational satisfaction, or, is it changing cultural expectations, shifting gender and family roles that impact relational satisfaction? It seemed that the largest impact on relational satisfaction was not really whether equality was reached, but to what degree the expectations of the individual/couple was met regarding domestic support. For example, in the 1940s in the US, it probably would have been unlikely for partners to expect equality regarding household chores, finances, and parenting because they were acculturated to different roles for men and women that did not value equality in all areas. Therefore, if equality is the “active ingredient” to Domestic relational satisfaction, it would have been unlikely for couples to have been happy in that era. However, because there was not an expectation for equality at that time, the lack of equality likely had little impact on relational satisfaction. Therefore, it seems possible that whether
expectations are met in an area, rather than the specific area (such as equality), that is the foundational element of relational satisfaction in this, as well as many other factors. Further research is necessary to confirm this hypothesis drawn from the results.

Expectations are formed through an interaction between cultural norms, family roles, individual experiences, personalities, morals, and values. These norms are not created in a vacuum, but rather are in interaction with our environment in which we are surrounded. For example, the almost constant interaction with media through electronic devices, social media, Internet, and so forth, likely has a greater ability to shape how we think and feel as well as expectations for relationships than in previous generations. Consequently, recent studies as well as the qualitative responses indicate that easy access to pornography through electronic devices is having a strong impact on the formation of ones’ sexual preferences and expectations that may negatively impact Sexual and Relational Satisfaction in couples (Perry, 2017). No longer is media just one factor that shapes how we think and feel, but its omnipresence in our life gives it greater and greater impact, depending on the amount of time we spend with these things.

Understanding the role of expectations and its interaction with culture as well as its impact on relational satisfaction among the various Relational and External factors may be helpful for researchers who wish to study relational satisfaction. As long as relational satisfaction surveys assess whether the couples’ expectations are being met in the significant Relational and External Factors, it appears that relational satisfaction can potentially be measured without the need to hyper-focus on the current cultural themes (dual-income households, equality within the relationship). If this is true, the ability to measure impact on relational satisfaction without needing to tailor the tool to the cultural trends and expectations of each group could reduce error among different cultures (i.e., collectivist versus individualistic,
Religions, Regions etc.), increasing validity and generalizability. Essentially, our expectations are an expression of our values. Incorporating too much detail into the assessment (i.e., the role of equality in the marriage) may unintentionally impose the values of the researcher or the culture from which the tool was created upon other groups. Rather than ignoring these important cultural themes, they will naturally be represented under larger relational categories that reflect satisfaction regarding whether their expectations are being met physically and emotionally. This preliminary hypothesis regarding the relationship between expectations, culture, and relational satisfaction requires additional research to test its validity.

**External Factors**

Emotional support and physical security are two of the most influential factors on Relational Satisfaction. Hence the external factors that have the greatest impact are those that are either barriers to, or supportive of, emotional connection/support. For example, the qualitative analysis revealed that extended family has one of the most positive impacts on relational satisfaction when the relationship is supportive. However, when the relationships with extended family are toxic, or they are unsupportive of a partner, it can be the source of great conflict and discontentment within the couple, thereby creating a barrier to emotional connection.

Finances, Work/School/Time, and Leisure Time themes have some similarities in the way they impact families. Financially stable couples are more likely to be able to enjoy more Leisure/Connecting Time and reduced conflict around finances with their partner whereas financial instability and debt tend to function as barriers to emotional and physical stability in several ways. First, it may require one or both partners to work longer hours with conflicting schedules, or stay in jobs with less optimal work environments in order to make ends meet.
Interestingly, financial stability appeared to be less related to Income than management of one’s finances. Financial instability may lead to little quality and connecting time for the couple and family, which was one of the predominant themes observed in the Work/School/Time category. Although career satisfaction had positive impacts, the largest volume of comments in this section centered around excessive busyness and demands on time due to work and school, conflicting schedules, job stress, and toxic work environments. Many of the participants said this meant there was little time or energy that could be devoted to the couple or family. Not surprisingly, the next most important theme was Leisure time. This factor represented the importance of being able to spend time together in various ways. In fact, all the complaints in this area were about barriers that prevented spending enjoyable leisure time together such as financial restrictions, work schedules, and on a few occasions, lack of compatibility around preferences regarding the use of Leisure time. Therefore, enjoyable time together, which is necessary to maintain an emotional connection, improves relational satisfaction.

**Discussion and Implications of Research Question 3**

Research Question 3: Do the factors identified in research question two differ by the demographic groups delineated in research question one?

Few differences among the qualitative groups and demographic information were observed. Gender differences were observed where men valued the role of religion in relational satisfaction less than women. The only difference regarding sexual orientation was that mixed orientation relationships were more likely to experience infidelity more negatively toward their relational satisfaction than any other group.

Parenthood was associated with poorer communication and friend support as factors in relational satisfaction. These observations make sense because parenthood places a lot more
time demands on the couple, likely making it more difficult to find time to communicate as well as be social. Future research exploring the impact of parenthood on relational satisfaction should also consider the length of relationship, relational stage, whether the couple is choosing to be childless or just haven’t had children yet. Significant differences may exist between the couples who choose childlessness rather than those who have not had children yet. Finally, the observation of improved extended family support among parents makes sense as children and grandchildren can frequently bring families together and require more outside assistance to manage the additional responsibilities.

Length of relationship was negatively correlated with the role of communication in relational satisfaction. It is unclear whether this finding is truly reflective of length of relationship, or an artifact of relational stage. Larson (2006) provided a 3 stage model for Marriages which includes: (a) Romantic love, (b) Disillusionment and distraction, and Dissolution or adjustment with resignation or contentment. For example, new couples in the Romantic love stage are more likely to be in a state of limerence, typically dedicate more time to communication, quality leisure time, and may have more patience and energy to dedicate to overcoming struggles than couples in later stages. The disillusionment and distraction stage follows when the “rose colored” glasses and positive projections on the partner begin to subside. The partners tend to notice more of the struggles and differences between them. Also, children, work, and other distractions become more significant at this stage. This leads to stage 3, the Dissolution or adjustment with resignation or contentment. The outcome of this stage depends largely on how the couple navigated the disillusionment and distractions that emerged in stage two. Resilient couples may have adapted and adjusted to meet each other’s needs and move into a new stage of contentment characterized by increased intimacy and connection. Alternatively,
less resilient couples may have decided the differences were too much and they dissolved the relationship, or moved to a more distant, parallel type of relationship (resignation). Therefore, the relationship stage of the couple, and the way the couple navigated the various stages are likely to impact relational satisfaction. Hence, additional research exploring whether length of relationship was really the cause of reduced communication and emotional support compared to relational stage would be beneficial to better understand this finding.

Similar to the results observed in research question 1, Social Economic Status (SES) was not correlated with any of the qualitative factors. Although financial stressors were reported frequently among the qualitative data, level of income did not appear to be protective from those stressors. The lack of influence of SES on financial stressors may have been due to a limitation in the way the study was designed. Another potential rationale may be that the way the couple relates with money and financial decisions is more important than the actual amount of money earned. Further investigation into the impact of SES versus financial management on financial stressors is merited.

Finally, Relational Status (Married versus Cohabitating and Non-Cohabitating) impacted the role of Communication in relational satisfaction. Married couples experienced poor communication playing a larger negative in their relational satisfaction than cohabitating and non-cohabitating couples. These findings appear to contrast themes reported in the literature in which married couples experienced greater relational satisfaction than cohabitating couples (Hymowitz et al., 2013; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986a). It is possible that relational status is also a reflection of relational stage in which newer couples are more likely to be cohabitating than married and may still be more likely to be experiencing the euphoria of the “honeymoon” stage of the relationship than other couples. Therefore, further research into the impact of relational
status, length of relationship, relational stage, and relational satisfaction on qualitative factors in
the relationship is recommended.

**Parenting and Relational Satisfaction Implications**

Qualitative analysis demonstrated both positive and negative impacts of parenthood on relational satisfaction. Statistical analysis of the impact of parenting on relational satisfaction was inconclusive. There was no significant correlation between parenting and relational satisfaction. Additional research in this area would be beneficial to clarify the overall impact.

The mixed results regarding parenthood and relational satisfaction are also observed in the literature. Some literature cites that parenthood has a negative impact on relational satisfaction (Feldman, 2000; Rollins & Fieldman, 1970; Rollins & Cannon, 1974; Twenge et al., 2003); however, there is also evidence in the literature that considering the impact of Parenting through the lens of Relational Satisfaction only may be misleading. There are many obvious reasons why parenting may reduce satisfaction, at least initially. Parenting young children who are very needy may result in sleep deprivation, lack of quality time for the couple due to lack of alone time, financial strain, and the emergence of differing parenting styles that must be navigated. It would make sense that Relational Satisfaction may be reduced simply due to the complexity and stress that is added to the lives of the parents.

Some studies suggest that whereas there are negative impacts of parenthood on Relational Satisfaction, there may be larger increases in overall life satisfaction (Umberson & Gove, 1989). Also, the literature suggests that parenting small children may have a more negative impact than older children (Twenge et al., 2003). Finally satisfaction may increase over the course of the life cycle as children move out and grandchildren come along (Burr, 1970). So, although the presence of children may suppress Relational Satisfaction in the short term, it may have
inconsistent impacts at different times in the lifecycle. Additionally, these scores should be juxtaposed to Life satisfaction scores for couples with and without kids across the life-span for a better understanding of the true impact parenting has on the couple.

**Mixed Orientation Relationships**

Another area of future research is to better understand relational satisfaction in Mixed-Orientation couples to determine how to support them. One of the significant differences identified in the study was that there was a higher probability of infidelity playing a role in these couples’ relational satisfaction compared to all other pairings. Due to the hefty emotional impact of infidelity in any relationship, this may be enough to explain the differences between these couples and other pairings.

As helping professionals, it is important not to place judgment on these couples and disparage their relationship or their choice of partner. There is some harmful language used to refer to these couples by referring to the primarily heterosexual partner as a “beard” and assuming that the predominantly homosexual partner was somehow pressured or shamed into the relationship. This may very well minimize a strong connection/attachment that the couple shares which brought them together. Historically clinicians would have said that homosexual or lesbian couples could not be happy, stable couples. However many recent studies (Kurdek, 1992), including this study, appear to contradict this theory. As societal acceptance of different relational pairings including gay, lesbian, polyamorous, and open relationships appears to be increasing, it is important that we respect and support all couple combinations, including mixed orientation relationships. We should seek to challenge ourselves to find ways to support them in their goals to stay together and thrive as a couple should they present in the therapy room.
Therefore further research into how Mixed Orientation Relationships work and how to support them is merited.

**Implications for Future Research**

The following sections present some preliminary observations and potential explanatory hypotheses gleaned from the qualitative data. Although the information is interesting and merits further discussion in the paper, the author stresses that these preliminary findings are a result of themes identified by responses to the open-ended questions. The author did not systematically set out to understand this potential phenomenon. Therefore targeted and systematic studies to validate or disprove the observations and hypothesis presented below are necessary to test their validity.

**A New Proposed Framework for Understanding the Key Ingredients of Relational Satisfaction**

The following summary is a hypothesis formed by the researcher to explain the many narratives and interactions observed among the various factors from the qualitative analysis and their subthemes regarding relational satisfaction. Confirmatory analyses should be done to check the validity of these observations and the metaphor utilized to summarize the findings/hypothesis of how the qualitative findings fit together. It is important to note that this metaphor is predominately focused on how couples describe what constitutes relational satisfaction and how the different factors seem to work together according to the information provided in the open-ended questionnaire. It does not in any way contradict the quantitative data, which provides more insight into potential factors that impact relational satisfaction rather than define it. For example, sexual orientation, parenthood, and length of relationship are all factors that potentially impact the “key ingredients” for relational satisfaction outlined below; however, they do not
contribute to the definition of it. Furthermore, this is a working hypothesis informed by the data, literature, and clinical experience that requires additional, targeted research to determine its strengths, weaknesses, and validity. Suggestions for future research are provided later in the chapter.

When the qualitative narratives observed in this study are considered as a whole, several key ingredients to Relational Satisfaction seem to emerge. No single factor appears to be “the” necessary ingredient for relational satisfaction; rather, Relational Satisfaction appears to be influenced by a complex interaction of various factors. Therefore, the researcher attempts to summarize the hypothesis formed through the analysis of the narratives of the qualitative analysis. These results are summarized using a metaphor of baking a cake. Every cake needs some basic ingredients (e.g., eggs, sugar, and flour). For relational satisfaction, the basic ingredients appear to be Safety, Stability/Security, and Connection/Support.

**The Cake (Safety, Stability, and Connection/Support)**

The first ingredient in the cake is Safety, which this researcher calls the “vital” ingredient. It represents things that are vital to personal survival such as physical safety (i.e., no physical abuse, safe housing, absence of addiction), emotional safety (no emotional or psychological abuse), and fidelity (infidelity may represent physical [STDs], financial, and emotional lack of safety for the partner). The qualitative codes corresponding to this ingredient include: infidelity, addiction/recovery, and emotional support (negative examples/abuse). There are some similarities between these key ingredients and the first three layers of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs: physiological needs, safety and security, and love and belonging (Maslow, 1943). Although the researcher is not suggesting a particular hierarchy of needs, it appears the presence of these various components is necessary for the formation of the cake (relational
satisfaction). The omission of any of these key ingredients would prevent the cake from forming.

Stability and Security is the “practical” ingredient that represents support and help with many of the practical and functional needs of family life. Stability and Security is represented by sufficient financial means (adequate employment, housing, physical needs met), ability to depend on partner for practical support (dependability, reliability, holding down a job, pitching in when they said they would), and commitment or dedication to the relationship (willingness to work hard when things get tough, attend therapy, resiliency). This ingredient also requires some basic communication skills around practical things; however, these skills may differ from those required for communication around emotional things that requires more vulnerability from the couple. The qualitative codes corresponding to this ingredient include: Domestic, Pets/Home, Parenting, Work, Finances, Compatibility, and Communication (on the more practical level).

Connection/Support is the “enjoyment” ingredient. It represents the things that make life fulfilling including: emotional fulfillment, good communication, intimacy (emotional, spiritual, and physical intimacy), attachment, and connection. It also represents companionship, fun, quality time, leisure time, and quality relationships with partners, kids, pets, family, friends, and the community. The qualitative codes represented by this ingredient include: Leisure time, Communication, Companionship, Physical Intimacy, Emotional Intimacy/Support, Parenting, Friends, Extended Family, Religion and Morals, and Social Support.

If we take the metaphor a step further, we can liken Connection/Support to the eggs in the cake. Although all ingredients are necessary, they function differently. The eggs, like connection/support, work to bond and hold the ingredients together. Without connection/support, the couple is more likely to function like a parallel relationship with little
emotional sharing and accountability, while coordinating the practical things to keep the household running. Therefore, the presence of connection/support differentiates a partner from a roommate, like a bowl of ingredients from a cake.

**The Plate (Foundation of Trust)**

Once the cake is baked, it must be transferred onto a platter from which to serve. This platter represents trust. If the platter is weak (paper plate) or broken, the whole cake will fall apart when you try to serve it. Therefore, in order to keep the cake together, you must have a strong foundation of trust. In fact, trust was the most frequently mentioned individual term from the surveys. Without trust in place, it is unlikely for the individual or couple to feel fully Safe, Stable/Secure, or Connected/Supported.

**The Icing (Perceptions and Expectations)**

Now that the cake is baked and plated, it is ready for the final ingredient, the icing. The icing is critical to the overall satisfaction of the cake. The icing represents the couples’ Perceptions and Expectations regarding the soundness of the platter (trust) and quality of the cake (Safety, Security, Emotional Connection). If the couple perceives that their expectations are being met in all these areas, it is like applying the sweetest icing. In fact, good icing can partially compensate for minor flaws in the cake. However, if the couple perceives that their needs or expectations are unmet, it is like applying spoiled icing to a perfectly good cake and ruining it.

An interesting feature of expectations is that they are more influenced by perceptions than reality. The influence of perception on relational satisfaction has consistently been reported in the literature. For example, one study found that increased spousal materialism (expectations of wealth/materials) was associated with increased perceptions of financial problems, which was
correlated with decreased relational satisfaction. Materialism (expectations) had a stronger impact on the perceptions of financial problems than income level (reality; Dean, Carroll, & Yang, 2007). Saffrey, Bartholomew, Scharfe, Henderson, and Koopman (2003) found that positive perceptions of interpersonal problems were associated with more positive relational functioning in couples. Busby and Gardner (2008) reported that perceptions of empathy have a significant influence on relational satisfaction over time, especially for females and that these findings are consistent with a social constructionist perspective. Ruvolo and Fabin (1999) found social projection, in which couples perceived their partners to be more similar to themselves than they really were, was correlated with a higher degree of emotional intimacy. Several studies have reported a correlation between attributions (perceptions) and marital satisfaction. Fincham, Beach, and Baucom (1987) found that non-distressed couples reported more benign attributions to partners’ behavior than distressed couples. Karney, Bradbury, Fincham, and Sullivan (1994) found that attributions were associated with marital satisfaction, and negative affectivity of one partner increased the likelihood of maladaptive attributions. Further studies ruled out the impact of depression, self-esteem, and initial level of marital satisfaction and revealed a possible causal relationship between attributions and marital satisfaction (Fincham & Bradbury, 1993). Another factor that seems to influence perception, attribution, and relationship quality is a person’s attachment style. Sümer and Cozarelli (2004) found that people with a secure attachment style reported less maladaptive attributions and led to higher level of relationship quality than insecurely attached people. Finally, idealism may play a role in positive perceptions and attributions. Murray, Holmes, and Griffin (1996) found that our perceptions of our partner more strongly affect how we feel about our partner than reality. They found that individuals’ impressions of their partners were more a reflection of their own self-images and ideals rather
than their partner’s self-reported attributes. Furthermore, these idealized perceptions predicted greater relational satisfaction. In summary, the individuals’ positive perceptions (attributes, idealism) positively impacted how the partner was viewed and the meaning attributed to their behaviors, resulting in greater relational satisfaction. Note that it was the meaning applied (attributions and social construction) that changed how the person felt about their partner, more than the actual behavior of the partner.

Another way perceptions may affect relational satisfaction is it may influence the likelihood of positive behaviors towards the partner. For example, Cobb, Davila, and Bradbury (2001) found that newlywed couples with positive perceptions of their partner experienced greater relational satisfaction and were more likely to engage in supportive interactions. Likewise, Adler, Yorgason, Sandberg, and Davis (in press) found that attachment behaviors positively and significantly increased relational satisfaction for both husbands and wives. Therefore, perceptions can affect how we feel about our partner, our behavior towards our partner, and consequently, relational satisfaction.

It is important to note that perceptions and expectations were not specifically coded for in the qualitative data as a separate theme. The main reason for the coding to be done this way was that all of the responses were essentially a measure or commentary of the participant’s perceptions of the state of the relationship regarding the various themes reported. The degree to which the participant was satisfied or dissatisfied with the state of the relationship was primarily captured by their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with respect to the particular theme on which they were commenting. The level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with respect to each theme was likely highly impacted by the individuals’ expectations and the degree to which the relationship was meeting their expectations regarding each theme. Therefore, perceptions and expectations
were not separated as an individual theme like unto other themes such as communication, emotional support, and so forth, primarily because they functioned differently than the qualitative factors identified in the study. Perceptions and expectations were essentially the lens through which the participant viewed and evaluated the relationship, which impacted how they saw each theme, not a separate theme itself. Future research may benefit from specifically asking about the participants’ perceptions, expectations, and degree of satisfaction regarding each theme in order to more clearly measure what they were seeing.

**Perceptions and the past.** Perception is likely highly influenced by our personalities, culture in which we were raised, as well as past experience. Up to this point of the metaphor, satisfaction with the cake has been strictly limited to the quality of cake the couple is baking together. However, the application of perception (icing) to the cake is the place in which the cake is most vulnerable to outside influences. This is especially true in the case of abuse, neglect, and trauma. Partners who have a history of trauma or neglect are more likely to negatively perceive (or project) onto their partners, and perceive the relationship in a more negative light that it may deserve.

The literature suggests that partners of individuals who are trauma survivors may experience increased intrapersonal and interpersonal distress due to secondary trauma effects. The relationships in which one or both of the partners experiences childhood physical or sexual abuse reported significantly lower marital satisfaction, higher individual stress symptoms, and lower family cohesion than unaffected couples (Nelson & Wampler, 2000). Victims of childhood sexual abuse were more likely to experience marital disruption and dissatisfaction in their sexual relationships (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis, & Smith, 1989). The impact of trauma and relational satisfaction is not limited to childhood trauma. In fact, military families in which a
veteran experiences PTSD are more likely to experience clinically significant relational distress including: severe sexual problems, difficulty with intimacy, sleep problems, dissociation, resulting in a higher probability of divorce than non-PTSD veterans and their partners. The degree of distress correlated with the severity of PTSD symptoms, especially emotional numbing (Goff, Crow, Reisbig, & Hamilton, 2007; Riggs, Byrne, Weathers, & Litz, 1998).

**Having your cake and eating it too.** These findings may suggest that unsatisfied partners should first determine to what degree the partner is meeting their expectations in the various areas, and whether or not their expectations are reasonable, or are they being influenced by other factors such as past trauma. In some cases, adjusting the expectations may be like changing the rotten icing for sweet, and may make all the difference in the enjoyment/satisfaction of the cake. This is also the easiest place for individual therapy to intervene and impact the overall relationship. Assessing the degree to which expectations are being met regarding the key ingredients (trust, safety, security, and emotional connection) would provide clinicians and researchers valuable information that can be used to intervene and stabilize the family system.

**Impact of Culture on Relational Satisfaction**

Some of the most prevalent themes reported by the participants in this study indicate that trust, safety, security, and emotional satisfaction are among the most impactful factors to relational satisfaction. Interestingly, these themes are not new to modern day couples, which may suggest that perhaps the major factors in relational satisfaction are immutable and potentially not very sensitive to changing cultural values, relational agreements (monogamous vs. polyamorous), sexual orientation, and demographic variables. Rather, Relational Satisfaction may have more to do with whether the couple feel safe together, have trust and respect,
experience emotional and practical support, can depend and rely on each other when times get
tough, enjoy spending time together, and have good relational skills (communication and conflict
management) rather than changing cultural ideals and themes. This could potentially be
explained by the fact that a relationship, and therefore relational satisfaction, is a human
experience. Although demographics and situations may change, at the core we are all human
beings. Therefore our relational needs may be more stable across cultures and demographics
than the researcher originally imagined. Further studies are necessary to confirm the validity of
the proposed hypothesis gleaned from the results, in which the core factors in relational
satisfaction are primarily based in human needs for connection and support rather than cultural
influences.

**Attachment Theory and Relational Satisfaction**

Human relationships thrive in an environment of trust, safety, stability, and connection.
Since these basic needs are human needs, it would be expected that these needs would remain
fairly stable among cultures, demographics, and shifts in social thinking. Although changes in
culture and environment impact the couple and may stress the couple and their relational skills, it
is ultimately the way in which the couple works together to handle the stresses that impact
relational satisfaction. This was observed in our study where the factor Stress/Trials was found
to have both positive and negative impacts on the couple. At first this was surprising to the
researcher; however, a comparison of the narratives seemed to suggest that the impact (positive
or negative) may have been more closely associated to how the couple handled a stressor, not the
presence of the stressor itself. For example, if the couple responded in a united way to address
the stressor (for instance, health problems, family tragedy, financial crisis) then the relational
satisfaction seemed to be less negatively impacted than in couples that responded in less
supportive ways. The couples that responded in positive ways appeared to demonstrate a resiliency factor that the less satisfied couples seemed to lack. One hypothesis that may explain this preliminary observation is the role of attachment security in the relationship where more securely attached couples fare better than their less secure counterparts. Therefore future research regarding attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982) and how attachment behaviors impact relational satisfaction and security in romantic relationships is merited (Hudson, Fraley, Brumbaugh, & Vicary, 2014; Zeifman & Hazan, 2008) to determine if the potential differences observed are impacted by attachment styles and behaviors.

Some of the common themes that couples reported as negative impacts of Stress/Trials on their relational satisfaction were that they tended to respond in unsupportive ways to each other, failed to communicate, and seemed to be less willing or able to work together to get through the situation. It is important to note, however, that these are preliminary observations gleaned from the data, not information that was systematically targeted for analysis. Therefore, further studies intended to specifically address how couples respond to stress and trials and its impact on relational satisfaction are necessary to determine if these initial observations are accurate.

**Potential Intervention Implications**

One study set to find out how the past (perception of parents’ marriages) impacted relational satisfaction and attachment behaviors in the present (Adler et al., in press). Their findings suggest that attachment behaviors moderated the relationship between the parents’ marriage and marital satisfaction. When perceptions of parents’ marriage were negative, but attachment behaviors were high, marital satisfaction increased. This suggests that positive attachment behaviors between the couple have the potential to counterbalance past negative relational experiences. Increasing the attachment between the couple and frequency of
attachment behaviors would likely increase relational satisfaction. Therefore, attachment focused couples therapies such as Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy developed by Sue Johnson (Johnson, 1986; Johnson, Hunsley, Greenberg, & Schindler, 1999) would be a good fit for the findings regarding the importance of emotional connection/support and communication and an appropriate intervention for improving relational satisfaction and increasing emotional attachment and security in couples.

Another strengths-based approach to mitigating the impact of trauma in the relationship is guiding the couple through the trauma towards Post-Traumatic Growth. Some participants provided information that may represent a potential phenomenon where couples who responded with resiliency to stress/trials in ways that made them stronger reported a positive net impact versus couples who reported a negative impact of stress and trials on the relationship in this study. Post Traumatic Growth has been observed among individuals and couples who have experienced a variety of trauma including: medical conditions, military service, childhood trauma, and relational betrayal trauma (Laaser, Putney, Bundick, Delmonico, & Griffin, 2017; Morrill et al., 2008; Tsai, Sippel, Mota, Southwick, & Pietrzak, 2016; Woodward & Joseph, 2003). Potential interventions to increase Post-Traumatic Growth include mindfulness-based stress reduction, creative arts, and spirituality (Garland, Carlson, Cook, Lansdell, & Speca, 2007, Sheikh, 2008). It is important to note that these observations, which may have some important treatment implications, require further research designed to specifically and systematically evaluate this potential phenomenon in order to determine its validity.

**Conclusions**

The depth and breadth of this large mixed-method study provided much valuable insight from the perspective of the participants as to what impacts and defines relational satisfaction.
The open-ended nature allowed the participants to organically share their perspective of what factors most impact relational satisfaction without being influenced by pre-existing theories and leading questions. This helped the researcher identify significant and potentially significant factors for future research from the quantitative data, which included: gender, sexual orientation, parental status, commitment level, relationship status, and length of relationship. The qualitative data provided a basis for the factors that most likely impact relational satisfaction that should be included in future studies if the researcher is interested in a comprehensive assessment of the factors that impact relational satisfaction. The qualitative factors that were found to significantly or practically significantly (small but notable effect sizes) impact relational satisfaction that merit future exploration include: Infidelity, Religion/Morals, Parenting, Commitment/Hard Work, Communication, Domestic, Compatibility, Work/Time, Emotional Support, Finances, Extended Family, Friends, Stress/Trials, Addictions/Recovery, Social/Community Support, and Health/Aging. Since these factors were not assessed for in a systematic way, it is difficult to determine which factors most impact relational satisfaction, although some preliminary hypotheses may be formed utilizing the frequency of the theme mentioned in this study.

Furthermore, several preliminary interpretations, hypotheses, and theories are presented throughout this chapter in response from the information gleaned from the data. However, these hypotheses and theories require further research to determine their validity. Ideas for future research are presented.

**Limitations**

An exploratory, mixed-method study of this scope is a challenging endeavor. Therefore, it encounters many limitations. The breadth of the study in addition to its exploratory nature increased the probability of finding erroneous results. In order to reduce the likelihood that a
finding is non-significant, a Bonferroni correction was applied to the data. However, the large amount of analyses that were run reduced that critical P value to numbers that were so small (for example, $p = .007$) that the ability to find any significance among the analyses with small effect sizes was extremely small. Therefore, the lack of findings may have more to do with the exploratory design of the study, than the fact that no differences exist. Therefore, researchers should interpret these findings with a bit of caution. Hence, some non-significant findings may still be worth exploring further to validate whether they really do or do not impact relational satisfaction. The researcher recommends further studies to investigate the relationship between relational satisfaction and the various factors that showed practically significant (albeit not statistically significant) effect sizes, including: relationship type (married, cohabitating etc.), sexual orientation, commitment level, finances/financial management, length of relationship versus relationship stage, impact of perceptions and expectations, trust, safety/security, stability, intimacy (connection, emotional support, sexual), communication, companionship/friendship, domestic support, and external factors such as addictions, infidelity, extended family, and work.

One of the limitations of this study is that the sample violated the assumption of normality regarding Relational Satisfaction score. The restricted range of responses in Relational Satisfaction presents serious limitations for the study. Either the majority of couples that are still together are, for the most part, happy, or only happy couples self-selected to take or complete the study. Another potential factor that may have impacted the skewed responses may be social desirability, or the pressure for participants to report more positively than what they truly feel.

Another limitation of this study was the poor response to the race questionnaire of the survey. More than half of the sample skipped the question, making it statistically unwise to
extrapolate the impact of race on relational satisfaction. The literature review indicated that there are some factors, primarily external (SES, culture, etc.) that may influence relational satisfaction across race (Wang, 2015; Wang & Parker, 2014). Therefore, additional research specifically looking at race and the qualitative factors we have identified would be beneficial. However, the findings in this study that relational satisfaction is a human experience and was largely immune from cultural influences causes the researcher to hypothesize that race is not likely to significant impact relational satisfaction. Hence, confirmatory studies to prove or disprove this hypothesis would be valuable.

One of the limitations of the qualitative analysis portion of this study was the data were coded by a single researcher. Further publications utilizing these data should incorporate a second coder to check for inter-coder reliability. To assist in this process moving forward, or promote replication of the findings in this study, a detailed description of the researcher’s process and codes are provided in the Code Book in Appendix B.

The qualitative codes were transcribed into numerical representations in order to validate the qualitative findings through statistical analysis. In order to do this, positive comments in a factor were given a +1 code, negative impacts were -1, and no comment was given 0. However, it was possible that a participant mentioned both positive and negative impacts of a factor (this was especially prevalent in the parenting section) in which case the participant was also given a score of 0, indicating no net impact. This is a limitation in the analysis as a 0 score did not necessarily represent that the factor was not important and there were no data. But, it could also mean that there were conflicting data, which canceled itself out.

Finally, the skewed sample, in which little variability was observed in relational satisfaction and commitment level (predominantly very satisfied and extremely committed), may
have been an artifact of participants “satisficing” their way through the survey, in which they responded in a socially desirable way, or in a way they anticipated the researcher wanted. This factor may have made it more challenging for the researcher to find differences among groups that may exist, but participants do not want to admit to.

In addition to the limitations mentioned above, several limitations were mentioned throughout the chapter. A summary of the limitations included throughout the text is listed below. Please see the related section for a further explanation and interpretation of the limitation observed. In addition to the limitations already discussed in this section, additional limitations included:

1. Exploratory Study that reduced the likelihood of being able to find significant findings due to Bonferroni Correction.
2. Sample: Predominately Caucasian female, with high commitment and relational satisfaction levels.
3. Qualitative analysis—omission of commentary does not necessarily mean that the information isn’t important to the participant. Therefore the prevalence rate does not necessarily indicate level of importance.
4. Qualitative data were coded by a single researcher, lack inter-coder validity test.
5. Overlap between coding of individual (personality) versus relational factors.
6. Less detailed, open-ended nature of survey.
7. The participants in this study were individuals who were in relationships over 1 year, not paired couples. It would be interesting to see what difference, if any, we would see by comparing the perspectives of both partners in a couple. Therefore, future research may consider sampling couples instead of individuals.
Despite the many limitations noted above, this study is still the first of its kind to explore relational satisfaction in modern day couples from a mixed-methods perspective. It also systemically explores individual, relational, and external factors that participants reported impact relational satisfaction. These identified factors can be used to cross check the themes in current assessments, identify any current gaps, or be utilized to inform the design of future studies.

**Future Research Suggestions**

Due to the high amount of overlap between Individual the Relational Factors, it appeared unnecessary to assess for the individual factors for novel information in this study. It is unclear whether this was a limitation of the design of this study. Future studies would benefit from systematic assessment of the Big Five Personality Traits utilizing validated assessment tools and compare those results to the prevalence of these traits being played out within the relationship. This would help determine the extent to which personality influences the relationship and consequently relational satisfaction.

Some of the implications of the study indicated that it might be helpful to interpret the data through the lens of attachment theory. Therefore future studies and assessments may benefit from including formal attachment style and behaviors into the assessment process to determine its impact on relational satisfaction.

Future studies would also benefit from further exploring the way couples work together to manage external stress and trials and how that impacts their overall relational satisfaction. Some potential themes identified in the research may indicate the way the couple work together in stressful situations may influence the impact on the couple, regardless of the nature of the stressor. The way some couples overcame difficult situations and grew closer, exhibiting a form
of post-traumatic growth, may provide some insight into potential treatment interventions and merits future research.

There were some indications that length of relationship, and perhaps relational stage, may influence relational satisfaction. It is possible that couples in the honeymoon stage are more likely to experience better communication and emotional connection than couples in later stages. Therefore, future studies exploring how the length of relationship may influence relational satisfaction would be beneficial to better understand these findings.

**Assessment**

Future research would benefit from recruiting a sample that includes people with poorer relational satisfaction to determine if, or how, they differ from more satisfied participants.

The rich information derived from our primarily *very satisfied* couples suggests that the global scores of relational satisfaction are insufficient to really understand how well a couple is doing. The global scores are more subject to social desirability; therefore a more accurate, and clinically useful measure for relational satisfaction would likely include the subthemes identified in the research, the degree to which the theme positively or negatively influences the relationship, and the degree to which the subtheme meets the expectations of the couple. Since our expectations are largely influenced by our individual personalities, family of origin, cultural influences, and personal preferences, it is possible for each individual in the couple to have very different expectations and satisfaction around the various subthemes. Therefore a quick, but accurate assessment of the most impactful factors influencing relational satisfaction could provide valuable insight to clinicians as well as researchers interested in improving relational satisfaction and designing interventions.
Some of the existing relational satisfaction measures include portions of the themes identified in this study, but the majority largely omits assessing for the impact of some of the significant external factors. Additionally, there has not been any assessment that has been created and validated for all couple configurations including sexual orientation and commitment type. Due to the increasing complexity of family formation in modern-day couples, it would be helpful for future researchers to develop and validate a Relational Satisfaction measure that is applicable and valid for diverse relational pairings. Once these measures have been validated, it appears that the key building blocks for relationships are largely stable, indicating that the measure will be less sensitive to becoming “dated” and inapplicable, as long as the new measure assesses for the major ingredients and perceptions of relational satisfaction rather than focusing on changeable cultural themes.

**Study Summary**

In conclusion, relationships are part of our human experience. Although we all differ by culture and demographics, overall, the participants seemed to show more similarities than differences, regardless of the configuration of the couple (sexual orientation, cohabitating, married), culture, or demographics. The researcher identified a few significant and potentially significant demographic factors that merit further investigation including: gender, sexual orientation, parental status, commitment level, relationship status and length of relationship. The qualitative factors that were found to significantly or practically significantly (small but notable effect sizes) impact relational satisfaction include: Infidelity, Religion/Morals, Parenting, Commitment/Hard Work, Communication, Domestic, Compatibility, Work/Time, Emotional Support, Finances, Extended Family, Friends, Stress/Trials, Addictions/Recovery, Social/Community Support, and Health/Aging. A new framework for understanding the key
ingredients of relational satisfaction is proposed. These ingredients include: Trust, Safety, Stability/Security, Connection/Support, and the degree to which the couples perceived their expectations were being met in these areas. Attachment theory also appeared to be helpful in interpreting the findings in this study. Future research applying attachment theory and behaviors to the key themes observed in this study would be beneficial.
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Appendix A

Relational Satisfaction Survey

Relational Satisfaction Scale. The following range describes the degree of overall happiness in your relationship. The middle point represents the degree of happiness in most relationships.

1. Please select where you fall in your relationship describing the degree of happiness considering your relationship as a whole.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Unhappy (1)</th>
<th>Unhappy (2)</th>
<th>Somewhat Unhappy (3)</th>
<th>Neither Happy nor Unhappy (4)</th>
<th>Somewhat Happy (5)</th>
<th>Happy (6)</th>
<th>Very Happy (7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is your degree of happiness considering your relationship as a whole? (1)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Please explain any additional information that you think would be helpful in understanding your rationale for answering the previous question as you did. ____________________________

3. What aspects of the relationship contribute the most to your overall relationship satisfaction? ____________________________________________________________

4. What initially attracted you to your partner? ____________________________

5. Are these qualities equally attractive to you now? Please explain. __________________

6. Have new qualities emerged that you find more attractive? If so, please describe. ________

7. What external factors (stressors or supports) have affected your overall relational satisfaction positively? ____________________________________________________________

8. What external factors (stressors or supports) have affected your overall relational satisfaction negatively? ____________________________________________________________

9. What causes the most conflict or dissatisfaction in your relationship? Please explain. ____________________________________________________________

10. Please select the button that best describes your agreement with the following statement:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am committed to my relationship. (1)</th>
<th>Strongly agree (19)</th>
<th>Agree (20)</th>
<th>Somewhat agree (21)</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree (22)</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree (23)</th>
<th>Disagree (24)</th>
<th>Strongly disagree (25)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Code Book For Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis was conducted by utilizing Excel to organize codes found within the sample into themes. Qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions utilized a combination of inductive and deductive thematic coding. When applicable, the themes were labeled to match themes already reported in the literature to facilitate the comparing and contrasting of the data.

For the statistical analyses, the qualitative codes were collapsed into themes with conceptually-related terms. The themes were organized into three main categories: internal, relational, and external. These categories were not always mutually exclusive. In some instances, the qualitative data was unclear whether the respondent was talking about the individual or the relationship. For example, a respondent may talk about trust, depending on the context, they may be referring to the trustworthiness of their partner, or the trust within the relationship. Also, the trustworthiness of the partner is likely impact the trust within the relationship, making it difficult for the two categories to be mutually exclusive. Consequently, some covariance among the categories is expected as some of the data was represented in both the internal and relational categories. However, the code was only represented once within the over-arching category, i.e., internal, relational and external. Finally, due to the descriptive nature of the responses, sometimes the response would include themes that were represented in multiple themes. When this occurred, every theme that was mentioned was coded, but the researcher was clear to indicate which part of the response merited inclusion in that theme. No single idea was coded into multiple categories. In order to make more clear, different parts of the responses were highlighted in the column, to ensure separation. Some examples to facilitate replication of results are given below.
Example 1:

“Sense of humor and empathy during problems. All relationships are easy when things go well. We have a knack for weathering the monotony of day to day and do well in personal and family crisis which is a real relationship tester.”

This is a good example when it is difficult to distinguish between the internal and relational codes. Sense of humor and empathy may be individual qualities of each partner, or one partner, or it may be something that is present due to the way the couple works together, making difficult to distinguish what is meant by the statement. Also, empathy is one of the most predominant subthemes in the Emotional Intimacy code in the relational group. Therefore, this segment would be coded as present in both the individual and relationship.

Internal: Factor 1 = Sense of humor Factor 2 = empathy,

Relational: Emotional Intimacy = empathy during problems. All relationships are easy when things go well. We have a knack for weathering the monotony of day to day and do well in personal and family crisis which is a real relationship tester.

   External: External Trials: do well in personal and family crisis

In order to ensure the themes were not multiply represented by an individual, each theme with corresponding data was only reported once per respondent, per category, even if the terms are included in multiple subcategories.

Example 2:

“We have gone to therapy to work on communication. We try to be healthy in all aspects and respect each other in getting healthy as long as it stays within our marriage covenants. We are completely open in communication and fully committed. Our marriage is eternal which allows us to think beyond this earthly trial.”

   Internal: Factor 2: Respect

   Relational: Emotional Intimacy: (respect each other)” We try to be healthy in all aspects and respect each other in getting healthy…”

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Communication: “We have gone to therapy to work on communication… We are completely open in communication . . .”

Hard Work/Commitment: (The sub-theme of Hard Work and commitment level are part of this theme. So this segment could have multiple parts coded here)

“We have gone to therapy to work on communication…. “(note the hard work and dedication of going to therapy to improve the relationship)

“We are completely open in communication and fully committed.” (coded for fully committed)

Religion/Values:

“…marriage covenants.”

“Our marriage is eternal which allows us to think beyond this earthly trial.”

Example 3:

This was given in response to the prompt, what external factors negatively impact your relational satisfaction, consequently, all of these responses fell under the External Factors Category.

“Stress of relocation, job changes, buying a home. Planning a wedding. External family conflict. Pets we both had prior to our relationship and learning how to share the responsibility of them”

External Trials: “Stress of relocation,. . . Planning a wedding”

Pet/Home: “buying a home…. Pets we both had prior to our relationship and learning how to share the responsibility of them”

Work/School/Time: “job changes”

Extended Family: “External family conflict”

The remaining document will be divided into the Internal, Relational and External Factors sections. Each subtheme reported under each factor will be describe along with the most prevalent terms and ideas to facilitate consistent replication of coding for future analysis and agreement between coders.
Internal Factors

The Big Five Personality traits will be used as codes to help organize internal personality factors reported by participants. This was utilized because a substantial research base regarding the five personality factors and associated traits within each factor has been established (Goldberg, 1990; Trapnell & Wiggins, 1990). Therefore, instead of relying on the researcher’s own way of conceptualizing which traits should form a factor, the researcher referred to the factorial analysis represented in Goldberg, 1990 and Trapnell & Wiggins, 1990 to organize the terms describing personality into the correct sub category.

Factor 1—Extraversion. There is one predominant personality factor that overwhelmingly represents this category: sense of humor (46). A sense of fun and spontaneity were the next frequently cited combination (6).

Factor 2—Agreeableness. The Agreeableness Factor 2 was the most frequently mentioned personality factor in both relational satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The most frequently cited subcategories influencing satisfaction included: trust, respect, kind/supportive, affectionate, loving, attentive, faithful/humble and forgiving. The Factor 2 components most influencing dissatisfaction included: temper, untrustworthy, stubborn, controlling, manipulative, impatient, insensitive, unkind, naggy, and lacking vulnerability.

Factor 3—Conscientiousness. This category was primarily represented by how reliable a person was. Reliability/dependability highly influenced relational satisfaction, whereas its absence was the biggest contributor to dissatisfaction. Other factors mentioned related to dissatisfaction were unmotivated/lazy, and money/spending issues.
Factor 4—Emotional Stability. This factor primarily represented the presence or absence mental health/mental illness in the relationship. The presence of mental health disturbances was frequently reported to negatively impact relational satisfaction.

Factor 5—Intellect/Openness. This factor was only mentioned when describing attributes that positively influenced relational satisfaction such as the presence of sophistication and intelligence.

**Relational Factors**

These factors were relational in quality, meaning that, the presence or absence of content in these areas impacted relational satisfaction. This category was reflective of the way in which the couple worked together in each area. The Sub-themes within this category included: Leisure time, Religion/Values, Domestic, Parenting, Compatibility, Commitment level, Communication, Emotional Support, Physical Intimacy and Infidelity.

**Physical Intimacy**

Physical Intimacy represented the couple’s satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the quality or frequency of their physical intimacy. Affection, intimacy, sex and passionate exchanges were perceived to positively impact relational satisfaction. Different preferences in frequency of sex, sex drive, sexual dysfunction, falling out of love, and time constraints were frequently cited as a major source of dissatisfaction in this section.

**Emotional Intimacy**

Emotional Intimacy is comprised of several significant sub-themes that contribute to emotional connection: companionship/friendship, trust/honesty, respect, love/adore, emotional intimacy/support, and open/sharing. This is by far the most frequently mentioned factor that positively influenced relational satisfaction. Conversely, deficits in this area were associated
with poor relational satisfaction and was second in its impact behind poor communication as the most damaging to relational satisfaction.

There are six subthemes observed in the Emotional Support category. The most common of these is Emotional Intimacy/Support, which represents ideas such as: being understood, kindness, connection, empathy, knowing that there is someone there for me, acceptance of each other. The next subtheme was rarely expounded upon, but was frequently mentioned, which is trust and honesty within the relationship. This was also frequently mentioned in conjunction with respect. Trust also played a role in the need for freedoms to be oneself as well as have some healthy autonomy. Companionship and Friendship was another theme observed in this category, which frequently mentioned the importance of being each other’s best friend, companion etc. Additionally the theme of being in love, loving or adoring the partner. Finally, the idea of being emotionally open and sharing with the partner was associated with improved relational satisfaction.

*Emotional Intimacy/Support.* This subtheme primarily describes the level of emotional support and intimacy the couple has. Frequent concepts include the idea of putting each others’ needs and the marriage first, being there for each other, feeling connected, fully accepting each other with all of their strengths and weaknesses, feeling truly “known” and accepted by partner, knowing that their partner would support them and be there for them no matter what. Feeling that the partner is kind, compassionate, understanding, empathetic and accepting were also frequently cited. For example:

“Marriage is top priority, relationship built off of long standing friendship, trust”

“we are always praising and providing compliments to each other,”
“take interest in one another’s family, friends and work. We trust one another and celebrate individual successes. It is important to me to know that we can work through rough patches together as well as enjoy each other’s company and have fun.”

Trust/Honesty. Trust and honesty was the second most frequently cited subtheme under emotional intimacy. Although emotional intimacy is a slightly larger subcategory, no individual term was reported more frequently than trust. Trust also frequently appeared with the concept of freedom. The presence of trust in the relationship appeared to make it easier for either partner to enjoy freedoms within and without the relationship. Freedoms to have other social contacts or participate in individual hobbies which positively influenced satisfaction within the relationship were frequently associated with trust.

“Also trust is another huge factor, you have to establish trust first and foremost before anything else.”

“The aspects that contribute to our overall happiness is the freedom we allow each other to pursue our own goals outside of the relationship. Career and educational goals for both of us are encouraged by each other”

Companionship/Friendship. This subsection primarily refers to the benefits of companionship and the unique friendship the partnership provides and how positively impacts relational satisfaction.

“I look at him and know I could marry him today tomorrow or in 10 years. Over the course of our relationship I’ve gained a best friend that is unlike any other.”

“Having someone to bounce ideas off of, to laugh and joke with, to do things together that we both like, and knowing someone will be there that has my back, will listen and sympathize if I have a bad day, and will be my biggest supporter when I try new things.”

Respect. Similar to trust, respect was rarely elaborated upon, but frequently cited as positively impacting relational satisfaction.

“We are both very independent and respectful of each other. We became friends first and then started dating.”
Loving/Adore. This subtheme is primarily made up of comments that reflect the experience of loving or adoring or being loved and adored by the partner.

“We have enough love to last us 4 lifetimes together and that’s what I truly love most. We love each other through the absolute worst times and through the greatest!!”

“And love. Deep, abiding, unsentimental love. My knowing there is nothing in the world he wouldn’t do for me, if I asked . . .”

Open/Sharing. The final subsection primarily discusses emotional connection and being open and sharing with each other.

“The openness my partner and I have with one another and the ability to just relax with my partner.”

“Being open with one another about our needs and feelings, being honest.”

Emotional Intimacy and Dissatisfaction. Whereas Emotional Intimacy is supportive of Relational Satisfaction, its absence is also correlated with Relational Dissatisfaction. Responses in this theme found that lack of emotional connection was the most frequently cited, followed by dissatisfaction with emotional support, emotional abuse, dishonesty, different emotional needs, insecurity, lack of romance/love, naggy and pressuring. Many of the themes expressed around dissatisfaction include different emotional needs and expectations that aren’t being met, dishonest, lack of trust, lying, lack of effort/support, one partner being emotionally disengaged, distracted or shut off, anger and abrasiveness.

Lack of Emotional Connection. This subsection primarily refers to feeling like a partner is emotionally distant, disconnected, or unavailable.

“He can be stubborn or deny the importance of his feelings.”

“My wife has a difficulty expressing emotion properly. This can cause her to obsess about things”
“His addiction to his cell phone and social media. Very distracting!!!! He is not ever fully present at home bc of the constant “connection to the outside world”

*Lack of Emotional Support/Abuse.* This subtheme covers failure to support emotionally to feeling criticized, nagged, or even emotionally abused.

“My wife says I’m abrasive, and I say she’s sensitive.”

“He can be a bitch . . . naggy, complaining about very small things. He tells everyone I’m the easiest woman to get along with, mostly I think, because I let him bitch. It’s a good thing.”

“Different expectations about what support we need to give each other; about empathy levels of the other person.”

“Partner is constantly angry, yells and is unkind”

*Dishonesty/Lack of Trust.* This subsection primarily refers to the lack of trust, or presence of dishonesty/lies in the relationship.

“constant state of stress and new trauma, dishonesty/lack of vulnerability.”

“Jealousy. Which I equate to lack of trust.”

“when she tries to hide the smallest stuff from me.”

“Him lying to me about what he has done in the past and where he is going and with whom out of fear of me getting mad when in reality I appreciate the honesty”

*Unmet expectations.* This subsection covers ideas from unmet or unrealistic expectations, not feeling cared about or satisfied in various aspects of the relationship.

“I think the love language differences. Not feeling we get those needs met as much as either of us want.”

“I think we are still figuring out how to best support one another through challenges. My style is more focused on emotional support while he is more focused on the practical. So, for example, if I have a hard day at work, I would prefer for him to support me emotionally by listening and empathizing with my problems. He tends to focus more on practical solutions and advice giving.”

“Unrealistic expectations. I personally think this is the root cause of almost any conflict.”
Communication

This theme divides into good and poor communication and its impact on relational satisfaction.

**Good Communication.** Couples with good communication frequently reported open communication, frequently talking together, honesty, the willingness to work through tough discussions respectfully, ability to compromise, agree to disagree, remain mature even when disagreeing, and addressing conflict in a timely manner.

“talking openly about our needs and wants, being willing to compromise and say that we’re sorry first, and remembering to be kind to one another even when we’re in a bad mood”

“We have rational discussions about our feelings rather than arguments.”

“if there is ever any disagreement or miscommunication we make sure to address it calmly and in a timely manner. Neither of us let issues brew before getting upset at one another.”

“open communication. We have made keeping an open dialogue a priority in our relationship and I believe it has allowed us to move to such a healthy and close level.”

**Poor Communication.** This section refers to: anger issues, miscommunication, misunderstandings, stubbornness, lack of communication, lack of time for communication, unwillingness to talk or work through things, different conflict resolution styles, unwillingness to compromise, indecisiveness, both having the need to be right, failing to admit fault or apologize, and tuning the other person out/not listening.

“We tend to disagree about things more often than we would like. We both have anger issues, and have trouble communicating correctly to each other.”

“We are both stubborn and not willing to give in on disagreements at times.”

“Lack of communication. 100%. He is very quiet and a man of few words while I know for sure my love language is communication and words of affirmation. If he would just out of the blue
compliment me it would make my world. Or simple things like decisions to be made or conversations to be had, it’s always my initiation.”

Commitment.

Three main subthemes are observed under the category of commitment (in order of frequency): overall commitment level, resiliency, and hard work.

Commitment level and Relational Satisfaction. Frequent terms include: loyalty, commitment, faithfulness, fidelity, security, and dedication.

“unwavering commitment to the relationship on both sides”

“Looking forward to having a future together. Willing to face what may come ahead. Faith in each other.”

Resiliency. Resiliency is demonstrated by the couples’ willingness or ability to overcome difficult challenges together as a couple. Frequently many things that many people would expect to be stressors on a relationship, were cited by the participants as being the very thing that brought them closer. Frequent ideas include: overcoming trials, emergencies, and obstacles together and coming out stronger.

“honestly there are many aspects of the relationship but I think number one is that hate that others have for lesbian couples. when we hear how much someone hates our relationship it makes us love each other more because we appreciate each other more.”

“We have a knack for weathering the monotony of day to day and do well in personal and family crisis which is a real relationship tester.”

Hard Work. This is a demonstration of the commitment level by the participant’s willingness to do hard things and dedication to the relationship. Frequent terms in this sub-theme include effort, equally committed, teamwork, and willingness to go to counseling.

“The fact that we both put the same amount of effort into the relationship is amazing. We both pick up the other’s slack when it’s needed, either emotionally or with things around the house.”
“We’re both in it for the long haul, we each take turns pulling more than ‘our share’, we have the same long-term goals.”

“We’ve utilized counseling in the past to help us know ourselves and each other better and learn how to meet each other’s emotional needs, after experiencing infidelity on both sides.”

Compatibility

Compatibility, or lack thereof, contribute to both relational satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

Compatibility and Relational Satisfaction. This theme primarily represents shared goals, teamwork, companionship, working together well, and just “clicking.” Frequent terms: teamwork, partnership, similarity, compatibility, companionship, complementarity, shared/mutual goals and interests, cooperation, commonalities.

“We have lots of shared interests and are able to work together as a team very well. We generally enjoy each other’s company.”

“We have similar work ethics and common goals.”

“Same moral value system, Family background similarities”

Compatibility and Relational Dissatisfaction. There are many ways in which the participants described their incompatibility. Some of the ideas have already been addressed in larger themes such as differences in emotional needs/compatibility and physical intimacy. Other themes observed in this section include: cultural differences, different habits, personal preferences, values, work ethic, financial views/management, political views, social preferences, cleanliness, and personality differences.

“I’m a neat freak and she is very messy”

“Different cultural backgrounds, especially with regards to social interaction and entertaining. I find promptness at social gatherings startling and often awkward, she hates to be late to anything. As a host I feel I should anticipate and provide for all of my guests needs, she only feels called to cover the basics. My partner is much more introverted and requires much more sleep than I do, and often wants to come home earlier from social events far earlier than I (an extrovert and poor sleeper) do, or would when left to my own devices.”
“mismatched Interest in sex, mismatched interest in outside activities, social life”

**Domestic.** This theme primarily represents how the couple fares around household chores/responsibilities, including pet ownership and care.

**Domestic and Relational Satisfaction.** Some of the most common terms include: equal partners, working together, shared responsibilities, equal contributions to household, chores, responsibilities, helpfulness around the house, housework, and building a home together. Equality and equal contribution to the household, both financially and splitting of chores was the most frequently mentioned sub-theme.

We share responsibilities financially and around the house.

We are equal partners in everything with the house, family, finances. She may have strengths or preferences in some areas of home/family management, while I have other strengths. It’s all shared.

**Domestic and Relational Dissatisfaction.** This subtheme frequently cites inequality and lack of responsibility of a partner pertaining to household chores, responsibilities, and financial contributions. Differences in preferences in maintain the household, such as cleanliness, timeliness of taking care of chores, laziness, disorganization, buying a home, and inequality in who is doing the majority of the work were the predominant contributions to relational dissatisfaction.

“Her lack of adult skills. There are a lot of times I need to show her how to pay bills, or manage other things that I think adults should know how to do.”

“Different domestic habits like neatness and motivation for unpleasant chores. I am more motivated and feel slighted when she isn’t and let’s me do all the work”
Parenting.

This theme references how the coupleship navigates parenting, co-parenting or even extended family responsibilities.

**Parenting and Relational Satisfaction.** Frequent themes include: raising children, being a parent or grandparent, sense of family/being part of a family, admiration for partner in the parenting role.

“The happiness felt in . . . raising a family together.”

“equal partners in raising our son”

“being a great parent to my child,”

**Parenting and Relational Dissatisfaction.** Different parenting styles/techniques, lack of time due to children, young children, kids with addictions or special needs, difficulty parenting, co-parenting, blended families, raising children, lack of support with kids, kids’ extra-curricular activities, infertility, and adoption issues are frequent themes in this section.

“Difference in parenting techniques.”

“how difficult it is to have children (expense, lack of social structure, intragroup stereotypes)”

**Religion/Values.** This theme primarily represents similarity in values, morality and world views.

**Religion/Values and Relational Satisfaction.** Frequent terms include: shared life values, religious beliefs, similar morals, faith, and spiritual beliefs, and respect and acceptance of differences in this area.

“While our personalities are polar opposites l, our beliefs, values, and ethics are very similar.’

“religious worship together, similar political/ethical/moral/religious values”
Religion/Values and Relational Dissatisfaction. This section primarily referred to differences in Religious views, values and political views.

“Religion and deciding what our kids will do when they are old enough”

“Values. Different political views.”

Leisure Time. This theme primarily references the amount and quality of time spent together as a couple and family.

Leisure Time and Relational Satisfaction. Frequent terms include: fun, laugh together, silliness, similar interests/hobbies, activities, enjoying time together, traveling/adventures, romantic, date nights, ability to enjoy hobbies and time together as well as independently, intentionally making time for the relationship, and having a good balance between together time and personal space.

“Laughing together. Talking together. Being active with each other”

“maintaining special “just us” times like date night,”

“hanging out with friends”

Leisure Time and Relational Dissatisfaction. Frequent themes in this sub-section include: lack of time, dissimilar interests, being over-committed/scheduled, not making time for each other, one partner being overly-involved with a hobby or extra-curricular activities, lack of attention, not enough time for sex, long-distance, difference in personality (introverted v/s extroverted), and work, school or hobbies getting in way of together time.

“Quality time is non-existent”

“My husband enjoys a larger social life than I do. He wants to go out, see friends, have parties to a much larger degree than me. I prefer a smaller, quieter life. It is a very basic problem. I would like to think that we meet in the middle between our natural inclinations, but I suspect that the larger share of the compromise on this issue is on him, not me.”
Infidelity and Relational Dissatisfaction. Frequent terms include: trauma, betrayal, sexual addiction, affairs, and cheating.

LGBT, Infidelity and Relational Dissatisfaction.

“The affair put a lot of stress on our relationship and my overall happiness in our marriage. Questioning whether she was attracted to me or staying with me for other reasons”

“sexual addiction trauma, betrayal trauma.”

External Factors

The following section will provide an overview of the external factors that couples reported impact relational satisfaction. External Factors were divided into 12 subthemes: Distance, Work/School/Time, Finances, Extended Family, Friends, Pets/Home, Previous Relationships, External Trials, Addiction/Recovery, Social Support, Mental Health/Health/Aging, and Therapy.

Finances.

Finance and Relational Satisfaction. Finances positively influenced relational satisfaction when the participants felt that there was adequate or stable financial situations, good jobs, when they were able to work well together regarding money, and when they influenced money, and financial success.

“Money is always a stressor but we’re both always learning and growing and figuring out what works best for us. Being able to have that growth with her and successfully come out on the other side always makes me happier.”

“We have a roof over our heads & reliable cars to drive & enough to pay the bills & extra to help out others.”

Finance and Relational Dissatisfaction. Frequent themes in this category include: lack of money, debt, financial hardships/stress, unwillingness or inability to hold down a job, job
instability or lack of employment, inequality in incomes, prior financial obligations, home
ownership, disagreements in spending, the recession, financial emergencies such as house
fires/accidents, trying to keep up with the Jones’, failed businesses, student loans, and inability to
vacation or spend money due to financial hardship.

“we are also now a single income family because she is now unable to work.”

“Money. We had very different incomes for a while. Thankfully now we are very similar.”

“Employment or unemployment have been stressors that affect our relationship. for me
specifically, a time of brief unemployment made me feel like a leech and a failure which
negatively affected my own sense of self in our relationship. My partner never voiced these
concerns, however.”

**Work/School/Time**

The category had both positive and negative impacts on relational satisfaction. This category
represents two main ideas: lack of time due to work, school and life responsibilities and the
emotional impact/satisfaction of work, school and careers on the family. The majority of
responses referred to a lack of quality/connecting time due to conflicting or excessive busyness
due to work, school or community responsibilities, commutes, and job stability. However, career
satisfaction due to education, work environment, stability of work and opportunities for growth
and success was the second most salient theme.

**Work/School/Time positive impact on Relational Satisfaction.** Some of the frequent themes in
this category include: work, career, jobs, job/career success and satisfaction, steady employment,
positive work environments and schedules.

“Our working daily together (we own 2 [University] stores) is often fun. We get to do lots of
things Together. And when the team is doing well we have so much fun
positive work environments,”

“Both of our careers keep us happy.”
Work/School/Time and Relational Dissatisfaction. Common terms/themes: conflicting schedules, work, work stress, long work hours, lack of time, long commutes, job security, lack of job, school stress, and military.

“Work stress finds its way home from time to time making that person irritable and then the other one gets the same way as a result.”

“Long periods of separation (military) and the stress of many moves and having small children.”

Extended Family

Extended Family and relational satisfaction. Frequent themes in this factor include: family acceptance, understanding, and support.

“Family members being understanding of our situation.”

“His family is very supportive and mine has become more accepting over time.”

Extended Family and relational dissatisfaction. This section describes the negative impact extended family has on relational satisfaction. Common themes include: lack of acceptance of partner, differences in religion, politics and values, mental health and addictions issues in extended family, family trying to drive the couple apart, and poor family boundaries, and stress.

On the flip side, being geographically isolated from extended family members who were supportive also contributed to relational dissatisfaction.

“My family is also religiously fundamentalist and they’re convinced we’re going to Hell . . . This makes holidays interesting.”

“spouse’s family’s lack of support”
Friends

**Friends and Relational Satisfaction.** The importance of supportive friends was frequently mentioned in conjunction with family as part of the couples’ support network. Themes such as friend’s support, encouragement, and acceptance dominate this section.

“Positive feelings from friends. (Approval of our friends for the relationship.)”

“We have a large community of friends and acquaintances that make our lives feel validated.”

**Friends and Dissatisfaction.** There were far fewer responses in which friendships negatively impacted relational satisfaction. But, for those that did occur, there were a few consistent themes. The most frequent response revolved around distrust of the partners’ friends, perhaps due to fears of attraction, or distrust of the friends’ support of the relationship, or friends dominating too much of the partner’s time.

“He joined a support group for ssa and his friendships feel as though they take priority over emotion intimacy with me.”

“Her male friends.”

“Friends that try to dominate the time and attention of one of us.”

**External Trial’s impact on Relational Satisfaction**

This category ultimately evolved to represent unexpected stress, trials, tragedies etc. that the couple experienced and how it impacted the couple.

**External Trials and Relational Satisfaction.** Common themes in this category demonstrate the closeness a couple developed by overcoming a trauma or obstacle together, whether it was lack of the support from the community, family, or friends, addictions, loss of children or family members, moving, job loss or home loss, and illness.
“trauma and crisis has brought us both to greater vulnerability. She is in recovery from drugs, and this has brought some criticism from others, but it has made our relationship stronger, more honest, and more communicative. I recently transitioned from FtM, and that has had the same reaction.”

“He has stood with me and been very supportive in the loss of my father to cancer a few months ago and the strife with my biological family since then.”

“Infertility issues have been a struggle to come to an agreement on as well as the let downs when treatments have been unsuccessful. Overall, I feel it has helped us to grow closer by being able to communicate about our feelings. We were in a car wreck on our honeymoon that has left a lasting impart due to trauma and anxiety. We have had to learn how to be patient with each other and communicate needs and fears.”

“Her recent disabilities & health problems have given me opportunity to bond with her in new ways. She requires assistance to donmost simple tasks, & it gives me great pleasure to do those tasks for her to help her & serve her needs.”

External Trials and Relational Dissatisfaction.

This section represents a whole lot of different situations and things that stress out or negatively impact the relationship ranging from other people hitting on the partner, death and loss of family members, partners’ sexuality, technology internet, media, comparison to others, illness, wedding planning, road rage, and partner’s hobbies.

“Fear of coming out”

“Death of a family member (my father in law), birth of a new child, serious illness of a family member (mother in law had cancer), my own personal health issues.”

“My wife is considering transitioning and although it doesn’t effect my attraction to her it definitely creates outside stress.”

“Overwhelming external stresses in life are sometimes expressed in the marriage relationship. Shorter tempers, easier to anger or irritation, etc.”

“Death of family members, relationship with another couple”

Previous Relationships. This section primarily discusses the negative impact that previous relationships have on current ones.
Previous relationships and relational satisfaction.

My first marriage really offered perspective on my second marriage.

I think the fact that we both had spouses that cheated and now we’ve found each other and are so happy.

Previous relationships and Dissatisfaction. This section primarily refers to the impact of previous relationships on relationships including ex-spouses, co-parenting, step-children, exes, and blended families.

“I was divorced. She wasn’t. The wedding was difficult for her and it still comes up time to time.”

“My partner’s friendships with exes.”

“Expectations of sex from previous relationships and society. Partner was a virgin until marriage, I was not.”

Pets/Home

This section primarily refers to the external pressure pets, home ownership, and living situations puts on the family. This section is sometimes positive and sometimes negative.

Pets/Home and Relational Satisfaction. Frequent ideas included: getting pets together, building/buying a home together.

“we have two dogs that make us feel like we’re one big happy family.”

“having a dog and a nice house”

Pets/Home and Relational Dissatisfaction. Frequent terms include buying or building a house, problematic living situations, pets that pre-existed the relationship, and house emergencies.

“Our previous living situation was difficult due to problems with the conditions and the landlord.”

“Pets we both had prior to our relationship and learning how to share the responsibility of them. buying a home. His large dog being in the house constantly.”
“Our ability to handle stressful situations- like buying a house and the basement flooding.”

**Mental Health/Health/Aging.** The mental health/health/aging factor primarily describes the way poor health, mental health or aging negatively impact the relationship. There are a few respondents who reported gratitude to improved mental health, or general good health relative to their age as a positive influence.

**Mental Health/Health/Aging and Relational Satisfaction.**

“He is no longer clinically depressed”

“have enjoyed reasonably good health.”

**Mental Health/Health/Aging and Relational Dissatisfaction.** This section frequently describes poor mental health, illness of partner, self or family members, and the negative impacts of aging on the couple. Frequent terms include: depression, anxiety, PTSD cancer, chronic poor health, infertility, mental illness, and aging.

“My wife was diagnosed with a chronic illness, including chronic pain, 2 years ago. I am her primary caregiver (she is only 27, and I am 31), and we are also now a single income family because she is now unable to work. My testosterone has changed some of my reactions or personality in some small but significant ways, and navigating that has been a challenge. Her physical health affects every piece of our relationship. Financial struggles, mental health, our social life, everything. It has made us a stronger couple, but it is the hardest thing on our relationship and both of our overall happiness and frustration levels with each other and with life.”

“My declining health. It often makes me feel as if I don’t contribute much to the relationship although he strongly disagrees.”

“Aging. He is turning into an elderly man right in front of me, while I, in the meantime am struggling with middle age. At ages 69 and 56 the age gap is much more pronounced”
Addictions/Recovery

Frequent themes in this section included the impact of the partner’s addiction on the family, addiction in the extended family, and recovery from addiction.


“She is in recovery from drugs, and this has brought some criticism from others, but it has made our relationship stronger, more honest, and more communicative”

“We are both sober and actively involved in recovery.”

Addiction and Relational Dissatisfaction. The most common themes included: sex and porn addiction, alcohol, gambling and various other substances. The impact of the addiction included self-report, concerns about the partner, extended family, and children.

“Gambling, pornography, drug use”

“unwanted emotional affairs, bullying, entitlement, arrogance, sarcasm, manipulation, deceit, infidelity, sex addiction, rage, alcoholism.”

“The infidelity was brutal, multiple escorts etc., much lying and deceit through years of our marriage”

“My husband is a sex addict and I learned of this in 2013. He has had multiple affairs and is addicted to masturbation and pornography. He is working on recovery, but the trauma of this realization is something that I work with everyday.”

Social Community Support

Social/Community Support and Relational Satisfaction in the LGBT Community. Frequent themes included: legal and social acceptance/support, and sense of community.

“We live in Austin, which is a rather liberal, supportive environment.”

“The widespread acceptance, for the most part, of gay relationships has had a large impact on our public lives. We are accepted as a couple but our families, friends and professional and social worlds.”

“Legal status - being able to be married and have benefits has been hugely supportive.”
Social/Community Support and Relational Dissatisfaction in the LGBT Community.

“We live in Texas and when we leave the Austin area you can’t help but feel the conservative nature of the state and that means an awful lot of people don’t approve of a gay relationship.”

“Having to come to terms that we loved each other, who happened to be the same sex, and wrap our heads around it. I’ve caught her making statements such as, “if we were a heterosexual couple we would have been married by now.” It took time to accept that we love each other, mainly due to society and religion.”

Therapy. The impact of therapy and relational satisfaction was exclusively limited to a positive impact. Frequent themes included: improvement in communication styles, benefiting from individual as well as couples’ therapy as well as group or intensive therapy experiences which positively impacted the relationship.

“We didn’t have good communication styles until we went to counseling,”

“Talking with a therapist helped a lot with not only repairing our relationship but to also strengthen it.
Appendix C

Coded Qualitative Data

Relational Factors—Positive Impact on Relational Satisfaction

Fun/Laughter/Leisure/Time/Hobbies

- laughter
- Our capacity for silliness
- Similar interests
- The ability to travel.
- Laughing together. Talking together. Being active with each other
- Travel together,
- activities
- maintaining special “just us” times like date night,
- Enjoy the same things
- laughter
- share similar interests, Us taking trips together.
- time spent together (living long distance complicates this sometimes).
- Very little satisfaction.
- Social aspect is most satisfying
- having fun together.
- I trust her 100% and she recognizes my needs to sometimes have a night with the boys and vice Versa. We are perfectly happy being apart because the trust is there
- hanging out with friends
- Time spent together talking and interacting.
- time together
- fun
- spending time together, shared interests
- Time spent together, vacationing
- frequent visits since in a long distance relationship, quality time
- We have a lot of shared moments which is important.
- time together
• Quality time is non-existent
• We are happy together laugh together and that is what is most important to me.
• Being able to laugh and have fun together,
• humor
• The joys of discovering art/music/travel together.
• We enjoy each other’s company, have enough interests that we can share a lot while also discovering a lot. We laugh alot.
• humor
• I really enjoy spending time with my wife. She’s the person that I find easiest to hang out with and she puts up with me so that’s always a bonus.
• having and respecting each other’s alone time
• Similar interests,
• We often go on vacation together and have a lot of fun
• laughter
• shared interests
• Same interests
• Having someone to bounce ideas off of, to laugh and joke with, to do things together
• play fun adventure
• The gift of time, especially vacation time
• Similar interests.
• love traveling and adventures.
• We both love the outdoors, and hike, camp fish, and kayak often.
• My husband wants to be around me.
• taken places
• Romantic
• enjoy the fun times together
• Spending time together.
• having fun together. Friendships outside of the relationship, personal interests and activities separate and apart from my partner.
• vacationing as a couple with friends, making time to DATE again,
• We’ve found common interests as well as enjoying some individually. We spend time together recreationally, with chores, parenting, …
• adventure
• Similar interests and hobbies
• time alone together/date night, road trips
• I enjoy spending my free time with my spouse.
• Mutual interests and goals, and quality time
• enjoy the time we spend together
• taking one trip a year with no kids
• date nights
• Making each other laugh and enjoying time that is spent together
• We laugh together.
• Activities together.
• common interests, sense of humor
• independent hobbies
• humor
• When there is time alone as a couple,, and a balance of work, play and time to relax.
• & time with each other
• I enjoy spending time with my spouse. watching tv shows together is about all we have time for since he has a busy schedule.
• Shared interests
• we’ve maintained our individuality (I love to be outdoors, he loves to read, so we book a hotel in the mountains and my son and I go hiking while he stays in the hotel reading),
• We lived abroad for a year right after we were married and I think that brought us closer together and helped us see each other as an excellent team.
• sense of humor
• moving to new places together, traveling together.
• spending time together
• Spending time together when we can.
• Having fun and enjoying the lives we have built together.
• laughing together all the time/time spent together
• Sharing time together, laughing together, and spending time with both of our families.
• occasional personal space.
• humor
• we do most stuff together, but can do stuff on our own as well.
• having fun, laughter
• Mutual interest in travel
• My husband and I make I huge effort to do as many things together as possible… date night, and of course being able to HAVE FUN!
• When we laugh and goof around together my life seems perfect.
• spending time with each other, limiting the use of electronic devices when around each other and taking mini vacations.
• We laugh together everyday.
• similar interests and occasionally spending time apart.
• Common interests brought us together but it is the things we took up or learned together after meeting that make our relationship long lasting.
• Family time
• Spending time with one another, , laughter with one another
• humor
• Spending alone time together talking or “doing” something (not watching TV/movies which is passive)
• understanding as well as enjoying each other’s company
• enjoying activities together, making time to spend time with one another’s family, being able to take a time out from stressful lives in order to make time for relationship
• Shared hobbies and activities. Making time for each other, but also knowing when they need space alone or with friends.
• interests
• my spouse making time for me
• We enjoy some of the same things and enjoy it with each other. We also spend time apart letting him enjoy his time alone and me enjoy my time with family or friends.
• Getting the right amount of attentcion, Having a hobby that we share helps!
• We work mainly different shifts so we don’t see each other the time, but when we are off together we spend our time together. We are not into “going out” like other couples around our age and would rather spend our time with each other alone and with our child.
• love spending time together.
• having travel experiences that have been positive
• sense of humor, shared interests
• We also enjoy finding activities that we can enjoy together thanks to shared interests.
• Laugher, it’s like we’re one sometimes. Mashley lol
• Spending time with him and
• taking time outside our children to work on our relationship
• fun
• shared interests
• Our freedom to and from each other. Sharing common interests and enjoying trying new things
• baseball games
• sense of humor/laughing
• giving each other space when necessary.
• mutual interests, Hobbies
• laughter
• He makes me laugh,
• volleyball, love for travel,
• Shared interests, trust enough to let each have their own social life, work life and interests outside the relationship
• Time spent together. Temperament/personality
• He prefers to spend time with me over anyone else.
• Quality time together, having similar interest, we laugh together,
• attention
• We do things as a family and spend time together.
• enjoy the same hobbies and take interest in one another’s family, friends and work. . . enjoy each other’s company and have fun.
• same interest, , ability to laugh at oneself and one another.
• Trying new experiences together, and allowing each other to also have individual interests and alone time.
• humor
• similar interests
• Similar interests
• common interests, we have fun together,
• intentionally spending time together, and having fun.
• vacations, quality time together
humor
Time together and time apart.

Religiousness/Morality/Values

- Mutual faith
- shared life values.
- Similar values and religious beliefs. Church attendance and values. It is a reinforces our commitment to the relationship and weekly reminds us of that.
- Common beliefs, morals and values.
- church,
- Shared common values, Our Church community provides support as well.
- Being part of the same religion helps us have a much more common background.
- My church
- We use religion as a support and try to serve our fellow man together.
- values
- church activity
- spiritual life
- While our personalities are polar opposites I, our beliefs, values, and ethics are very similar.
- support from family and church has also been valuable
- Leaving our religion.
- Our connection and devotion to each other and the lord
- Our marriage is eternal which allows us to think beyond this earthly trial.
- same values
- faith
- our respective spiritual beliefs
- spiritual beliefs
- She understands my core values and why they are important to me
- common values
- Our church and friends have been amazing. Our church is not your typical Christian church . . . little dogma, lots of mysticism and meditation.
• Longevity and mutual beliefs
• Our faith in God
• We enjoy activity in our church, together.
• on the same page with religion, politics and money. same views of politics, religion, and finances and raising kids. VERY IMPORTANT IN A MARRIAGE.
• Shared Life and Values, church
• We have different views on many important topics (politics and religion) and we accept this and are supportive of each other’s passions.
• faith
• our religion
• our shared commitment to family and church
• Although we have different religious views, we respect one another
• going to church as a family,
• religious worship together, similar political/ethical/moral/religious values
• Our values, goals, common interests, sense of humor, spiritual growth together. Spirituality.
• faith
• religion (over the years this has gone both ways--positive and negative)
• shared interests and values
• religion and the perspective that gives us. fulfilled responsibilities in our church
• Same values
• our beliefs
• Our mutual faith in Christ
• faith
• We have a strong faith in God. Putting Him at the center of our relationship has been a huge positive in our marriage.
• integration of Christ in relationship. church involvement and friendship support
• Same moral value system
• religion
• similar values, shared religion
• beliefs. Our Church/Faith
• shared values
• Our church and our common beliefs,
• shared values
• A foundation in Christ, praying together,
• Shared values and sense of humor.

**Domestic**

• work together on chores and share all expenses
• equal say
• We share responsibilities financially and around the house.
• We are equal partners in everything with the house, family, finances. She may have strengths or preferences in some areas of home/family management, while I have other strengths. It’s all shared.
• We share the work load and enjoy the fun times together
• We respect each other, help each other. Nothing is one person’s job we share everything.
• Maintaining the household.
• equal partners in raising our son and in household decisions, we don’t force one another to do anything,
• Shared responsibilities,
• helps around the house.
• division of workload raising children,
• Working together 50/50 and splitting duties as a family
• My husband and I make I huge effort to do as many things together as possible ... cook dinner, clean house, grocery shop, household decisions, doctors appointments etc.
• equality. Sharing the same values and goals. Both being willing and able to do any chore or task.
• How we work as a team at home.
• Contribution to our relationship is equal!
• We both pick up the other’s slack when it’s needed, either emotionally or with things around the house.
• equality, sharing of responsibility
• equality
• share responsibilities
• My husband helps out when he can.
• having my partner help with chores, finances, etc.
• I don’t have to worry about a male dominant relationship forming because he’s a feminist and we act as equals.

Parenting/Kids

• kids
• Brief periods of happiness when the kids were small,
• Watching our boy grow up
• Children,
• our son
• The happiness felt in . . . raising a family together.
• child
• Children
• kids
• having children.
• kids
• Being a Family.
• Children.
• Our children
• having a kid has deepened her . . .it helps
• importance of family,
• having a child together
• Birth of child,
• My children, my grandchildren, my friends, family, the pets, the homes, and my work.
• Friendship, parenthood and grandparenthood, longevity, loyalty.
• Supporting our grown kids through tough times has brought us closer together. We have discussions about how we each think we should handle things, what support we should offer, and then talk to them together, no matter who’s biological kids they are.
• sense of family
• Having children and watching them grow to become well adjusted, educated, financially independent and civic minded adults and marrying and having their own children.
- He is a good father to our 11 year old daughter. He is a great provider
- Having my children
- same views of politics, religion, and finances and raising kids. VERY IMPORTANT IN A MARRIAGE.
- family
- raising a child.
- We are a team in life and parenting.
- children and grandchildren
- having kids
- Kids . . . and hubby willing to be at their events/involved with school
- having children together, family game night
- Children
- Raising children
- Raising our Children
- Devotion to family
- is a very good father to our kids.
- I believe we’re really happy because we don’t have to worry about kids like many of our other friends, so we just get to focus on each other.
- We dealt with issues from my family as a team.
- raising a kid together.
- child rearing
- my spouse’s hard work for his family
- equal partners in raising our son
- being a great parent to my child,
- our children.
- having children
- having children
- Our children and being able to enjoy them together.
- parenting together
- Also my family
- dynamic between spouse and other family..
- children
how he interacts with our children
Child
Our son brightens up any stressful day.
our child
I love how he works so hard to provide for his family and how dedicated he is to all of us
He’s a good dad and treats me with respect.
having kids.
Children/family
kids
him being a great dad
pregnancy
our first born
love and respect for each other’s families
our children,
Our son initially caused stress but it became positive because we were both learning how to be parents
our children

Compatibility/Goals Companionship

Teamwork
Our partnership,
shared goals
similar tastes and desires.
Companionship
Balance of ideas, activities, different perspectives.
We get along great.
the inter-dependence we share.
We click. Not forced, not arbitrary
Knowing there is someone to come home to every day.
Being able to enjoy each others company.
Partnership.
• The happiness felt in sharing a life …
• cooperation
• team work
• shared interests and goals
• We have a lot in common, but are different in important ways. It keeps things interesting.
• We have lots of shared interests and are able to work together as a team very well. We generally enjoy each other’s company.
• we have the same interests and values but disagree on some things enough to keep it interesting.
• have similar aesthetics (silly, nothing fancy),
• Totally compatible
• My partner matches me very well.
• ongoing achievement of goals, building life together. mutual goals, similar affection needs, similar intellectual levels, similar world views
• That we have common goals
• Totally ‘get’ each other. So easy being together
• Companionship, shared interests.
• Getting along amicably
• companionship
• compatability
• similar habits
• goals
• We work together as a team.
• We are a team in life and parenting.
• Life is hard but it’s always better with my husband by my side.
• The way we work together, the humor
• Balanced partner ship with shared goals, similar senses of humor
• companionship
• mutual goals
• commonalities
• balance of personality
- Mutual interests and goals,
- We work in the same field so we have an understanding of each other’s day to day responsibilities and stresses at work. We work together and have a partnership.
- Companionship
- Mutual interests,
- team work
- Both work hard
- Similar goals
- Partnership
- compatability
- Family upbringing. We were both raised in very similar families.
- similar sense of humor, differences in one another helps build the other person up in their weaker areas
- we have the same long-term goals.
- companionship
- My husband and I have a mutual understanding of the goals we have for our life. And we work together to acheive them.
- We have similar work ethics and common goals.
- Same moral value system ,Family background similarities
- sharing same …goals
- shared vision for the relationship(i.e., Marriage is next step),
- teamwork
- work together as a team, and
- mutually working to better our lives
- common goals
- When he’s not super stressed, he is the Ying to my yang. I’m loud, obnoxious, spur of the moment. He’s quiet, plans everything, level headed
- Compatibility with my husband. We compliment each others strengths and weaknesses.
- We complement each other very well. He makes me laugh, makes me feel good about myself, supports and encourages me.
- compatability
• It’s nice always having a companion to do things with, spend time with, vent about my day to. We have a lot in common, i.e., Eating healthy and exercise and that makes me happy we are both committed to that.

• compatability

• Always having someone to do activities with. Never having to go anywhere alone. Having someone to talk to about my day.

• same interest, common goals/aspirations,

• common life goals,

• We can laugh about the same things which helps when we’re happy or when we’re experiencing stress.

• We work together really well, we both are passionate about the same things and both have similar goals towards our future.

**Hard Work/Level of Commitment**

• Looking forward to having a future together. Willing to face what may come ahead. Faith in each other.

• value of love and commitment

• unwavering commitment to the relationship on both side

• loyalty to each other.

• That we are equally committed to doing the things it takes to make sure we stay together.

• commitment,

• Loyalty

• commitment

• Fully committed to the marriage.

• commitment

• Sense of humor and empathy during problems. All relationships are easy when things go well. We have a knack for weathering the monotony of day to day and do well in personal and family crisis which is a real relationship tester.

• commitment

• working though the large situations as a team.

• It’s hard to quantify. My fiancé is trans, and we’ve been learning together what that means, and how to be stronger together. We have a lot of shared moments which is important. We have a lot in common, but are different in important ways. It keeps things interesting. So, maybe that’s it.
• Probably the ability to overcome obstacles together.
• Our connection and devotion to each other and the lord.
• We have gone to therapy to work on communication. We try to be healthy in all aspects and respect each other in getting healthy as long as it stays within our marriage covenants. We are completely open in communication and fully committed. Our marriage is eternal which allows us to think beyond this earthly trial.
• faithfulness
• loyalty
• honestly there are many aspects of the relationship but I think number one is that hate that others have for lesbian couples. when we hear how much someone hates our relationship it makes us love each other more because we appreciate each other more.
• loyalty
• calming one another in crisis, of which we have had many.
• dedication
• loyalty, longevity
• team relational work---we both are involved in the relationship
• commitent
• Commitment, Security
• security
• We’ve utilized counseling in the past to help us know ourselves and each other better and learn how to meet each other’s emotional needs, after experiencing infidelity on both sides.
• The most significant, concrete thing is that we are traveling the same path together and I know if one of us wants to try a different direction, the other would go too. We are in this together, whatever it is. It is nice to have that foundation in life. To know there is flexibility, but consistency.
• loyalty
• effort
• going through ups and downs of life together;
• loyalty
• loyalty
• loyalty
• faithfulness
• overcoming obstacles
• Loyalty, honor, and
• overall commitment to each other!
• commitment, loyalty
• fidelity
• We’re both in it for the long haul, we each take turns pulling more than ‘our share’, we have the same long-term goals.
• challenges
• commitment
• Loyalty to each other
• Utmost trust in monogomy and fidelity.
• same commitment levels
• commitments
• commitment
• The fact that we both put the same amount of effort into the relationship is amazing. We both pick up the other’s slack when it’s needed, either emotionally or with things around the house.
• commitment
• loyalty
• Our commitment to one another I think makes us work through difficult situations and remain together.
• Our commitment
• faithfullness
• commitment
• loyalty

Communication/Interaction Style

• Communication!
• open communication, dedication to discussing and setting clear expectations,
• More in depth conversations,
• communication,
• Communication
• open communication.
• Talking together.
- open communication
- Communication
- talking openly about our needs and wants, being willing to compromise and say that we’re sorry first, and remembering to be kind to one another even when we’re in a bad mood
- disagree respectfully,
- communication.
- Communication
- Communication
- communication
- an ability to ignore the negatives. Knowing which battles are worth fighting.
- Partnership. When we do have disagreements, it is handled in a mature manner. Regardless how mad one of us is.
- Time spent together talking and interacting.
- communication
- Our ability to communicate and talk about both good and bad. While we may not always agree, at least we understand what the other is thinking and feelin.
- conversation
- communication
- communication
- Being able to be open and honest, good communication
- Communication
- clear and open communication
- We are completely open in communication, We have gone to therapy to work on communication.
- being open and honest about everything including feelings.
- Sometimes we fight but usually work things out quickly and maturely.
- Communication
- Our communication
- communication and humor
- communication
- We talk about everything. If we have a problem with one another we speak about it and try to find a solution to the problem.
• Constant communication! Being honest and open and willing to work together to be happy.
• good communication
• We do communicate
• communication
• Intimacy through communication,
• good communication
• communication
• communication
• Communication is the biggest part of our success.
• Being able to talk to each other about everything.
• My knowing there is nothing in the world he wouldn’t do for me, if I asked . . . but I have to ask, including stuff that I would like to be automatic- like cleaning the cat litter.
• When we communicate freely, choosing to forgive quickly, speak our minds openly,
• communication
• Communicate effectively
• communication
• compromise
• communication
• Our ability to communicate
• open communication
• communicate openly.
• Open honest communication
• We have learned to work through and navigate around our disagreements.
• communication
• good communication
• Communication
• Excellent communication
• ability to talk about anything together
• We communicate well,
• communication
• listening/communication
We make sure to communicate and always of each other’s needs
communication
communication
open communication
open communication, compromise
My husband are communicate with each other well and trust each other. We respect each other and always sit to talk out any conflicts that may arise. We have a relationship based on trust, communication, and respect.
communication with my partner, compromise, compassion
flexibility, acceptance of the other person ability to talk out concerns and frustrations and find an actionable solution.
communication
communication
We talk about everything,
Great communication and
willingness to engage through conflict
communication
communication
communication
communication
honesty, open line of communication
communication and trust are very strong points in our relationship,
Good communication, spending time with each other, limiting the use of electronic devices when around each other
Communication is the key! We are still working on that but it’s truly a key component of a relationship.
communication
good communication
communication failure
We have rational discussions about our feelings rather than arguments.
open and honest communication
if there is ever any disagreement or miscommunication we make sure to address it calmly and in a timely manner. Neither of us let issues brew before getting upset at one another.
• communication
• frequent open and honest communication (created safety communicating within relationship)
• open communication
• communication
• communication
• Our communication
• Communicating and having an open dialogue.
• communication
• communication
• Listening to one another. We have disagreements but we discuss it that same day and do not let it go till the next day.
• communication
• We have open communication
• My husband and I have great communication, which we work on constantly,
• communication
• good communication
• we talk through issues
• communication
• communication as a couple
• ability to work through problems
• communication
• communication
• ability to compromise
• good communication
• compromise, great communication
• Communication! No matter what type of relationship you’re in (intimate, friendship, family, whatever), it thrives on solid and honest communication.
• We understand what is expected of each other and communicate very well.
• work to find solutions if we have problems, We both try to be realistic and logical with one another when issues arise.
• Communication
• communication
• open communication. We have made keeping an open dialogue a priority in our relationship and I believe it has allowed us to move to such a healthy and close level.
• good communication
• honest, direct and open communication
• Our communication is the biggest thing. We are always willing to talk things out.
• communication
• we can talk,

Quality of Emotional Connection/Support

• Being open with one another about our needs and feelings, being honest.
• Support,
• respect each other’s space,
• better appreciation for one another.
• understanding, love
• Mutual trust and understanding. A total lack of shame when discussing personal wants, needs.
• sharing, love
• mutual caring
• mutually supportive
• Emotional support, longterm familiarity, respect, acceptance.
• Harmony. We enjoy each other’s company.
• Accepting each others strengths and weaknesses
• Mutual understanding
• The fact w have no restrictions in our relationship and trust.
• mutual respect
• Knowing someone is on my side
• Giving each other what is missing in each other’s lives.
• Mutual support, friendship, love
• Reciprocal love and respect.
• We’re best friends.
• Our love and adoration for the other
• We each love the other for all the good and bad we each have
• trust each other
• Love, mutual respect, compassion, drive,
• openness to my needs,
• He brings out the best in me and knows how to make me laugh, even during the worst of times.
• Openess, trust
• The support I get from my wife not only in taking care of the family but encouraging me in my career.
• love
• She is my friend.
• Love for each other
• mutual respect, friendship, appreciation for each other,
• Sense of humor and empathy during problems. All relationships are easy when things go well. We have a knack for weathering the monotony of day to day and do well in personal and family crisis which is a real relationship tester.
• I trust her 100% and she recognizes my needs to sometimes have a night with the boys and vice versa. We are perfectly happy being apart because the trust is there
• Faith in one another and our relationship.
• Thinking of the other and trying to put the other person’s needs before your own.
• Reminders that we love each other.
• Honestly (no white lies either) & openness.
• maturity and understanding
• understanding and trust, love
• friendship
• emotional intimacy
• We are truly each other’s best friend.
• I always look forward to seeing ……., and I feel better when I’m with them (singular they, ………. goes by gender neutral pronouns).
• unconditional love and support from my spouse
• The fact we put each other first. Always.
• Both of our willingness to do deep emotional work has been a huge positive factor. Our connection
• Our friendship.
• respect for each other.
• Emotional support, willingness to forgive and understand
• Love, caring about the other spouse,
• He does lots of things to make life easier for me.
• Trust and love
• Mutual respect, faithfulness, faith and love
• Trust. Respect. Differences.
• emotional intimacy,
• Our Love for each other and our being best friends as well.
• She is my soul mate.
• The compassion, understanding, love and the care we have for one another.
• Our love for each other and no matter what the situation is we are there for each other to support one another and to be there for one another no matter if its financial relational family we are there and care about one another and that’s what makes our relationship satisfactory
• Friendship and common understanding/support of each other
• trust
• It’s hard to say sometimes. When things were good, they were great. I got much satisfaction out of the fact we were so “in sync”, were very emotionally and physically close (until our 4 yr old was born), and felt like we always had each other’s backs.
• and shows me respect on a daily basis (i.e., importance of family, academics, challenging in a positive way, support in every way emotional and otherwise, sense of humor)
• mutual encouragement toward success,
• Feeling truly accepted and loved for exactly who I am and who I’m working on becoming. Not only am I free to be me, I am also encouraged to be me. I am enough.
• The feeling of being known, that my partner will not be surprised by most things I want to do.
• honesty, loyalty
• we try to make each other happy
• friendship
• loyalty
• I think I said it all above. Loads of understanding, kindness, support, calming one another in crisis, of which we have had many. An attitude of “it will be OK.”
• Thoughtfulness, sexual, intellectual, flexibility, communication
• Love is the number one and caring for each other’s needs, even tho we might not always agree with each other.
• respect
• respect
• Love and appreciation for each other.
• acts of honesty, compassion, and respect toward me,
• Emotional support and encouragement
• Having someone to bounce ideas off of, to laugh and joke with, to do things together that we both like, and knowing someone will be there that has my back, will listen and sympathize if I have a bad day, and will be my biggest supporter when I try new things.
• Understanding
• Physical and verbal demonstrations of love
• Respect
• The fact that my spouse also has learned to be self sacrificing and puts my needs, wants, and desires ahead of his own has also been a strongly positive dynamic in our life long relationship. . . . Intimacy through communication, listening, laughing, crying, physical touch are all far more important than sex.
• trust, comfort
• He cares, thoughtful, emotionally available as well.
• Partner understanding,sense of humor,romantic.
• He’s kind, considerate, compassionate, helpful
• Friendship
• Mutual love, respect, support, encouragement, feel safe and loved
• acceptance, love
• We respect each other, help each other. Nothing is one person’s job we share everything.
• Mutual respect, good boundaries, good self-care, interdependence,
• personal space
• And love. Deep, abiding, unsentimental love. My knowing there is nothing in the world he wouldn’t do for me, if I asked . . . We trust each other. That should probably be in
caps because it is so hard won and I trust so few people. I think we are both a little codependent, getting less so. That makes it hard and makes it easier in some ways.

- Knowing I can trust my spouse. Coming home to someone who loves me for me.
- understanding, acceptance, love
- trust, humor, love
- For me knowing I have someone to talk to, someone to vent to, someone I can be 100% myself with--flaws and all.
- emotional intimacy
- friendship
- Trust, Honesty, and Support
- mutual respect
- Vulnerability with one another.
- genuine care and respect
- support
- Safety and trust.
- He loves me
- honesty, trust
- We respect each other
- We are both supportive of each other and our likes, careers, etc.
- Best friends to one another
- being shown love from my spouse, being appreciated by him for the things I do to contribute.
- Friendship
- forgiveness, acceptance
- Trust, sense of humor, compassion and mutual respect
- We were friends before we started a relationship. We are best friends
- balance
- respect, love
- He supported me through law school. Unwaveringly. He allows me to do what I want, in my career and otherwise.
- honesty, trust
- kindness, mutual respect, trust, unwavering support,
• trust
• Trust. We like the same things. He really is my best friend
• friendship
• helping each other
• acts of service, acknowledging my efforts
• We build each other up and compromise.
• My husband are communicate with each other well and trust each other. We respect each other and always sit to talk out any conflicts that may arise. We have a relationship based on trust, communication, and respect.
• respect, love, Compassion
• We are both very independent and respectful of each other. We became friends first and then started dating.
• He is my best friend
• Trust, support, respect, and occasional personal space.
• Comfort, trust, humor, stability, love
• He treats me kind
• we are truly best friends
• Thoughtfulness
• Empathy, trust, honesty, intimacy, vulnerability, unity, support, openness,
• connection
• trust, love
• Always supports any ideas or endeavors that I chose to take on or think about taking on always quick to lend support
• Honesty, trust, appreciation for one another, affection, and friendship. My husband is my best friend.
• stability, trust, partnership, friendship
• expressing emotions
• his personality, stability, love. suppierting me through nursing school with a home and car, getting engaged
• trust
• Just everyday things that make a relationship a refuge. Daily love and support.
• trust
• trust, intimacy
• Also trust is another huge factor, you have to establish trust first and foremost before anything else. We have enough love to last us 4 lifetimes together and that’s what I truly love most. We love each other through the absolute worst times and through the greatest!!

• respect, honesty
• the love given

• Utmost trust in monogomy and fidelity.

• We support each other fully and equally. It isn’t a give and take, and neither of us keep track of who did a something for someone last.

• The fact that he is a kind and intelligent person who is also my beat friend

• The aspects that contribute to our overall happiness is the freedom we allow each other to pursue our own goals outside of the relationship. Career and educational goals for both of us are encouraged by each other

• trust, intimacy, love
• loving partner flaws and all
• honesty, feeling valued

• How I feel about our relationship. How we work as a team at home. How he makes me feel about myself.

• Willingness to forgive
• understanding, trust, love

• level of intimacy we have with each other. We truly know each other, mind, body, and spirit

• trust, kindness
• Mutual respect and support
• Complete trust and honestly.

• honesty

• We always consider each other and go out of our way to please each other.

• respect, trust

• Understanding of one another.

• support, understanding, love

• support one another and encourage each other. We tell each other I love you at least once a day.

• Feeling accepted, supported, and loved. We have a great friendship and know how the other one works.
• understanding
• We are best friends above all.
• The support that we provide for each other is probably the biggest factor.
• unity, kindness, understanding, forgiveness
• mutual understanding
• the fact he is observant of my needs and
• friendship
• trust, warmth, security, fun
• mutual respect
• I always want to feel more loved. Nothing is ever enough.
• Being able to trust and understand each other. I appreciate his patience when I was not ready to be sexually active
• trust
• honesty, giving each other space when necessary
• trust, love
• trust
• supports and encourages me
• Knowing the importance of both our physical and emotional relationship.
• trust enough to let each have their own social life, work life and interests outside the relationship
• very supportive
• understanding of one another.
• support
• My husband helps out when he can. He accepts me for who I am and I don’t feel like I have to hide any part of me from him.
• Marriage is top priority, relationship built off of long standing friendship, trust,
• we are always praising and providing compliments to each other,
• trust and honesty
• attention- all other areas are ok
• Being able to be myself around my significant other and them accepting me for who I am
• comfort, trust
• take interest in one another’s family, friends and work. We trust one another and celebrate individual successes. It is important to me to know that we can work through rough patches together as well as enjoy each other’s company and have fun.
• Having someone who has been there for most of my life that understands what I’ve been through.
• unconditional support, selflessness,
• support
• Someone to talk to. Your best friends, friends and family will always there be there for you to talk to, but having a significant other makes a difference. I can share my worst fears and issues in life without being judged. Not that friends and family judges you but it is important to have someone that will be there at any given time.
• Being comfortable and honest
• honesty
• The openness my partner and I have with one another and the ability to just relax with my partner.
• trust, respect, and honesty.
• honesty
• He greatly supports my decision to attend grad school and he is supportive when school becomes stressful for me.
• consideration of one another, support
• We really understand each other.
• love
• emotional support, friendship, and the degree to which we understand each other
• our connection, the trust/openness we have
• having a supportive partner, a strong friendship, support from him during the graduate school process and moving to grad school
• Emotional openness
• trust, honesty,
• we learn and grow together, we have fun together, we can be ourselves around each other.
• closeness, comfort
• serving each other on a daily basis
• I look at him and know I could marry him today tomorrow or in 10 years. Over the course of our relationship I’ve gained a best friend that is unlike any other.
• I don’t have to worry about a male dominant relationship forming because he’s a feminist and we act as equals.
• Trustworthy
• Respectful
• Love, Trust, humor, support, understanding
• Support. Humour.
• We have been bestfriends for more than 10 years and when we got into our relationship, our friendship grew.

**Physical Intimacy**

• cuddling
• I think that our open relationship allows us to not place an unrealistic expectation of one person having to be the only person in our lives that provides an outlet for sexual and intimacy needs. In my experience, that can often lead to feelings of disappointment and inadequacy when these needs are not met by that one person expected to do so.
• intimacy
• sex (when it happens)
• sexual interaction,
• Passion for my partner, rooted in the romantic and magical beginnings of the relationship
• Sex.
• physical attraction
• sex
• affection and lots of touching,
• Sexual satisfaction
• chemistry,
• sexual intimacy
• similar affection needs,
• sex
• Sex.
• sexual
• sex
• it would be nice if there was occasional cuddling, hugging some sort of touch
Physical and verbal demonstrations of love

Sex is not the most important aspect of our relationship, it is down the list a ways. Intimacy through communication, listening, laughing, crying, physical touch are all far more important than sex.

sleep in the same bed and engage in regular mutually satisfying intimacy, both sexual and nonsexual.

physical intimacy

intense physical attraction

Sexual attraction

attraction

we still have a strong physical relationship.

sexual satisfaction

no pressure to have sex.

sex

passionate exchanges

affection

intimacy

affection

We have a crazy attraction to one another.

sexual contentment

sex

affection

Knowing the importance of both our physical and emotional relationship.

happy with intimate relationship

sex

affection

sex

affection

passion

My partners affection toward me

We have a crazy attraction to one another.

Affection
Internal Factors– Positive impact on Relational Satisfaction

Introversion/Extroversion Surgency

• humor
• laughter
• Our capacity for silliness
• drive, laughter
• makes me laugh
• Sense of humor
• humor
• laugh together
• laugh
• humor
• humor
• Sense of humor
• laughter
• laugh, joke
• We are both easy going, positive
• Sense of humor
• Sense of humor
• Sense of humor
• humor
• humor
• similar sense of humor
• Sense of humor
• making each other laugh
• We laugh together.
• Sense of humor
• humor
• sense of humor
• my spouse’s sense of humor,
- Sense of humor
- humor
- sense of humor
- being able to HAVE FUN!
- humor
- humor
- Spontaneity
- sense of humor
- humor
- sense of humor
- laughter
- makes me laugh
- ability to laugh at oneself and one another.
- humor
- sense of humor
- sense of humor
- humor
- humor

- HEADING Trust/understanding/Pleasantness or Agreeableness
- cuddling
- Kindness, empathy, respect each other’s space,
- understanding
- Mutual trust and understanding
- mutual caring
- mutually supportive
- Emotional support, respect,
- Trust
- Accepting each others strengths and weaknesses
- Mutual understanding
- trust.
- Faith in each other.
- Understanding
- mutual respect,
- Mutual support,
- respect
- trust
- mutual respect, compassion,
- Loyalty
- openness to my needs,
- trust
- mutual respect,
- empty
- trust
- Faith in one another and our relationship.
- honesty
- understanding
- understanding, trust,
- affection and lots of touching,
- respect
- respect
- understand, willingness to forgive
- He does lots of things to make life easier for me.
- trust
- mutual respect, faithfullness, faith
- trust, respect
- compassion, understanding
- understanding
- trust
- respect, understanding
- affection,
- honest
• honesty, loyalty
• understanding, kindness, support
• thoughtfullness, flexibility
• caring for each other
• respect, sex
• respect
• emotional support
• it would be nice if there was occasional cuddling, hugging some sort of touch
• Understanding
• respect
• Physical and verbal demonstrations of love
• The sense of family
• Respect
• Getting along amicably
• He treats me so well
• trust
• Having love shown to me, appreciated, spoiled once in awhile.
• He cares, thoughtful, emotionally available
• He’s kind, considerate, compassionate,
• trust
• flexibility
• respect, support,
• we respect each other
• mutual respect
• respect
• consideration for others
• trust
• trust
• understanding
• trust
• trust, honesty, support
• mutual respect
• respect
• trust
• honesty, trust
• respect
• supportive
• trust
• being shown love, appreciated
• acceptance
• trust, compassion, mutual respect
• respect
• honesty, trust
• kindness, mutual respect, trust,
• trust
• trust
• trustworthiness
• trust, respect
• respect, humility, compassion
• respectful
• flexibility
• trust, respect, support
• trust, comfort
• kind
• empathy, trust, honesty
• trust
• honesty, trust, appreciation, affection
• trust
• Trust,
• trust
• trust
• trust
• utmost trust
• kind
• trust, affection
• honesty
• trust,
• trust, kindness
• respect
• trust, honesty
• honesty
• respect, trust
• respect, trust
• Getting the right amount of attention
• honesty, respect
• kindness, understanding,
• observant of my needs
• trust, warmth
• mutual respect
• trust
• trust
• honesty
• affection
• trust
• trust
• trust
• supportive
• trust, honesty
• affection, attention
• t’s nice always having a companion to do things with, spend time with, vent about my day to.
• trust
• mututal respect
- affection
- honest
- honesty
- trust, respect, and honesty.
- honesty
- trust
- affection towards me, trust
- honesty, trust
- trust, honesty
- trustworthy, respectful
- trust, support, understanding
- affection, support

**Conscientiousness or Dependability**

- reliability
- good financial decisions
- dedication
- goal-oriented
- plans everything, level headed

**Emotional Stability**

- independence
- codependency
- independent
- I always want to feel more loved. Nothing is ever enough.

**Intellect-Openness**

- similar aesthetics
• intellect
• intellectual
• love traveling and adventures.
• adventure
• intelligent
• openness
• Trying new experiences together

Internal Factors– Negative Impact on Relational Satisfaction

Introversion/Extroversion Surgency

• humor
• laughter
• Our capacity for silliness
• drive, laughter
• makes me laugh
• Sense of humor
• humor
• laugh together
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• makes me laugh
• ability to laugh at oneself and one another.
• humor
• sense of humor
• sense of humor
• humor
• humor

**Trust/Understanding/Pleasantness or Agreeableness***

• cuddling
• Kindness, empathy, respect each other’s space,
• understanding
• Mutual trust and understanding
• mutual caring
• mutually supportive
• Emotional support, respect,
• Trust
• Accepting each other's strengths and weaknesses
• Mutual understanding
• trust.
• Faith in each other.
• Understanding
• mutual respect,
• Mutual support,
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• mutual respect, compassion,
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• respect
• respect
• understand, willingness to forgive
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• mutual respect, faithfullness, faith
• trust, respect
• compassion, understanding
• understanding
• trust
• respect, understanding
• affection,
• honest
• honesty, loyalty
• understanding, kindness, support
• thoughtfullness, flexibility
• caring for each other
• respect, sex
• respect
• emotional support
• it would be nice if there was occasional cuddling, hugging some sort of touch
• Understanding
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• Physical and verbal demonstrations of love
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• Getting along amicably
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• trust, honesty, support
• mutual respect
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• respect
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• trust
• being shown love, appreciated
• acceptance
• trust, compassion, mutual respect
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• trust, comfort
• kind
• empathy, trust, honesty
• trust
• honesty, trust, appreciation, affection
• trust
• Trust,
• trust
• trust
• trust
• utmost trust
• kind
• trust, affection
• honesty
• trust,
• trust, kindness
• respect
• trust, honesty
• honesty
• respect, trust
• respect, trust
• Getting the right amount of attention
• honesty, respect
• kindness, understanding,
• observant of my needs
• trust, warmth
• mutual respect
• trust
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• honesty
• affection
• trust
• trust
• trust
• supportive
• trust, honesty
• affection, attention
• it’s nice always having a companion to do things with, spend time with, vent about my day to.
• trust
• mutual respect
• affection
• honest
• honesty
• trust, respect, and honesty.
• honesty
• trust
• affection towards me, trust
• honesty, trust
• trust, honesty
• trustworthy, respectful
• trust, support, understanding

Conscientiousness or Dependability

• reliability
• good financial decisions
• dedication
• goal-oriented
• plans everything, level headed

Emotional Stability

• independence
- codependency
- independent
- I always want to feel more loved. Nothing is ever enough.

Intellect-Openness

- similar aesthetics
- intellect
- intellectual
- love traveling and adventures.
- adventure
- intelligent
- openness
- Trying new experiences together

External Factors—Positive

Living Together/Proximity

- Moving in together, deciding to move together.
- co-habitating
- Having to be apart for 9 months, seeing each other on weekends made us appreciate one another and made the relationship stronger.
- being together in the same space
- Proximity
- Living in the same city! We had a long distant “friendship” for 4 years. She moved back because she really missed me and soon after we officially started dating. Long-distance helped us appreciate each other more and living together blossomed (helped us progress) our relationship.
- Getting married
- living in the same house made us both happier as a couple
- long distance
• Living together
• It's been helpful now that we are living together instead of being in a long distance relationship like we used to be.
• living together and learning each other’s faults and strengths
• Moving in together
• where we live (on the same street) makes a modern-day relationship downtown Chicago really nice. Otherwise it would be a stress on our relationship’s growth.
• Moving in together after being long distance for two years has greatly improved my relationship satisfaction and closeness.
• Long distance
• Cohabiting

Work/Time

• work
• work
• career
• We both found jobs in our field of choice.
• We have been blessed with a good career,
• jobs
• Ambition to better our education as a stressor. We push each other, believe in each other’s abilities and have standards higher than in previous relationships.
• jobs
• great jobs, Education
• Being transferred with her job
• his job required a loyal partner.
• Our working daily together (we own 2 WVU stores) is often fun. We get to do lots of things Together. And when the team is doing well we have so much fun
• positive work environments,. education (going back to college for me), new experiences
• Education.
• jobs
• opening my own business
• Both of our careers keep us happy.
• Time apart. He works swing shift. Absence makes the heart grow fonder
• He supported me through law school. Unwaveringly. He allows me to do what I want, in my career and otherwise.
• both of us have finished degrees, succeeded in jobs,
• Both of us having jobs
• Support during major career changes
• Career advancement,
• supportive in each other’s career choices and increasing responsibilities . . .
• He has been very supportive of my career pursuits.
• living halfway between both of our jobs is helpful.
• His support of my career.
• I think we both enjoy our jobs and friends so that is a great thing
• similar job, school
• Job promotions
• job changes
• Working towards each of our careers
• the navy
• steady jobs
• our success in our careers
• My job is major stressor and has pushed us closer together.
• Career opportunities have also made achieving our goals easier.
• When I was looking for a new job he was very supportive and he will support me in anything I want to do in life.
• Me going away to school for my undergrad program, and commuting for my graduate program.
• Our schedule helps our relationship flourish. We’re able to sleep, eat, work, exercise, hangout on the weekends together. Our schedule and
• Finishing college and obtaining jobs
• He greatly supports my decision to attend grad school and he is supportive when school becomes stressful for me.
• School-it allows us to talk about new and exciting things.
• work situations
• school
Finances

- money
- & financial success
- Financially we have come together and work closer as a team.
- Financial situation.
- so we have 'nt had to deal with many financial stresses.
- being poor together
- Financial strain has at times proven to be tines when we can really work together, reassuring each other and working as a team to make the necessary changes.
- good financial decisions
- Money is always a stressor but we’re both always learning and growing and figuring out what works best for us. Being able to have that growth with her and successfully come out on the other side always makes me happier.
- him providing for our family
- We have had lots of support for my career from local physicians and my mentor, Angeles Arrien.
- We have a roof over our heads & reliable cars to drive & enough to pay the bills & extra to help out others.
- Money..financial needs
- We both have good jobs.
- Good income because we don’t argue about money any more
- we have work, a home
- adequate finances,
- Working through financial stress
- finances
- Promotions at my job increase in cash flow allows us to live life more extravagantly
- good standard of life
- We learned to manage money while he went back to school and then when I went back to school.
- financial stability;
- When money isn’t an issue there is also more satisfaction.
• We don’t stress about money, which is a huge help. We don’t worry about money,
• Being financially supported by him. Him taking care of things for me. His kindness.
• equally being able to provide financial support
• he has a good paying job that alleviates financial stress.
• Other times we fight about finances and it gets real . . . .
• Comfortable living status
• My husband has worked harder to provide a comfortable living for us.
• income/job. (I don’t care if people say money doesn’t affect happiness- it does)
• financial stability
• Having more financial stability helps as well- we have more freedom to do the things we enjoy together.
• We are very financially stable. We agree on how finances should be spent and gathered.
• financial stability

Family Acceptance/Support

• Family acceptance,
• Family members being understanding of our situation.
• Family
• His family is very close and has since become my family, as my immediate family are all out of state.
• His family is very supportive and mine has become more accepting over time.
• We are accepted as a couple but our families, friends and professional and social worlds.
• Acceptance from both of our families
• Family
• Family.
• strong support network within the family we have chosen, my biological family’s support
• family relationships
• family & friend’s support,
• Our families are very supportive.
• Loving and supportive families.
• familial support
• Probably the fact we both have very close and supportive families
• Encouragement of friends and family.
• New extended family.
• Him meeting my family and becoming part of my family unit. Me being introduced to his family and they accepted him and me.
• Family,
• extended family
• support from family
• We have loving and supportive extended family,
• family
• Family support and acceptance by each other’s family
• Support from our family and friends has really helped keep our relationship together.
• Our families have also been really helpful.
• Supports would be his parents constant approval of our relationship
• support from family and church has also been valuable
• in Laws
• family
• family support
• supportive family and friends
• Moving away from family.
• family support
• Both of our families have been very supportive of our relationship
• The love and support of both our families towards our relationship.
• external family
• The support of our friends and family.
• family support
• My extended family loves him, his daughter and her family are supportive and we have fun with all of them.
• Family including extended family
• Our parents are highly supportive of our relationship.
• families
• extended family
- family
- Support of family and friends
- supportive family and friends,
- family
- Watching my grandparents marriage.
- Moving away from my parents.
- My family is supportive of my 2nd marriage.
- My family tends to be a positive support.
- Having family assist with kids to have some alone time.
- Relationship with our family members.
- Family support
- family
- family
- My mom babysitting
- He has wonderful parents
- family
- support of family
- Both of our families (parents & siblings)
- spending time with both of our families.
- He comes from a really good, stable, supportive family. Marrying into his family has been really nice. I really couldn’t ask for better in-laws.
- family
- Positive role models and successful marriages in our families.
- family
- family
- We also have great family support emotionally and occasionally financially.
- Support from my family
- familial support
- supportive family
- family
- The strong support system we have built with our families and friends
Both of our parents being married for over 35 years. They are such wonderful role models and a great support system when we need to talk.

Family support from both sides

Family. Our family is our greatest strength. They won’t take a side during an argument and the always have been there for us both.

family support

His family is great.

Our families being there for us and supporting us and helping us in difficult times

Our supportive families

We both get along with each others families and friends.

family support

Being distanced from poor family relations.

My parents actually like him, so that’s positive.

Family support,

Our families are very supportive of our relationship to where they encourage us.

parental support

Having friends and family that support our relationship has had a great positive impact on our relationship.

Good relationship examples from our parents,

family

Support of my family regarding the relationship

Supportive parents from both our sides. family welcomeness

love and respect for each other’s families

Family and friends support,

good relationships with each other’s families

His family are lovely and my family and friends like him too

family

family

Having friends and especially family in an Indian household that supports the relationship really helps us focus on each other rather than being worried of what others think.

My family loves him.

family
family approval on his side.

Our families each like our significant other and have been very supportive, as have friends.

We get along with each other’s friends and families (for the most part) and they are a support system for us.

He gets along well with my family.

Our friends and his family are extremely supportive of our relationship. They comment on how well we complement each other and being accepted by and close to his family is very important to me.

Holidays-being with each other’s families.

our families
family is so supportive
Support from friends support from family
Friends and family have encouraged us through tougher times.
Our friends and family consistently give us positive feedback and admiration of our relationship.
Families love for the significant other has helped us as well.
Familial support of our relationship
Our families
My parents influence over us. They have an incredible relationship that we can look up too.

How excepting our families have been.

My family’s support

Friends

good friends
friends
Positive feelings from friends. (Approval of our friends for the relationship.)
We have a large community of friends and acquaintances that make our lives feel validated.
We are accepted as a couple but our families, friends and professional and social worlds.
My friends see the connection and encourage the relationship
common friendships,
- family & friend’s support,
- friends encouragement
- Encouragement of friends and family.
- friends
- friends
- support from friends
- friends
- common friendships
- Support from our family and friends has really helped keep our relationship together.
- We have some great friends who are supportive and understanding.
- good supportive friends,
- good support system
- We’ve had very supportive friends as well.
- friends and making sure we always make time for our own separate friends,
- The support of our friends and family.
- having friends who have stable marriages
- friends
- Support of family and friends
- Friendships outside of the relationship,
- supportive family and friends,
- wide variety of interests that bring many friends into our lives
- Friends
- good friends
- Friends
- friends
- mutual friends
- Also, my close female friendships have continued to be very important in helping me navigate the ups and downs of life (relationship included). I think my friends help me be a better partner.
- friends
- friends
- support of friends
friends
friends
Merging into one another’s friends group,
friends
supportive friends
friends
The strong support system we have built with our families and friends
Friends opinions
I think we both enjoy our jobs and friends so that is a great thing
friendship support
Our friends are so supportive.
We both get along with each others families and friends.
Emotional support from our friends.
friend support,
making mutual friends
Having friends and family that support our relationship has had a great positive impact on our relationship.
Friends liking his company.
good friends
friends
Family and friends support,
my family and friends like him too
friends
Sharing common friends and enjoying our time with them together. Also willingness to be around new people together
It helps that my friends and family love him and vice versa. I like that other people who I trust agree that he is a great partner for me.
Having friends and especially family in an Indian household that supports the relationship really helps us focus on each other rather than being worried of what others think.
Friendship approval
Our families each like our significant other and have been very supportive, as have friends.
• We get along with each other’s friends and families (for the most part) and they are a support system for us.
• Our friends and his family are extremely supportive of our relationship. They comment on how well we complement each other
• Support from friends support from family
• Friends and family have encouraged us through tougher times.
• Our friends and family consistently give us positive feedback and admiration of our relationship.
• Interested in meeting each other’s friends and friend’s support of relationship

Addictions/Recovery

• She is in recovery from drugs, and this has brought some criticism from others, but it has made our relationship stronger, more honest, and more communicative. I recently transitioned from FtM, and that has had the same reaction.
• Sobriety. 23 years for me, 12 for him.
• and I am a recovering addict
• We are both sober and actively involved in recovery.

Social/Community Support

• We live in Austin, which is a rather liberal, supportive environment.
• The widespread acceptance, for the most part, of gay relationships has had a large impact on our public lives. We are accepted as a couple but our families, friends and professional and social worlds.
• Legal status - being able to be married and have benefits has been hugely supportive.
• where we live,
• Women’s community.
• The change in lgbt laws, including social acceptance.
• Good social network
• community, supporting each other through hard times
• fulfilled responsibilities in our church and community.
• Having good role models.
• Shared adoration of Bernie Sanders. His campaign helped us focus and solidify our ideas and values.

Mental Health/Aging

• He is no longer clinically depressed,
• have enjoyed reasonably good health.
• Stress would be the aging process although we are both incredibly healthy for our ages.
• Both of us near death
• Longevity

Therapy

• Talking with a therapist helped a lot with not only repairing our relationship but to also strengthen it.
• Individual and couples therapy
• JIM
• We have gone to therapy to work on communication. Counseling, appropriate literature
• Counseling about how to talk about feelings.
• Counseling
• We’ve utilized counseling in the past to help us know ourselves and each other better and learn how to meet each other’s emotional needs, after experiencing infidelity on both sides. Marriage counseling,
• Our therapist, Mary Ellen Henry. Without her, we would not have made it.
• I have participated in some amazing therapy groups and have built a ‘tribe’ of women to support me and the needs that cannot be met by my husband currently.
• couples counseling
• therapy

Negative External Factors

Distance

• Have lived far away from each other for significant amounts of time.
• Long distance even though it’s not as extreme as some have faced it’s still had its effect.
• Distance has been the main stressor in our relationship.
• Logistics. We live two hours apart
• long distance
• military deployment
• My husband is military and the distance and time apart makes it hard but that is when we make sure all lines of communication are open. But the separation can be hard.
• The physical distance as aforementioned.
• He was laid off his job at the beginning of the year and when he finally did get one, it was two hours distance. We’ve spent the last 4 months apart and see each other twice a month.
• Also, we lived in different states.
• Long periods of separation (military)
• long distance
• Our location causing a long commute to/from work. Seeing my family/friends requires 5 hours of travel.
• soon his ship will be out to sea for long periods of time.
• Long distance
• the fact that we are currently in a long-distance relationship. Finding ways to spend time together and make it feel like spending time together when you are across the country from one another.
• Our long distance relationship is the biggest stressor right now. Our lack of time together as a result of our long distance relationship and work commitments causes the most conflict. It’s hard when you want to plan little trips together or even just spend an evening together sitting at home. But it makes us both appreciate the time we do have together and it also allows us to have separate interests and grow as individuals.
• We live apart, currently 4 hours away, so finding time to be together can be difficult.
• We had to move out from our shared apartment to attend school when he transferred. Now we live an hour away from one another. I was very depressed and anxious for weeks because of school and work. It was a trying time.

**Work/School/Time**

• travel
• Stress from working too much makes it harder to be patient and understanding. job stress
• Long hours at work.
• Busy schedules
• Work
• Work dissatisfaction
• Gender bias in the workplace
• Conflicting schedules,
• His work is very stressful. His job. Sometimes the stress from work spills over our home life.
• employment discrimination
• Different schedules
• Work, being unhappy with work bringing those stresses home
• School stress and busy schedule with work/school/home life balance
• Long hours and stress of work bring out the worst in us.
• jobs
• too much work
• Jobs/career. Spouse job causing absense
• work schedules.
• Work . . . we are both police officers and it is at times a high intensity high stress job . . . .we work for the same department and therefore can not have the same hours this doesn’t provide much time together . . . however perhaps the lack of time together sometimes helps us from getting tired of one another? Idk
• Work.
• Conflicting work schedules
• work
• Work
• Work commitments
• Graduate school and associated anxieties
• Time at work
• Miscommunication has caused the most conflict. We are both very busy with our careers and have tried to make attempts to connect frequently, but sometimes the communication falls apart.
• work stress
• not enough time to spend together. Not enough down time.
• School, work
• Outside stressors (my husband’s work and graduate-degree work)
• Careers

• Money, work, and sex. This translates into stress at work, because we’re both determined to succeed. We work long hours and often go without seeing each other. Deciding on careers, and other issues that come along with growing up.

• work

• Stress related to working too much and not being able to spend as much time together

• stress from overworking

• Work hours and stress

• work stress

• work

• Diff seeing each other with our schedules

• Career

• long hours at work, having to work multiple jobs,

• starting a new chapter of school. Starting a new job.

• “When we are stressed (his job before retirement especially) we seem to get irritated with each other rather than the job. Stress from his job but he is now recently retired so that does not Happen.”

• Time away for work

• I want more time with my kids, and he’d like me home more.

• job loss

• Owning our own businesses means very little time when we are not thinking of work. We need to stop work once we walk out and lock the door. I don’t like that we talk about work once we are home. All day long is enough.

• Never enough time to get everything done. Exhaustion.

• Working too much

• Work stress periodically and seasonally

• Wide variety of interests can lead to scheduling nightmares

• Difficult/stressful careers

• His job has declined and I feel like I am pulling all the weight

• jobs, schedules

• job loss/money= disagreement on homemaker status

• Work stress and busy

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• Job loss
• Being pulled in a million different directions
• Work tends to put stress on each of us which we bring into our relationship,
• work
• work
• It’s been stressful to transition careers and not being able to spend as much time together during the week.
• loss of job
• work schedules being opposite and one of us frequently being alone with the kids. The long hours we work and being home at different times and often feeling alone in parenting because of work hours
• pursuing higher ed and the stress/strain of extra work, his being a pastor,
• job and money stress.
• Working at the same place - I’m not good at keeping my mouth shut.
• The fact that he works so much has effected us. The fact that all the running has been put on my shoulders
• Work stress, schedules. Differing schedules
• entrepreneurship also has been a big stressor.
• He is frequently gone for work. Right now for instance! But I’m understanding.
• Him traveling.
• Thus, our time off doesn’t always sync up (he had to study in the evenings when I was home from work), For most of our marriage, we have been on different schedules. I have been working full time and he was in school and is now job searching. during the day (me thinking about things at work and him stressing about finding a job.)
• job failures, sometimes church and community responsibilities take away from family time
• Work, busy schedules, military deployment
• Lack of job for husband
• schedules. Sometimes life gets busy and we get neglected. Wish we had more alone time/date nights
• Work, our schedules are very different. This just makes the time we have together more important
• work and school.
• work responsibilities. Whose responsibility is it to care for the kids when they are ill or one must work late etc . . . Two parents working full time is tough to juggle quality time with kids
• him not finding a job,
• loss of his job
• The military.
• Careers
• When my husband was placed somewhere at work that he was unhappy with, he carried that crabby attitude home with him.
• Long hours at work.
• Demanding work schedules
• career related stressors
• His job, how much he works.
• Jobs
• Work
• Our jobs are also both stressful and we are unhappy with them.
• Definitely his job stress he brings home from time to time. Puts a damper on things.
• Work schedules that differ from one another
• his lack of having a steady job. He also had a hard time getting a job.
• Work schedules are difficult and
• work
• work schedules. schedules and integrating of our personal preferences into our home
• work stress
• Work stress finds its way home from time to time making that person irritable and then the other one gets the same way as a result.
• time
• Work schedules. He is self employed and easily works 80 hrs a week where as I have a 40 hr wk Monday-Friday.
• Long periods of separation (military) and the stress of many moves and having small children.
• It’s hard to make time for the relationship sometimes when we work long hours and are tired.
• We work excessive hours and have high stress jobs. Sometimes that leaves us drained for home life. Long work hours and less time doing fun activities and de-stressing.
- Work
- My job and the fact that I work night shift has made it a little difficult for our relationship.
- Job security
- Work-long hours and time away from family
- Job stress
- Job stress
- His job and his anxiety makes it difficult to be happy sometimes
- Working geographically far from home,
- The Navy
- Right now, he’s in school and I’m starting a new job. We’re facing different obstacles, and we’re both dealing with the stress involved with each. That has definitely had some negative impact on our relationship.
- Job/School stress.
- Our location causing a long commute to/from work
- WORK.
- work stress. time spent apart due to travelling for work
- He was in law school for 3 years, and it did have some negative effects on our relationship.
- We are both back in school so we are less capable of making the steps and strides in our relationship as others our age. We fight about that frustration often.
- med school
- job changes,
- I guess his work schedule. We don’t get to spend as much time together has we would like. He works from 5am until 9pm and soon his ship will be out to sea for long periods of time.
- Me going away to school for my undergrad program, and commuting for my graduate program. But nothing we couldn’t recover from.
- I used to work at the same place as him. I was offered a promotion there (his job as he was promoted) or another job outside the company. 2 weeks of debate led me to leaving the company and that was hard on both of us. Especially since I didn’t take his role.. I think he felt let down that I didn’t want his old role at work. But of course hard not to see one another every day like we were used to.
- Grad school - very time consuming.
• Being young and trying to find a healthy work-life balance. I often work more than he does and have a more stressful job. I have to actively remember not to bring that into our home life. We don’t get in big fights often, or really bicker much anymore, if we do-its usually because one or both of us have been working too much and have run out of patience for the little things.

• Stress of school and work, taking frustrations out on one another at times

• Sometimes we don’t see each other for 3 or 4 days because I conflicts in schedules. His work, and my commitments. Working and not seeing each other a lot.

• Job searching.

• work

• Job expectations, his struggles with finishing his education, his ability to manage real world responsibilities

• School was a stressful time

• Our current career choices are not where we want to be long term. Financially they are inadequate as well as for personal fulfillment.

• stress from school

• Hectic schedules with work And school

• Difference in occupation, I have a lot more of a workload outside of 9-5 whereas they work a standard day and come home.

• Work related time away.

Finance

• money. Financial pressure adds stress to our home lives

• financial hardships/debt,

• we are also now a single income family because she is now unable to work.

• and financial stress

• Money,

• money can sometimes be a point of contention,

• finances

• finances

• finances a lot of the times

• Money worries

• Money. We had very different incomes for a while. Thankfully now we are very similar.

• financial
• The years when we were building our careers and money was tight
• Financial pressures
• Financial insecurity
• Financial fears,
• Probably money during the recession
• Financially, we each work really hard, perhaps over work.
• Money issues
• Also financial situation as he continues school and I pay most of the bills. Over the years, I have come to support him more financially than emotionally, so naturally the dynamic turns into me being more controlling, although I try to refrain.
• Money
• Employment or unemployment have been stressors that affect our relationship. for me specifically, a time of brief unemployment made me feel like a leech and a failure which negatively affected my own sense of self in our relationship. My partner never voiced these concerns, however.
• and finances, going through hard times.
• income
• Money
• Finances
• finances
• Money, wife is always stressed about money
• money
• Arguments over money or the kids.
• Money and discipline issues
• Occasional tight finances.
• Money and debt . . . deciding this is the person I love and want to be with also means you take on their debt . . . granted I don’t have to but because I love her I want to help her
• cost of living,
• It’s money. Sometimes, I resent earning most of the money, other times I’m completely ok with it. Honestly, it fluctuates. Money. I’m earning most of the money right now, and if we fight about anything, it’s that.
• We we’re thrown into being home owners early on into our relationship so that’s been a large strain and the stress for money would happen to go along with that. Money. It takes a lot to run a household and I earn more than he does so it’s a struggle coupled with
me trying to find the appropriate time to go back to school for my bachelors degree it’s the source of many of our arguments.

- money stresses
- not enough money to get the things we want (like money for me to finally finish college and get back in the workforce. It’s hard being dependent on someone who has a degree and I dont . . . and having to feel less than because others can easily slide back into working after kids. Or having a house that is ours, not a rental. Stuff like that . . . not like clothes or cars or whatever related to money.)
- , money
- Money . . . He spends it a lot and I am a saver. This causes stress on a day to day basis.
- Finances
- Money
- Financial concerns
- Money, work, and sex. We stress about how to manage money, considering we’re married and young with student debt.
- as well as money-related issues.
- money in college
- money
- financial, Financial issues
- Talking about money
- Financial
- financial stressors, me still being in school,. financial problems
- finances
- Money, debt,
- Money
- money,
- Prior financial obligations
- Finances
- money
- Money
- He spends money more freely than I’m comfortable with.
- , hous fires and floods, involvement in car accidents,
- He seems very bitter that he makes all the money, yet balks when I offer to get a job
• Finances, family issues
• Miscommunications. Bills. The list is long.
• financial issues
• Years ago, money and feeling we needed things to be like others. Always a concern regarding money. Kids with college or usual financial hardships.
• Finances caused stressors on and off over the years.
• finances
• Finances. I tend to be uncomfortable discussing finances. My husband is uncomfortable NOT talking about them
• Money management. Paperwork. Financial problems: profligate spending, lack of consistent employment. We own 2 houses that have stalled in renovations that we have become completely stymied on. We are broke, but land rich. Home ownership is the biggest stress.
• We had a business that failed and struggled financially.
• Lack of money
• Money stress
• Money or sometimes the lack there of. Money . . . we have experienced some job layoffs and lack of affordable health insurance which has resulted in more money issues.
• Financial hardships. Lack of financial stability
• The more money I make the less he makes but still wants to spend the same
• Money
• Financial issues, but this also made us stronger as a team supporting each other
• Money,
• job loss/money= disagreement on homemaker status
• Money
• no stability
• Financial stress while he was in college
• Fear of losing job and decreased sleep.
• Financial stress
• Debt as well. Finances. I’m a saver and he tends to be a spender which causes a lot of friction.
• “Money
• Comparison to others”
- money
- Financial struggle,
- Financial, extra curricular activities of our kids,
- Finances
- Financial stressor.
- financial strain,
- money stress
- money
- and financial stresses.
- finances
- Financial, grad school
- money
- money,
- money
- money while going thru school. Prob money,
- Money: how much is spent and what it is spent on
- Money,
- Money
- Finances and job stresses as well as choosing what to spend money on. Planning for the future financially
- Money
- The loss of his job (our main income),
- For a while, money (or should I say the lack of it?) was stressful, but I wouldn’t say it impacted our relationship negatively. We just had to communicate about our budget regularly. I don’t think we’ve ever actually fought about money. We’ve disagreed about what should be our top priorities, but not to the point of feeling resentment or anger.
- Finances
- Finances
- Money is always a touchy subject but we’ve gotten better with budgeting and planning.
- Economics
- Impulsive buying for wants
- Money
Financial stress
Fixing up our home, owning multiple homes prior to marriage and trying to sell them . . . finances
Disagreements on Money and
Talking about Financials, sore subject and always ends up in a disagreement. finances
Or if we need to buy something but may not have the money.
Money
Money. We fight about it.
Finances, work,
Typically we fight about spending money, AL though, fights with us is rare
Also, we don’t have the time or money to take a real vacation together right now
financial problems. Money.
Money
Finances. Him not having a stable job & stress on me
finances (At times)
Financial stress.
Job and financial stressors.
, maintaining finances
It gets worse if we are financially strapped too.
Disagreements about when to spend money and when to grow our family.
Student loan Dept.
difference in money spending habits
Money, decisions
money stress
Money worries and dishes.
Both of us have gone through unemployment and financial issues and it affected us very negatively.
Partner’s unemployment for 1 year, quitting my high-paying job to start a graduate program
Finances. One of us is more cautious with money while the other is more materialistic.
Arguments over how to spend money/pay off debts. Financial needs cause stress.
Money and student loans, living situation. Different money management techniques and ideas of responsible spending

I would say finances is one of our biggest stressors since we’re both students and things can be hard in that aspect. Our biggest stressors have revolved around finances and differences in personality/sensitivity to things.

I think that money is the biggest cause of dissatisfaction. We have been together for a significant amount of time, but I am a student so we are unable to afford a wedding anytime soon. However, we face pressure from family and friends to get married. Our families are unable to financially support a wedding.

Financial burdens also caused tension.

Different spending habits and understandings of finance. I am very frugal and resourceful while he is used to spending money freely. I am in grad school while he is working a well paying position while we are planning a wedding.

He helps out his family any way that he can and I love it, but it once put us in a financial bind and we are rebuilding finances from that.

“Financial restraints

“

Many ups and downs with finances and

Financial judgements

Extended Family

My family is also religiously fundamentalist and they’re convinced we’re going to Hell . . . This makes holidays interesting.

family

family

spouse’s family’s lack of support

family relationships

Also, he is pretty sensitive so sometimes family issues make him doubt his good relationships.

Relations with his family. They cause undue stress and are not supportive of our relationship.

My family.

my family that I walked away from. My family was hazardous to my relationship with my wife.
• She has complained about my mother or even sometimes my father saying things that are judgmental. Both of us have had problems with her family. They can cause stress between us and I have observed them causing her a lot of stress as they have expected her to solve their problems for them.

• Also, in-law conflicts. Sometimes I assume I know if she doesn’t want to go to family dinner or spend time with certain family Members and I get frustrated with it.

• In laws and family
• inlaws
• We’ve had stressors regarding family health issues that we didn’t agree on, as well as a divorce,
• Family and drama
• Both of us are the oldest child in our families and family members attempting to bring us into their crisis. Supporting parents that are making poor choices with other children in the family
• Her mother passing away was negative. Her guilt and sleepless nights were hard on us both.
• lack of familial support, substance abuse in immediate family.
• Equally, the same friends and family that we can say helped us positively also affected us negatively because now that is something that we had to overcome (which was extremely difficult.) We can always forgive but at times, it gets hard to forget which can hurt us. Moreover, I like to think these helped more positively because we know that we are not the same people we were when the negativity was happening and so we don’t dwell on that and can be proud of who we are now. Getting married and now having to deal with in-laws.
• Issues with his family and mine caused us to move 500 miles away from all of them. His family has loads of chemical dependency and mine was very enmeshed. Too much pressure.
• his mother
• Moving away from family.
• In laws have been hard to deal with on his side. In laws voicing there opinion on issues that don’t concern them. Not getting support from them.
• His family is more difficult to be around.
• Family
• Family issues: his family, when they were alive, were big sources of fighting. (My husband had zero boundaries and a lot of pent up emotional crap with them that came out at me. His mother was a total narcissist and became physically infirm the last 7 years of her life and made everyone wait on her and was small and spiteful and demanding. A tyrant . . .)
• in-laws
• family members
• family stressors
• Extended family
• in-laws
• his family tend to be negative stressors. His family is very selfish and isolated and is not thoughtful at all.
• My spouse’s mother, sometimes uses passive aggressive behaviors or comments toward me. It makes me less likely to want to spend time with his family.
• Our extended family
• Disagreeing over family member relationships.
• we don’t have a lot of conflict, but i would say our parents sometimes cause it.
• My concern about his family impacting our relationship and our future children. His families choices (i.e. their alcohol and substance use)
• Disagreement on whether or not his brother can stay with us. He’s an addict and has lived with us in the past, so when he asks -- my husband wants to give him the benefit of the doubt, but I no longer do.
• Family opinions
• My family was resistant to our relationship at first.
• extended family responses and reactions
• Partners family and family values, political views
• family issues
• family differences
• being geographically far from family of origin. The way that my husband’s family interacts with me is the biggest point of contention. They make it clear that I am not part of their family of origin.
• Family.
• My side of the family. They need me too much and I’m too nice to say no. My mother had a stroke and also needs my help and going over there so often tends to leave things undone at my house which causes more stress.
• My mother is crazy, and she’s (almost) driven a wedge between us.
• Seeing my family/friends requires 5 hours of travel.
• I would say his mother. She always wants things her way and my Fiancé doesn’t want to upset her.
• Relationship with some extended family has caused tension.
• Family
• External family conflict.
• Family
• In-laws. His mom not treating me nicely
• Moving 1000 miles away from family
• His sister is a huge dramabucket.
• Family approval
• Family problems negatively impacting our relationship
• Also, while I get along with his family, some of their values I do not agree with and it caused a little stress.
• My family is not as supportive as I would like for them to be. They see that he is good for me and they admit that, but they resent that this relationship has changed some of my perspectives, which used to align more with theirs.
• Our families
• Tension between in-laws
• Sometimes family can be a stress.
• The cause of our biggest conflict is also one of the things I love about him. He helps out his family any way that he can and I love it, but it once put us in a financial bind and we are rebuilding finances from that. But the ability to encourage our ability to get through the bind together made us even stronger.
• Each other’s family
• Family issues on both sides,
• His parents influence, they aren’t the best people to look up to and can some days have a negative impact on us.
• His family and the way they try to get to me.

Friends

• Her male friends.
• Being able to trust my spouse’s friends that also experience SSA.
• My husband’s gay friends
• He joined a support group for SSA and his friendships feel as though they take priority over emotion intimacy with me.
• Friends that try to dominate the time and attention of one of us.
• friends at different times
• When he puts his friends first
• friends of both mine and his who voiced negative opinions toward the relationship. Female friend of his who has only recently begun to accept me as a long term part of his life.
• Some friends negative influences. Some of his friends
• friends
• other guys. Certain “friends.” Anything that has to do with a guy I used to work with that had a crush on me. It really threatened him.
• toxic friend relationships.
• friends

Pets/Home

• or where we planned to live. Nothing major
• Buying a house
• Our ability to handle stressful situations- like buying a house and the basement flooding.
• I have always lived alone. We had a roommate when I moved in that was his best friend and I had a hard time with that. Most of our arguments when I moved in was over that.
• Pets we both had prior to our relationship and learning how to share the responsibility of them. buying a home. His large dog being in the house constantly.
• living situation
• Our previous living situation was difficult due to problems with the conditions and the landlord.

Previous Relationships

• I was divorced. She wasn’t. The wedding was difficult for her and it still comes up time to time.
• My partner’s friendships with exes.
• Expectations of sex from previous relationships and society. Partner was a virgin until marriage, I was not.
• Exes
• other people putting pressures on our relationship or bringing up past relationships that we’ve been in
• He has a son living with him and has to communicate occasionally to his former spouse this makes him extremely anxious and has impeded on our relationship occasionally. when he talks about his former spouse
• Issues with adult step children
• Situations with stepchildren
• Stress related to managing my biological children, who are not my partner’s children - integrating my partner into the family system.
• Difficulty with parenting a blended family at times
• His daughter
• Mother of stepchild
• My children’s father can be a stressor for us both because we get frustrated at how he treats the kids.
• Ex wife/step-son. He has an 8 year old with his ex-wife. Their custody arrangement has limited our ability to live where we want.
• His ex that he has a child with
• My ex - I was previously in a homosexual relationship and we had 2 children together. Because of the kids we have both committed to stay on good terms but it has been difficult because she still wants us to get back together and is unaccepting of him
• difficulty with one another’s ex partners
• stressors related to his previous marriage;
• Talking about being friends with my ex boyfriend still
• His daughters mother.
• ex-girlfriend
• His Ex wife had caused some stress early on.
• exes

Stress/Trials/Moving

• moving
• mixed orientation marriage realities,
• We have the same stressors as everyone else: Some neighborhood conflicts with a couple of rednecks who rent the houses across the street from us,
• Partner needs to be connected for aspiring career and uses social media constantly.
• Fear of coming out
• Individuals making inappropriate advances
• Overwhelming external stresses in life are sometimes expressed in the marriage relationship. Shorter tempers, easier to anger or irritation, etc.
• car driving, attitude
• We currently have a foreign exchange student, which has been fairly stressful for my wife.
• Discovering he experienced ssa
• marriage conflict
• moving to a different state ,deciding on careers, and other issues that come a long with growing up. Usually you don’t go through those life-changing moments with a partner, but we did. Many times those decisions were limited because we wanted to stay together, causing stress on our relationship when one of us had to ‘give-up’ something to stay together, but we came through it.
• Moving so much.
• Death of a family member (my father in law), birth of a new child, serious illness of a family member (mother in law had cancer), my own personal health issues.
• My wife is considering transitioning and although it doesn’t effect my attraction to her it definitely creates outside stress.
• The deaths of both our sisters.
• Life transitions can cause us a lot of conflict. Getting married and now having to deal with in-laws. Starting a new chapter of school. Starting a new job. Transitions in general are always hard but once we become comfortable in these new stages we can learn to adapt and make them work.
• He also is not a good driver and I have been known to “go nuts” when we are driving. I think my reactions to his driving causes him stress. There to date has been nothing that has caused a rift as we can argue, discuss in loud voices but also have the skills to stay on subject and remember that our time together is limited given our ages.
• Death of family members, relationship with another couple
• internet
• “Early and untimely deaths of siblings on both sides, along with death of parents and one miscarriage.
• Moving away from family.”
• The stuff life throws at you, job loss, house fires and floods, involvement in car accidents, illness . . . may have been negative but we came through them positively. …. Possible relocation
• social media affair
• personal failures. Ex. I wrote a book, it didn’t do as well as I wanted. I was depressed about it for a long time. Gained weight, drank a lot, cried a lot. Same for my partner. When he fails in his personal creative projects, he wonders if I would be better with someone else and needs reassurance.
• Lost one parent and another parent struggled for an extended period of time with cancer.
Moving

After moving to Idaho, I realized I prefer living on the East coast, which caused some friction.

Media’s portrayal of ‘perfect’ relationships

Living in another country (that is not my own), finances, and immigration issues.

Previously - moving out of state for 2 years,

Moving!!! I hate moving. Don’t do it!!! Moving!!!! Moving is a pain & very stressful. I will never move again!

Personal need to help others and unfortunately puts stressors on us as a family

Wedding planning

His response (or lack thereof) to tough times- death in the family, career related stressors etc-in our relationship make me nervous about our future. He lacks a certain amount of empathy and has trouble expressing his emotions.

Deaths in family, me personally being on edge certain days that remind me of that person and him not always being able to understand or support me the way I need

Secrets I have kept about my past. My past as a “party girl” and him not being as open about my use of marijuana.

Increased responsibility

Gossip. Gossip and busy bodies are a killer for a good time or mood. We had someone ruin our announcement that we were pregnant just out of spite.

We have been through illnesses and deaths together

relocation

the stress of many moves

That’s hard to pinpoint . . . we are working on some big issues for the future as well such as where we will be living

Sometimes the lack of a job has impacted us in a negative way, but has also been the part that has made us stronger

We argue a lot due to language barriers and different expectations.

I feel like the above stressors negatively effected me because I really hate change, but because of him I was able to get it together and he was very patient with me.

Perspectives of other people regarding our significant age difference; stressors related to his previous marriage;

volleyball

“dumb drivers”, future decisions

Stress of relocation, Planning a wedding
• He is constantly on his phone. He cannot put it down. Even at dinner.
• I do not like certain habits of his which comeback here and there to create hurdles in my relationship.
• Lack of summer. We both thrive in Summer! Do winter months suck, however we do make the most of what we can. And fortunately that is it! If you can even class that as dissatisfaction.

**Addictions, Recovery (Self Care)**

• sexual addiction trauma, betrayal trauma.
• My alcoholism caused issues (in recovery for the past 5 months now).
• When either one if us is not practicing self care, we both tend to be short with eachother, but with great communication we work things out.
• and alcohol
• Alcohol. I may sometimes drink a bit more than I should.
• addictions with children
• alcohol
• Did not know she was an addict. She is in recovery now.
• My husband’s sex addiction, infidelity, and lack of accountability for his choices.
• His addiction to his cell phone and social media. Very distracting!!!! He is not ever fully present at home bc of the constant “connection to the outside world”
• Pornography addiction and the trauma behind it.
• Pornography effects our relationship in a negative way.
• The issue that causes the most problem in our relationship with problems with alcohol.
• lack of familial support, substance abuse in immediate family.
• Gambling pornography drug use
• When he doesn’t get enough sleep and he is very moody and argumental.
• attempt to stop using nicotine.
• unwanted emotional affairs, bullying, entitlement, arrogance, sarcasm, manipulation, deceit, infidelity, sex addiction, rage, alcoholism.
• sex addiction
• Spouse is an addict which limits my social fun.
• My husband is a sex addict and I learned of this in 2013. He has had multiple affairs and is addicted to masturbation and pornography. He is working on recovery, but the trauma of this realization is something that I work with everyday.
• His pornography addiction.
• Alcohol
• addiction
• Currently - his nicotine addiction (chewing tobacco). My husband uses chewing tobacco, the addiction is fueled and made worse by his ADHD medications - this causes conflict/dissatisfaction.
• My husband uses tobacco and I don’t want him to due to health concerns.
• His families choices (i.e. their alcohol and substance use)
• Disagreement on whether or not his brother can stay with us. He’s an addict and has lived with us in the past, so when he asks -- my husband wants to give him the benefit of the doubt, but I no longer do.
• His smoking.
• alcohol
• him not being as open about my use of marijuana.
• We don’t have a lot of conflict, but maybe my alcohol consumption
• he can get wrapped up in videogames or another hobby that can cause stress at times.
• Drinking
• Drinking and partying too much. He’s almost 30.
• drinking
• “Drunken nights out with loss of communication”
• Alcohol tends to lead to arguments
  
  **Politics/Social/Community**

• His political opinions are not mine, we clash over it but still love each other.
• We live in Texas and when we leave the Austin area you can’t help but feel the conservative nature of the state and that means an awful lot of people don’t approve of a gay relationship.
• immigration policy; discrimination;
• Having to come to terms that we loved each other, who happened to be the same sex, and wrap our heads around it. I’ve caught her making statements such as, “if we were a heterosexual couple we would have been married by now.” It took time to accept that we love each other, mainly due to society and religion.
• Generalized homophobia. Heterosexual, misogynistic expectations about what roles two people in a relationship should be filling.
• Difference in political views
Mental Health/Health/Aging

- my anxiety
- Chronic poor health, infertility, depression/mental illness,
- My wife was diagnosed with a chronic illness, including chronic pain, 2 years ago. I am her primary caregiver (she is only 27, and I am 31), and we are also now a single income family because she is now unable to work. My testosterone has changed some of my reactions or personality in some small but significant ways, and navigating that has been a challenge. Her physical health affects every piece of our relationship. Financial struggles, mental health, our social life, everything. It has made us a stronger couple, but it is the hardest thing on our relationship and both of our overall happiness and frustration levels with each other and with life.
- My declining health. It often makes me feel as if I don’t contribute much to the relationship although he strongly disagrees.
- Different views about our retirement plan
- Aging. He is turning into an elderly man right in front of me, while I, in the meantime am struggling with middle age. At ages 69 and 56 the age gap is much more pronounced
- Some ADHD aspects of my personality. Reduced sex drive
- Health concerns.
- codependency
- lack of Sex (with age, obligations, responsibilities, lack of time)
- cancer
- infertility
- Her anxiety.
- The extent of her health & disability, but not in the way you might think. I feel a great amount of sorrow that she went from being the most active person I know to being mostly bedridden. It’s not sprow for myself or lost opportunities, its a shared sorrow for the pain & limitations she now faces. I wish I could take her suffering on myself so as to alleviate it from her.
- cancer
- For sex, I have medical issues that make relations painful and near impossible, so that is causing stress until we can get the money for surgery. We’ve had stressors regarding family health issues that we didn’t agree on,
- depression
- Mental illness PTSD
- My wife has extreme control and narcissism issues resulting from childhood abuse, and these are especially bad when there are external stresses. my own personal health issues.
• and current illness
• Poor health. Discussions about retirement and fear of not having enough in pension to make it through.
• Our life goals have been challenged by my progressive and debilitating illness. We see the world, religion, politics, differently now than when we were young.
• His PTSD can be difficult to deal with.
• making plans for retirement and possible relocation. illness . . . may have been negative but we came through them positively.
• We don’t manage our world very well and it is very stressful. I think depression runs in both of us. I recently stopped taking Zoloft after 15 years. He recently went on it for the first time!! ha ha. We tend to waste a lot of time on facebook, playing cards online, taking surveys . . . that causes us a lot of stress later on. But we are overwhelmed. Too many logs on the fire, so to speak.
• Self doubts, personal failures .
• ADHD, Weight gain
• Health issues
• Financial, his PTSD, my anxiety over PTSD, his health, and finances. These issues have defined our married and engaged life as they have been present since 5 months of initially meeting. He got physically sick around this time..Chronic illness, my anxiety
• depression
• his undiagnosed and untreated ADHD
• having issues trying to conceive
• I am also prone to anxiety at times.
• We have been through illnesses and deaths together
• Learning how to deal with the stress of the epilepsy. A lot of that is personally mine to deal with.
• age difference
• Sometimes I get a “glass-half-empty” mentality that can negatively affective the relationship until i snap out of it. And as stated before, my husband isn’t always good at expressing emotions.
• attitude
• his anxiety makes it difficult to be happy sometimes
• Depression and anxiety has creeped up in my life and it has made it difficult to feel a lot of joy or open up like I want to.
• I also have a lot of health problems for my age-this limits my energy level and the activities that we can do but we found ways to deal with it. Going through seasonal
depressions can be hard on a relationship too—its hard to live with someone when you want to isolate yourself.

- My medical issues/health